

ON THE ROAD TO HEAVEN'S DOOR: An Encounter with the Ultimate Reality

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To the memory of GEORGE HARRISON AND JOHN LENNON

**To my late gurus:
SWAMI GITANANDA
SWAMI VISNUDEVANANDA
AMBU**

The mere fact of traveling in India changes one's way of life. One never comes back the same after having traveled long distances or having spent some time in India.

The whole of Asia, from Istanbul to Bali, was first explored and popularized by our hippie culture; only subsequently, as we see today, did the tourism industry take over.

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PREFACE

The 60s and 70s were times of great emancipation; heaven knows what planetary influences had ushered us into this soul-searching venture. The Beatles's trip to India had certainly set the pace for thousands of hippies on the road to Asia. Philosophers, authors, and poets, too, had channeled us into unfamiliar ways of seeing the world. Some, like Timothy Leary and Aldous Huxley, promoted the use of mind-expanding substances, leading to unchallenged states-of-mind. Others, like Alan Watts and Allen Ginsburg, championed Eastern spirituality, which brought about a most fulfilling merger of East and West. And let us not forget the countless rock stars and rock bands who turned the world upside down, enrapturing us with psychedelic sounds and transcendental poetry.

HIV was unheard of. It was a time of great sexual liberation. The Nixon administration and the Vietnam War were in full swing. Yes, the times they were a-changing, as Bob Dylan once sang out. At no other time or place in these last few centuries has the world gone through such unique, radical, and harmonious changes—as one big family united under the banners of peace and love. We were wishful thinkers with high goals in mind. Yet this did not interfere with my own quest for the Absolute, which began in the mid-70s, when I was an audacious hippie traveling through Asia in search of the meaning of life. Through yoga I came to have an experience of direct Nirvikalpa Samadhi, a mystical union with the Supreme Consciousness—known in India as Brahman, the everlasting Soul. I was initiated into yoga in 1975 by masters in India, and through the years I persevered in my practice with an iron will. I can now say with humility that I know who I am. Immortality does exist. This is a true story; this is how it happened.

In 1997, on a cold wintery morning while performing sophisticated breathing exercises, known in yoga as *kapalabati* and *bastrika pranayama*, intense bellow-like breath practices, I became aware of powerful tremors occurring throughout my body. These mysterious forces vibrated from the base of my spine up to my forehead. At the same time, I could hear an intoxicating high-pitched humming deep in my skull, which was so strong that I thought I might lose grasp of present-day reality—who I was and what I was doing. I was scared stiff, thinking I might pass out. Sensing this, I followed the guidelines of my first guru, the late Swami Gitananda, who had warned me back in Pondicherry, India, in 1975 to stop if ever this occurred. As soon as the tremors subsided, a most soothing and serene feeling of equanimity set in. Needless to say, one becomes addicted to this naturally composed mind-body enhancing substance called yoga.

But that particular winter morning, when I lived as a semi-reclusive yogi in Central Italy, off the Adriatic coast not far from Fano, I acknowledged something unusual stirring within my psyche: my thoughts were drifting fretfully through my mind, and as a yogi, I was unable to calm them

down. Be that as it may, a short time later, while engaged in a standing posture with my eyes closed, legs slightly spread out, and head bent backwards with a *kumbhaka*, or full-lung breath-retention exercise, an extraordinary phenomenon took place. My thoughts and mind, which had been part of my inner psyche since the day of my birth, were all at once projected away from me, out of my psyche, like a strong magnetic current. My mind was taken away by some unknown force animating two entities. In front of me, I saw my thoughts inside a rectangular-shaped mind-frame rolling downward at great speed inside some sort of chassis. The thoughts were moving of their own accord at a fast pace. I realized that somehow 'I' had been cut off, while witnessing them as though they were waiting for me in an empty space, outside on their own free will.

At the same time as this dissolution was taking place, another mind—my real 'Self'—said, "But we are two here." I then began to make a thorough assessment of the situation by glancing around, as it were. To my right, I saw the Infinite boundless space. I was then able to look directly behind me, simply by the command of my inner self, and I saw more of this Infinite space. My 'Heavenly Sight', unmoored from my physical eyes and body, went from front to back and directly through me without turning, impelled solely by the power of my will. In this unfathomable world, wherever I gazed in wonder and bewilderment, I saw thousands of atom-shaped star/galaxies taking root beneath my Being, moving freely away from me and spreading out through this Indescribable Universe of the Beyond. I saw that wherever I stared into the distance of this Infinite, my Being emitted a tremendous glowing celestial light, which illuminated all that my sight fell upon. I then observed what was below me, and I marvelled at the sight of an inconceivable mass of enormous, white, immaculate clouds—my Heavenly Body—eternally shifting and bubbling about. At that same moment, I became aware of a perfect warmth and bliss flowing through the core of my Being. It wasn't heat, as one is accustomed to through the sense of touch. I no longer had any physical senses at all. It was a warm, consoling, unimaginable bliss right inside my spinal column, so to speak. I looked down again, bemused in awe, and then realized at once that this was it: *this* was what I had been striving for over the course of eons of incarnations. This was humanity's final goal, of which all sacred books speak, and which has been repeated variously since the time of the Biblical prophets and Indian seers. This was the knowledge of the difference between name and form, much discussed in Buddhism. This was the Eternal Tao, God the Father, Brahman of the Hindus, Purusha of the mystic yogis, also known as the state of Nirvikalpa Samadhi in Sanskrit.

Time had stopped and had become an eternity. There was neither past nor future: only the now and the ecstasy of eternally existing in this state of being. Once I had grasped the Ultimate Knowledge in this super conscious state, I looked back to my side and, through the force of my Divine Will, drew back into my Being, into myself, my mind and thoughts, which had been waiting for me in that rectangular-shaped thought-box. Once back in my physical body, in this phenomenal world, I found that the Eternal Being had become one with my body. In other words, the super conscious state, the Eternal, had been superimposed onto my conscious, temporal mind. After that mystical union, I completely forgot all that had happened during that experience.

When I came back to my senses, I felt dizzy and shaky, as if I had fallen into a lifeless state on the floor. As my awareness returned, I felt something was missing: it was as though a line of demarcation, a border, a pre-established barrier from an unknown past prevented me from remembering what had occurred in that super conscious state. It was as fleeting as the transition from unconsciousness to consciousness, or from life to life. Until that fateful day in 1997, I had been practicing yoga daily for 22 years. Even so, this experience would surely not have presented itself without my long years of travel in search of the Truth. This is a true narrative of my encounter.