

LORDS OF THE HIDDEN WORLDS

FRANK GLASBY



© Frank Glasby 2004

Darch Literary Service
16 Mapleton PI, Duncraig
WA 6023
Email: I.glasby@bigpond.com

SYNOPSIS

LORDS OF THE HIDDEN WORLDS

FRANK GLASBY

The story rests on the Buddhist concept of the journey of the soul through various worlds on its way to the heaven world. The framework of this consists of six worlds and four heavens, and the earth is half way in this sequence.

The setting is in the hill settlement of Darjeeling in British India, at the eastern end of the Himalayas, in northern Bengal. The time period is immediately after World War II and the central character is an Anglo-Indian, with an Indian mother and a British father who was a colonel in the British army. The discontent with this situation causes the central character to seek an escape from social limitations.

The first two chapters set the scene in which the central character becomes a disciple of a Tibetan Buddhist lama, by which he hopes to attain power to improve his personal life. This necessitates mastering the lower worlds, as it is by this that he will attain the necessary powers. To do this he has to face the lord of each realm and avoid becoming a victim of his desires. He therefore has to resist various temptations and explore each world as a means of gaining mastery over it.

There is an external story line relating to his mother, with whom he lives, and to his job as an assistant under-manager in a tea-plantation. In this setting, he meets a young woman but is unable to pursue a relationship because of sectarian differences, but he eventually meets another young woman who is free from such restrictions.

Eventually he has to choose between using his new powers for personal gratification or to help others. He finally chooses the altruistic path and offers to marry the young woman. In this double life, he has to keep his mystic experiences secret. The story ends with a final experience that completes his search.

PREFACE

Throughout history, the great scriptures refer to other worlds, which exist in different dimensions. The Egyptians and the early Greeks, as well as the Old Testament civilizations all had a very similar tradition of invisible worlds, which often overlapped into the everyday physical world. These worlds have various names. Jesus spoke of “many mansions”, and earlier Hindu Vedanta teachings describe different levels of existence, known as “lokas” in the ancient Sanskrit. According to their own descriptions, the lokas are in tiers of seven. There are seven main levels and seven lower worlds that contain different life forms. In a clear contrast, the Buddhists speak of a basic system of ten directions of space. In this system, there are six worlds and four heavens. The soul, in its slow journey of development progresses through these worlds until it reaches the highest of the worlds, which is the earth world that we accept as our reality. From there, the task of the wandering soul is to progress to the heaven worlds where true spiritual development can occur. This story revolves around adventures of the soul through the ten directions of inner space and is an account of the “pilgrim’s progress” in the invisible worlds where the soul makes its real journey. This is the same as the story of Ulysses, who wandered for years before returning home. The details for the theme are from collective descriptions from many sources. The unusual information is not a literal description, as in most cases it is only symbolic. All the characters are fictitious and do not represent any one person, either living or dead. The consideration of different religious views is only part of the story. References to writers are authentic but they have no factional significance.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 - A DOOR TO THE HIDDEN WORLDS

CHAPTER 2 - THE DOOR OPENS

CHAPTER 3 - THE REALM OF LUSTFUL GHOSTS

CHAPTER 4 – LORDS OF THE ANIMAL KINGDOM

CHAPTER 5 – THE WORLD OF EVIL DEMONS

CHAPTER 6 – DEMONS OF THE EARTH WORLD

CHAPTER 7- SECRETS OF THE INNER SOUL

CHAPTER 8 - DARK ALLEYS OF DESIRE

CHAPTER 9 – THE WORLD OF THE ANCESTORS

CHAPTER 10 – THE WESTERN PARADISE

CHAPTER 11 – THE LORDS OF WISDOM

CHAPTER 12 – THE BLUE LORD

CHAPTER 1 - A DOOR TO THE HIDDEN WORLDS

The hillside town of Darjeeling, nestling in the foothills of the eastern Himalayas, seemed an unlikely place to take a course in mysterious magic and risk becoming a disciple of the Devil. There was no brochure offering the opportunity to embark on a sightseeing trip to the lower slopes of the hell worlds. There was more opportunity to visit a tea plantation or find a Sherpa willing to guide someone in mountain climbing than find someone who had the keys to heaven and hell. For John Hammersmith-Brown such a suggestion would have seemed ludicrous. In retrospect it all appeared very logical and really almost inevitable. Even so, it seemed a strange setting for a drawn out drama of occult adventure and encounters with demons.

Darjeeling was a beautiful place, perched on a mountain ridge in the far north of old Bengal, and it commanded a view of Mount Everest and the famous Kanchenjunga. British built bungalows clung to the sides of hills, offering privacy and status in the earlier Imperial life style of agents of the British Raj. No one would have suspected it as a backdrop for a secret esoteric play with demons as the main actors. John Hammersmith-Brown was not the type to be in the central role of such a play. He lived in a comfortable social bracket in a class minded society, and he sometimes felt trapped in a made-in-England caste system that refused to recognize any but approved members. His father had been a captain in the British army. He was a conventional cog in the machine of the army administrators that operated every facet of the Indian outposts of the British Empire. That part was acceptable enough for the socialites of the hill station, but the fly in the ointment was that his mother was not British. She was Indian, and in her day had been a local beauty, sure to receive an invitation to all the balls and Officer's Mess functions. Unfortunately, any offspring from such romantic liaison were not always welcome. At the end of World War II, his father disappeared, suddenly repatriated into the labyrinth of English army life and left his exotic Brahmin maiden with a heavy womb and an imminent birth. Now, thirty years on, the plain Mr. John Hammersmith-Brown was still trying to fit into the scheme of things. This was difficult, as it was not so British and yet, not very Indian. His mother had blessed him with his father's name but his modest status was only that of junior assistant under manager of a tea plantation. In the past, the senior

mangers were all British sahibs and were automatically members of the Burrah Club, which was for the big sahibs. Under-managers had to be content with the Chota Club, which was for lesser sahibs. As for assistant junior hirelings, they had no access to anywhere, especially as the senior sahibs were now all Indian, who delighted in cracking the whip over the remnants of British colonialism, when Indians were only assistants to assistants. Now it was their turn, and that was the rub. The snag was that he did not fit into this post-war hierarchy.

His mother always philosophized.

“It’s your Karma,” she always said, “and you will have to accept it.”

That was all right for her. With her high caste lineage, she still had respect in her Indian world. Every morning she performed her rituals, making obeisance to her deities and putting flowers round the necks of statues. There was Shiva, the Supreme Lord, Vishnu, the Preserver and a silver statue of Ishvara, the individual soul. She was always admonishing him to be less concerned with the world of men.

“This is only temporary,” she informed him. “We are all seekers, looking for our personal Ishvara.”

The way she said it was convincing, but the photographs of his father in his dress uniform seemed very worldly, and her reminiscences of prestigious English garden parties were not at all celestial, but as a dutiful son he never argued. Nevertheless, he felt denied and rejected by the social world and bemused and mystified by the spiritual world that his mother so easily embraced. She had found the knack of balancing the opposites of aesthetic asceticism with worldly pleasure and social comfort. In some trick of social tightrope walking she had managed to give him a private school education that was enigmatically Christian, followed by a university education in Calcutta, where he studied history, philosophy and literature that she assumed would open his mind. Somehow, it had not quite done the trick and all he could boast was the status of a minor sahib with no hope of promotion and not much hope of marriage. His salary was pitiful and his worldly position matched it. Life, he thought, is a swindle. This is the land of frustration where all ambitions and desires are doomed before they even took shape. In her cabinet of souvenirs, his mother had a little model of a donkey trying to bite a carrot. Each movement of the donkey created an evasive movement of the carrot. When he had played

with it, as a boy, he had tried to help the donkey but even with cheating, the donkey never got the carrot. It was very clever and just a trick with magnets. After he had studied science at the boarding school, he realized that he could have changed it by reversing one of the magnets. Yet, life was not like that, even with his best efforts at manipulating events he still finished up without any kind of carrot. He felt unwanted, unfulfilled and isolated. Why any soul ever chose to come to this planet eluded him.

When he was younger and not able to escape his mother's guidance she had explained the whole plot. According to her interpretation of the scriptures, we are all down here on a big learning assignment. She explained that as souls, we are trying to find our spiritual home and everything that happened was all part of the learning curve. She made it sound reasonable but there seemed to be no map and no compass. As well as that, there seemed to be no signposts for this journey through life. What was more, he could not find many people who took it at all seriously. At the university, the name of the game was pleasure and for that the specific aim was money. The carrot they all chased was that of qualifications. The formula was, "qualifications equal a good job". A good job equals money, and money equals the doorway to pleasure. Whether this was synonymous with happiness never came into the equation, but the real difficulty was in getting a good job. It seemed a futile exercise to get a degree just to become a railway clerk with the Indian railways, or a tax assessor in a dingy government office.

When he grumbled his mother came out with her explanations from the scriptures.

"Resentment will achieve nothing," she told him. "You should conquer your desires."

Her platitudes sent him crazy. How could she talk like that? After all, she had virtually been the mistress of a British army captain and his own frustrating life was living proof that his mother had most certainly not controlled her desires. . The whole thing was a nonstop saga of temptation and denial where money and position were the magical keys to any type of gratification. He was a love child and now he was loveless. How could he not feel resentful?

His mother answered his thoughts.

"I know you feel cheated. The girls prefer men who have money to spend on them. Perhaps, you should get a better job."

He knew that was impossible, at least, not without leaving Darjeeling. The thought of that was distasteful. He had seen the so-called real world, down in Calcutta. It was the melting pot of the East, with more vagrants sleeping on the pavements than in the rest of Bengal. In any case, he knew his departure would destroy his mother. At the age of fifty-two she was dependent on him to add to her tiny income. That was the main reason why he had no money for socializing. Either way, he loved his mother and he knew she genuinely loved him. In all his confused resentment, she was always the anchor in his sea of discontent. No, if ever he were to break this pattern of dependence, he would need a miracle of pure magic.

A voice outside interrupted his conjectures. It was his friend Rajik. Rajik was a modern Indian, who had been at University with John. He had the same problem but somehow he seemed to handle it differently. His philosophy of life was in two words.

“Why worry?” he said.

It sounded very simple but it did not work with everything.

“Come on,” Rajik called. “Let’s have a coffee in town.”

John laughed. “Some town”, he remarked.

There was one sloping street that passed as the High Street, and a few side alleys with shops and a bazaar. The big buildings were British government buildings and amongst them was the British style hotel. The most exciting thing that ever happened was a fight between the men who spent their time gambling on the pavement, playing complex versions of schoolyard games, in which they always seemed to finish up penniless. Despite that, it was pleasant and even the war had not done much more than ruffle the tranquility that generally lay over the tiny town.

At the café, they sat on the chairs outside, enjoying the late summer breeze. A waiter, dressed in the resplendent white outfit of a military bearer came up.

“What would the sahibs like?” he asked.

“Two coffees, “ Rajik said.

“Yes sahib,” the bearer responded, with a slight token bow.

John observed it. Everything was all very civilized. Why would he want to leave and be another aimless soul, swallowed up in a big city?

Rajik nudged him. “What’s bugging you?” he asked. “You’re not with it. You seem to be somewhere else. Have you got a problem?”

John smiled wryly. “I think I have,” he answered, “I’m not with it. In fact I feel very much without it.”

Rajik laughed. He had studied psychology at the university and then, like nearly everyone else, finished by doing something different. “Without what?” he asked, and laughed again, adding, “as if I do not know.”

John was only faintly amused. “It’s all right for you. What do you know about it? You have already turned your back on this world. As soon as you left the university, you went off visiting ashrams. Everywhere from here to Kashmir, and what has it got you?”

“I didn’t go to get anything”, Rajik almost snapped.

John shrugged off his mood. Rajik was the only one who understood him. In a more apologetic tone, he answered his own question. “Yes. I know. You were on a quest of consciousness, looking for the Holy Grail of enlightenment. Everyone seems to have a guru to lean on. My mother is always asking me when I am going to take life seriously, and you just shrug everything off and quote one of your ashram pundits. Maybe I am not with it, and that’s what is wrong with me.”

The bearer returned with two cups of steaming coffee.

“There you are sahibs.”

He said it like an attentive mother, as if the coffee was magic brew that would dispel all woes. They both picked up their cups and sat sipping the coffee, letting the aroma of the coffee beans drift up their nostrils.

“There’s a new holy man in town, Rajik said eventually.

“And who have we got this time?” John asked.

“He’s called Nam Tso Lama, a Buddhist, with a dash of shamanism by all accounts.”

“What does Nam Tso mean?” John asked. “Has it got any meaning, like your guru’s title?”

“Nam Tso is the name of a mountain, north of Lhasa, in Tibet,” Rajik answered.

“Oh - a mountain? That means that he got his awakening there.”

“Well done,” Rajik said banteringly. “You do know something.”

“Well, they did teach us a few things in Calcutta, but have you seen this new character?”

“No,” Rajik replied. “I think he’s giving a talk tonight.”

“Where?” John wanted to know.

“In the bungalow; next to the old Maharaja’s palace. You know the one that is dropping to bits.”

“Oh yes. British troops used it during the war. My mother told me about it. It was a rest and relaxation station. That’s when the population started to increase.” John stopped abruptly. He had slipped up there. Such a remark was too personal. Fortunately, Rajik ignored it. He was more concerned with the idea of meeting another guru.

“How about going along?” he asked John. “We might learn something.”

John sighed. “Why not? What else is there to do?” He paused, thinking what it might offer. “Right, count me in. No doubt there will be other curiosity seekers.”

“You’ve got the wrong attitude,” Rajik said. “It’s not like that.”

John avoided the temptation to ask what it was really like. He knew what Rajik would say. He was a dedicated seeker. To him all gurus were potential stepping-stones to some eventual Nirvana or the Western Paradise.

“Very well,” he said. “I’ll go. What time does the show start?”

“It isn’t a show,” Rajik protested. “It is only an introductory talk.”

“There might be some girls”, John suggested.

Rajik shook his head at John’s attitude. “Could be, there are usually one or two. Anyway, it starts at seven.”

“I’ll see you outside then.” John replied.

John arrived early. He did not want to attract attention by arriving late. He stood outside the bungalow with three or four other people. Slowly more people came up. They were some young people and a few gray haired men who gave the impression of being experienced seekers on the path of liberation. Most of them wore their traditional Indian dress, but one or two were wearing western style white cotton trousers. John felt relieved at that. He always wore western style clothes.

Rajik came up behind him.

“I think we should go inside and get a good seat,” he said.

John knew what that meant. It meant sitting at the front.

They went inside and the others began to follow. In the hallway, there was one open door, with a pair of shoes neatly placed to one side. Rajik kicked off his sandals. He had come prepared, and was not wearing any socks. John unlaced his shoes and pushed them off.

“Good,” Rajik said, and led the way into the room.

The room had no furniture. There was only a big carpet, covering most of the floor. The earlier arrival was already sitting. He was sitting cross-legged on the carpet, facing a big silk covered cushion that was obviously there for the lama.

Gradually the room began to fill with more arrivals, until there were almost four rows of people, all sitting cross-legged, waiting for the lama. John felt a bit chagrined with Rajik’s decision to sit at the front. It meant that he could not look at the other people without turning round. There were at least six or seven young women there. He had watched them come in, gliding over the carpet in their slightly swaying walk, with their thin saris fluttering round them as they moved. The world of the flesh was of far more interest to John than the hope of enlightenment, but somehow such delights always eluded him.

His reverie ended with the sight of another figure entering the room. It was the lama.

John looked at him with surprise. He had imagined a short tubby figure, with spectacles and a balding head. What he saw was the complete opposite. The lama was tall, a good six feet in height. He was not bald and was beardless. His hair was thinning. A wisp of gray fringed his temples, yet his age seemed indeterminate, as if he were a timeless visitor from another realm. There was an impression of a glow of light round him, but the room had a good light and it was impossible to be sure. The lama’s robe was a dusky faded color that had once been an earthy yellow. There were neat patches here and there, in the traditional manner of wearing the robe until a replacement was necessary.

The lama stopped beside the cushion and faced the assembly. He put his hands together in supplication and greeting and bowed slightly to the people, who had remained seated. The group responded by putting their hands together and bowing their heads. The lama sat down, arranging his threadbare robe over his crossed legs. He began to speak.

His voice was firm and clear and had the ring of authority and certainty. The impression was that here was no wandering monk seeking a signpost to enlightenment, but someone who had found the path and traveled all the way along it.

The assembly listened in anticipation as he began to speak.

“There is only one question,” he said. He paused then added, “Why are you here?” He waited for this strange question to sink in, then continued. “What is it that you really want from life? Why are you on this earth?”

John sucked in a deep breath, between clenched teeth. He could have given a big list of what he wanted from life, but the questions as to why he was on this planet frustrated him. As far as he was concerned it was all the product of a biological accident, and any meaning or purpose did not come into it

The next question was even more disturbing. The lama leaned forward, as if to emphasize the question. “What were you before you were born?” he asked.

There was total silence. No one had an answer.

“And where were you?”

John struggled to comprehend this unusual question. He wondered what others might be thinking and wanted to ask for clarification, but felt too awkward to say anything.

Someone behind him broke the silence.

“I don’t understand that question,” one of the older men said. “Do you mean in our last life?”

The lama was faintly amused. “No,” he answered. “I mean before your physical birth. People think of life after death, but I am speaking of life before birth. What do you think; that your spirit, the soul, miraculously appears at birth?”

To John the concept seemed meaningless. He knew about reincarnation, but never gave the idea much thought. The concept of one life after another seemed a useless treadmill of fantasy

The questioner persisted, groping for an insight into this new approach. “Could you explain?” he asked.

“Very well. We will start with reincarnation. Most of you probably accept that, but it is not like that. The spiritual self, or what some people call the soul, may not have had a previous life in this world. It might have come from a different world, but that is not the

point. The question is, ‘What are you. What is your identity, whether you are in this world or any other?’”

John was beginning to wish he had not come to this talk. He did not get on too well with philosophy. There were too many concepts that had no factual basis, and this present discussion seemed to be going to that extreme. He waited for the next comment. A different voice entered into the discussion.

“What you seem to be saying is, ‘What is the nature of the self, irrespective of where it is’.”

“Exactly so,” the lama said.

One of the young women broke into the discussion.

“I don’t understand all this talk of coming and going. I know the question, ‘Who am I?’ but where we come from and where we go eludes me.”

“Yes,” her friend said. “What happens after death anyway?”

“That depends on your degree of self awareness and what you think you are. Your spiritual quality also affects the situation. You have four options. The first is an opportunity to evolve towards the heaven worlds. That is what we are aiming for, but it depends on your spiritual growth. The opportunity to progress is not available to everyone.”

“Well, who can go on?” the woman asked with some concern.

The lama smiled at her anxious insistence. “Most have an opportunity, especially the ones who are committed to their chosen deity. All sincere devotees receive help to move into the appropriate heaven world. Others go elsewhere. Some may reject the upward path and are more attracted to a lower world.”

“You mean hell?” the woman asked.

“Not exactly - there are different levels. Each soul goes to where its nature takes it. There is a big range.” Apart from that others return to their own world, and there are many, but such visitors are relatively few.”

“What is the fourth option?” she asked.

“That is the one you know as reincarnation, but not everyone comes back. Some prefer it here, but the others only use it as a stepping-stone. As you have no doubt heard, it is a great privilege to be born on this earth, because it is the intermediate world, but the

aim is to move on, and evolve into a pure soul. Some come back because they can make faster progress here, but most go on. Why come back to the kindergarten when you have learnt what you need to know?"

"And if we haven't learnt, what happens then?"

The lama looked thoughtfully at the speaker, then answered with a firm deliberation.

"The critical point is your attitude and intent. If you want to evolve spiritually, you can learn in the next world or you could come back here. Many choose not to return, but some do. That is how the misconception of total reincarnation has arisen. Because you are here, as seekers, you will go on seeking, but the ones who are not seeking may go to a less pleasant dimension, or come back. Most sincere devotees and seekers do not come back. Even so, the real key is self-awareness, not as an ego, but as a soul. It is that condition that is the deciding factor."

No one made any comment. The lama remained silent, letting the group ponder on his words. John sat in deep contemplation. He admired the way that the lama had led his listeners into the subject. From one or two initial statements, he had caused the assembly to ask questions and to ponder on what he had said.

The lama's English also impressed John. Although many people in India spoke English fluently, they usually had an accent and a different way of phrasing their words. The lama showed no sign of that.

A sudden burst of conversation behind him made John turn round. Two of the Indian men were speaking and gesticulating enthusiastically. They were speaking in their native Hindi. John listened to them, as he knew the language from his mother. One of the men was excited. The lama's words must have pressed a hidden button in his mind. Something had clicked.

The lama's voice cut into the stream of excited words. In perfect Hindi, he told the man to stop. Then in English he said to the rest of the group, "I will see you next week."

They rose to leave, but when the group was leaving the room the lama called the excited speaker back, and when they were all outside, he closed the door.

"What's all that about?" John asked Rajik in amazement.

His friend Rajik laughed, and stretching his arms and moving his shoulders to overcome the stiffness of sitting, said, "That was good."

“So you say,” John commented, “but why did he call that man back?”

“I should think it is to tell him to shut up. I have seen it before. He probably had an awakening. There are many minor awakenings, but they are always personal. The tradition is that they are not for public discussion. The lama will probably give him a meditation theme, to strengthen the experience, and tell him not to talk about it.”

John lapsed into silence. Despite some familiarity with the general religious cultures, and the personal influence of his mother’s devotional attitude he had never considered these different ideas as anything but conventional belief systems. It had always seemed a mystery as to why his mother had sent him to a Christian boarding school. That experience had made him see all religions as personal belief cults, and he had never really thought that there might be a common thread, which bound them all together.

“What do you think of the lama?” he asked his friend.

Rajik was full of praise. “I think he’s got it,” he said.

John had to accept that and he wondered if his mother could perhaps explain things. Then he decided it might be better to wait until the next week and try to grasp the details a bit better. To John it was only a subject, like the subjects at university. He could not see what the mystery was. All anyone had to do was to master the subject and the right book would probably explain it all quite well. In terms of his western influences, he secretly thought that all these shamans and swamis were just peddling a nebulous mystique as a means of making a living. There was always a bowl for donations and even with the lama; the people there had put money into the bowl by the door. The best plan seemed to be to say nothing and check it out. Eventually, he would know, without asking.

In spite of his cynicism he was looking forward to another visit. When the next Saturday came round he met Rajik in their usual café, and his first words were on this new topic. “Are we going to the lama’s lair tonight?” he asked flippantly.

Rajik groaned. “When will you take things seriously?”

“How can you take it seriously, when it is so nebulous?” John countered.

“Your problem,” Rajik said, “is that you are really a barbarian. You do not believe in anything.”

As soon as he said it, Rajik knew he had made a mistake. He knew that he had pressed a sensitive button in John’s mind.

“Believe! Believe!” John almost spluttered. “What’s belief got to do with it? Beliefs aren’t necessarily truths, are they?”

Rajik was silent. He had heard these arguments before. They were all so logical. What John often said was true, people believed in things that had no backing. He searched for a way out of the discussion, but John was well into his favorite topic.

“If this lama mentions belief I’m out of it,” he asserted fiercely.

Rajik tried to placate him. “Well, some beliefs are all right.”

“And some are not.” John retorted. “In fact they are downright garbage. Just a lot of fantasies passed off as religion. They are only ‘Santa Claus’ religions, where people one day wake up and realize that there is no Santa Claus.”

Rajik shook his head. “I think your mother made a mistake by sending you to a Christian boarding school. They have addled your brain.”

“Maybe, but I am not brainwashed. In any case, what do you suggest?”

Rajik drew in a deep breath. “You know my approach. I prefer knowledge. I’m into Jmana Yoga, the knowledge path that leads to wisdom. That’s not a belief system, it’s a knowledge system.”

“In that case you should not mention beliefs,” John told him.

Rajik agreed. “Sorry,” he said and changed the subject. “What did your mother think about it? Did you tell her?”

“No,” John replied. “I thought I’d better to wait until I had a better grip on it. To be quite honest, I can’t quite get my mind round the ideas.”

“Give it time,” Rajik advised. “We’ll probably get a better idea tonight.”

Rajik was right and at the meeting, that evening, the lama launched into a new set of ideas that established the platform for the new developments that sprang from it. The lama began by a further explanation that they were all on this planet for the sole purpose of evolving spiritually.

“Not only is there physical evolution,” he reaffirmed. “There is spiritual evolution as well, and our duty is to understand that and help the spirit to grow.”

He paused to let the idea sink in. Then he continued.

“To help this we need a teaching, which explains how things are. There is no such thing as a perfect teaching as all descriptions fail because of their limitation. The central

theme, which you already know, is that there are lower and higher worlds. Our task is to awaken to our own spiritual identity and move into the higher worlds.”

John waited for something new. The lama had more or less said these things last week, and like any teacher, he was repeating the points.

“Now,” said the lama, with a new emphasis. “To do this you need a method. There are four main paths. The first, which few take, because it is very difficult, is the path of power. This gives control in this world but does not go all the way to the heaven worlds without extra effort and a teacher. Some like it because it offers success, but only in the lower worlds, including the earth world.”

John listened eagerly. This, John thought, sounded more useful. Success and fulfillment in this life seemed far more attractive than reaching for an invisible heaven in some future life.

The lama carried on speaking. “The second path, which many choose, is the path of devotion. This is very good but in any case you will need knowledge, and the third path is that of knowledge, which is what I teach.”

Rajik gave John a slight nudge and cast a sidelong knowing look at John, as if to make sure he was listening.

“The fourth path, which is the one most people take, is the path of conflict and suffering.”

He stopped, as if waiting for a response. The reaction was rapid.

“But why should anyone choose the path of conflict and suffering?” a young man asked.

The lama smiled. He had made his point, and he expanded on it.

“No one chooses it deliberately, they take it out of ignorance. Because they have no wisdom they drift into the path of woe, where frustration and disappointment cause them to seek relief.”

“So what can we do to avoid it?” the man asked.

“You can do what you are doing already. You can seek knowledge. That is the cure for the sickness of ignorance. That is what I offer.”

John pondered on this. He was not so sure. He had heard Rajik say that the knowledge path was the hardest of all. He remembered Rajik’s words. ‘Knowledge strengthens the

mind, and that makes it difficult to transcend it.’ Maybe the path of power would be better, John thought. In any case, it would be more practical. Either way it all sounded very difficult. He decided to ask about the path of power. The lama had stopped speaking and was waiting for questions. John grasped the opportunity.

“Could you explain a bit more about the path of power?” he asked.

The keen interest in his voice indicated to the lama that this was not a passing curiosity. He looked at John thoughtfully, and then said quietly,

“See me after the meeting. I will explain.”

John nodded his thanks and went into a reverie, wondering what mysteries the lama might tell him. When the meeting ended, he stayed behind and Rajik left him with critical comment.

“I hope you are sure about this,” he said.

John could not understand what he meant, but the lama’s first words were almost an echo of Rajik’s remark. “Do you understand what the power path is?” he asked John when they were finally alone.

John sat cross-legged, just in front of the lama, who was sitting in the traditional lotus position. There was no way that John could evade that question. He realized as he heard it that really he knew very little about any of the systems of meditation. He had heard Rajik mention some of them but had never paid much attention. Now, one remark by Rajik jumped into his mind. ‘You have to be careful’, he had said, ‘after all, you are playing with your consciousness. People think an altered state of consciousness is just a novelty. They are stupid.’

John briefly wondered if he was perhaps being stupid, but he had no time to ponder on that. The lama was waiting for a reply.

“Not exactly,” John said lamely, trying to dodge the question.

The lama was silent for a few minutes. John felt like a candidate for a university course, waiting for a verdict. When the lama spoke, his words were even less reassuring.

“You have asked. Therefore, I will answer. Then we will consider.”

John waited, thinking that Rajik was probably right. The lama continued.

“The path of power is the method of awakening the divine power, and controlling the energy. Wrongly awakened it can be dangerous. Some people cannot handle it.”

He paused. Inwardly John wondered what was he getting himself into, and again recalled Rajik's warning. It sounded ominous. "And you think I would not be able to handle it?" John asked.

The lama stared intently at John. "You are not Indian," he said bluntly.

"No, not really. My mother is, but my father was British."

The lama added. "That could be helpful. You probably have a strong mind and a good constitution."

John nodded in agreement. His father had certainly bequeathed him something from his Anglo-Saxon influence. He was assertive and very robust. The lama carried on speaking.

"The method is a great strain on the nervous system, and there is some distress, but the advantages far outweigh the difficulties." He paused, then added, "I think you could handle it, but you must make the decision, and once started it cannot be reversed. Ponder on it."

John thanked the lama and left. The lama had certainly given him something on which to ponder.

The next evening, after he had dinner with his mother, she asked what was wrong. "What is worrying you? You are not usually so quiet."

John hesitated. How could he explain to her when he did not fully understand what was happening? The phone ringing interrupted his worried thoughts. His mother picked up the phone, and turned to John.

"It is Rajik," she told him. "He says he is coming round."

"He's another one who wants to know what is going on," John said sarcastically.

His mother avoided any further comments and started to clear the table.

"We will sit on the veranda," John told his mother, and went into his bedroom to relax for a while. As soon as he had left the dining room, his mother went into the lounge room and opened the windows slightly, so that she would be able to hear what John and Rajik would be discussing.

"I will bring coffee out to you," she said when Rajik arrived.

He felt relieved to escape further questions from his mother, but it was difficult to be private, as the bungalow was not very spacious. It was one of the earliest British India

buildings, with an airy lounge and a separate dining room. For normal living, it was quite adequate, but it did not offer much scope for intimate conversations or personal discussions.

John sat in one of the cane chairs, facing Rajik, who was still puffing and blowing with the effort of riding his cycle up the steep slope overlooking the valley. All the bungalows were scattered along the hillside and the opposite slopes gave off a twinkle of lights that indicated other hillside homes. Fortunately, Rajik lived on the same side as John and did not have to travel very far.

When he had sat down, John's mother came out, and greeted Rajik and asked if they wanted tea or coffee. When John's mother had brought their drinks to them, she withdrew to the lounge, and sat where they would not be able to see her. She was anxious to know why her son was so tense, and waited to see what the conversation might indicate. On the veranda, Rajik moved his chair closer to John and fired the question that he was burning to ask.

"What did he say?" he asked eagerly.

Inside, John's mother could hear Rajik asking what had transpired at the private discussion with the lama. She waited as keenly as Rajik to hear John's answer.

"He offered to accept me as a disciple," John replied, not wanting to say too much.

"Oh. Is that all? I thought it was something special. All gurus do that. They just face you in the right direction and that is it. I thought it was something special."

The tone of his voice indicated that he had expected more than that. Inside the house, John's mother relaxed. She was pleased that John was at last looking for the spiritual path in life. She had sent him to a Christian school because he had shown little interest in the Indian culture. His whole outlook was very western, and he had never really considered his Indian background as very significant. Like many offspring of a mixed union, he often felt suspended between two cultures. His mother had given him the opportunity to understand them both but he still appeared to be directionless. Perhaps the firm discipline of a meditation system would help. She waited to hear more.

John felt slightly chagrined at Rajik's dismissive tone. What the lama had said seemed very special, at least to him.

“He offered to set me on the path of power,” he said aggressively. “Surely that means something?”

Rajik’s whole demeanor changed. He was impressed, but wondered if John knew what that entailed.

“Do you understand what he is saying?” he asked John

“Not exactly,” John said in his usual uncertain manner.

Rajik began to explain. “He means that he can awaken the spiritual power. In Yoga, that is the Kundalini Shakti. If he knows what he is doing, that could be something special, but if he does not it would be a short cut to agony. Frankly, I wouldn’t touch it with a flagpole.”

“What do you mean? Why should there be agony?”

Rajik raised his hands in exasperation. “You are like all these others, looking for a way of cutting the corners and yet you know next to nothing about it.”

“Well! Explain then.”

“The point is,” Rajik went on patiently, “is that any meditation increases the spiritual energy. This can overheat the nerves. There is always some overheating of the nerves in the body but there should not be any extra heat in the head. That can be dangerous”.

“Well, what’s the point in it? It all seems a bit abstract to me.”

Rajik added more. “The aim is to activate the different centers of consciousness in the subtle body. Biolo

After that, Rajik stopped talking and the conversation ended. John was silent. He was pondering on this m

Rajik stood up. “I think I shall go,” he said. “I can see you want to think about it.”

John thanked him and Rajik wheeled his bicycle onto the hard dirt path and coasted down the slope. John

John followed her into the lounge room. She walked over to the tall bookrack and turned to John.

“I heard what Rajik sad,” she told John. “I am pleased that you are thinking of choosing a spiritual path.”

John said nothing. How could he say that he was hoping for personal power, in this world and in his personal life? He was beginning to see that his own private agenda was different from that of his mother, or Rajik. He had never said that he wanted enlightenment, or liberation or whatever else they called it. His mother spoke again.

“I have come to the bookcase to show you something,” she said, and took two or three books from one of the shelves.

“These books are about Kundalini Yoga,” she informed John. “I think you should read them before you make up your mind.”

John looked at the books. He was pleased that his mother understood what was happening, even if she did

“It does not really matter how you start, or where you start, the outcome is the same. There is only one path, and that is the one of spiritual progress.” She paused then went on, “I asked my own guru about the lama. He says that he knows about him. He is well respected and you will be safe with him.”

John felt a sudden surge of love for his mother. He knew that she was speaking out of concern for his welfare, but her words of encouragement lifted a great weight off his mind. His uncertainty vanished. With the support of his friend and especially of his mother, he felt that he could survive the difficulties.

“It may take a few years,” his mother warned him, and then changed her tone to one of mild chastisement. “You should read these books,” she told him. “So far you have never even taken one of these books off the shelves. All you think about is the outside world, but there is a more meaningful inside world.”

The last remark seemed to stand out, and in the days and weeks ahead, John would have cause to remember those words.

Having once made up his mind, John was eager to find out what the lama might do. His imagination soon explained that the word initiate meant ‘to set in motion’ and that it was the Kundalini Shakti that would be set in motion.

Even then, this would have meant very little to John. Like most people, John was particularly unaware of

“Scientists know nothing,” Rajik often said. “They only study matter. That’s why they are so materialistic those.”

John always defended the western viewpoint and they generally agreed that the ideal combination would be western practicality and eastern insight.

At the next lecture, Lama Nam Tso added a few more explanations to his teaching.

“The most important idea that you must grasp is that there are two points of identity. There is the external ego-body person and there is the inner spiritual soul. The link between them is the mind and we have to use the mind as a bridge. This is why all the

disciplines work on the mind. First, we must calm the mind, and that is why we chant. Then we have to learn to control the mind, and that is difficult. After that, we must purify the mind, and only then, can we transcend the mind and attain spiritual insight. Buddhism says that we must cross to the far shore, which means the furthest limits of the mind, then, we have to make the great leap into the arms of faith. What we have to do is to transcend the ego and experience our identity as the spiritual Self, but true enlightenment is beyond that, and is an experienced awareness of the eternal spirit in everything. You have to transcend the ego because the ego person cannot gain enlightenment. The ego has to surrender, but does not wish to do so. That is why there is conflict. The secret weapon is knowledge, and devotion to the search for your true inner identity. Some of you know all this. It is in many books, but you must work at it. Meditation and contemplation are essential if you wish to have genuine experience of what I say.”

John listened with extra interest. He had read the books his mother had given him and was becoming more familiar with the concept of a living spirit that was the real prime mover in the worldly life. He waited for the end of the meeting. When it was over the lama spoke to John.

“Have you decided?” he asked.

“Yes,” John replied.

“Can you come in the morning?” the lama asked.

John nodded. The next day was Sunday. There would be no problem.

“Good!” the lama said. “We will open the door to the hidden worlds, and I will explain what happens.”

John was enthralled. It sounded like a new life. He was to find out that although that was correct it would be a slow and difficult journey. It would not be quite as magical and instant as he had imagined.

CHAPTER 2 - THE DOOR OPENS

John arrived early. His enthusiasm and curiosity were pulling him forward into what he hoped would be an exciting new life with endless remarkable experiences. Although there were undoubtedly many aspects of inner awareness that might fall into that description, John was soon to find that curiosity and unchecked enthusiasm did not make a good recipe for dealing with the hazards of the hidden worlds, and the lama's opening words emphasized that.

When they were sitting, the lama looked seriously at John and began to explain. "I am accepting you as a disciple because I know you have the potential for a true awakening. The responsibility is both ways. I can help you but you must trust me. I cannot explain many things until you reach the appropriate stage, and there are many dangers on this path, as you will find as you progress. If you do not wish to follow this path you should go now, and continue on the knowledge path."

"I will stay," John said quietly.

The lama nodded and continued. "The knowledge path is very safe but it is very slow. There is a shorter way for those who are willing to take the risk. Once anyone awakens the spiritual power, he cannot switch it off. Once started it must continue. There are two or three degrees of awakening and we shall not take the easiest one, neither shall we take the strongest one. That would be too fierce for you."

He paused, then asked, "Do you understand?"

"Yes," John said, feeling glad that he had read the books that his mother had given to him.

"There are different centers in the subtle body, which connect with the nervous system, and the energy can be stimulated at any of the centers. Most systems start at the heart center because that is the safest and it avoids the distress and conflicts of working through the lower centers. Each center is the door to a hidden world, and each has its own risks. For seekers who want a balance of knowledge and power the energy must awaken at a lower center. There is the center at the base of the spine, which will give great insight and the power that comes with it. For the full awakening, the beginning must be in

the feet. This is because for true power you must learn to control the spirits of the earth. This is not an easy task. Its own lord rules each world and they do not wish to share their secrets and will try to stop you, and even keep you. Some will promise power if you serve them. Many shamans have difficulty in these different levels. A true shaman transcends them all.”

The lama waited, and let these details sink into John’s mind, then added, “The strongest defense is purity. This means strong mental discipline so that you do not allow thoughts of fear or desire to weaken your resolve.”

Another long silence followed while the lama let John absorb these details. After a while, he added more. “The other defense is seeing the situation clearly. For this, there must be inner vision. This will not be a simple psychic skill but a continuity of consciousness that operates while the body is asleep.”

John looked astonished. He had never considered such a situation. The lama expanded on the subject. “When the body is asleep the subtle body dreams and indulges in its own fantasies. These are meaningless. What is needed is conscious awareness, even though the body is asleep. It can develop by practice but our way is quicker. By starting at the feet we can ensure that you work through the lower worlds in the correct order, and by opening the inner eye you will be able to see where you are. The greatest risk is in not being able to stand what you see. This is why the Buddha said that intuition is the best method, because then you can avoid the sights. Do you have any questions?”

John’s mind was in a whirl. He could have asked a dozen questions, but somehow they seemed unimportant. The critical question was, did he want to go through with it? He did not want to back out now. That would have been a loss of face. John felt that he was already committed. There seemed no point in asking futile questions. He shook his head.

“No.” he said almost in a whisper.

“Then we can commence,” the lama said, with a great air of finality.

“First we will work on the feet. Stretch out both your legs.”

John pushed his feet forward, thinking this seemed very bizarre. One month ago, everything had appeared very mundane, with the daily routine repeating in a long unbroken repetition of endless days that came and went without any variations of light

and shade. Now the canvas of his life was changing with bold strokes that suggested the outline of a vivid new picture. He struggled to remain objective but felt that he was sinking into a sea of subjective phenomena where external reality was fading into a dream world that he was helping to create. He watched as the lama leaned forward and grasped his feet with both hands. A slight shock, like the tingle of electricity entered his nerves and traveled up his legs before dissipating in his body.

The lama kept a firm grip on both feet, concentrating on what he was doing. John felt his feet becoming hotter and wanted to shake his feet free but they were in a vice like grip. The heat increased until all of both feet felt suffused in warmth, which included his ankles. He remembered the sensation of relief when he had bathed his feet after a long walk. That had been pleasant but this was almost too much. Suddenly the lama let go and leaned back. John felt the warmth flow up his legs again, but this time it seemed to stop when it reached his body. He could feel the lower centers, below the solar plexus, becoming active.

“Stand up now,” the lama commanded.

John stood up.

“How do you feel?” the lama asked.

John responded by stamping his feet two or three times, then to his amazement, he heard himself say,

“I feel great. I could kick a tree down.”

The lama smiled at the comment.

“Excellent. The energy is working. You will have more strength for everything, but you must conserve it for the tasks ahead.”

John noticed the use of the plural. What tasks? He mentally queried the statement, not at all sure if he liked the sound of that. Now, it was too late to do anything about it. The fire was alight and it must continue to burn.

“Sit down again,” the lama ordered.

John resumed his cross-legged position.

“You must practice the traditional pose,” he told John. “It is important that you keep a firm seat when you meditate. You must meditate every morning. Sunrise is the best time.

There is always more energy then. I will give you an exercise that will develop your concentration so that you can have a one-pointed focus to achieve results.”

The lama leaned forward again and reached out one hand towards John’s head. “Keep quite still,” he told John.

John clutched his knees as he pushed forward to resist the pressure of the lama’s hand on his forehead. After a few minutes, the lama eased the pressure and pressed his thumb hard on the bridge of his nose, between the eyebrows. John felt a slight fluttering in that area and flickering lights broke the blackness of his tightly closed eyes. John vaguely wondered if this was the opening of the third eye, or the eye of Shiva, as he had heard his mother describe it.

The lama released his pressure and sat back. “After a few days you will begin to develop inner vision, but it will only operate within the range of the night-time experiences. From now on, you must come to me every week. The inner vision should begin to show before next week. Usually there are only glimpses, but in case of any difficulty, you can call on me. If you call my name, I will respond. When you are more aware of what is happening you can use simpler methods. The inner experiences are out-of-the- body experiences and you will know that. Usually, if in difficulty it is enough to think of your body and you will return to it. Also, you can think of someone you love and that always creates a speedy return.”

Inwardly John squirmed. Why should it be necessary to make a speedy return? What were the difficulties? The lama kept using that word and it was very disconcerting.

“That will be enough for now,” the lama told him.

John thanked him and stood up. The feeling of strength in his lower limbs was still there and John felt that he could walk up Mount Everest with no difficulty.

After bowing his respects to the lama, John left and walked home slowly. He needed time to grasp the events that were now overtaking him and he sauntered along, pondering on the strangeness of his new experiences.

As he walked into the bungalow where he lived, his mother greeted him.

“How did it go?” she asked.

John felt happy to tell her but was not sure how much he should say. The lama had not forbidden him to say anything to anyone, but John knew that the tradition was to

avoid discussions, especially with people who were unsympathetic. Obviously, residents in the same ashram or monastery would support each other and discuss their progress. He decided to treat the subject in that way, without revealing too much. He went into the kitchen and sat down at the little breakfast table. His mother automatically began to make some tea and he sat there watching her. He was glad that he had someone with whom he could confide. The new experiences were so mind stretching that he felt a need for some personal type of support, and he thought how fortunate he was to have such a mother and a friend like Rajik. When his mother gave him the tea and sat down, he began to describe the recent events.

“I do not quite know how to express it,” John said to her. “It is all so different.”

“I have had a few experiences myself,” his mother said encouragingly.

John gave her a quick look, but realized that she had been studying the subject for years and that it would be remarkable if she had not learnt something. He suddenly felt ashamed for thinking that his mother knew very little about such things. With a touch of modesty, he tried to explain.

“We just sat facing each other and he held my feet, then pressed at the center between the eyebrows, and said I would have clear experiences at night time.”

After he had added a few more details, his mother looked thoughtful.

“You know I take a traditional approach,” she said, “and some of my friends are Buddhists, but I have never heard anything quite like that.”

She thought for a few moments, and added, “I suppose it is because he is a Tibetan lama. He is using Tibetan Buddhism. They are much more into all this esoteric knowledge. You will probably have to learn a lot. Did he give any indication of how long it will take?”

“Well,” John answered slowly, “he said in one of his talks that if we started at the right time we could attain enlightenment in seven years, but I do not know what he meant by the right time, or what method he was considering.”

“Oh yes,” his mother said, as if she knew something about it. “There are times when there is better spiritual growth. I will ask my guru. Perhaps he will know, or you could ask Rajik, he is very well read in such matters.”

“I will,” John said. “No doubt he will be along later, to see if I have developed a halo.”

His mother smiled. “I do not think there is much chance of that. At least, not just yet.”

The conversation ended and John went into his room to ponder further on the new developments. “No doubt it will take time”, he thought, “but I certainly have plenty of that!”

Altogether, he felt pleased that he had accepted the challenge. Even from a mundane point of view, it gave him something to think about and a goal for him to attain. Whichever way things progressed, it would be better than the aimless routine he had before.

Two hours later, he was still sitting pondering when he heard the familiar tinkle of Rajik’s bicycle bell. He stood up.

“Now, we’ll have a real inquest, “ he said to his mother as he went through the lounge room to meet Rajik.

“I will make tea for you,” his mother said. “It is a pity we do not have a bearer, but they are too expensive these days. I do not suppose your father ever knew what the inside of a kitchen was like.”

“Probably not,” John answered. “From what you have told me, he liked to play the role of being a pukka sahib.””

As Rajik rolled up on his ancient bicycle, he waved and called out a greeting. “Salaam to the sahib,” he said.

John responded with equal wit. “You will have to salaam better than that from now on, and call me burrah sahib. ”

Rajik climbed the veranda steps, pushing his long hair back from his face. He was smiling. “Well, at least the lama hasn’t done too much damage,” he said as he reached John.

They both sat down and John’s mother came out with a tray of tea. “I am not sure whether he knows what he has let himself in for,” she told Rajik. “He seems to think he is going to become another Milarepa.”

“Ha ha!” Rajik said humorously. “Milarepa was a great Tibetan Yogi who was a poet and a saint. Dear old John can’t even make two words rhyme, and as for being a saint, some hopes.”

“Be careful,” John said in mock seriousness, “or I’ll put a hoodoo on you.”

As his mother left them, he became more serious. “I’m glad you came. To be quite honest I’m not sure whether I’ve bitten off more than I can chew.”

Rajik listened intently to all John had to say. John told him a few more details than he had told his mother but he still refrained from mentioning that it was the thought of power that had attracted him. Now he was not so sure, and thought it better to be discreet.

“By all accounts he has opened the door to the hidden worlds with a bit of a crash,” Rajik said. “You are fortunate not to get the full treatment. If he turned the tap full on you would soon be wondering what had hit you.”

“Why?” John asked. “You make it sound like a disaster.”

“It can be.” Rajik replied, “There was a man in one of the ashrams who heard of a special technique and he tried it. The Shakti was too forceful and he suffered enormous nervous stress. According to him, it was extremely painful. His great mission now is to warn others to proceed slowly and gradually, and get there safely.”

“So you think I’m in for a rough ride then?” John asked worriedly.

“Not really, just a bit bumpy. To tell you the truth I have been checking up on Lama Nam Tso. He has been here before and some of the older people know him.”

“What did they say?” John asked with interest.

Rajik was amused at his friend’s concern and deliberately hesitated.

“For God’s sake, tell me.” John insisted.

“They said he is an excellent teacher and there are one or two here who had a similar initiation. I will find out who they are and we can perhaps see them. There is nothing like knowing the questions before the exam. That way you’ll be sure to pass.”

John agreed with the analogy and lapsed into silence, wondering what the night world of dreams and out-of-the body experiences might hold for him. Rajik noticed his friends brooding concern and decided to leave him to ponder on the events. In his personal searching, Rajik had visited many ashrams and had long discussions with various teachers. From these he had learnt that patience was a necessary ingredient and that

nothing happened overnight. As with everything else, he knew that there is a long period of growth and that developing the shoot into a beautiful flower was likely to be a difficult process. His own choice was the safe and more tedious path of knowledge and he knew that his own progress would be slow. Yet, because of his knowledge he knew that his friend would flower much quicker and he was eager to learn by watching John unfold his consciousness as the invisible energy forced the inner growth of John's spirit.

John waved to his friend as he left and remained seated on the veranda, still thinking about his new situation. It seemed very odd. On the outside, nothing had changed. The landscape looked exactly as before, people moved about in the daily activities and his body appeared exactly as before. Yet, somehow everything seemed different. His perception of the most ordinary things in life was keener and subtler. He had a new set of values with which to measure everything but they were not clear enough for John to understand what was happening. He went inside and stood in front of his mother's bookcase. There were books on every kind of spiritual philosophy and even reading the titles made him realize what a wealth of information his mother must have accumulated. He felt very chastened by the awareness of his own ignorance and wondered why the lama had accepted him as a pupil when he was so uninformed on the nature of the spirit. He took a book on Buddhism and sat down to read it.

He continued to read all day and finally went to bed, thinking that the whole saga was a fantasy in his own mind. In bed, he tried to observe himself falling asleep, thinking that he could consciously check the transition into another dimension of inner activity. To his astonishment, the next thing he knew was his mother's voice telling him to get up. At the breakfast table he complained of his disappointment.

"You are expecting too much," she told him. "Give it time."

Despite her sympathy, he was not reassured. His mother stood up and went to the calendar that was on the wall. She ran her finger along it.

"The Full Moon is on Friday night," she told him. "There is always more activity then. Do your meditating and try to prepare yourself."

John realized that he had made a poor start. He had not attempted to meditate. He knew his mother meditated and asked her about it.

"When do you meditate?"

“At sunrise,” she said. “I always have done, ever since your father left.”

John felt a mixture of emotions. His father had left his mother when she was pregnant and she must have found life very difficult. As if in answer to his thoughts, she said,

“It was that shock that made me think about life,” then added, after a pause, “most people never think about it unless they get a kick in the teeth from the great guru called life.”

John had a fleeting image of a mighty guru called life figuratively kicking his mother in the face and knew that he had never experienced anything like that. A new respect for his mother rose within him. He knew she had always loved him but the thought of his mother getting up at dawn and meditating before she started on her daily routine amazed him. For him the day started with a fully prepared breakfast table and no suspicion that his mother had done anything else before that. In a new determination, he said, “I think I must follow your example. I am supposed to meditate every morning.”

By Friday evening, John had begun to realize that he was very naïve to think that there would be instant results from the lama’s initiation. He knew that the energy had been set in motion because he could feel various sensations in his legs. Descriptions of these effects were in one of the books in his mother’s bookcase. He had read them with some amusement, as they sounded very bizarre. One that particularly amused him was the description of a sensation of ants crawling on the skin. He thought that was ridiculous, although he accepted the description of the sensation of heat in the feet on the same page. That was because he had experienced that when the lama had performed the initial stimulus. The occasional sensations that he felt were very subjective, and were mostly a feeling of pressure, as if the blood was circulating more forcefully.

At the Full Moon, John felt new sensations. To start with, there was an incredible itching round his ankles, and as the day wore on, he felt a growing heat in his feet. It was so noticeable that he kicked off his shoes when he was sitting at his desk. Towards evening, he began to feel a change in the surface sensations. It was as the books said. There was a distinct feeling of ants crawling up his legs. He even checked to make sure that there were no ants or insects of any kind, and as soon as he arrived home, he took off his shoes, and socks and commented on the phenomena to his mother.

“My feet are on fire,” he told her, “and I feel as if an army of ants is rushing up and down my legs.”

“Ah,” his mother said knowingly. “That’s the Shakti. You see, it is working after all. The sensations mean that there is an increase in nervous energy. It is better for it to be on the surface. According to the books, it can overheat the nerves, but from what I have read, it is not very serious in the legs. I have never had such things, because I started at the heart center. That way I avoided most of the difficulties.”

“Why did the lama not do that for me?” John asked, in a questioning voice.

His mother looked thoughtful for a few minutes. “The heart center is the devotional center, for those on the devotional path. What did you ask for?” she said eventually.

John avoided the question. “The lama mainly teaches knowledge,” he told her.

His mother continued with her preparation of the evening meal, then to John. “Even so,” she said, “very few start with the feet.”

John changed the subject. He thought that his mother was probing a bit too much. He was beginning to see that she had a completely different agenda and was not interested in practical results in the world of human activity. He avoided any further discussions during the rest of the evening, tried to appear indifferent to what he secretly felt was happening.

At bedtime, he sat on his bed and stared at his feet. He felt them both carefully. They definitely seemed hotter, but he wondered if perhaps he was imagining it, and wondered if maybe the whole thing was getting out of hand. Nevertheless, in bed he kicked the bedclothes off his feet and lay there with his bare feet sticking out of the bed covering. In that position, he fell asleep.

Some time later, he was aware that he was standing outside the bungalow. Yet, when he looked at it the appearance was different. The building had the appearance of being very ancient, and the veranda, which was of a wood construction, now seemed constructed of stone. As he pondered on this unusual effect, he thought, ‘I am dreaming. This is a dream.’ He looked round carefully. Everything was familiar, but it yet it was different. He put out a hand and touched the veranda rail. It felt hard and solid. He grasped it firmly but it did not yield. He released his grip and walked round the

bungalow, touching and pulling at objects as he went. ‘It is all so real’, he said to himself. ‘It is so solid.’

At the front again, he was still trying to grasp what was happening and became aware that someone was behind him. He turned and saw the lama smiling broadly at him.

“You are having an out-of-the-body experience,” he said to John. “You will remember it all in the morning. Come, I will show you something.”

“Why is everything so different?” John asked, as he followed the lama.

“The inner consciousness cannot cope with the detail in the outside world. It tends to simplify and all you get is an impression. The same thing happens when you get a message from the inner self. It is a system of correspondences. I will tell you more on Sunday.”

The lama led the way and John suddenly realized that they were underground. He looked around and saw that they were in a large tunnel that seemed to be in solid rock. He had no time to rationalize on this and in any case, his powers of reason seemed to be absent. There was a weird sensation of direct experience that did not match the normal experience of worldly activity. The lama stopped and said, “I will leave you now. When you want to return just think of your body. Do not be afraid.”

The last remark might have seemed ominous under normal conditions, but here it sounded more like practical advice than a warning. The lama vanished and John looked more carefully at his strange environment. Although the walls were apparently of solid rock, they seemed to be alive, with a subtle inner activity of their own. He had the impression of millions of atoms whirling round each other in their restricted formation of mineral matter. A fearful roar of a hoarse voice arrested his speculations. He looked in the direction from which it came. The area where he was standing was quite large, with different tunnels leading off it. The sound had come from directly ahead. John moved forward cautiously. As he entered the tunnel, a figure came out of the gloom. Walking towards him was an ordinary looking man in very shabby nondescript clothes. The man smiled as he greeted John.

“Hullo,” he said. “Are you visiting?”

John was too astonished to answer immediately. Somehow, the scene did not fit together. Behind the man, further in the tunnel, another enraged roar echoed towards

them. The man laughed and said, “Don’t worry about him. He cannot get out, but what are you doing here?”

John controlled his urge to ask a flood of questions and attempted to give a rational answer.

“My teacher brought me here,” John told him.

“Ah,” the man said, “a learning expedition. Come on. I will show you the local sights.”

John thought it was all too strange for such a casual manner but followed the man into a wider area of the tunnel. Along the sides were caves, with strong bars to keep the inmates confined securely. Another roar indicated that this was where the original noises had originated. John’s companion pointed at the first cage. Inside it, pushing at the bars was a monster of a man. He was completely naked and grossly overweight, with a face distorted by anger and hate.

“This,” said his guide more seriously, “is the extreme epitome of a recalcitrant soul.”

A sudden thought flashed into John’s mind. He expressed it aloud. “Is this one of the hell worlds?”

“That is it, exactly. These are souls who refuse to be guided or helped and they are confined to stop them causing more chaos.”

“And what about you - why are you here?”

The guide shrugged his shoulders. “It may seem odd but I volunteered to work here. It is part of my service.”

A stream of foul abuse came from the wretched figure in the barred cave. When he stopped out of exhaustion, John’s informant carried on as if this was all very much a routine incident.

“I volunteered as a means of working off my bad Karma. As you no doubt know, we cannot enter the spiritual kingdom until all karmic debts are paid. I could have had another life on the earth, or maybe two more, but I did not want that. I chose to mitigate my karmic debts by service. This is only one kind. There are guards and guardians in all the worlds. Many evolved souls do this work and advanced ones become teachers. The plan is to awaken everybody, but these slow learners try to sabotage that.”

“Does everyone have to do these things?” John asked, in concern.

The guide laughed, as if he was just chatting on the street corner. “No. You can take the slow easy way of learning by experience, but we all progress eventually.”

“And this man, is he here for ever?” John asked.

“No, not at all, he could improve things rapidly if he wanted to. All he has to do is to reform and repent, even a little bit, and show signs of regret for his evil ways. This one must have been an awful character when he had an earth life.”

Another question came into John’s mind. “Do you have an earth life now?”

“No. I left human life two yeas ago and I spend my time learning and doing service. After this period, I shall probably choose a different service. It may be as a guardian, helping to protect a higher world.”

John moved back, unconsciously demonstrating his wish to leave this terrible place. His companion raised a hand in a gesture of farewell.

“I will probably see you again. There are two other levels down here, which I have to show you, but if you stay too long, it may be difficult to get away. Each area has its own lord, and they are always looking for helpers. My service here is almost at an end, but you are on a different mission. I can see that you still have a body. I will have to go now, to make sure things are in order.”

With a final wave, the man went further into the tunnel. For a moment, John wondered what to do, then, he remembered the lama’s instructions and he thought of his body. He focused hard and thought of it lying asleep on his bed. With a jerk, he was back, sitting up in bed, trying to decide whether he had only been dreaming or whether it had been a genuine experience. He felt pleased that the next day was Saturday. He would be able to see the lama, and discuss his new nocturnal adventures. He felt very grateful for that and thought of how difficult it must be for isolated individuals who had no one with whom to discuss such unusual events.

It was impossible to go back to sleep and as soon as daylight began to disperse the shades of night John sat up and threw back the bedclothes and settled into a meditation position. He found it hard to keep his mind steady and focus on the theme the lama had suggested. After a while, he changed to the expedient method of silent chanting as a means of calming the mind. Eventually, his mind became calmer and he was able to review the events of the night with a quiet approach. After about one hour he dressed,

ready for a new day. His mother heard him moving about and went into the kitchen. They sat at the breakfast table and John was happy to recount some of the details of his new adventures, but was careful not to reveal too much, as he thought it was too strange. Despite her knowledge on such subjects, his mother had no direct experience of such events. She listened attentively to John's account of life in another dimension.

"This is fascinating," his mother said, "but there is a big difference between seeing strange sights and experiencing communion with God. After all, the aim of Yoga is union with God. In fact, that is what the word means. Yoga means union."

John refrained from argument, but in his viewpoint, practical useful help seemed far more important, and for him, that had to be in terms of power to act in the world he knew. He did not wish to admit that he wanted power, and agreed with his mother as part of his emphasis on a practical policy of avoiding conflict.

"Yes mother," he said, "but surely it is useful to know about these things."

"It may be useful," she replied, "although I am not sure whether it will help you to be happy, or to enter the spiritual kingdom. Swami Vivekananda said, 'If you want ghosts you get ghosts and if you want God you get God.' It is a matter of choice. As I see it you are only taking the long way round."

John wanted to protest. Already he was becoming far more interested in the journey than in the destination. He changed the subject.

"I wonder what Rajik will think," he said. "I suppose he will have something else to say. He will probably be early, to check up on what is happening."

She was right. They had hardly finished their breakfast when the sound of Rajik's bicycle bell indicated that he was arriving. John called to him, telling him to enter. Rajik came in, greeting John's mother and looking expectantly at John.

"Good morning mem-sahib," he said, and waited politely for her reply before turning to John.

"Hullo Rajik," she replied. "Do you want to sit in here, or in the lounge room?"

"This is all right," he replied, sitting down at the cluttered breakfast table.

John's mother started to clear away the breakfast cups and plates. Rajik stared at John and asked a brief blunt question. "Well?" he asked.

"Well what? There is nothing to report, same old thing," John answered.

Rajik knew he was delaying an answer and sat back, determined to ignore John's teasing attitude.

John relented. "Right," he said, "I'll give you a brief run down."

Rajik listened as John repeated the main details. When he had finished Rajik looked thoughtful. "I do not really see the point in it," he said. "What I want to know is where is it taking you?"

He was almost asking the same questions as John's mother had asked. John parried the question with a partial answer. "It is knowledge, isn't it?"

"Um," grunted Rajik. "It all depends what you want."

John stood up. "Let's walk down to the bookshop," he suggested. "They might have something about it there."

Rajik stood up and spoke to John's mother. "He's a slippery customer is this one. We'll have to keep an eye on him or he will be bringing zombies home."

John's mother laughed. "In that case, I had better burn an extra joss stick."

"Good idea," Rajik said as they went out.

In the book shop there was a mixed collection of eastern and western publications. New and secondhand books were on the same shelf. Some were in Hindustani and others were in English, with here and there a few copies of unusual books in German or French. They browsed through the shelves, on the lookout for something new, or different.

"How about this?" Rajik said, "just your kind of thing."

He read it out. "Dante's Inferno," and added seriously, "you ought to take this. You might learn something."

John smiled, "If it is cheap enough I will buy it."

"It is second hand," the shopkeeper said, and named a low price. John paid and they went off to the coffee shop to examine the book. John opened the book and read the introduction.

"Uh," he said in disappointment. "It is part of a bigger work, called *The Divine Comedy*, by a thirteenth century Italian poet, and it says here that it is only an allegory.

"So what? Vyasa was a poet, and his *Bhagavad Gita* is only an allegory. That is not really a conversation between Krishna and Arjuna. Vyasa was a philosopher as well as a poet, and he did a similar thing."

John laughed as he read some of the descriptions. “It is certainly very Christian. By the sound of it there are demons prodding the sinners with pitchforks as they try escape from boiling in oil.”

He pushed the book towards Rajik and he read some of it. “This is great,” he said. “Now, when you can tell me things like that I will be impressed.”

“I wonder what Lama Nam Tso would make of it. I have to see him tomorrow.”

“We are going tonight, for the weekly session. You could ask him then,” Rajik suggested.

John shook his head. “I don’t think I will. He might think I’m treating it all as a bit of a joke.” Then, in a more serious tone he turned to Rajik and brought up the subject of souls in hell.

“Do you think there really are things like that, with souls restrained because they are dangerous?”

Rajik pondered on the question. Like most serious seekers, he had read a great deal and could usually say something about the various mysteries on the road to enlightenment.

“The snag is,” he said, “that Yogis who attain a revelation do not say much at all. I remember one description of a hell world where the inhabitants were in a vast treeless landscape of excrement, from which they could never escape. By all accounts, the conditions are some form of karma, but they can be a projection, symbolizing a state rather than a condition. They call it a correspondence. We discussed it once before when we read that we create our own hell. As I see it we are trapped in a great thought mirage, and it is some sort of personal allegory that we create.”

“Ah!” John said thoughtfully. “I remember something from the Christian schooldays. Jesus said, ‘As a man thinks so he is.’”

“You mean, ‘so it is.’ That’s how things are, because of our thoughts,” Rajik replied.

“What? You mean we create it?” John asked.

“Well, I think it means that we cause it.”

“That really bugs me,” John said in exasperation, “and that is something I could ask Nam Tso.”

They finished their coffee and Rajik clapped his hands to attract the attention of the bearer. “The chitty,” Rajik commanded.

The bearer brought the bill and Rajik paid him, waving an indication that the change was for the bearer. With a flourishing salaam, the bearer glided away and left the two men pondering on how to spend their Saturday in quiet Darjeeling.

“Let’s walk to the lookout on Observatory Hill.” Rajik suggested.

“Why not? We might even get a good glimpse of Mount Everest.”

Rajik laughed, “Oh yes. That would be a novelty,” he replied flippantly.

At Observation Hill, they sat looking at the beautiful landscape and gazed at it with bland indifference. John pondered on the thought that some people would be awestruck with such a view, but a lifetime of familiarity blurred any such impression for him. Another thought crossed his mind and he expressed it.

“You know,” he said to Rajik, “It’s no wonder that the Tibetans are so immersed in their religion. What else is there to do? I bet the lama was in some remote monastery where there was nothing else to do but meditate.”

“And take a trip round the hell worlds,” Rajik said roguishly.

John nodded in casual agreement. “That could be. After all, what would we do if this were a city? Remember Calcutta, we didn’t sit around there, did we?”

“No, but when you add it all up we didn’t do anything useful either. It was just escapism,” Rajik said.

“That’s a fact,” John agreed, “Escapism from boredom. It’s stupid.”

“Maybe the Jesus statement was right, we think it and we cause it.” Rajik suggested.

John looked thoughtful. “In that case, we’ll have to watch our thinking. I’ll ask the lama if I get a chance.”

He did not have any chance that evening, at the meeting, and had to wait until he was alone with the lama, on the Sunday morning. First, he described his experiences and asked his questions as if they connected to his nighttime adventure.

The lama listened carefully. “I can see that you are learning,” he said. “Yes. The effects and the thinking are connected. We attract conditions to us. If we had perfect mental discipline we could virtually create anything, but as it is we project our thoughts and turn them into events.”

The answer pleased John. He could see why the lama had set him on such a course. By seeing the effects through direct experience, he would learn the importance of having the right mental attitude. The lama interrupted his thoughts.

“You create your own karma whatever level you are on. Even in hell, a soul can change the conditions by changing the attitude. The attitude is a product of thinking. Hate creates hate, and conditions that arise from it. To change your life, change your thinking. In the end, you get what you focus on. If you concentrate on the Heavenly Paradise, you will gradually move towards it. Be careful what you say you want, for you will surely get it. There is no gain without a loss and the lower must always surrender to that which is higher. If you want the joys of this world you can have them, but if you want the true joy of heaven you will have to give priority to that.”

“Do I have any more visits to the lower world?” John asked when the lama stopped speaking.

“Yes. There are one or two experiences that will be useful, and you have to confront the lords of the lower worlds, one by one and master each situation.”

John said nothing. This was not exactly what he had bargained for. The lama explained further.

“At the threshold of each level there is the guardian who will try to keep you on the level you have entered. The dweller on the threshold is an aspect of your self. He will reflect whatever you are. If you think, he is separate and are afraid of him he will dominate you forever, and in your inner life you will live on that level. You may have a mansion in this world but your soul will live in a hovel. Do not be afraid. The Lord within is watching every step, but you must learn to stand on your own spiritual feet.”

John rapidly thought of a number of comments that seemed appropriate but did not express them. All these remarks seemed beyond any comment.

“That will do for now,” the lama said.

John put his hands together, and bowed his thanks and then stood up. He bowed again and left the lama sitting on his meditation cushion. At the house, Rajik was already waiting for him. He was eager to know what new mysteries the lama had revealed.

“Hullo,” John said, when he saw Rajik, and sitting down on a veranda chair next to Rajik he expressed his reaction to the latest lesson.

“I don’t know if I can cope with all this,” he told Rajik, and explained the main details of what the lama had said.

Rajik was fascinated and soon responded with his usual analysis.

“He keeps saying the same thing, and so do the books. We cause things to happen, and it is no good blaming fate, or God. We should blame ourselves. Yet, there is one thing I don’t quite get, it is the difference between a projection, a manifestation and hallucination.”

“Yes.” John agreed. “I see what you mean. We might project some things, which manifest as events, but we could only imagine others, and hallucinate. Yet, the question seems to be whether there are other worlds that exist irrespective of what we think.”

Rajik laughed. “My psychology lecturers at the university would say you are nutty. For them, this world is the only reality and people who think otherwise are nut cases.”

“How nice,” John said. “I am beginning to wish I had stayed like that. Ignorance is bliss, so they say.”

“It’s too late for you,” Rajik added. “You have opened Pandora’s box and now you have to deal with it. You see, most people think that events just happen, and do not take any personal responsibility, but from what I can make of it, your lama guru is making sure that you accept self responsibility and become self aware so that you can be self directing.”

“Where did you get all that from?” John asked.

“I’ve read a lot of books,” Rajik answered, grinning broadly.

John looked at him suspiciously, and waited for another comment.

Rajik went on, “The fact is I got it from my guru. They are all saying the same thing you know. We are all souls on the path, looking for the kingdom and all the problems are similar, so of course the answer is similar.”

“I suppose so,” John said in uncertainty, and shrugged it off, wondering what demons were hiding in the corners of his mind. He recalled an explanation by the Christian priest at the school he had attended. The priest had explained the advice by Jesus, about cleaning and garnering the house. “The house is the mind,” he had said, “and the demons are our own evil thoughts. We have to cast them out and invite the Holy Spirit in, or they will come back.” The idea of the demons running wild in his mind was one thing, but

confronting them as a tangible reality in a huge hologram of heaven and hell was a bit too much.

“What is it?” Rajik asked, when John did not answer.

“Well, it’s what we just said. Is it real or is it fantasy?”

“I think it is both,” Rajik replied. “It is a type of self-generated fantasy, but it is real when you are in it. You know what they say, all is illusion, but not when it is happening to you.”

“Oh. Thanks. All I need is a clever philosophical summary,” John retorted.

Rajik could see that his friend was not very happy with the present situation and decided to leave.

“I’ll give you a ring later in the week,” he said to John, and went down the veranda steps to ride off on his bicycle.

John watched him go, hoping that he had not upset his friend. By the look of it, he would need an understanding friend. The idea of a confrontation with the keeper of hell, which somehow lived in his own mind, was too much to handle.

By the evening, he had calmed down, and he went to bed hoping that he would have a normal night with good sleep. Although he was trying hard to appear normal, he was beginning to realize that he was not normal in the everyday sense. Apart from Rajik and his mother, there was no one to whom he would dare to mention out-of-the-body nighttime adventures. Not many knew about these things. Even fewer took them seriously, and still fewer attempted to apply them. The books said we are in a truth ending age. This is when materialism would be dominant. According to the teachings, this was the nadir of the Kali Yuga, the Dark Age, when spiritual teachings would decline. Allegoric illustrations depicted Lord Shiva warning people to control their speech and control their desires. Others showed the dragon of greed devouring spiritual texts and demolishing temples. These were predictions of the last days of the era, when the cycle of devotion and beauty gave way to lust and pride. As for spiritual knowledge, the example of his Christian school teachings was enough to deter anyone from speaking. Today, spiritual teachers would not undergo a crucifixion; they would probably have to endure incarceration in a psychiatric hospital. No wonder the scriptures said that he who knows is silent. As a beginner, he could not claim to know, but the suggestion to anyone that

there are other worlds would be enough to qualify for a free psychiatric examination. At the thought of it all, he felt very isolated and lonely. It was bad enough before, when he had felt the lack of love in his life, but the new developments made him realize that there would be very little chance of understanding or acceptance from most of the people he knew. More than ever, he felt grateful for Rajik's friendship and for the loving support of his mother.

His hopes of a quiet sleep were in vain. Although he dropped off to sleep easily enough, it was not to be a night of pleasant dreams. As a start, he again found himself standing outside the bungalow, and in spite of his earlier depressed mood he looked round with a more determined interest. He knew that his body was safely asleep and that he was certainly out of the body. The bungalow looked very solid and he put his hand on the walls. They seemed to be as tangible as in the ordinary world, but he could not understand why the building looked so old. The lama had indicated that it was an aberration of the mind and that nothing is what it seems, either in this world, or in another. John turned away from the bungalow, thinking that perhaps everything was an endless dream and he was just moving from one fantasy to another. He stood there, wondering what he should do next. He wanted to know how the lama went inside the earth. With that thought, he found himself in the open area where he had met the guard of the souls in hell. The man was there, waiting for John.

"Hullo," he said. "I was expecting you."

John wanted to ask how he knew he was coming, but the man looked at John's puzzled look and laughed.

"Don't worry about it," he said. "You will learn as you go. It is all in the mind, literally."

The statement, 'as you think, so it is,' flashed into John's mind, but he had no time to consider it.

"Come on," his guide said, "I will show you another department."

John followed him and his earlier anxiety returned. He tried hard to cast it out but he had a foreboding that this trip was to be more eventful than the last one. He recalled how the lama had said more than once, 'do not be afraid,' and remembered that he could escape when he concentrated on his sleeping body. With that comforting thought, he

decided to go on. The guide turned a corner in the tunnel they were following, and to John's amazement, they seemed to be outside. There was the semblance of an overcast leaden gray sky but John realized that he was not actually outside, as he would be on the surface. The guide moved to one side to allow John to have a better view. Before him was a vast bleak and barren rocky vista, with low cliffs and numerous ledges. On the ledges, and on the stony ground, numberless naked and forlorn looking men and women lay in idle misery. They were a morbid picture of motiveless sloth and apathy.

"Good God!" John uttered in surprised shock. "What is this?"

His guide explained. In a tone that showed a strong lack of sympathy for the wretched masses of rejected humanity he said, "These are the ones who lived an idle useless life when they had a life on earth. Their choice was to avoid work and do nothing. All they wanted to do was to enjoy their feeble pleasures and do nothing for anyone else. Now they are experiencing their own attitudes as an actuality. They wanted an idle life and now they have one. They are indeed reaping the fruits of their actions, or in this case, non actions."

"Will they be here forever?" John asked.

"Time is not like it is on earth. Eternity is a concept and time is a concept. In life, they attempted to pass their time by frittering away their boredom on empty pleasures. Now they have the essence of that exact condition. Look at them carefully."

John studied the rows of hunched and recumbent figures. Some expressed hate and resentment to the ones near them, especially where they were of a different race or color. Others attempted to alleviate their boredom by molesting their immediate neighbors, whether they were male or female. The whole scene was of futile useless existence and by all the guide had said, this is where they deserved to be.

"Some of these souls still have a body, on the earth," the guide told John.

"Then why are they here?" John wanted to know.

The guide smiled, but there was no mirth in his voice. "All souls are where they deserve to be, irrespective of whether they still have a body or not. The persons of these souls are now living an unhappy useless life even now. Such a person may have money and position but his spirit is joyless and his soul is already where it belongs. Their life has no quality and their spirit has no quality either. When the physical life ends this is the

only life they will know. So you see, it does not matter whether anyone has a body or not, the inner reality is the same for them.”

“But you said they could change, even in hell.” John said.

“They can. Free will is always there. They have to learn to use it in a constructive manner and to make a useful choice. It is all very simple. Now, come, there is more for you to see. This will be a test.”

John did not like the way the guide said that. He had no time to ask what that meant, for the guide was moving too quickly. They went on a downward slope, in a different direction from before, and John expected to see another aspect of wayward souls, and tried to imagine how there could be a test for him. In front of a low arched area that was large but airless the guide stopped.

“Here you are,” he said, and turning rapidly left John to continue alone.

John stared into the gloomy cavern. He could hear the noise of activity but no one was visible. Half curious, half fearful, John moved further into the low roofed space. As his vision adjusted to the murky shadows, he could see figures working. They were not men, although they were closely humanoid. Their stature was short and thickset, with no real semblance of a neck, and with a narrow featureless hairless head that had long extended ears hanging down to their shoulders. The face was expressionless and the nostrils were just two slits, below a pair of eyes that were so close together, they were almost touching. The creatures were working but John could not understand what they were doing, and noticed that their extremely long arms moved quickly. All the strange beings were standing, and John could see that they had very short thick legs that supported their long grotesque bodies. Their feet, wider than those of a man, were half hidden by the shaggy hair that covered the lower part of their bodies.

As John stood looking, one of the strange beings saw him and turned towards him. He grunted in a guttural croaky voice and John intuitively knew that it was a question as to what he was doing. John waved a hand in an open gesture, as if to indicate that he was working. This seemed to satisfy the creature and it went on with its work activity. John decided that he had seen enough and that he would withdraw. It was then that a new figure barred his way. John was to learn later that this was the real guardian of these hells. He was the Lord of the Lower Worlds.

The figure was resplendent in jeweled attire that contrasted strongly with the wretched appearance he had seen so far. To add to the awe inspiring impression the lord was tall and very human in appearance. On his head was a most elaborate crown, and a cascade of curly hair came right down to his shoulders. John's eyes moved down slowly, inspecting the costume of grandeur. A high collar, studded with gems was round his neck, and below it, two ornate chains hung down like necklaces, onto his chest. A wide belt that was made of interlocking loops of precious metal encompassed his waist. From there, the robes spread out into a wide skirt that stopped at the knees, and revealed loose silky trousers that were gathered in at the ankle with more jewelry. Round his ankles were large rings of jeweled gold, and the feet had precious gems in rings on each toe. The whole impression was one of regal authority and John noticed that the figure before him held a whip in one hand and a cudgel in the other. These were obviously the symbols of his power and an implied suggestion that anyone who did not acknowledge the lord might feel the weight of the cudgel and the sting of the whip.

The lord spoke. In a voice that echoed with power and assertiveness, he said, "What is your desire?"

This confused John. Did he mean, 'what do you want?' or did he mean, 'how can I help you?' Or was there something more sinister in the question?

John racked his brains for a suitable answer. Two warnings jumped into his consciousness. Do not be afraid, and, be careful what you say you want. This, he thought, is the test, but what is the right answer? The imposing figure took a step towards him. John resisted the temptation to run away, or take a step back. The lord looked down at John, who was inwardly trembling but determined not to show any fear. Then, as John wondered what to do the figure vanished as quickly as he had appeared. Without attempting to understand what was happening, John took the opportunity to concentrate hard on his body. He returned to it with a jolt and sat up in relief. He swung his feet onto the floor and walked over to the window. The waning moon shed just enough light for him to recognize familiar objects in the garden, and he went back to bed with the comforting assurance of ordinary life and fell asleep again.

In the morning his mother said, "I heard you moving about in the night. Is everything all right?"

“Yes,” said John, “I was only looking through the window,” and hastily added, “I thought I heard a noise.”

He did not want to talk about the latest episode in his saga of a hell to heaven journey, and in any case, he had a strong premonition that the test, whatever that might be, was not yet over. As well as that, he was beginning to see how such accounts might sound to others. He knew that his mother had read many unusual books, but he was still not sure how far she would accept his reports of the things he had seen, and he thought that the less he said the better it would be.

He said nothing, and sat there enjoying the ordinary experiences of such an uneventful situation as eating his breakfast. He observed the crunchy texture of the bread and held his cup of tea in both hands, enjoying the sensation of the heat that permeated the cup. When he stirred the tea he watched the tea swirl round, carrying a lone tealeaf on a merry go round of a journey to nowhere. The song of a bird in the garden letting the world know, ‘I am here. I am here,’ came through the open window. John listened to the sound of the bird asserting its claim over its territory. A minor revelation of insight imprinted on his brain.

“That is it. That is it,” he whispered to himself.

He was grateful that his mother had gone into the kitchen. He felt like shouting. He picked up his cup of tea and said to his mother, as she came back. “I think I’ll sit outside.”

He sat down in the cane chair, sipping the rest of his tea, and listening to the bird.

“That is it,” he said again, “the lord was asserting his authority over his territory.”

The more he thought about it the more certain he became and he considered what the bird would do if another bird invaded its territory. There would be a fight in which the defender usually won. He did not want a fight and in any case, had no wish to take over that territory. No doubt, there was more to it than that, and he hoped that he had no more encounters until he had chance to talk to the lama.

His mother’s voice came from the house, “You will be late for work,” she called out.

John jumped up, delighted to walk to the office. How wonderful it all was. It was so ordinary, and he looked round in approval at the familiar landscape.

When the weekend came, he went eagerly to see the lama, hoping to find an answer to his latest experience. The lama listened carefully and made some noncommittal comments. John went away disappointed. His friend Rajik was not much help, but that was mainly because John did not tell him very much. Added to that, his mother offered no advice, although he realized that he was also telling her very little. The days stretched into weeks and John realized that he was continually having the same type of nighttime experience. The guide to the lower worlds became a familiar figure but he never seemed to say anything useful. The lord of the lower worlds frequently appeared in the same role and asked the same question, then vanished. Slowly John began to see that he had to resolve the situation. Somehow, the solution was in his hands, but he had to grasp it for himself, otherwise he had not mastered the test. He pondered on it in every free moment, trying to work out what he had to do. He went over everything the lama had told him, checking each piece of advice for a clue. Why did the lord always ask, ‘what do you want?’ The answer had to be in that, but it eluded him.

The weeks passed by and the Christians in the community started to prepare for their Christmas festival. Some of the other religious groups joined in their preparations. There was no sectarian friction and the mutual respect often merged into mutual rejoicing. After all, a festival should be fun, even for others. In any case, there was not much variation in their isolated situation, and any excuse was useful to break the routine of everyday life. John was familiar with all the Christian traditions, through his life in the boarding school. Because of this, he knew the story and he recalled the account of the three wise men bearing gifts. This reminded him of Rajik and his mother who often took gifts to their gurus. It was a way of acknowledging their help, and he remembered Rajik’s emphasis on service.

“People want help but offer nothing in return,” Rajik often said. “They don’t offer to do anything.”

As these thoughts came into his mind John thought of the lord of the underworld asking what he wanted. John considered what he had said to the llama. Right at the beginning, John had asked about power, and the lama had said that it depended on help from the spirits of the earth. Now, he was beginning to see that he was getting what he had asked for. Yet, there was probably a price to pay. John decided that he would try to

find out what that might be. He was clear about it all now. He had asked for power, and this test was probably the result of his request. The next time he found himself before the lord of the under world John was ready. He held his ground and showed no sign of fear. Sure enough, the lord asked the same question. “What do you desire?”

The figure looked more imposing than ever. The lord did not seem less imposing with familiarity but projected a new image of authority with each appearance. After asking the question, the lord waited. John knew that he would disappear if there were no reply. He now understood that the lord also expected something in return. The question was, “What is the price tag?”

John responded firmly. “What can I offer?” he asked.

The lord bowed his head in acknowledgement. John knew had given the right answer.

“Come,” commanded the lord, and led John to the cavern where the grotesque figures were hard at work. The lord stopped at the entrance and cracked his whip. The creatures stopped their activity and looked at the lord. He waved a hand towards John and motioned them to look at him. They crowded closer and stared with their squinty little eyes with obvious interest. After a few minutes, the lord waved them back to their rocky workbenches, and turned to John.

“That,” he asserted.

For a moment John did not grasp what he meant, then realized that this was the answer to his question on what he could offer. It seemed a strange request. What importance was there in such a situation? All they had done was to look at him.

“Very well,” John said, and waited.

“What do you desire?” the lord asked in a final demand.

John knew that this was the bargaining part of the deal. He explained his aim.

“I wish to have power to do things, and need help.”

The lord nodded in agreement. “So be it. You come. You ask. We help.”

That was the deal, and John bowed his head in agreement.

“That is good,” affirmed the lord and vanished.

Before John had time to think of returning to his body, the guide of the lower worlds appeared. He was smiling in amusement.

“So you worked it out,” he commented. “There is no free ride. You help, they pay. They help and you pay. What more do you want?”

“I don’t understand what they want,” John replied.

The guide shrugged. “Ask your guru. He sent you here. He will tell you.”

John thought how weird it all was. Here he was, talking to a guard of the underworld as if it was a street corner meeting, talking about service to the lord of the nether regions, as if they were discussing a common topic. He dismissed the questions that had crowded into his mind and asked a different question.

“Will I see you again?”

“Sometimes,” the man said, “but I have nearly done my service here and I will have a different task.”

“Surely there are other ways of working off karma,” John said

“There are. I could have chosen service on the earth, but I did not want that. They are all mad up there; they are all killing and robbing each other, and finding different ways to ruin things. I did not want that. This is more straightforward and we do have a clear aim, which is to evolve, and to help others to evolve.”

As he said that, John understood what the deal was. In some way, he would be helping the workers in the cave to evolve. He thought about it and said, “I am beginning to see what is happening,” and added, “Now I must go.”

The man raised a hand in salute and John waved as if departing from an old friend. Inwardly he thought it was more bizarre than ever. Whichever way he looked at it, the situation was certainly weird, he thought, and decided that from now on he would tell Rajik as little as possible, in case his friend accused him of being a disciple of the dark forces.

In his bed he looked round at the darkened bedroom. It is nice to be home, he thought, and fell asleep as if he were tired from his long journey.

On the following Sunday he sat down with the lama, ready to ask a thousand questions. The lama forestalled him.

“I can see you have progressed,” the lama said. “So I will explain what happened. Then we can consider the next stage.”

John noted that the lama spoke as if he had followed the whole saga in a secret ongoing report. He obviously knew already and John was ready for a very brief analysis.

“You have done well, and your conclusions are correct. Your payment is to help the spirits of the earth to evolve. They will do that by studying you, and for that you will receive help. Be careful that your request is not frivolous, or selfish, and if you can achieve your aim without them, do so. Whatever you wish to do, they will help, but they have their duties. They are the keepers of the fires.”

“Ah! Fire elementals,” John exclaimed.

“No, no,” the lama shook his head, and added, “the fire elementals are in the fire itself. The spirits of the earth serve the fire elementals, and others serve them. That is the law. As you have seen, the law is very simple. We are all where we deserve to be. Consider carefully what you want, for you will pay for it, in one way, or another. In the New Year, we will prepare for the next part of your journey. That is in the realm of the lost souls, who become trapped in the bardo.”

John knew that this was the area where souls that were not prepared became lost in an in between world from which their only escape was to take another birth on the earth. This was why they offered guidance to the souls, by prayer, when they were dying. He thought it would be easier than the other worlds. After his visits to the hell worlds, this did not seem very frightening, and he accepted the suggestion without any hesitation. He had not yet understood that he had to battle his way through all the realms. Now that he had started there was no turning back, but the lama wisely told John all that he needed to know at that time, and John left him, in the bliss of ignorance, thinking that all his woes were behind him.

At home, his mother was standing in the lounge room looking down at the carpet.

“We really should turn this carpet. It is very worn near the doorway,” she remarked, as John entered the room.

John looked at the carpet. It was obviously old. There was no doubt about that, and for him it was a familiar symbol of home. He had crawled on the carpet as a child, and had learnt to walk by taking his first staggering steps across it. Now, on inspection, he could see how badly worn it really was.

“We should get a new one,” he commented, not thinking of the cost.

His mother asked the obvious question, “And where would we get the money?”

She sighed as she spoke and John could see that a new carpet was more of a dream than a possibility. His mother only had a small income from the trust set up by her father, and his own salary did not run to the extravagance of buying a new carpet on an impulsive whim.

“We will have to get a cheap rug to cover the worn part,” was his mother’s practical remark, and added wistfully, “there is a lovely carpet in that carpet shop, next to the post office.”

A wild idea jumped into John’s mind. “How much is it?” he asked, trying to be casual.

“Five and a half thousand rupees,” she told him.

John grunted noncommittally, and made a mental note to have a look at it, then, as if that was the end of it he wandered into his bedroom and closed the door. In the privacy of his room, he clenched both fists in excitement. Brilliant, he thought, brilliant. It is just what I need. He sat on the bed and pondered on it. He had already made up his mind. “Spirits of the earth,” he whispered, “here I come.”

That evening he went to bed early, eager to try out his new powers. It was difficult to fall asleep and he felt frustrated at the effort. He lay there repeating a calming mantra and finally drifted off to sleep. In the open area, where the tunnels branched off, the lord of the lower worlds was already there. John was too intent on his mission to wonder how the lord knew he was coming. John stood before him, waiting for the inevitable question.

“What is your desire?” the lord asked.

John noticed that there was a change in the tone of his voice. It was not so harsh, as if his willingness to help had created a more sympathetic bond. John replied rapidly, trying not to seem too eager. He was eager at the thought of testing his powers and he wanted to see how the wish would become a reality.

“I need money,” he said, “for a carpet,” and added as a safeguard, “for my mother.”

The lord inclined his head. “So be it,” and led the way to the work cavern.

At the entrance, the lord cracked his whip, and waved towards John. The misshapen creatures crowded round him, starting intently. John stood there, knowing that they were studying him carefully. The thought that they were not so odd crossed his mind. That was

only by his standards and he wondered how they saw him. He wanted to ask how they could evolve by looking at him. As if the lord were answering his thoughts, he came to him. The answer was a rule he already knew. ‘You get what you focus on.’ The lama had impressed on him. John thought that it was odd to model their evolution on him, but concluded there must be others who acted as role models and image pattern for these beings at the lower end of the scale. With a wave, the lord dismissed his charges back to their duties and John gave a token bow of thanks to the lord, who instantly vanished.

Back in his body, lying between the warm blankets, John considered the strange situation, and tried to work out how five and half thousand rupees could manifest. Perhaps they will fall down the chimney, he thought, but dismissed that as ludicrous, and unable to sleep he jumped out of bed and put on his clothes. It was nearly dawn and he thought about his meditation, but was too restless to try sitting quietly. John went outside and walked down the path, then turned towards the road where the occasional cars and trucks went by. At the intersection he stopped, thinking that this was futile. “I will go back and have a coffee,” he muttered. “It’s too cold for rambling around.”

As he turned a piece of paper fluttered past him. John looked at it with idle curiosity. It had a faintly familiar appearance. He bent down slightly, to peer at it in the half-light. The impression stopped his breath with a sudden impact. It was a note, for one thousand rupees. Half-expectant, and half fearful that it was not happening John looked round carefully. Another note slid over the road, pushed by the morning wind. John picked up the two notes, and looked round intently. Within a few paces, he had five one thousand rupee notes. Then, as if in conspiracy with the process the wind suddenly dropped. John felt the hair tingle at the back of his neck and clenched his teeth in excitement. “Wow,” he breathed, and felt disappointed that he would never be able to tell anyone.

His mother was in the kitchen when he returned. “What’s wrong?” she asked as he walked in.

“Nothing”, he answered, trying to be nonchalant, and restraining the impulse to whoop and say that everything was great.

“I think I will go to work early,” he said, “then I can knock off early.”

As soon as it was eight o’clock John left the house. He would be going past the carpet shop, and by now, it would probably be open. Sure enough, the carpet vendor was already

hanging out a few small carpets to let people know he was open. John slowed down and wandered casually up to the open shop front. He could see the carpet his mother had described, and the price ticket said clearly, five thousand five hundred rupees.

“Good morning sahib,” the shopkeeper said. “Can I help you?”

Sure, thought John, you can let me have that carpet for five thousand rupees, but he remained silent for a minute before saying indifferently. “That’s a nice carpet,” and indicated the one he was after. Scenting a possible sale the dealer praised the carpet. “Very good carpet. It is one of my best. Only five and a half thousand rupees.”

“Umm!” John grunted, as if in great doubt, “I think that is too expensive. The other shop has one at four and a half thousand.”

“I can give you a good deal,” the shopkeeper insisted. John played the game. He felt certain that he would get the carpet for five thousand rupees. He had found only five thousand and he took that as a sign that five thousand was enough. The haggling went back and forth. “How about five thousand?” John suggested. “And delivery free?”

The shopkeeper looked worried, but a sale was a sale. “Very good sahib.”

“I’ll take it,” John said, almost gleefully. It was indeed very good. .

The post office next door was now open. John left the shopkeeper, and went into the post office and bought a Christmas card. He deliberately picked one with Santa Claus on it, and wrote inside it. ‘A present from Santa Claus’, and wrote his mother’s name and address on the envelope. Back at the carpet shop, he gave the card to the dealer. “There is the address. You can send it any time.”

The dealer waved a beckoning hand to the day porters who were always sitting around, waiting to carry anything from the shops. The dealer picked two strong porters and pointed to the carpet as he read out the address on the envelope. John left them to it, scheming on what he could possibly tell his mother about the money. In the office, smiling colleagues greeted him.

“What’s the good news?” John asked, trying to be whimsical.

“Don’t you know?” they replied. “We are getting a bonus.”

It was not much but it gave John an answer. He could say he had saved some and the rest was the bonus. That was logical, and likely to meet with no awkward questions. He

was right. Almost as soon as he walked in the house, his mother came to him waving the Christmas card. “This is your writing,” she said. “You wrote it, didn’t you?”

John raised both hands in a gesture of casual agreement, waiting for the big question. “But where did you get the money?” his mother wanted to know.

John looked at her in amusement. He would have loved to say that it was his friends downstairs, but he said without blinking. “We got a good bonus, and I had saved a bit.”

Tears came to his mother’s eyes and she went up to him and embraced him.

“You are such a good boy,” she said with emotion.

Returning the embrace and looking over her shoulder, John bit his lip to stop from laughing. “Yes mother,” he said deliberately. Hoping he did not sound too facetious. “Let’s put the carpet down.”

John thought of the timing. It was indeed a Merry Christmas.

CHAPTER 3 - THE REALM OF LUSTFUL GHOSTS

The quiet town of Darjeeling hardly felt a ripple from the Christian festivities of the minority Christian community. The different sects all acknowledged each other as equal members of the human race and there was no friction, even at the times of the different religious festivals. Some people joined in with some of the others as part of their daily social interaction. Yet, there was one celebration, which they all joined in. This was the beginning of the New Year and the mutual interaction of a public New Year's Eve party was almost obligatory. In recent years, John had wondered on the irrationality of that. After all, it was only a date on a calendar, and had no real significance whatsoever. The first day of spring at least made some sense. That matched astronomical calculations of the position of the earth on its annual orbit. Now, it was just a number on a calendar and everyone behaved as it meant something. Nevertheless, it did help to unite the community as the New Year's party was in the street and everyone was very friendly. There was no heavy drinking, as almost everyone took their religious views seriously, but for this meaningless date on the calendar, even they were set aside, for the purpose of a mutual festival. John also enjoyed it and liked the idea of dancing in the streets and meeting new people.

This year was set to be like any other year, with happy conviviality and some new friendships. Yet, there was now a difference because John was not the same. His new experiences had changed him and this New Year would be a new year for him, in many ways. For the figure of destiny was waiting to trip him up, and jealous spirits from the nether world were waiting to test him. On the surface, everything was fine, but beneath the veneer of conventional normality, the demons of desire were lurking in the shadows, waiting to pounce.

They pounced at midnight, just as the hooters and bells clanged in the New Year. John had been dancing with an attractive young woman who had recently moved to the area. She was a happy outgoing young female of the species who accepted the world and its inhabitants as a potential paradise. The frustrating difficulties of the ego assertive world had not yet bruised her sensitive outlook. John was enraptured, and to tempt him

even further the vivacious newcomer had obtained employment in the same building as the one where John worked. His daily duties would at times overlap into her domain. Life was indeed looking up, John told himself. As the sounds rang out, some of the people embraced, as if reinforcing old acquaintances. John stood politely and looked at his new partner. Her name was Rona, and to John it had a pleasant sound. He smiled at her and she smiled back, and as the last note of the cacophony of sounds died out, he impulsively embraced her. Her response was warm and vibrant. This was no mere physical contact but an exchange of emotional feeling in a natural bonding. If John could have put a name to it, he would have said that at that moment he fell in love, and if the demons of desire could put a name to it, they would have said, "Gotcha! Now get out of that." In ignorance of such complications, and even in ignorance of his own inner feelings he only thought, 'this is great,' and held the hand of his new companion, as if all he had to do was to continue to walk forward on his new rosy path of life. However, life, the ultimate guru, was also waiting to guide him.

The next morning, John was still beaming at the thought of his meeting with Rona.

"Happy New Year," he greeted his mother as he walked into the kitchen.

"And a Happy New Year to you," she replied, wondering why John was so buoyant, and asked a question as a means of finding out. "How was the street party?"

John was very eager to tell her, "It was fabulous," was his answer, and went on telling his mother why it was so wonderful.

His mother listened with interest. "Rona?" she queried, "I don't know the name. What is her second name?"

"Oh, her second name. I never asked her, but I will be seeing her tonight."

"What is she?" his mother then asked.

"A typist," John answered gleefully, "and she will be in the next office to mine."

"I didn't mean that," his mother went on. "I meant, what is her religion?"

John shrugged, thinking, who cares, but asked a different question. "Why? Does it matter?"

"It might," his mother replied.

John dismissed the idea of any problems and happily went off to work, hoping to meet his new colleague. "What a pity she isn't in my office" he murmured, as he

approached the office building. His boss greeted him as he walked in, and said, "There will be some extra work for you today. We have a new typist next door, but she starts next Monday. You will have to handle her mail until then."

"That's no problem." John answered, trying not to show any disappointment.

The day dragged along and at the end of the working day he was glad to escape and rushed home, to get ready for his date, although he had two hours to wait before he would see Rona. He picked his shirt and a tie with great care. He always wore western clothes and wondered what she might be wearing. Last night she had the common baggy trousers and a loose blouse, with a silk shawl over her shoulders. That was the standard casual dress and he thought she would no doubt wear something similar. In the end, he discarded the tie, trying not to overdo things, but with a bit of luck she was modern and would not be too conventional. He had arranged to meet her at seven o'clock, in the restaurant where he usually had coffee with Rajik. That was a safe venue, and excellent for a quiet conversation. As he entered, the bearer, who knew him well, gave a polite salaam, raising the back of his hand to his forehead. John nodded in acknowledgement and looked around for Rona. She was sitting at a corner table, with a silk scarf over her head. At the sight of it his heart sank. He remembered her shawl. It was obviously not a shawl, but a headscarf, pushed back for the street dancing. He sat down, feeling very subdued. He knew that the chance was that she could be a girl with a strict faith, and if that were true, he would be in for a serious blow. He knew now why his mother had asked, and wondered how he could ask without seeming bad mannered. Rona solved the problem.

"I'm sorry about the scarf," she explained. "My father made we wear it. He will not let me go out without it. He's a bit old fashioned, and I've had a strict upbringing, but I think it is too much."

She said it as if it was no big deal, and it might not have been, in the sprawling city of Calcutta, but this was not Calcutta.

"Where did you say you were from?" he asked her, hoping to find a more liberal chink in her background.

"I didn't say," she relied roguishly, and flashing her wonderfully even teeth at him. "We are from Lucknow. My father is an engineer and he has got a new job here, at the waterworks."

John was not impressed. Anyone from Lucknow was likely to have very traditional sectarian views and he did not fancy the thought of meeting her father.

“Are you sorry to leave there?” he asked, fishing for clues about his chances of success with Rona.

“Not really,” she told him. “It was a bit too stuffy. My parents would only let me go out with boys they choose. If they do that here I might as well stay in.”

John explained that there was a small mosque and that there was no friction in the town. “They are all just friendly people here,” he told her. The place is not big enough to separate into factions.”

They chatted on, with John slipping in odd questions here and there, trying to build up a profile of her background. Finally, they left and John walked along beside her. He knew she would be going home. There was no reason to be out in a poorly lit street. His hand touched hers as they walked and he tried to take hold of it. She pulled it away and said. “We shouldn’t do that.”

John’s heart sank even lower. “But it was all right last night,” he protested.

“Yes. It was the excitement of it all. It was my fault.”

The way she handled the situation was charming. He was not getting the cold shoulder; neither was she rejecting him. It was a practical acceptance of the facts. She was a good devotional girl and he was something else. His mother would certainly approve of her. She liked people who knew how to play the social game and avoid friction.

Thinking aloud, he voiced the thought. “My mother would like you, and she is very broad minded.”

“Good,” answered Rona, “I will have to meet her, but my father will ask what she is, and what you are. What should I tell them?”

That, thought John is the sixty-four thousand dollar question. What indeed could she tell him? He could imagine her parents saying, “Why don’t you find a nice boy?” Then there was the attitude of arranged marriages. Why bother? He thought. What is the use?

Rona had evaluated the situation keenly. The whole business was a problem for her as well. “We can be friends,” she told him.

“There is no law against that I suppose,” he replied negatively. “We will have to be, and I will be seeing you in the morning. I’m in the next office.”

“How wonderful,” she said with genuine pleasure. “That will be nice. We can have a break together.”

This was too much, John thought, now she is twisting the knife, but he was pleased that she liked the idea of seeing him.

At the corner she left him, “Give my respects to your parents,” he said.

“I will, and give my regards to your mother.”

He watched her turn towards her house and went back to discuss this latest incident with his mother. He knew that she would be sympathetic to keen to listen and felt in need of her maternal sympathy.

“Back early?” she queried, as he entered the room.

“Yes. She had to go home. You are right, she has a strict background, and by the sound of it her father is one of the old school.”

“I’ll make some tea,” his mother said. “Then you can tell me all about it.”

“There’s nothing to tell. I was misled. If she had been wearing her head scarf I would have known.”

“And not have spoken to her no doubt,” his mother retorted.

“Of course not. There is no point in choosing problems.”

His mother agreed and stated the obvious, “But this is different.”

“It is. I think I’m hooked,” he moaned. “Now I don’t know what to do.”

His mother poured the tea and gave him a cup before sitting down to offer condolences.

“I know how you feel. I fell for your father, even though I knew he was likely to go away, and look what happened. The best thing is to avoid being alone with her, and just be friends.”

He nodded, “I suppose you are right,” then leaned forward as an idea came to him. “If I bring her here, you can have a woman to woman talk with her, when you are in the kitchen. I could invite Rajik, and say it is a New Year celebration. That way you could get her to talk.”

His mother laughed. “Now, you are scheming, but it won’t do any harm to get it clear. Then you will know that it is useless.”

“Thanks,” he snorted. “End of Act 1. Will the hero get the heroine or will the villain get her?”

“You are being cynical. Anyway, there is no villain, is there?”

“Not yet, but over half the staff are very conventional. We are a mixed lot up there and her immediate boss will be Arno, and he is very orthodox, and probably her type.”

“Oh yes. That nice young man you brought here one day. Good looking and charming as well.”

John knew his mother was teasing him, but it was not funny, especially as what she said was true. By the look of it, he would have to face it. Things were not looking good. The next day was Saturday and Rajik turned up for their usual Saturday morning chat. John had not seen him since New Year’s Eve and Rajik’s first words were direct.

“How did it go?” he asked John. “Have you got her name and address yet?”

“More than that. I know her religion.”

Rajik groaned. “Well, I don’t need a thousand guesses to work that out. She is a strict something or other. Right?”

“Right,” John agreed. “Come on. Let’s go and have our morning coffee and I’ll weep on your shoulder.”

Is it that bad?” Rajik asked in amazement.

“Worse than that,” John’s mother said. “The poor boy is smitten,”

Rajik laughed. “In that case, it’s simple. Just change your religion, although that might be awkward, because you haven’t got one.”

John sighed. He had always prided himself on his eclectic attitude, and he could not see that as a solution.

“Did she ask what you were?” Rajik asked as they went off down the hill.

“No, but I suppose she will,” John replied.

“Well, just tell her you are a freethinker. That will fix it.”

“It will fix it with her old man, that’s for sure, then I will be sunk.”

In the café, John went over his dilemma. Rajik nodded. “I don’t blame you. She is a stunner. She would have flattened all the wolves at the university.”

chaos of feelings, after that there was the battle with the monkey mind, followed by the difficulty of surrendering. The teacher had pointed out that the villain in this drama is the ego, but he did not think John would like to hear that.

“Never mind,” he said. “There are more fish in the sea than ever came out of it.”

“Maybe so, but they always seem to get away.”

In the evening, they sat in the usual places, listening to the lama discussing the abstractions of Buddhist philosophy, but John paid little attention. He was preoccupied with the problem of liberating himself from the emotional tangle that had ensnared him. Unknown to him the lama was studying him carefully. Now that the New Year distractions were out of the way, the more serious personal activities could continue. Tomorrow would be the next session in the task of guiding John through the doors of the inner worlds. For this it was necessary for John to have a tranquil mind, but the signs were that John was anything but tranquil.

On Sunday morning, the lama was very serious. John sat facing him, in the usual cross-legged position. He waited politely for the lama to speak, but was disappointed when he heard the lama’s first words.

“You have a problem,” he stated, as if he already knew all about it. “And it seems that you are disturbed.”

John remained silent and the lama continued. ‘ You are free at any time to stop, or turn to one side, but you cannot go back. Whichever way to go there will be consequences. Our task is to control the consequences, but this is impossible if you are emotionally unstable. We shall leave the next stage until you have decided which path you have chosen.’

John felt stunned. It had never occurred to him that his new romantic attachment could be so critical. The lama indicated with a slight gesture that there was nothing more to say and John left without pausing to bow his thanks. Now he was doubly disturbed, and had no idea what he should do. He started walk home and Rajik came up on his bicycle.

“Hi,” he hailed, as he came nearer. “You’ve finished early today.”

“Yes,” answered John, and told Rajik what had happened.

Rajik walked alongside, pushing his bicycle. “Well, it’s all very simple. Just cast Rona out of your mind.”

John could not agree with that. Everything was always very simple to Rajik. He had a favorite quotation from one of his lecturers that he seemed to use like a magic formula. ‘Destiny is fan shaped,’ he repeatedly said. The principle was simple. At any given point, there was a choice of options. Rajik used to draw a diagram. A straight line ended at a point, marked with a heavy dot; and from it, other lines fanned out, with arrow points on them. Each line represented an option. “You see,” Rajik always said, “It is simple. Just name each arrow and choose the one you want and ignore the rest.”

It sounded simple, and maybe it was to Rajik. Without doubt, he had two contradictory options, and he knew Rajik would argue from that viewpoint. He decided not to discuss it and changed the subject.

“Where were you going?” he asked Rajik

“I was going to your house, to see your mother. I have a new book that she will probably like to read, and I want to borrow one of hers,” Rajik told him.

John sighed. How simple it was for Rajik. He and his mother got on very well. Rajik treated her like a second mother and at the same time was friendly and easy going and distractions from young females never seemed to cause any ripples.

Rajik spoke again, and offered practical Yoga advice

“Meditate before you go to bed,” he advised, “and cast out desire. Renounce all longing.”

John had no wish to do any such thing but out of desperation, he agreed.

“I’ll try anything. I don’t want to give up the lama’s training, and obviously the Rona fantasy is a dead end before it even starts.”

“Good man,” Rajik commented. “That should do it.”

That night John put the idea into practice. He sat quietly, in his meditation pose, and concentrated on his intention of casting out desire. As he did so he could feel the burden lifting from him and after half an hour felt that he had succeeded and that he had cast out all longing and attachment. He went to bed, and slept peacefully and rose the next morning with a quiet mind and a happier mood, now that he thought that he had put the problem behind him. After breakfast, he went off to work, thinking that seeing Rona

would now be just another contact with an associate. She was walking up to the tea estate office as he arrived.

“Hullo,” she called out, waving gaily, and came up to him emanating warmth and charm.

John looked at her as she came closer. His feelings welled up, swamping any attempt at being cool and detached. As she stood before him, he could feel her aura enveloping him. Like a fine red mist, it swirled all round him, and seeped into the remotest corners of his mind. He wanted to embrace her but somehow managed to behave with some semblance of normality and led the way into the building. In his office, he sat with his head in his hands. So much for meditation on renouncing desire, he thought. An Indian proverb came into his mind, ‘the vows of the night are forgotten in the morning.’ He groaned at the thought of it. Was every day to start like this?

It was. Tuesday and Wednesday were the same. There was always a warm friendly greeting, which caused his determination to forget her to blow away by the whims of desire. By Wednesday evening, he was frantic. He felt foolish that his feelings should pull him about so easily, especially as it was clear enough that there could never be any fulfillment. In desperation, he thought of the lord of the nether world. He could hear the question echoing in his mind. “What is your desire?” He pondered on it with deep intensity. He recalled the warning that a selfish request would lead to the downward path. “Maybe this is a test,” he muttered, but could not quite see how. The lama could have explained, but he would not see him until Saturday and John felt in need of an answer at that moment. With a clearer mind, he might have realized that it was simple, like Rajik always insisted, and seen, that it was a choice between the upward or downward path. By bedtime, he had decided. He decided would seek help to break free. That way he would not be at risk from selfishness. Almost to plan, he fell asleep, and found himself before the lord of that lowest world.

“What is your desire?” was the expected question. John explained. “I wish to be free from an attachment,” he said briefly.

“So be it,” was the same answer as before, and once again, he endured the same ritual of being a model for the keepers of the fires. It was all so odd that John secretly vowed that he would never again ask for anything. From now on, he would stick to a more

formal approach. With the inspection over, the small assembly dispersed and John was alone again. Thankfully, he focused on his body and rapidly returned to the solid familiarity of his bedroom, and fell into a sound sleep.

The next morning he went to work early and was in his office before anyone else arrived, and he managed to avoid seeing Rona all that day. On the Friday, he again went early, but as he arrived, Rona also turned up. "Ah! Just the man I want to see," she exclaimed.

John waited, wondering what new twist fate might be dealing him.

"The boss wants me to work in the other office," she told him. "You know the one at the other end of the estate."

"That's two miles away," John told her. "How will you get there?"

"On my bike," she answered, "but the marvelous thing is I will get extra money. So, I do not mind at all. Anyway, we shall not see much of each other."

John restrained his excitement and the impulse to say, "Thanks for that," and uttered a few platitudes before going into his office. He sat there thinking of Rajik's diagram of the path of destiny. From now on, he decided, there would only be one line, so the conflict of choices would not occur.

By Saturday, John felt confident that the lama would now help him to commence the second stage and he went to the evening meeting with enthusiasm. He tried to appear casual but felt that during his talk the lama was watching him. Once John thought that he detected a faint smile on the lama's face, but he was so continually impassive that John could not be sure. Nevertheless, he felt that the lama's attitude was encouraging and looked forward to the private Sunday meeting with happy confidence. He was not disappointed. The lama greeted him warmly and his manner indicated that the lama was pleased with John's effort to break free from his emotional entanglement. As soon as they sat down, the lama spoke.

"I can see that you have succeeded. You have done well."

It unnerved John to think that the lama seemed to know all about him when he had never mentioned things. Even a casual thought seemed to affect the lama, and he would often answer John's unspoken questions before John had time to put them into words, but he was beginning to realize that an enlightened seer did not operate on the level of

ordinary activities. He waited politely for the lama to speak. The lama looked at John with a serious look on his face, and started to explain.

“The next stage is very dangerous and you will have a guide at all times. The last stage was not dangerous, although it can be frightening. Because you offered to help you can always receive help from the lord of that world. In this present level, the lord of the lost souls seeks to control and will try to make you serve him. If you do that, he will keep you as a prisoner. You may appear normal in the daytime world but your soul would be under the control of the demon lord. He rules over the realm of hungry ghosts who are obsessed. They try to possess people as a means of satisfying their desires, and will try to possess you. There is another world on that level. This is the realm of evil demons. Their delight is to attach and destroy human souls. The lost souls are the ones who failed to find the right path when they died, and your task is to help them to find the path to the heaven worlds or to another birth in the human world. This is your service on that level. Each level has a test and a service. Unless you pass these, you will never have real power. Tonight I will introduce you to your inner teacher. He is an initiate and an adept on all the worlds below the earth world. He will lead you through the next three worlds. Every Sunday, you will come to see me, as before. That is how it will be.”

The lama stopped speaking and sat in silence. John knew he was waiting for questions, but could not think of anything to ask. After a while, the lama gave a curt nod of his head and John took that as a dismissal. He rose to his feet and putting his hands together gave the traditional short bow of thanks. On the walk back to his home, he pondered on the situation. The lama seemed to be treating the situation like a military exercise. He concluded that the lama was now putting more pressure on him as a means of developing discipline. At the bungalow, Rajik was waiting for him, and he mentioned the lama’s mixed attitudes.

“He seems to be very friendly one minute and then detached and formal, as if I am just another ant running around aimlessly,” John told Rajik.

Rajik smiled at the analogy. “That’s the whole point,” he replied. “The gurus are the same in the ashrams. It is all part of making you self responsible, and also breaking down the ego by not pandering to it and praising you.”

John grunted in discomfort. The thought that he had an ego that needed discipline was not very flattering.

Rajik spoke again. “Anyway, what is happening? What is he on with now?” he asked John.

John did not answer for a few moments. He now knew that the further he went the less he could say about it. Rajik was on a simple progressive path, working through the traditional levels of physical, emotional and mental to attain spiritual awareness. For reasons, which he had not yet grasped, his own path had started at a lower level. He was beginning to wonder how and why he had started that way, and he knew that he could not talk about it, even to Rajik. He answered Rajik’s question cautiously. “He is talking about levels, but I’m not certain what he means.”

“Ah!” Rajik said knowingly. “Yes, levels.” He paused, and then went on to explain. “You know there are many levels, and some are a bit murky. Yoga only deals with the main seven, starting with the physical world, but is simplified into four or five for the sake of working in stages. Some go into the lower levels, but I do not know anything about them. My guru only talks about transcending the ego and attaining spiritual insight. I think you have got a different agenda, but it is a mystery to me what it is.”

John pressed his lips tightly together, as if afraid of speaking and revealing too much. How could he say that he had chosen the path of power? Rajik’s remarks had clarified everything. The discipline, and the mastery of the lower worlds went together, and the outcome was power.

He nodded his head, as if agreeing with Rajik. “It’s mystery to me as well,” he commented. “Maybe he is taking me the long way round.”

“He must be,” Rajik went on. “You know one or two others in the group see him regularly. They are on the knowledge path, and they do not seem to have any problems. Obviously he must think you are a different type.”

John shrugged and left it at that. He had more to think about, for there was still the next stage, and the new guide. It seemed weird. His nighttime activities were slowly becoming more important than the daytime routine; as if the day were a shadowy dream and the inner actions were the real life.

The conversation with Rajik helped John to see his new program a bit clearer and he waited almost impatiently for the nighttime to see what new adventure awaited him. Although, the lama had said that this next stage was dangerous, he felt that he would be all right because there would be a guide. He went to bed early, but his enthusiasm kept him awake, until he fell asleep from physical weariness. Every night he tried to observe himself falling asleep, but that only kept him awake, until the natural bodily tiredness took over and he went to sleep. Despite his eagerness on the one hand, and his attempts to observe on the other it seemed to make no difference. For when he was he was in another world there was not a time factor, and the events developed in almost the same way. This time was slightly different. There was a brief period outside the bungalow, then the transition to some inner dimension, but in the open area, where he had gone down to the lower worlds, a figure came towards him. It was a man, in normal everyday clothes, and he smiled as he approached. John realized that this was his new guide and he raised a hand in salute and indicated that John should follow him. It all seemed so natural that it was difficult to see anything unusual. This time, the new guide led John into a different tunnel, which climbed slightly and went into a different type of setting. In what appeared as a more sophisticated cave dwelling, the guide stopped and turned to John.

“This is my office,” he said humorously. “From now on we shall always meet here, but first of all I must introduce myself and explain the program.”

John took a quick glance at the cave. It did not seem very much like an office, and apart from a few bench-like rocks, there was nowhere to sit. The guide began to speak, and John listened with interest.

“My name is Gopas,” he announced, “and I am not down here all the time, like the first guide. I still have a body, in another town. As an adept, I can leave my body at will, which I do to work down here. This is my service, helping new seekers.”

He paused, and John used the opportunity to ask a question that was waiting in his mind. “Where do you live?” he asked.

Gopas laughed. “I was waiting for that,” he said. “I live a bit further south, in Dinajpur.”

John interrupted him. “How amazing. That is quite near.”

“There is nothing amazing about it. It is all deliberate, so that we can meet sometime, and it is in the same time slot, so that sunset is at a similar time.”

“Oh, of course, but who would have thought there was anyone like that in Dinajpur?”

Gopas laughed again. “I can see that you have a lot to learn. There are unusual people everywhere, and spiritually awakened people are in many places, apart from the cities. The biggest problem is that there are many well developed souls but they are not awakened in their physical life, like you.”

“How do you mean?” John asked in surprise. “What about me?”

Gopas smiled. “Well, think about it. Why do you think the lama took you on?”

John thought about it for a few minutes, and shrugged his shoulders. “It beats me,” he answered. “I thought it was because I asked about it.”

“More than that,” Gopas told him. “He could see that you already have the light.”

John looked puzzled. “What light?”

“You see. You do not even know. Why do you think the lama puts so much emphasis on knowledge? It is because most seekers virtually know nothing. It is not enough to believe, although in your case you are not even a believer, but an independent freethinker. That is what makes you such a good candidate. As for the light, that is the bright pinpoint of light that is the spark of spiritual consciousness that is the real you.”

He emphasized the word ‘you’ and John looked more puzzled than ever.

Gopas started to explain. “The trouble is that you are too identified with your body, and think that the bag of blood and bones is you. That is only an instrument. You are a spiritual being, and your real form is a body of light, and to the physical eyes it appears as a bright point of light. You can see it in meditation. You should ask your friend Rajik, he can tell you a lot about these things.” He stopped speaking, then added seriously, “But do not tell him about me, or what happens with me. Just discuss the teachings. He has his own guru and there is a lot he never mentions. You must be the same. Do you understand?”

John nodded. He was astonished. The thought that there was a secret network of enlightened souls in another dimensions was too much for him.

Gopas noticed his bewilderment. “Do not worry about that. You will put it together slowly. For now, we must learn about the immediate task. I will tell you the main details and we will make our first attempt tomorrow night.”

John waited with curiosity and Gopas sat on one of the rock bench and went on with his explanations.

“The lama has warned you that this phase is dangerous. You only have to master two sections and learn to work in the other, but there are many more dimensions, or mansions, as some call them. The first we shall deal with is in the realm of the hungry ghosts. They will try to possess you, to gratify their desires through you. They have possessed many souls. Our task is to help to free them, and that is doubly dangerous. Later we have to master the realm of the demons. Their main aim is destruction. They attack whatever is different from them, so that means everything. They are a nuisance as well as being dangerous, but once you are master of your self, they cannot get near you. Apart from that, we have to help the lost souls to find their way to the true path and go to one of the heaven worlds.

The days and the nights passed quickly.

When he stopped speaking, John was ready with another question. “How long will all this take?”

“That all depends on you, but the average time for the full course is well over twenty years.”

The announcement amazed John. This was something he had never considered. “Twenty years?” he queried. “Why?”

Gopas rocked back in laughter. He took it all very light heartedly. “That is a short time really. What do you think? Do you think a monk would spend a lifetime of meditation in discipline if there were a shorter method? Although in fact there is a short method, but the strain and stress is fearful. The best way is slowly and gradually. For you, it will not be so bad. Even so, you will be with me for a few years, then I hand you over to someone else. Just learn to be patient and then the time becomes unimportant.”

John listened carefully to what Gopas said, and all the time Gopas was speaking John was studying him carefully. It was unbelievable that such an ordinary looking person should be describing his role in this amazing situation. Had John met him in the street he

would never have suspected that he had any special qualities. Gopas was of average height and of average looks. He would pass anywhere as an ordinary Mr. Man-in-the-street. As he studied him, John felt a twinge of guilt at his critical thoughts. After all, he was as ordinary looking as Gopas. Apart from having more height, his features were not at all different. The only noticeable characteristic of John was that he was light skinned, because of his British father. John dismissed the thoughts with impatience as he began to see that even this situation was breaking down his preconditioned concepts as to what people were really like. When Gopas said there would be no further instruction, he felt relieved. He felt a need to be alone and put this new situation in perspective. He knew that this would not be easy, as he had no real standards for evaluating this situation.

Gopas gave one last instruction. “When you leave your body you will always come here. If I am not here, you must wait. Never leave without me. There are different conditions in these worlds, but now you must go back and catch up on your beauty sleep.” He laughed as he said it and put a hand on John’s shoulder. With that touch John found himself back in his bed, half wondering if he had imagined it, or just dreamt about the events. He lay there thinking about it. He liked Gopas and appreciated his lighthearted manner and he closed his eyes and fell into a normal sleep.

In the morning, he rose early and went into the garden. He sat on the garden seat where he could see the bungalows on the opposite slope. The whole scene was very familiar and it gave him a feeling of certainty. Things were obvious and clear-cut in the ordinary world of work and domestic routine. Here there were no demons or lost souls that needed saving. Everything had its place in the communal order, with a firm social framework in which he had a safe and secure niche. Now it was beginning to turn into a superficial image, like the pictures on the cinema screen, which seemed real but were only a projection that had no substance. He thought of the Yoga teachings that Rajik often quoted. ‘All is illusion,’ he would say, and John would look round at the very tangible world and wonder how that could be described as an illusion. Now, he was not so sure, but the fear was that perhaps the inner worlds were only an illusion as well. Perhaps that is what the word all meant. His mother’s voice cut into his thoughts.

“Ah. There you are. Your breakfast is ready. Come on, or you will be late.”

He stood up, and put his arm round his mother and gave her a little hug. “Good morning,” he said, with genuine pleasure at seeing her. Her affection was the one firm rock in his life that never shifted. More than ever he was beginning to see what that meant, and he vaguely wondered whether he should have chosen the path she had chosen, of simple devotion to the Lord. The power and knowledge path was all very well, but it seemed to be a lonely path, because he could never share his problems. Now, he could only rely on a teacher that he met in another dimension.

In the next few nights, nothing happened and John was beginning to think that it was all a dream and there was no realm of lost souls after all. Then, on the Friday, almost as soon as he fell asleep the new stage began to unfold and he was soon on the mystic path. There was the usual brief view of the bungalow and then he was in another realm. He was still unable to understand how he moved from one location to another. There was a sudden swift movement and then he was in the place that Gopas called an office. Gopas was not there and he had time to look closely at the rocky construction. As he was pondering on it Gopas appeared, and with a typical laugh commented on John’s curiosity.

“Ha ha! Checking things out I see.”

“Yes,” John replied. “I can’t understand how we are in the earth. It seems weird.”

“Well, it’s actually even weirder, although I prefer to call it wonderful. In one way, it is not like this, because it is only an impression that acts as a transition. You will see in a minute, when we go to the realm of the hungry ghosts. We could jump into their dimension immediately but the mind has to learn to adjust. What you have seen so far has some semblance of worldly reality, but some of the hidden worlds are so bizarre that a sudden introduction would be too much. Even I try to avoid some of them, and I have been into many worlds.”

John did not know whether to take the information with interest and curiosity or whether to see things as one hazard after another.

“Come,” Gopas said. “I will show you. Then you will begin to understand. Stay close to me.”

John stepped closer to Gopas. There was another sudden swift sense of motion and he was in a different setting. This time he seemed to be outside, in a landscape that was similar to a normal earth view. They were standing on the edge of a little valley, with low

trees and bushes that offered a lot of cover for whatever might be in there. The light was subdued and a faint mist enveloped the valley and restricted visibility.

“This is the entrance to the realm of the hungry ghosts. It stretches in all directions and everything is cold and misty.”

As John peered into the hazy landscape, he noticed shapes flitting about amongst the bushes.

“There is someone down there,” he said to Gopas.

“Oh yes. There is someone down there all right, and who knows we are here. Keep close, and watch this.”

Gopas moved further into the valley and as they went deeper more blurred shapes appeared. They came close and John could see the shapes all round them. A mass of leering human-like figures that had no sharp outlines hovered on all sides. The ghost like shapes tried to come closer but some type of barrier held them back. Gopas made a quick motion and raised one hand as if to strike them and they flitted away rapidly, then slowly came back. John felt glad that he was with Gopas and carefully kept close to Gopas, who was looking around carefully.

“Ah,” Gopas said in a low voice. “See, there’s one there.”

John followed his indication. One of the hungry ghost-like shapes was moving very slowly and almost with difficulty. John noticed that it appeared much more human than the others.

“Observe it well,” Gopas whispered. “We shall be back for that.”

He nudged John and indicated that they should withdraw and John gratefully complied and made a swift return to the office area with some relief.

“Right,” Gopas said. “Sit down and I will explain.”

John sat on one of the rocky benches and Gopas remained standing as he outlined the strange itinerary.

“You have to learn two things. One is to go in there on your own and keep them away. That is not too difficult and is really only a matter of learning to create a mental force field, like a shield. The other thing is to look for special types, like the one I pointed out. That one looked more human because somewhere, in the world we know, it has possessed someone. That way, they gratify their own desires, and if the victim becomes

ill, or perhaps does something wild and is put in prison it will leave him, because the victim can no longer be used. The effort of keeping a hold on the victim slows them down and they are easy to catch. What is more, they are always on the edge of their world, so we do not have to go very far to find them. The task is to liberate the victim. He could be anywhere while the hungry ghost has a hold on his soul, like a leech. He is a ghost parasite.”

“Will they be like that for ever? John asked.

“They will if they do not change. It is like the slothful souls and the violent souls that you saw in the previous stage. All they have to do is to desire to change. If they prayed for help they would get help, but they always seem stubborn. In any case, they would always have to take another human birth and they do not want that. Life on earth is a big learning experience. It is a giant classroom, and these different types of recalcitrant souls do not want the discipline of a physical life so they stay where they are. The demons are different. They are in their own environment and the problem with them is that they attack frail souls. We will get round to them later. So you see, the task is to master each level. A true master is one who has mastered all the levels, but the service is in helping other souls. Easy isn't it?” he said with his usual laugh.

“I don't know about that,” John replied. “I'm beginning to wonder what I have let myself in for.”

“Yes. They all say that. Yet, there are great benefits. Of course, you could just choose an easy path, or be a straw in the wind.” He smiled at John's concern and added a few words of encouragement. “You would never have been sent to me if you were not worth it. Talk to your lama. You have a great teacher there. He can tell you everything.”

Back in his bedroom, he pondered on his strange Jekyll and Hyde existence. Fortunately, he was not turning into a monster, but only meeting them and it was certainly as Shakespeare said, 'there are more things in heaven and earth than ever man dreamed of.'

The weeks slipped by and Gopas showed John a ritual to liberate a possessed soul from the vampire clutches of these decadent souls. All the time Gopas was with John, but one night he informed John that it was now time for him to test his powers and enter the hazy shadow world without the protection of Gopas. John was ready for the attempt and

had prepared his mind by careful observation of everything that Gopas showed him. When Gopas led him to the edge of the misty valley for his first solo-attempt John was confident that he could apply his mind and keep the hungry ghosts at a safe distance. He knew that it could be a dangerous encounter but his experience in the lower world gave him a sense of assertiveness that he felt would support him. There he had repeated warnings to have no fear and he approached the new test with confidence.

What he was now to discover, was that there is a difference between fear and danger. Fear is internal, and personal discipline can overcome it. Danger is not within. It is external, and can appear in many ways and some of them are extremely insidious, as he was to learn by experience. Gopas stopped at the edge of the valley and said, now, go in. Do not do anything. They will come to you. All you have to do is to keep a firm hold on your mind and project a mental barrier in the way I have shown you.”

John went forward. At first, everything seemed as normal, with the ghostly shapes flitting about and disappearing into the bushes. John stopped at the head of a slight rise and looked around. They were there. He waited. They drifted towards him, trying to press close, but John kept his mind steady and they remained well beyond reach. Then, as if they were working together they came forward in a great rush. For a second John felt a wave of panic and had to make a strong effort to assert his mental barrier. They retreated and John stood still, wondering what he should do. He felt disturbed at the thought that one of them had touched him. Disconcerted by the sense of a cold contact that he could still feel, he began to panic. To his relief Gopas appeared beside him and signaled him to leave the valley. Back on the bleak hillside Gopas spoke.

“That was more than I expected,” he told John. You did well.” After a pause he asked, “How do you feel?”

John told him. “A bit shaken, and I did not like their slimy touch.”

Gopas looked at John with serious concern. “Are you sure that one of them touched you?” he asked.

“I think so, but maybe I imagined it.”

“Let’s hope so,” Gopas added.

John did not like the way Gopas sad that but he had no time to ask any more as Gopas led the way back at a brisk rate. In the rocky office, Gopas looked at John again, and John thought that he was studying him carefully. “Is anything wrong?” John asked him.

“I’m just checking, to see if they marked you, but you seem to be all right.”

That was the end of the session and John was glad when Gopas said there would be no lessons during the next three nights. John wondered if it was for time to recover and in the next few days, he began to see why Gopas was concerned. He could see that there were effects and for the first day did not think too much of it. He noticed that in his office he felt restless at the tedious work of checking orders and consignments of Darjeeling tea and had difficulty in concentrating. Once or twice, he felt an uncharacteristic urge to go to the nearby hotel and have a drink. As he did not indulge in that type of social drinking it seemed odd and he dismissed the thought. The other wayward thought was in his attitude to the female staff. When one came into his office, he felt the urge to make ribald remarks and try to touch the young women. Yet, these thoughts were subtle and did not seem too noticeable.

By the next day, his mood was becoming obvious, even to his mother. She commented on it at the breakfast table.

“You seem restless,” she said. “Is something wrong?”

John ignored her question. He was too busy looking at his mother. How young she looks, he thought. She still has a nice figure. Even now, she could make a man happy. He caught himself thinking such thoughts and rose from the table rapidly.

“I’ll be late for work,” he said and left the house hurriedly.

During the walk to the office, he tried to understand why he was so restless. At the office, he made an effort to push his concern aside, but more disruptive thoughts invaded his mind. Two young women who worked in the next office were standing in the foyer. He stared at them with intense interest. How nicely their saris cling to their bodies, he thought, and when they walked away he looked at their swaying hips with avid enthusiasm. By evening, such feelings were becoming stronger. He was almost drooling every time a female came near him, and the last wisps of his rational mind that had not yet collapsed kept telling him to be careful. At home, he ate his meal quickly and retired to his room, saying he was tired. With the door locked, he tried to analyze what was

happening. He sat there all night, alternately observing the waves of lustful thought and enjoying them with relish. Dimly he realized that he was suffering a weird metamorphosis that was changing his whole outlook. By morning, he was sweating with distress. The thought of the young female bodies in the office was a lustful lure, which made him want to rush to work and look for a chance to molest them. Yet, somewhere in the recesses of his spirit something was urging him to resist. He decided not to go to work and sat there struggling with his fearful impulses. He recalled his thoughts about Jekyll and Hyde and shuddered at the horrifying thought that something like that was happening to him. By evening, he was almost frantic and swinging between the urge to succumb to his lecherous fantasies and bitter recriminations at himself for thinking such thoughts. To try to escape he went to bed early and from the fatigue of not having any sleep the night before, fell asleep immediately. With the usual swift movements, he found himself in the underworld office, where Gopas was waiting.

“How are you?” Gopas asked bluntly.

John knew this was not a greeting but a serious question, and told him the about distressing impulses of the past three days.

Gopas nodded, “I was afraid of that. You were contaminated. What has happened is that one of them has inserted a thought form into your own psyche. The idea is that it will grow, and take over. What happens is that it feeds on any similar thoughts you might have. If a person is pure it will not work, but very few are so pure. The conflict comes from opposing thoughts, such as the values and discipline from upbringing and education. The conflict can last forever, as the thought form will never let go as the hungry ghost is still feeding it. Eventually, it will take over and you would turn into a satyr maniac or worse.”

“What can we do about it?” John asked worriedly.

Gopas smiled. Now that he knew how things were he knew he could change them. “It is really very easy,” he explained. “All we have to do is to meditate together and give our unfriendly ghost a shock. If there is one thing they cannot cope with it is love. By the way, who is your Ishta?”

John looked puzzled. “What is an Ishta?”

“It is a deity that you revere. It can be Shiva, Krishna, Buddha, or anyone. The name is not important. The key thing is to have a means of filling your heart with love. You could just think of someone you love, but it is better to have a permanent Ishta, as that acts like an anchor for your spiritual feelings.”

John thought of all the divine figures he knew about and considered his mother’s description of Ishvara.

“Ishvara is the Lord within,” she had told him. “That is your own inner Self, and if you love Ishvara he will love you, and protect you.”

Gopas waited. “How about Ishvara?” John asked him.

Gopas looked surprised. “Excellent,” he commented. “Where did you get that?”

“My mother told me about Ishvara. She is a devotee of Lord Shiva.”

“You are fortunate to have a mother like that. I remember now. Lama Nam Tso told me about her. It is good. Now sit down, on that bench, and let us meditate.”

They sat there meditating, facing each other. John could feel the warmth of love coming from Gopas and he followed the instructions of Gopas and filled his heart with love and faith and tranquility and devotion to Ishvara. Almost immediately, the distressing mood that had enclosed John began to lift. John could almost see it go, like a dark cloud that had entered his mind. Finally, with a quick surge the last vestige of morbid desire fled back to the evil spirit that had created it. As the meditation ended, Gopas returned to his usual jovial manner.

“Well, that hungry ghost is going to be an angry ghost.” He laughed as he spoke. “He will be waiting for us next time, but little does he know I will be waiting for him. We will use him to teach you something useful. I call it the magic of love, never fails, works like a charm. We will do it tomorrow.”

The bright mood of Gopas dispersed the last doubts about hungry ghosts and John returned happily to the peace of his bedroom, where there were no ghosts and he could be a plain normal person, although he was beginning to wonder if such a thing was possible. Nevertheless, it is nice to be home, he thought, and fell asleep without any difficulty, as if battling with ghosts was very ordinary and all in a night’s work.

After that experience, John was careful to do exactly as Gopas told him.

“There is no room for error,” Gopas affirmed. “Possession is a real thing, and if you cannot handle the hungry ghosts you will never cope with the demons.” The advice made John even more determined to master whatever skills he might need to cope with demons or anything else. In his rational daytime awareness, he admitted to himself that he had no real wish to be a magician or a master of occult powers, but now that he had entered the arena, the best approach was to face the monsters and ensure his own victory. He recalled the ancient myths of classical Greek legends and concluded that some of them were more than symbolic and that some of them referred to actual battles in the underworld, as he was now experiencing. He discussed the theme with his friend Rajik, being careful not to reveal that for him it was a reality and not mere imagination.

“What does a clinical psychologist say when a patient says he has out of the body experiences?” John asked Rajik.

They were sitting on the veranda of their favorite restaurant, having the ritualistic Saturday morning coffee. The question seemed out of keeping with the placid atmosphere of the morning sun shining through the clear mountain air. Ghosts and demons did not seem to fit into that scene.

Rajik shook his head. “I do not really know. I only took social psychology. I could tell you if a person is likely to be a criminal type, like you,” he added slyly, “but I am not very well informed about the other aspects.”

“Yes, I know, but you have done general reading, and in your Yoga knowledge system there are all sorts of things. I have heard you mention them.”

Rajik looked quizzically at John. “I do not quite know where you are coming from, but I am beginning to think you are outside the teaching. Yoga is concerned with working through the levels of consciousness above the human level, to reach the spiritual level, and all this other stuff is of no interest. It is true that there are seven levels below the main seven that we deal with, but what is the use of going downstairs when you want to go up.”

John tried a different approach. “I agree. Yet, all the scriptures talk of hell, as well as heaven. Some of the mystics obviously knew about it, or they could not have spoken about it.”

“True,” Rajik assented, “but we are not studying voodoo, are we. After all, we do not want to be a witch doctor. What we are after is enlightenment. So why worry about it.”

A great sense of forlorn isolation welled up inside John. He could see that he would never be able to share his experiences with even his closest friend. What the sages said seemed true, ‘You are forever alone.’ He thought of his mother. Her path was simple. It was devotion to the Deity, and she could share that with her fellow devotees. As for Rajik, on his knowledge path, he had many deep discussions with his fellow seekers, but for himself there was no one. There was no other course for him but to remain silent and be stoic.

“Yes,” I think you are quite right,” he said to Rajik, clapping his hands together in a flourish of dismissal. “Why worry about it?”

As more weeks went by John cultivated the veneer of outer serenity and inwardly struggled to master all his doubts and accept his nightly routine as normal for himself even if not for others. Gopas and the lama noticed his attempts at discipline. They followed John’s progress with interest. Unknown to him John was not quite as alone as he sometimes thought.

Finally, after more tests and encounters, Gopas announced the next stage.

“There is no point in wasting any more time on this stage,” he informed John. “You are quite safe now, so we will tackle the realm of the demons. This time you will meet the king of the demons, but you do not have to worry about him. They all respect one thing. It is power. You have probably noticed that the hungry ghost back off as soon as you look at them. Take that attitude into the demon camp and there will not be any battle.

John felt pleased at the encouragement. He was beginning to see that the whole process was one of mastering his own weaknesses. He could see that when he was sure and certain the outcome would be a success. Yet, he was also learning not to be overconfident.

The next night started as usual and Gopas led the way into another hidden world. This time the setting was different. The dominant color was the moody tone of a maroon-crimson. It seemed as if the atmosphere was red, and although there were no clouds, or mists the impression was of a very deep red, shot through with slashes of fiery orange.

The impression was one of seething anger and hate and John sensed that this would not be an easy world to enter. Gopas sensed his uneasiness and spoke calmly.

“The clever trick is not to let their mood get into you. The name of the game here is cool calmness. Once you become angry you are on their level and they can attack you. Remember your Ishta and maintain a love for him. All the way through, these demons and devils do not like love. Down here, love is the king. For them, hate rules, so if you have the opposite they cannot get near you. When you have finished all these stages, you will truly know the power of love, and from then on things will be better, even in your normal life, because love will be part of you.”

With this new thought, John felt determined to succeed in his encounter with the demons, but had not calculated on the impact of meeting their king on the very first night. This time there was no gradual approach, but a dramatic jump that was almost into a personification of the red and orange atmosphere in that realm. As John and Gopas stepped into the shimmering red landscape, a fierce looking figure barred their path. John realized that this was the lord of the hungry ghosts and king of the demons. Everything about the huge figure bristled with aggressive and arrogant authority. The immediate impression was that they had trespassed into the demon territory and now they must pay for their impertinence.

Although it was a shock to John it obviously was not so for Gopas, and he stepped forward rapidly, placing himself squarely in front of the latest lord, who towered above him. There was no sound and the giant apparition, who was at least one foot higher than Gopas, stood firmly before them. The pause gave John time to study the fearsome figure, and John had the fleeting ludicrous thought that it was a pity that he did not have a camera. He eyed the ghostly lord with interest, remembering what Gopas had said about being able to imagine them clearly as a means of mastering them. The impression seemed frozen in time and John was able to observe the vision in detail. The face was that of a skull, but not an ordinary skull. Its color was bright vermilion and the features were as if the skull had a covering of opaque red silk, so that the bony structure beneath was sharply visible. The skull head was not one with eyeless sockets, but had livid green eyes in the dark rimmed holes. The mouth was not just a set of teeth but could move and was gibbering in a malicious grin of hate and anger. Long hair of a blue and green hue hung

down each side of the face and on the head was a crown shaped like a helmet, with decorated sidepieces covering the ears. The robe was of a luminous gray color and rippled with contrasting shadows in the folds, so that there was an impression of beauty, which contrasted sharply with the general appearance and added to the deadly mood of the awesome figure. The robe was heavy with folds, and both wrists had silver bands and a similar highly decorated belt encircled the waist. One hand held a curved sickle, ready to hook into an opponent, and the other held a heavy chain, equally ready to bind any unfortunate victim. The overall image was that of a demon ghost and John shivered at the thought of being between the phantom lustful ghosts and the hordes of demons lurking behind their demonic king.

The demon king seemed to be waiting for Gopas to make a move, but Gopas remained motionless. This was not what the demon ghost wanted, and John could feel that he and Gopas were in an invincible and invisible protective shell that Gopas had created. As with the previous encounters, they were safe inside a protective cocoon, which deterred any aggressor by its magical resistance.

With a hateful glare of frustration, the lord of the demon ghosts suddenly disappeared, and John waited for the next development. To his amazement and to his secret relief, Gopas laughed, and said. "That's it. Lesson over."

Gopas led the way back, and John followed him, waiting for further explanations. In the stony office, Gopas shrugged with mock indifference and stared to explain.

"That is all there is to that. We do not trespass into their domain, but we have to ensure our safety. It is not good to be a victim of their sadistic appetites. Your task will be to face the demon king on your own, and after that you will be free to rescue the lost souls who are at risk of capture from these two departments of vulture-like predators. I will teach you how to make the ringed barrier that shields us from their emanations. It is really quite simple. If they cannot get into your mind they cannot get near you."

"Ah," John said with a quick flash of insight. "I am really only mastering something in myself."

"Exactly," Gopas affirmed.

The following weeks were one of repetitive demonstrations, in which John practiced the projection of a wall of energy that would shield him when he faced the demon lord of

the hungry ghosts. After his earlier failure John listened carefully to every minute instruction and made sure that when the time came he would not fail.

The lessons were simple enough. All he had to do was to keep a steady mind and direct his thought energy where he wanted it to go. With each test, Gopas played the role of the demon lord and finally was able to tell John that he had done it correctly. Eventually, after further reinforcement Gopas said, "You are ready."

On the night of the test, John went forward confidently. Gopas remained in the background, out of sight, but ready to come to John's aid if needed. John stepped into the rocky cleft that led to the demon lair. A rush of movement alerted John to the arrival of the ghostly lord. John braced himself for a forceful mental effort, but to his amazement, the giant demon just swooped round him and disappeared. Unsure of what might happen next, John remained still and alert. Behind him, he heard the familiar laugh of Gopas. He heard him clapping.

"Lovely," he said to John. "That deserves an A plus."

"Why?" John asked.

"Very simple really. He knew you had done your homework and he was not going to waste any energy trying to invade your mind. That is the real key. You have to learn how to keep your own mind, and he knew you had done that."

Before John left, Gopas mentioned the next stage. "We will have a break before the next level. It will give you time to catch up on your social life. Then we can get into a bit more interesting action."

John left him, feeling pleased and happier now that he was progressing in this strange path of self-mastery.

At the Saturday evening meeting John was surprised to see the large number of people who had turned up to listen to the lama's discourse on the path of awakening. As Rajik had said, there were some younger people in T-shirts and jeans. Yet, it did not seem out of place because everyone was familiar with western modes of dress through the television and modern magazines. Almost unwittingly, everyone was cooperating in the blurring of cultural boundaries that seemed to be the mark of the modern times. John favored western dress and in the cooler weather always wore a suit, and he looked at the newcomers with interest. Sitting in the row in front of John, and a bit to one side, were

two young women. One of them was an attractive girl, probably in her mid twenties, and John found it easy to glance at her. As if intuitively aware that she was the focus of his attention, she turned her head and smiled at him. John automatically smiled back and felt pleased at the incident. Rajik, sitting beside him gave John a sharp dig in the ribs and indicated that John should pay attention to the lama's speech. John listened patiently. The familiar theme of their inner spiritual nature was always the central point in anything the lama said. Nevertheless, the lama always found new ways of expressing that theme and John soon became absorbed in the discourse. Only when the lama brought his hands together for the polite formality of thanking them did John think of the new feminine member. As he thought of her, he looked towards her and at that moment, she turned and looked at him. For a second their gaze met and they both smiled. Rajik hissed in John's ear. "Come on, before you slip up again."

John reluctantly rose to his feet and drifted towards the door. A voice behind him arrested his exit. He turned to see a woman who was one of his workers at the office, coming towards him. With her was the young woman who had attracted his attention.

"This is Eda," she said, and to the girl, "this John."

At his side, Rajik gave a slight groan and left John to his friend. After a few polite words, the woman who had introduced them left and John was face to face with a new temptation. Yet, this time John was more cautious and wondered how he could find more about Eda without appearing rude. The girl spoke. "We are going to the restaurant for a coffee," she told him. "Would you like to come along?"

It was so natural, and so easy, and such a good opportunity that John agreed immediately. He listened to the conversation of the small group as they walked back to the main street. By the sound of things, they were not serious seekers but took it all as a social event, and the further conversation at the coffee table emphasized the casual interest they had on the esoteric mysteries of Tibetan Buddhism.

John said very little and he noticed that Eda did not say very much, and at the end, when some of them had left, Eda apologized for them

"You must not take them too seriously," she explained. "It is all very new to them."

John nodded sympathetically, thinking that her remark indicated that the teaching were not new to her. There was no opportunity to probe further into her views but when

they left the restaurant the others went one way and Eda started if in the opposite direction, which John had to take. Without any intention of doing so, he found himself alone with her, on a walk in the same direction. They chatted amicably and John asked how she had come to their quiet corner of the world.

“I live here,” she told him. “My parents are here. I’ve just finished university and now I have to find a job.”

In the ensuing conversation, John elicited that she had gone to the same university as he had, and had virtually taken the same course. There were many points of contact and the end of their walk together arrived all too rapidly. Just before they reached the road where John turned off she stopped, and said, “I live down here. Thank you for seeing me home. I will probably see you next week.” Then she was gone.

John went home, pondering on this new development. After the Rona fiasco, he was wary, and now that he was experiencing the mysteries of out of the body activities, he did not know whether to risk another feminine encounter. With a shrug, he dismissed it as too hard a problem and focused his thoughts on something the lama had said. In his discourse, the lama had pursued an old theme. This was that we all create our own circumstances. ‘Whatever happens, you have helped to cause it,’ he had said. John had heard it before and Rajik had often quoted a saying by his favorite Yogi, Vivekananda, ‘Confused thinking causes confused circumstances’. John thought that it sounded good, yet somehow he did not seem able to create his own circumstances in the way that he looked. He decided to ask the lama in the morning. He had been very brief for the past few weeks and it seemed that the lama only wanted to know that he was progressing safely, and left all the guidance to Gopas. Now that there was a temporary respite John thought that perhaps he could ask these more personal questions.

The next morning John went to the lama’s bungalow and sat before the lama, waiting for a chance to speak. The lama forestalled him.

“I know that you have a question,” he said quietly. “You are worried about how you cause things to happen.”

John was not surprised at this. The lama seemed to know everything. In some ways, it was a bit disconcerting to think that someone knew almost everything he thought or did.

‘Everything is known,’ he often said, and ‘no one can hide anything.’ It was a mystery, which John did not understand. He waited for the lama to continue.

“The answer is within your self,” the lama explained. “You must learn to observe your thoughts. Whatever you think will always seek expression. I have told you before, be careful what you say you want for you will surely get it. Observe your thoughts and your desires, and observe what happens. Nothing happens overnight, but eventually it will happen, and according to you intent and motive, so it will be. Be careful that you do not cause more bad karma.”

The lama said the last sentence in a tone of finality, indicating that the interview was over. He had received an answer to his unspoken question and this baffled him. John put his hands together, gave a brief token bow with his head, and left the room.

Back at the house, Rajik was waiting. “Well?” he said eagerly. “What’s the latest scandal?”

John knew he was referring to Eda and that Rajik was curious. John deliberately avoided the question and started to speak about the lama’s comments. Rajik broke into his explanations. “Don’t try that,” he said. “I know you. You are deliberately changing the subject. Come on. What’s happening?”

John smiled, and explained. “The thing is that according to the lama we create our own chaos. He was explaining that, and the point is, am I creating any chaos if I get a new girl friend?”

“My point exactly,” Rajik asserted. “Look before you leap, that’s my motto.”

“How dreary,” John groaned. “I know you are right, but surely life is meant for living. Or is it just one long lesson, with the invisible guru of destiny whacking us with a big stick every time we stray off the path?”

Rajik rocked back on his chair and laughed. “I can see that they have got you,” he commented. “You will have to ring up the fortune teller every morning and ask if it is a good day to get out of bed.”

“Very witty,” John replied, “but seriously, I don’t want to make any more stupid moves, but she is a nice girl.”

Rajik became serious. “I think that you should not cross your bridges before you come to them. You will have to play by ear. In any case, she might have a boy friend already.”

For the next two weeks, things continued the same and there was no opportunity to do anything. Then, after another session with the lama, the night time lessons started again and John became immersed in the strange experience of another new world.

CHAPTER 4 – LORDS OF THE ANIMAL KINGDOM

John was glad of the respite. The past months had been stressful, with far too many internal conflicts to allow any interest in external activities. He had not attended the Saturday evening lectures with the lama for a number of weeks, and even the Saturday ritual of morning coffee had become a session of silent contemplation rather than a happy exchange of the week's news. Fortunately, Rajik understood that the inner spiritual growing pains were often difficult to handle. When John suddenly became his old breezy self, Rajik responded with enthusiasm.

“You have finally come out of the dive then?”

“How do you mean?” John asked.

After a pause while Rajik gave the bearer the order for their usual cups of coffee, Rajik answered.

“Well. You have not been with us. You know that, but you probably never realized how far away you were.”

“Far away?” John queried. “I haven't been anywhere. What are you talking about?”

Rajik gave a slight shrug, half inclined to dismiss the subject, but John was waiting for an answer.

Rajik switched on his best psychological approach. “Meditation is a subjective process. Do you agree with that?”

“Of course. So what?” John replied.

Rajik went on. “And we live in an objective world. Right?”

“OK! Go on,” John was clearly impatient.

Rajik explained. “Well, it should be obvious. If you immerse yourself in the subjective experiences, whatever they are, you tend to cut off any interest in the outside world. In meditation terms you were deep in, and now you are grounded again.”

John nodded thoughtfully. He agreed but thought the conversation was becoming dangerous. He did not want any questions because he knew that he could not give any answer and discuss what was happening in his inner world of out of the body experiences.

“Yes,” he assented. “I tend to become too introspective.”

“And almost introvert,” Rajik added. “It is a good thing for you that I have seen these meditation moods before. Even your mother thought that you were a bit too preoccupied.”

John cut in quickly. He could imagine the next question. Rajik would want to know what happened, and John did not want to offer any answer.

“Never mind all that,” John said brusquely. “How are things at the group meetings?”

“Well, on our planet things have been going on as usual. The group is now almost twice the size. There are a few new female members. Some turn up in jeans and T-shirts. I think we shall have to call it The Western Buddhist Society, or something like that.”

“I do not think that Lama Nam Tso would agree with that,” John said with a grin. “Anyway, I think I’ll roll up tonight. Just to get back into things.”

“You mean just to check it out. I don’t think your meditation is getting you anywhere,” Rajik teased him. “Your glands are just as active as ever.”

“Maybe so,” John said, “but I have not quite reached the vow of celibacy stage yet.”

Rajik laughed. “Anyway, it is good to see you back to normal.”

In the evening, John went to bed early, but was not expecting any developments and had a surprise when he found himself outside the bungalow as a prelude to another nocturnal episode. He moved with the usual eerie swiftness and rapidly found himself in the meeting place where Gopas was already waiting.

Gopas raised a hand in greeting. “You look surprised,” he said.

“Yes. I am.” John replied. “I was not expecting any action just yet.”

“I know,” Gopas told him, “but there is a lot I must tell you before you meet our new friends. So I gave you a call.”

“Really? How do you do that?”

Gopas smiled. “All in good time. First, I must tell you what to expect. This time there is no danger and nothing to fear, but the first sight may appear strange, especially if you have not been warned.”

The remarks mystified John. The earlier sights had been strange enough and he wondered how there could be such a difference that there was need for a warning.

Gopas continued. "This time you will meet many lords of the animal kingdom, but you only need to deal with one of them. This time there is not a challenge, but a temptation. The animal lords have great power and can be a powerful asset, but if you settle for that, it is difficult to go any further. Shamans often choose an animal guide and that becomes the focus on their totem. Yet, that is not the important point because you must not show surprise at their appearance. You see they have human bodies but animal heads. There is a lord for each species. That is why there are so many. Anyway, what animal lord would you like to meet?"

John considered this amazing information with astonishment. He had imagined a meeting with another fearsome figure and the thought of an animal head on a human body seemed a bit too weird.

Gopas stood waiting. "How about cats?" John asked.

Gopas laughed. "A good safe choice, although they will not try to eat you. Come along and I will show you."

Gopas put his arm on John's arm and they moved swiftly and stopped at the edge of a pleasant wooded area. Gopas signaled to John to be quiet. As they waited John could see different forms emerging from the behind the trees. They stopped some distance away and John was able to recognize two or three different animal lords. To his amazement, there were normal human forms amongst them. In surprise, he turned to Gopas.

"Who are the people?" he asked.

Gopas spoke in a low voice. "They are souls who love animals. They choose to work with the animal kingdom as part of their service. Look, one of them is coming towards us."

A man left the animal headed group and came up to them. "Greetings," he said. "What is your wish?"

Gopas answered, "My friend wishes to meet the lord of the feline species."

"Very good," the man said. "That is my lord. I will call him."

The man turned and cupped his hands round his mouth and sent out a strange cat-like howl. A tall figure emerged amongst the bushes and came towards them. As it came nearer, John could see the features in detail and at close quarters, the impression was one

of unreality, and when the figure spoke, it was so uncanny that John had to struggle to avoid any show of surprise.

“Who wishes to meet the lord of the cats?” he asked.

The voice was soft and pleasant. It helped John to relax and make a show of behaving normally, as if talking to cat people was an everyday affair. Gopas said something that John could not hear. For almost a minute, they stood looking at each other. It gave John time to study the cat lord. His face was feline, but not exactly like any particular species of the cat family. There was almost a jungle appearance in the features and if there had been stripes John would have thought it was a member of the tiger family. He realized that this was the essence of all cats, large or small.

The contrast of the clothes made the face seem even more formidable and John studied the dress with interest. The body was in a tight fitting tunic that just covered the torso. A large decorated standup collar half framed the face and the lapels were turned back in long points that almost touched the shoulders. They had patterns, with precious stones that glistened and reflected light with every movement. The shoulders had fancy curved epaulettes that had more jewels on them, and the tight fitting sleeves had clasps at the wrists, of jeweled gold bands. The legs were in tight fitting trousers that emphasized the human shape of the legs. On the feet were close fitting shoes that curved out round the ankles. All of it was of a shimmering gold color and seemed to be a material of spun gold. Like the other lords, there was the impression of authority and command.

In answer to the question, Gopas indicated that John wished to meet the lord and the lord turned towards John.

“Do you wish to join the ranks of the cat brothers?” he asked John.

John remained silent and the cat lord went through a long list of powers and benefits that he could offer. John listened carefully; interested to learn how some shamans had such remarkable powers. When the lord of the cats had finished his speech, he waited. John sensed that it was now up to him to respond. He racked his brains for a diplomatic answer. He recalled a piece of advice that his mother had quoted. ‘Never burn your bridges. You may wish to use them.’

“Thank you for your offer,” he said to the lord, “But I do not think I am right for that. Perhaps I could come back when I have more experience.”

The feline lord looked at John with his big gray eyes and nodded thoughtfully. “Yes,” he said. “You could come back.”

“Thank you,” John answered, and watched the tall cat lord walk away.

Gopas waited until he was out of sight then spoke to John. “That was brilliant,” he said. “You kept your options open and he was able to do the same. Much better than an outright rejection, and who knows, the time might come when you want to do that.”

“Well, what happens now?” John asked Gopas.

“Not much. It is a bit of an anticlimax. Most candidates want to try out their powers and do not want to do any return service. You avoided that so we can begin to consider the next phase, although you may get a test to see if you are sincere in what you said. People do not usually get away with things that lightly. You will have to see what happens.”

At the Saturday evening meeting, these thoughts faded at the sight of Eda in her tight fitting jeans and T-shirt. Although one or two others wore western dress, her outfit seemed to be more unconventional than the others were. It reflected the liberalizing influence of university life, where students met people from different parts of the world. In a western setting Eda would have merged into the crowd but here, her bold modernization not only flaunted convention, but also echoed out like a challenge. This was not only a symbol of West meeting East, but of the new transcending the old. Without realizing it, she and others like her were pioneering a new radicalism and acting as a catalyst for a new approach to life.

At the end of the discourse, Eda walked straight to John.

“Do you mind if I walk with you?” she asked. “No,” John told her, and introduced her to Rajik, who was standing nearby. They chatted together for a moment and then Rajik left them. Outside John and Eda walked slowly, both wishing to prolong the walk. John tried to think of something to say, but Eda had no difficulty.

“I’ve been checking up on you,” she said gaily, as if they had known each other for a long time.

“Oh!” John responded, and waited for an explanation.

“Yes,” Eda went on. “I think you are a bit of a dark horse.”

“And how do you make that out?” John asked her.

“Well, from what I can gather, you do not say much, yet you are a disciple of Lama Nam Tso, and go to see him regularly.”

John was astonished. He had never thought of himself as a disciple, and he wondered how Eda knew such things.

“Who told you all that?” he queried.

Eda laughed, obviously enjoying his consternation.

“Surely you don’t think that you can do anything here without anyone knowing. This is not Calcutta. People probably know what you have for breakfast.”

“That is ridiculous. That is going too far. In any case how could anyone know that?”

“All they have to do is to see what you buy at the grocery store. That would be easy,” Eda answered.

“OK, but what about the other. Who said that?” he asked.

“Well, that’s easy as well. You walk past my friend’s house every Sunday morning, and you spend about one hour with the lama, and then walk back. You see I’ve got my spies everywhere.”

The whole affair obviously amused her, but before he could think of a suitable reply, she asked a serious question. In a different mood, she said, “What’s Nam Tso like? I mean, when you are a disciple.”

The question was unexpected. John countered it with one of his own. “Why do you want to know that?”

In a very serious tone she said, “I am thinking of asking him to take me on, and be my guru.”

John was so amazed that he stopped walking. Eda stopped as well and they stood looking at each other.

“And what will you ask for?” John wanted to know.

Eda had no hesitation. “Well, there’s only one thing to ask for, isn’t there? Enlightenment of course.”

John had no answer to that. He had assumed that it was a choice between power for self-direction and knowledge of the teachings. In spite of his mother’s devotion to Lord Shiva, John had never given these subjects too much thought. Even with Rajik, he had

always treated Yoga as a philosophic subject for discussion and debate rather than a useful activity.

“ You are probably right, he said cautiously, “but perhaps you should talk to some of the others. They seem to have a better understanding.”

They were now at the end of the road, where Eda turned off.

“I will see you next week,” she announced, taking it for granted that they would carry on where they left off.

“Right,” John replied, and watched her disappear into the darkness.

The next day, after visiting the lama John was glad to see Rajik.

“Hey. Listen to this,” he said, and told Rajik everything that had transpired. “What do you think of that?” he asked at the end.

Rajikl scratched his head in a mixture of amusement and amazement.

“I think she had got you checked out alright, and she seems to know where she’s going. Perhaps you should listen to her. Maybe you might learn something.”

John looked quizzically at Rajik. It sounded like one of Rajik’s subtle jokes, implying that he knew nothing, but he shrugged and said lightly. “Perhaps I will.”

Before Rajik could answer, shouts further down the hill attracted their attention. Excited voices sounded an alarm and argument.

“There is something wrong,” Rajik said. “Let’s see what it is.”

At the bottom of the side road, a group of people was discussing what they should do, but John had no idea what they were discussing.

“What is it?” he asked.

“It’s the tiger,” they told him. “It has killed goat. We are going to kill it. Have you got a gun?”

John became angry but hid his anger, because he wanted to know more. He was a staunch supporter of the Save the Tiger Society and had no intention of helping in any tiger hunt. He was surprised that any tigers were in their vicinity. The Bengal tiger preferred more wooded land, and the open tea plantations were not likely to be good hunting grounds.

“Where is it?” John asked.

The men waved towards a wooded area where there were small subsistence farms.

“It’s down there, and we are going to kill it,” they shouted.

The men surged off and John ran after them, not sure what he could do.

He noticed that so far no one had a gun and felt that this would be an advantage. At the edge of the wood, the men stopped, uncertain what to do, and not quite so brave now that they might see the tiger face to face. John left them and walked into the wood, leaving the crows behind. In the gloom of the shaded wood he looked round carefully. A movement attracted his attention. From behind, a bush a fully-grown tiger emerged and turned towards John. They stood there, looking at each other. John knew that he must not move suddenly and remained motionless, looking straight at the tiger. Its huge eyes looked up towards his face, and John gazed at in admiration and alarm for its safety.

“You should not be here,” he said, unwittingly thinking aloud. “You should go while you are safe.”

The tiger looked at him with an unflinching gaze and John had a weird feeling that he was again in the world of the cat lord, who was looking at him through the eyes of the tiger. He shook his head to dismiss the strange impression. For a second their gaze locked together, then the tiger turned and went off swiftly, disappearing deeper into the wood, leaving John with a feeling that there was some significance in this silent encounter. Outside the wood, raised voices called to him. He could hear Rajik calling his name. John went back.

“He’s gone,” he told the men. “You will not see him again.”

The men accepted the explanation. They had no wish to risk a personal meeting with a tiger and they let John lead them away, back to the roadway. As they dispersed, Rajik asked what happened.

John was brief. “He was in there, but he went south. Why he was up here I have no idea.”

“Ah well,” Rajik commented. “Never a dull moment. What with girls and gurus and tigers thrown in, you are quite a busy man.”

John made no reply and was careful to avoid any further discussion. The incident seemed unusual, and he thought it better not to think about it. He thought the event better forgotten, but that night he found that it was more unusual than he imagined. He went to bed early, and fell asleep easily and did not expect any nighttime experiences, as they

were usually during the week. A sense of swift motion made him realize that he was not dreaming and he found himself in the stony area that Gopas called his office. Almost at the same moment Gopas appeared, grinning broadly as if there was a big joke, which John did not understand.

“So, you had an encounter with a tiger,” Gopas asked.

“So that’s it,” John replied. “I wish someone would tell me what’s going on.”

Gopas gave his usual laugh. Everything seemed funny to Gopas, especially a mysterious event like this one. “Alright. I will tell you, and put you in the picture. I knew something would happen. The cat lord was a bit too casual. Of course, he knows all about you. They can read your memory.”

“Like you do,” John interjected.

“Naturally,” Gopas agreed. “It is very simple. You will learn it eventually.”

“What was it in my memory that interested the lord of the cats?” John asked.

“That’s very simple. You are a member of the Save the Tiger Society. He just wanted to make sure that you were sincere, that’s all.”

“But why?”

“Well, look at it this way. They need all the help they can get, and they are always looking for new helpers, especially ones who go trespassing in their world of cat lords. I think you have made a useful friend there. I can see we will make a shaman of you yet.”

John looked at him in alarm. He had no wish to be a shaman and only wanted to have power in his own life. Gopas answered his unspoken questions.

“I was joking,” he said. “You are not on the shaman path. I may as well tell you, Lama Nam Tso has other plans for you. Even so, you do not get power for nothing. There is always a payment, some type of service, and you should be pleased to be accepted. All these lords are very choosy, and so far you seem to get things right. Nam Tso is very pleased, and so am I, and if you let that go to your head we shall be very displeased.”

“Right,” said John. “I’ve worked that out already, and thanks all the same, but what happens now?”

“Nothing. We are having a break, and you have something else to do. It is time you were helping instead of just receiving help.”

“I do not understand. Where do I help?” John asked.

Gopas gave John a whimsical look. “Perhaps you have not noticed, but the world is full of people. Many of them are looking for the path. All they need is a bit of help sometimes.”

“How do I find them?” John wanted to know.

“You do not find them. They find you. Just keep your eyes open and see who crosses your path.’

“OK I will do that,” John assented.

As soon as he could, John raised the subject with his friend Rajik. It was very difficult, as he had never told Rajik about his nighttime adventures. He decided to say that the lama had said something and asked Rajik for his opinion.

“According to the lama I should be trying to help others to find the path,” he said.

“Well, of course,” Rajik replied. “They all say that. As soon as you have learnt something you are able to help others to understand it.”

“The idea is all right in theory, but I do not know much.” John protested.

Rajik disagreed. “It is not always a question of formal knowledge. There is often a need for support and encouragement. As you know, the search may often be difficult, with periods of depression. Sometimes the help is only moral support, such as when a person’s faith becomes a bit thin.’

“That all sounds very noble, but I do not know anyone who needs any help,” John retorted.

“You may not know anyone at the moment, but who knows who you will meet, and there is Eda. She seems to think you know the way.”

John shrugged his shoulders, “Maybe,” he assented.

“And what about your mother? She is very well informed. I go to her often, you know that, and you must have picked up lots of clues with a mother like that. Tell your mother about her and see what she says.”

John agreed to do that. Eda lived very near, and there did not seem to be any complications, like there were with Rona.

“Yes,” he said. “If the opportunity arises I will do that. In the meantime I will have to get on with my own meditation, in case I get left behind.’

“I do not think there is much chance of that. You have changed enormously in the past year. I would love to know what the lama does with you. You never say much but I suppose he is telling you something.”

John knew that Rajik was fishing for information, but could not see how he dare tell even his best friend what really happens.

“He instructs me about the different levels. There is nothing that you do not know,” he replied evasively. “What is the point in telling you what you already know?”

“Not much,” Rajik said, accepting the explanation. “The Yoga teachings explain it in a different way, so I suppose it is better that we do not argue. In the end it makes no difference.”

“Quite right,” John added, but secretly he wondered if they did share the same knowledge. Rajik always talked about the higher worlds but he seemed to be working through the lower worlds, and he was not sure why. He decided that he must ask Gopas, and find out a bit more of the mysterious path he had unwittingly chosen.

When he next met Gopas, he had no chance to ask anything. Gopas wasn't quite as light hearted as usual and gave John a serious look when they met. John realized that something was wrong and asked Gopas what it was.

Gopas shook his head at the question and his answer was disturbing.

“It is our mutual friend, the lord of the cats. He wants to meet you again. That is unusual and I think we shall have a problem if we are not careful.”

“Why?” John asked worriedly.

“The thing is, he has taken a liking to you and he thinks you would make a good recruit. In a way, they are all the same, trying to improve their world and looking for anyone who can help them. The point is he insists on seeing you. From past experience, I think he will offer you more powers. Many shamans would give anything to be in your position. You have mastered two difficult worlds and if you can master this one you will be well on the way.”

“Well on the way to what?” John asked.

“Well on the way to becoming a true master. Mastery is what we are seeking. A master is one who has mastered all the levels.”

“So that is what Nam Tso has in mind?”

Gopas nodded. "I may as well tell you. He thinks you have a great potential."

"And you, what do you think?" John asked further.

Gopas stared at John with a serious expression. "I agree with Nam Tso, and I have checked you out thoroughly. You know by now that gurus do not take disciples on lightly. I know you have never thought of it like that, but it is time you understood that you are on the royal path. This is not just a matter of enlightenment but is a means of being of true use."

"Well, what do you suggest, about the lord of the cats, I mean?"

Gopas pursed his lips thoughtfully. "You will get away with a polite refusal. He will probably show you some of his kingdom, to let you know what you are missing."

"And what happens if I agree?" John wanted to know.

"Then you will indeed be a great shaman, and you would probably attract many disciples. You would not need your job, money would just flow to you, but you would have no personal life. It would be a full time commitment. There is nothing wrong with it. It is a case of each to their own path, and if you choose that so it will be." Gopas paused, and then added, "We will go and see him now."

John accompanied Gopas with a feeling of trepidation. He was beginning to see that these lords did not easily take no for an answer. The situation reinforced his earlier conclusion, that they were all seeking recruits and were not interested in personal problems. Each had their own agenda, it was to enlarge their empire and look after their own interests. John sensed that he would need all his diplomatic skills to avoid an entanglement in the animal kingdom. To his surprise, one of the human devotees met them. He was one who had chosen to work for the animal lords. Gopas had explained to John that these were the souls of men who had chosen to be animal shamans, and after death they went to the animal kingdom where they became lesser lords with great power. These were the agents of the animal lords and their main duty was to help in recruiting new animal shamans and animal lovers who would devote their energy to caring for the welfare of animals of all types.

The man who met them wore the most magnificent attire. Like the great cat lord, he wore a short tunic garment with tight fitting trousers sheathing his legs. The material shimmered with reflected light as the man moved, and with the ornate jewelry that was on

the belt and collar, he looked almost as impressive as the cat lord himself did. John was impressed and remembered the warning Gopas had given him. ‘Do not let their appearance overawe you. That is part of their strategy, to get you to agree to their propositions.’

Gopas greeted the man and stated their business.

“The Lord of your realm wishes to see my friend.”

“Very well,” the man answered. “You wait here, and I will take your friend to him.”

This was not what John wanted but he had no choice, and he followed the man, not knowing what to expect.

Beyond the leafy branches that hid everything from view, they came to an open area. Spread before them, in a valley, was a small city with marvelous buildings clustered together in different groups. The guide stopped, turned to John and began to explain.

“This is the world of my cat lord. Each set of buildings has a ruler who is an assistant to the cat lord. My area is over there.”

The man pointed to a large building, which had smaller buildings round it.

“The large building is my palace,” he told John, “and the others are used by my assistants. Each assistant lord cares for a distinct species and has a retinue of workers to help him. You could have a palace like mine, as an assistant lord of the tigers.”

John made no comment. He could see which way the situation was developing and did not wish to follow in that direction. The next remark indicated how many shamans would see that path as very tempting.

“Some of the assistant lords are alive, in different parts of the world. They are great shamans on their community and have power there also, and wealth,” and after a pause, “They want for nothing.”

John’s mind worked overtime in imagination. He tried to visualize himself as a shaman in his part of the world, but could not quite imagine himself in that role.

“Let us go to see the cat lord, he has many things to tell you.” The assistant lord said.

John followed him down a grassy slope where they entered the paved streets of the amazing city. Round a corner, they approached a building with an ornate façade.

“This is the lord’s palace,” the guide said.

Inside the building, it opened out into a large internal courtyard, and sitting at the far end, under a spacious decorated canopy, sat the cat lord. John recognized him from his previous encounter, and when he looked into the lord's eyes he keenly remembered the look that the tiger had given him and fleetingly thought that it was not a tiger but the cat lord who had confronted him. The lord rose as John approached and came down the three wide steps that were in front of the dais, where his throne stood. He then led the way to one side where a long silk covered seat was against the wall. Sitting on it, the lord motioned John to sit beside him.

In his soft husky voice, he thanked John for helping the tiger and stated his aims.

"We need someone to help with the tigers," he told John, "and you would make an excellent assistant lord."

John waited for a further explanation but none was forthcoming. Clearly, he thought that John would agree. Knowing that protest would achieve nothing, John decided to be open and state his own case.

"I am on a course of training and I have not finished it."

The cat lord looked thoughtful, and John decided to make a noncommittal offer.

"I could work with the Save the Tiger Society," he suggested.

This was something that John had often criticized. In his opinion, they were not active enough and did not do enough to alert the public to the danger of losing the tiger.

The cat lord beckoned to his assistant lord who had moved away. He came over and stood waiting.

"And how would you work through the Save the Tiger Society?" the lord asked John.

John explained how he thought they were not properly oriented to public awareness and that perhaps they could start a magazine that would help to keep people informed and alert officials to the need for better controls.

John spoke passionately and sincerely. This was something that he would like to do. He felt that they should do more to save the tiger from extinction.

The lord listened with keen interest.

"This is what we need," he said, when John had finished explaining. He turned to his assistant and spoke firmly, implying that his suggestion was a command. "We could help in that. We could guide useful people to you. We know all the animal lovers, and through

them, we can make sure you have enough money to do these things. Let it be like that,” he said finally.

The assistant cat lord nodded. “Yes, we can do that.” he agreed, and turning to John he said, “All you have to do is to make a start, the rest will follow.”

The lord rose and John stood up at once.

“We shall meet again,” he said to John, and went into the building, leaving his assistant to deal with the suggestions.

“What do you intend to do?” the assistant lord asked John.

John had no trouble in answering that. “I will advertise in the paper and start a local Save the Tiger Society. That way we will have more people and perhaps useful officials as well.”

“Excellent,” the assistant replied. “We will make it happen, and I will be able to contact you or you can contact me through your guru. Now, I will take you back.”

With Gopas once more, John explained what had happened. Gopas laughed with his usual joviality. “I wondered how you would handle it. You are certainly a master of diplomacy. All you do is to offer an idea, and say that you will help them. They are happy with that because they still hope to reel you in, later.”

“I can see that,” John replied. “I think it will make me keener to develop my own power, but I don’t mind the work for the society, I am doing that anyway.”

Gopas looked relieved, and he voiced his thoughts. “Each level, and the sublevels involve a test. There is always the risk that you may choose to go down a side path. All the way, you have free will. No one can pressure you. My master wanted you to volunteer and he does not like it if you refuse. The lords do not do anything but they will never help you, because you are not one of them. You are wise. This is not the first time you have gained a friend without surrendering too much. If you ever need help the cat lord will help you, but it would be better to keep your requests for his work, otherwise you become dependent on them.”

“I can see that, but what is the next stage?”

“I don’t think we will rush into that,” Gopas said seriously. “We will continue with the break and you can get on with the social activities and the Tiger Society.”

John felt pleased to let it be like that and with a wave of farewell he concentrated on his body and returned with the usual slight shock to his familiar and cozy bedroom. The contrast always amazed John. Each time he left his body it seemed more bizarre and yet it always seemed perfectly natural. It was as his mother said about mundane things, 'It all depends what you are used to.' Slowly he was becoming used to operating in two worlds, although, when he thought about it, there seemed to be many worlds.

After the next Saturday evening meeting, Eda waited to walk home with John. As they walked along John listened to Eda's eager announcement that she had been to see Lama Nam Tso.

"I asked him what he thought of my chances of attaining enlightenment."

"And what did he say?" John asked with interest. "He said that there is not one living soul who could not attain enlightenment", she replied.

"Yes. I have heard that, but what about you?"

"That's up to me. According to him, we get what we work for, but the big thing is that he has accepted me as a disciple. I am happy about that, as I always felt rudderless. Now I have a clear path, so I am hoping it will be better."

John could only agree and on impulse he said, "You should really meet my mother. I know she has been through all that, and she has studied all the scriptures, but she is a devotee of Lord Shiva now."

"That sounds wonderful. When can I meet her?" Eda asked enthusiastically.

"What about tomorrow, in the afternoon? I will tell her tonight. She is always pleased to meet anyone who is interested in the scriptures."

With that question settled, Eda turned to another subject.

"I hear that you had an adventure with a tiger. People say that you are the great white hunter."

He could tell by the bantering tone of her voice that she was teasing him and responded accordingly.

"Oh yes. I wrestled it to the ground you know."

"Climbed a tree and shouted at it is more likely," she responded, "but what really happened?"

John recalled the meeting with the tiger. He knew that he could not mention the lord of the cats and it would sound crazy to say that he talked to the tiger.

“Nothing happened,” he told her. “I stood there and it took one look at me and then went away.”

“Well, that makes sense,” she teased. “The sight of you obviously put him off.”

John laughed, pleased that she was so lighthearted, and explained why he did it.

“I belong to the Save the Tiger Society, so I felt that I had to do something. “I’m thinking of starting a local branch, to get more publicity.”

“Oh, great.” She said. “I will become your first member.”

“Good,” John said keenly, “can you type? We will need a secretary.”

“I can do better than that”, she said, “I’ve got a computer. We can print our own newsletter, and all that sort of thing.”

“In that case, you’re on. We will have to get some badges, and you can be my number one tiger lady.”

Eda laughed merrily. “Perhaps you should be careful. I might tear you to pieces.”

They were now at the end of the road where Eda turned off. She stood facing him and he looked down at her upturned face. They stood in silence for a minute and John felt an urge to embrace her, but the shadow of the Rona episode flitted across his mind. He recovered from his romantic reverie and said as casually as he could.

“I will see you tomorrow, when you meet my mother.”

“Yes,” she said. “Well, good night,” and she turned and left him.

The next afternoon he waited impatiently for Eda to call. His mother noticed his restless anticipation but said nothing. She was pleased that he had met a girl he liked and hoped that this time he would find a steady friend. A knock at the door alerted them to the arrival of Eda and John’s mother stood back and left it to John to receive her. He opened the door and she was standing there with a large ginger cat in her arms.

“Here is your pussy cat,” she said.

John looked at the cat and said, “We do not have a cat. Where did you get it?”

“It was on your path. I thought it was yours,” Eda explained.

John’s mother came up behind him.

“I think he’s lost. He looks very thin. He came yesterday, and I fed him. I’ll ask around here, and see if anyone has lost a cat like that.”

Eda put the cat down and it walked into the bungalow, rubbing against John’s legs.

“He likes you,” Eda said. “Perhaps he’s your familiar, and you’re a witch.”

“You’re the witch,” John replied, matching her teasing manner. “Anyway, men are not witches. They are called warlocks.”

“That’s right,” Eda said merrily, and she leaned back, pretending to study him through half closed eyes. “Oh yes. I can see you are the warlock type. I think I will have to be careful.” She looked at John’s mother and added in a mischievous tone. “I bet he goes flying round the town on a broomstick when we are all asleep.”

John thought the conversation was becoming too weird and he stood back, holding the door open. “Never mind that,” he said with a grin. “Come in.”

Eda walked into the room and looked round with an easy curiosity. She went up to a large picture of an army officer and studied it with interest. She turned and looked at John. “Your father, I suppose.”

John’s mother replied. “Yes. He was a British officer and went back to England when the war ended. I was his girlfriend, but he did not know I was pregnant.”

Eda accepted the frank explanation with a sophisticated ease.

“Ah. So dear John is a love child.”

“I suppose you could say that,” John’s mother replied.

Eda looked at her, and in an even more mischievous tone of voice, sad, “Have you got any photographs of John as a baby?”

“Yes, plenty. I’ll show them to you.”

John groaned inwardly, but secretly felt charmed by her youthful indifference to his feelings. He knew she was doing it deliberately, and sat down, pretending it was not important. The cat jumped on his knees and curled up. John sat there stroking it, listening to Eda and his mother. After a few minutes, he decided to get up.

“You’ll have to move,” he said to the cat, and gave it a gentle push. The cat jumped down and John stood up. The cat immediately went round him and jumped on to the chair.

Eda laughed. “There you go. See that? He’s taken over. You know what they say, ‘Dogs have masters but cats have servants’. Whether you like it or not you’ve got a new boss.”

John went into the kitchen and filled the kettle to make some tea. He thought of what Eda had just said. He had never believed in coincidences and somehow the arrival of this cat seemed too much of a coincidence, but he dare not say what he thought. Either way it looked as if the cat was going to be very familiar, and from how things were going, Eda was becoming familiar. As if to confirm his conclusions, Eda walked into the kitchen with his mother.

“Can we help?” she asked John.

He smiled at the way she managed to turn everything into a provocative comment.

“I was just making a cup of tea,” he told her.

“Well, I can do that,” she said. “You sit down with your new tiger. I think you should call him that. He can be the mascot for your local tiger society.”

John made no reply. He did not see the cat as a mascot, but thought it was more of a symbol, and he was not sure whether it was a good omen or not.

CHAPTER 5 – THE WORLD OF EVIL DEMONS

The next Sunday morning, after a week in which the cat established itself as one of the family, John rose early. He sat in his bedroom pondering on the strange events that had come into his life. He was beginning to see that every day was a test, with some type of temptation, and vaguely thought that somehow it was all a reflection of what happened in his nighttime excursions. He would have liked to write it all down, and set it out with headings and subtitles as a means of having a more objective view of the weird double life that he was leading. He refrained from that as he thought that anything that revealed how things really were could be dangerous. Such details could only lead to argument and confusion. The most he could dare to say was that he agreed that there were other worlds. He knew that no one would believe that he had any experience. In any case, both Rajik, and his mother, who knew a great deal of such things only spoke of the higher worlds. They would never understand how or why he had entered the lower worlds. Not that he understood that very well. When he thought of it, the whole approach seemed to be madness. He had received what he had asked for. He had chosen power, and having started on that path, he had to finish it. In the meantime, he still had an ordinary life, and in the daytime was just as human as he had always been. In fact, in contemplation of it, he felt more human than ever, and the thought of a better acquaintance of Eda urged him to keep his nightlife a secret and make the most of his daytime human life. From now on, he decided, there had to be a watertight compartment for each half of his life, and as the Christian teachers had said, at the boarding school, ‘do not let your right hand know what your left hand is doing.’

He looked at his watch. He would have to hurry now, as he had his usual meeting with the lama. At the end of each stage, the lama always evaluated his progress and gave him extra instructions. The thought made him wonder what the next phase would be like, and he finished dressing and left the house.

At the bungalow, Lama Nam Tso welcomed him cordially. John sat down facing him and waited for Nam Tso to speak.

“Gopas has kept me informed of your progress,” the lama said, and to John’s astonishment asked an unexpected question. “Do you wish to carry on?”

John felt tempted to make a quick retort and say, 'Why should I not carry on?' but restrained the impulse to react and instead asked a different question.

"Why? Is my progress not satisfactory?" he asked the lama.

A faint smile flickered across the lama's face. John thought he looked pleased and waited for the answer.

"Quite the opposite," the lama assured him. "The question was merely a formality. With some disciples that question is asked at every new stage, but I know you will continue. Nevertheless, it is necessary to ask it at this stage, because it is so dangerous. I shall explain the dangers and then ask you again. This is necessary, in case you fail, or even destroy yourself. Do you understand that?"

John nodded and said in a low voice "Yes. I understand."

The lama continued. "You have been warned before, for the earlier stages, but this is much more difficult and very dangerous. This is the realm of the demons called 'asuras'. They are evil demons that spend all their time fighting. Their great delight is to destroy humans. They are worse than the demons you met in the beginning, because they are so near to the human world. The human world is the next one after this and sometimes the evil demons can possess a human totally. For example, when a person is inebriated and so drunk that he has no control an asura demon can displace his soul and use the body. These demons can then indulge in evil pleasures, or even commit murder, and afterwards leave the unfortunate victim to suffer the consequences. The other demons try to do the same but they have less power and can only attack the ones who enter their domain. These can enter our world and their doorway is through our own evil thoughts. This is why it is essential to have a strong discipline and great mental purity to continue safely."

The lama stopped speaking and looked at John very earnestly. "Do you wish to carry on?" he asked.

John did not hesitate. He had been thinking about it as the lama spoke. There was no way that he would back off now and he felt sure that neither the lama, nor Gopas, would let him get into trouble.

"Yes," he answered briefly.

"Then I will tell you more", the lama said.

The next stage after this one is the human level, and the aim of the evil demons is to prevent souls from evolving. As you already know, it is a great privilege to be born as a human being, because the human world is the gateway to the higher worlds. The demons know this and want to keep all souls away from the upward path. They have many ways of attacking humans and they can invade the mind with thoughts of hate and temptation. This is how the popular idea of a devil has arisen, but the real problem is in our own thinking. They cannot enter a pure and clear mind, and any disruptive thought acts as an opening so they can enter. It is the same principle, all the way through, and in the world of duality, you become a predator or a victim unless you learn to transcend duality. The universal spirit that penetrates everything is beyond such divisiveness, but on that level divisiveness is dominant. The demons are parasites and they operate in two main forms. One is as imitation humans, whereby they can obsess a person and displace his soul. The other is in a minute form, in which they fasten on to a person, like a leech, and use the person as host for their evil desires. In that form, they can influence the thinking and cause the person to do things that are gratifying to them. In every case, purity of thought, discipline and compassion defeats them. They only thrive on anger and hate and they have many subtle ways of causing that. It is important that you master this level well, otherwise you may be deceived in the human world, where they are very active.”

The lama lapsed into silence and John considered what Gopas said. The length of the lama’s speech indicated how serious he was. Usually his comments were brief, with no discussion. The forceful descriptions of the nature of the evil demons made it clear that the demons were a concentrated form of the demons on all the previous levels. They all wanted to use and exploit any unwary soul. The others offered something in return but by the sound of things the demons offered nothing.

“Why do we have to deal with them at all?” John finally asked, “Why not avoid them?”

The lama gave one of his rare smiles. “Everything must be paid for,” he replied. “If you want real power you must give something. The best payment is service, and in this case, it means helping other souls to avoid the demons. That is why the demons will hate you, because they already know that you have mastered the lower worlds. For them you are an enemy and they will attack you. Do what Gopas tells you and you will be safe.”

The lama indicated that the meeting was over. “Gopas will tell you everything you need to know,” he said as John left.

John thanked him and went outside, where he paused to look around. Sometimes he felt that he had been away to some distant land and coming outside was a return to his home territory. This was particularly the case after an intense nighttime event. He took a deep breath and started to walk home slowly. He knew that Rajik, and probably Eda, would be there and he wanted time to tune his senses into the everyday feeling of reality. He pondered on the thought of what the word reality meant. He found it hard to define it. In the world of the animal lords, he had accepted their values as a reflection of their reality. They insisted that their world was the true one and that the earth world was an illusion. Yet, the others had taken a similar view. In each of the worlds he had visited he had experienced events as very real and they only faded into a less definite existence after he had left them. He knew that if he went back into any of those worlds he would again experience them as real while he was there. The thought intrigued him. He recalled some words of Jesus that he had read at the Christian boarding school. Jesus said, ‘As a man thinks, so he is.’ He had discussed the statement with Rajik and had decided that the concept of reality was in the thinking. He found it difficult to grasp the concept.

He was now almost home and his neighbor was outside, pruning dead leaves from the bushes. John deliberately stopped to talk to him. How wonderful, he thought, to immerse the mind in such a simple down-to-earth task. He knew that his neighbor never imagined any other reality than the one he knew, and he felt envious of such a simple philosophy. It was refreshing to talk about the plants and the weather and he lingered, savoring the earthy tangibility of the normal practical reality.

As he went into his own garden, he heard the laughter of Eda and Rajik, who were sitting on the veranda waiting for him. A slight twinge of jealousy changed his mood again as he saw how friendly they were to each other. He wondered if Eda was perhaps too friendly with men and his thoughts of a personal interest were perhaps only his imagination. His serious expression caused them to change their mood and they fell silent as he approached.

“How did it go?” Rajik asked

John gave an indifferent shrug and sat down in one of the chairs on the veranda.

“Same old thing,” John replied with indifference.

He knew that he could not discuss what the lama and said, and in any case did not wish to do so. Although he did not realize it, a different demon of doubt had invaded his mind. Unknown to him; the human devils of desire and jealousy were already invading his mind. The evil demons would have no difficulty in exploiting such foibles of human weakness, but John was too full of his own imagined woes to think that his next nighttime encounter might follow on from a trivial human attitude.

The ensuing conversation did not flow very well. Rajik decided to leave, saying there was something he wished to do at home. Eda tried to break down John’s serious mood but did not understand the cause of it. She mistakenly thought that John’s withdrawn attitude was the result of his interview with Nam Tso. After a few attempts at friendly conversation, Eda also left. John thought that she went because Rajik had gone and wondered if she was now going to him. In that sullen mood he went inside, and ignoring his mother, went into his room, where he kicked off his shoes and lay on the bed indulging in a negative review of his friend’s unreliability.

By nighttime, he had managed to dismiss the thoughts and returned to a consideration of the things Nam Tso had said. He knew from experience that the new encounters often followed without warning, and he tried to prepare himself for any unexpected event. That same night, he found he was correct in that conclusion. Soon after falling asleep, he was with Gopas. The out of the body movements were now automatic, and he moved about easily. Gopas greeted him as usual and started to explain the further difficulties as soon as John arrived.

“The important thing is to have a calm clear mind,” he told John. “There are two qualities that are a total defense against the evil demons of this realm. They are reason and love. The demons are incapable of both these qualities and a rational attitude blocks their attempts to invade your soul. Love is an even stronger insulation, as it is the opposite of their basic character of hate and the anger that always goes with it.”

To John it all sounded quite clear, yet, he had not remembered his own earlier analysis that many of the encounters were really a confrontation with faults in his own character. He had overcome his own fears but desire and jealousy had not so far come

into the equation. He would have to balance the opposites and he had not yet done that. Unaware of such problems in John's private life, Gopas continued with his explanations.

"The best thing to do is what we have done before. That is, to go into their domain, so that you can have an initial experience on which to build a resistance. That is what we have done before. I will come with you, and leave it to you to deal with them. There will be many of them, but first we have to confront their lord. Come, we will start at once."

Gopas put his hand on John's arm. There was a quick flurry of movement and they were standing in front of a large cave lit inside by an eerie glow of light. As he became used to the dim light, John could see a seated figure at the far end of the cave. Gopas took a couple of steps forward and John moved with him. He could now see what the figure was like. The demon lord was the essence of many illustrations that John had seen in some of Rajik's books. The figure was sitting crossed legged, on a cushion that rested on the back of a huge tortoise. The robe was a blood red color, made of silky material and the figure had his arms crossed. In one hand was a large key, which was probably the key to his kingdom, and in the other hand was another symbol, of a post with two bars across it and a sphere at the end. Although John had seen the symbol before, he could not recall what it meant. John's gaze then moved to the face. This was set in a snarling grin that revealed fanglike teeth. The eyes glowed with an inner fire and moved rapidly as the demon studied the intruders. The contrast of that movement with the total stillness of the body gave an unreal impression. If it were not for the eyes the figure might seem like a painted statue, but the eyes, with their flickering malicious gaze made it clear that this was no statue. To add to the unrealistic appearance the figure was in a mass of red and yellow flames and behind it was a huge serpent, holding its tail in its mouth. This made a large circular frame encompassing the unworldly apparition.

The figure spoke. "Who dares to enter?" the demon said in a grating voice.

Gopas spoke in a loud clear voice. "We dare," he said, "and we have come to announce our presence."

The statement was a challenge and John wondered what the response would be. The lord of the evil demons curved back his lips into a more menacing show of his fangs and spoke again.

"What do you require?"

“Nothing,” Gopas informed him. We are warning you to keep your demons away from us. We are only passing through.”

The firm attitude of Gopas impressed John but he knew that the demon king would not be impressed and would not be likely to allow strangers to pass through his kingdom. To John’s astonishment the figure faded away and they were suddenly standing alone, in an empty cave.

“Come, ”Gopas said quietly, and putting his hand on John’s arm whisked them both back to the stony office.

“What was that about?” John asked in amazement.

Gopas laughed and the tone of his laughter made it obvious that he felt relief at being back in his own quarters.

“That was about keeping clear of demons and that means in the world you know. All demons are thought-forms and these thought forms have many disguises. In other words, they enter you via your own negative thoughts. As you have remarked before, the battle is within your own self. Yet, it is necessary to understand that the demons do exist in their own domain. Whether we announced our presence or not the challenge would be the same, because they would challenge us. As an initiate you will be the target, and what they will try to do is infest you.”

John could not understand what Gopas meant. “How do you mean, infest?”

Gopas enlarged on the subject of infestation. “The most difficult demons are small and hard to see. The demon king never does anything, he just sends a host of little demons to infest his victims. Imagine a plague of fleas or cockroaches attacking you, except these are not so visible and they attack internally, in your feelings and moods. This is why you must have a pure clear feeling, then they cannot enter.”

He paused, and added, “The demon king was checking out your weaknesses.”

John nodded and asked, “But why do we have to meet him at all? Why not do it by meditating?”

“Normally, that is enough. For ordinary seekers, prayer and meditation will remove all impure thoughts, but you have chosen a different path. So, for you, it is externalized and objective. That way you learn to cast them out by an act of will.”

It all seemed rather unnecessary to John but his previous experience made him realize that there would be an outcome which he would have to face, whether he thought it necessary or not. Gopas made one final comment that did nothing to reassure John.

“All we can do now is to wait, and see what happens, and if you keep your mind quiet very little will happen. It is really as simple as that.”

After a few general remarks, Gopas told John to return to his home, and they parted.

All during the week, John continued as usual and by Saturday the strange encounter with the demon king had faded into an indistinct impression. On the Saturday morning, he set out for the restaurant to have his usual ritualistic coffee with Rajik. As he walked into the restaurant, he heard a familiar laugh. He looked towards it and saw Eda sitting with Rajik. As John approached, they both waved. John did not wave back, but sat down with a glum expression as he recalled their last meeting. Eda and Rajik looked at him in worried concern. They could not understand why John was so moody. For a while, they tried to make light conversation but John was too absorbed in his jealous suspicions to respond. His remarks were so surly that Rajik decided he would leave, but before he could think of an excuse to go John stood up and bluntly stated, “I have to go.”

Back at home, John went straight to his bedroom and closed the door with a slam. His mother went to the door, intending to ask John what was wrong, but she thought better of it and went back into the lounge room. By the time of the evening meal, John had not ventured out and his mother thought it wiser to leave him.

In the bedroom, John sat in the chair by the window, repeatedly going over his imaginary grievances. From his distorted viewpoint, Rajik was the villain and Eda was a disloyal female. The fact that he had never indicated any personal interest in Eda, or offered to take her out, did not come into his confused thinking. There seemed only one thing for him to do and that was to cast them both out of his life and have nothing to do with members of the opposite sex. The more he thought about it the more he convinced himself that he must do that and without any desire for food he sat there brooding over the injustice of a cruel life that seemed determined to taint him. Finally, he went to bed but sleep eluded him and he was glad to get up early and prepare for his Sunday morning meeting with the lama. Before going, he made an effort to calm his feelings and when he thought he had succeeded, he went to the bungalow of Nam Tso. In the room, when they

were seated, the lama looked at John intently. John could feel him probing his mind and squirmed in discomfort, making an extra effort to appear calm. The lama leaned back slightly and spoke sternly to John.

“You are infested,” he said. “Do you understand?”

John recalled what Gopas had said, that the evil demons had a method of invading the mind and feelings with disruptive thoughts.

“Yes,” John answered. “What can I do about it?” John asked appealingly, obviously hoping for help.

The lama’s reply was unsympathetic. “What do you think? You fail and you want someone else to pick up the pieces?”

John was too embarrassed to reply, and the lama terminated the meeting with a further thrust. “God gave you brains,” he said with cutting penetration. “Go and use them.”

John left the room rapidly. He noticed no one or anything on his way home. One word was echoing in his mind. The lama had used the word ‘fail’ and fear engulfed John at the thought of it. Remorse, as well as the resentment against Rajik and Eda welled up inside him. In that mood, he returned to his room, leaving his mother to sit alone in worried anxiety at the sight of John’s disturbing behavior.

All that day he sat alone, struggling to understand what was happening. He could not understand how the demons of hate and anger had managed to infest his mind. To him the recent events seemed very clear cut. Rajik was going behind his back to steal Eda and John was the injured party. Whichever way he looked at it he was only expressing righteous anger and that was all there was to it. He sat there until he heard his mother go to bed then went into the kitchen to cut a sandwich. He had eaten nothing since yesterday and had not had much sleep. He felt tired and exhausted, with the deep disappointment in his friends adding to his weariness.

He sat on the edge of the bed, with his head bowed, supported by his hands. He stared at the carpet with unseeing eyes, bemoaning his failure and the collapse of his personal world. He tried to review the events and slowly began to see that the fault might have been within him, but pride stopped him from making a clear confrontation with his personal weaknesses. The recent incidents showed that he was not as strong as he had

imagined and that his successes in the lower worlds were by no means a guarantee that he was in control of his self in all situations. As he stared at the carpet he became aware of a strange light to his left, and raising his head, he looked to see where it was coming from. To his horror, he saw the lord of the evil demons hovering in the air. Complete with his tortoise throne he sat suspended a few inches above the carpet, like a film projection on an invisible screen. John looked at the figure in disbelief and listened to the grating voice in fearful trepidation.

“I have come to offer you the key to my domain,” the demon said.

As he heard the words, John realized that his own anger and distrust had opened the door that had allowed the evil demons to infest his mind. With an effort, he tried to reject the demons but his will was not strong enough. The advice of Gopas came to him, urging him to have an Ishta on whom he could call for assistance. Inwardly he called on Ishvara but the demon king remained unmoved. John could feel the power of the demon draping over him like a cloud of poison. He made a greater effort, recalling the image of Lord Shiva in his mother’s garden. The demon image flickered slightly but John’s concentration was not enough to have the desired effect. In anguish, half as an oath and half as a prayer he impulsively groaned, “Jesus Christ!”

The figure shuddered and John noticed that the edges of the image blurred, and suddenly it was gone. A deep calm silence permeated the room and John had a clear realization of his own foolishness. He buried his face in his hands and wept in shame, knowing now that the demons of jealousy and hate had entered his mind through his own weakness. As he sat there attempting to restructure his shattered composure he recalled one of the scripture lessons from the Christian boarding school. It was the story of cleaning out the house. In it, Jesus said, ‘When you have cleaned the house invite the Holy Spirit in, other wise the demons will return with all their friends.’ The priest had explained that the demons were the thought forms created by personal negative thinking and that we had to fill the house with love and compassion so that the demons could not enter. At the thought of the demons returning, John dropped to his knees and prayed to keep them away and he wept again at the thought of the injustice he had done to his friends. He got up and sat in the chair, looking through the window at the moonlit garden. He deeply wished that he had never chosen the path of power and perturbed by the

recollection of the lama's words he felt a bitter regret. The lama had said that once chosen it was not possible to change. The path had to continue to its completion. He went cold at the thought of more tests and wondered what further trials awaited him. In the morning, as soon as it was light, he went into the kitchen. His mother heard him moving about and came in. She looked at his red-rimmed eyes and in a shocked voice asked what was wrong.

"You look as if you have been weeping," she said.

"I have," he told her, and broke into a torrent of words, explaining what had happened with Eda and Rajik. He carefully made no mention of demons but told her the story of his own human misery. She listened in amazement and at the end shook her head in disbelief.

"You silly boy." She said. "You have got it all wrong. Eda thinks the world of you, and she is upset because you do not ask her out. She talks to Rajik about it because you are so reserved. They have been discussing ways of making you act, but perhaps you do not care for Eda after all."

At the thought of his stupidity, more tears trickled down his face. He sank into a chair. "What can I do?" he asked his mother.

Her answer was practical and blunt. "Phone them now, and apologize," she said.

"But it is only six o'clock in the morning," he protested, flinching at the thought of making the apology.

"Well. Either you want Eda or you don't," his mother affirmed, and she picked up the phone and handed it to him, then left the room so that he could speak in privacy. After almost half an hour, John went into the lounge room where his mother was waiting.

"They're coming round tonight," John told her.

"Good," said his mother in a matter of fact tone of voice. "I'll make something special."

In the evening, Eda and Rajik came in together. Without hesitation, Eda went straight to John and flung her arms round him. Behind her, Rajik looked at John's mother and gave an awry smile. "I think we are back to normal."

"Yes," said John's mother, "and now let us eat." She led the way to the dining room.

At the next session with Gopas, John learnt that it was now time for him to face the demon lord alone. This is what had happened in all the previous encounters. First, he was

with Gopas and eventually he had to stand on his own feet and face the challenge with his own strengths. This was always the anxious part, but there was no way of knowing how well he could cope unless he went alone. From experience, he knew that the evil demons would have many ways of deceiving him and he had no way of knowing what they would be.

“You will have to be ready for anything,” Gopas said as he led him to the entrance of the demon kingdom. Gopas did not take him all the way, as he had done before, but stopped where a dimly lit passageway led to the demon’s cave.

“This is where you are on your own,” Gopas announced. “You know the routine. Just keep calm and if you are in trouble call my name.”

“Right,” John said, and went forward.

As John came near to the place where he thought the demon resided he was surprised to see that everything was different. The scene was a pleasant garden that reminded him of the garden at his grandfather’s house, and there was the seat where his grandfather used to sit in the evenings. His grandfather had been dead for over ten years and John very seldom thought about him. Now memories came flooding back and John looked at the garden with renewed personal interest as he went forward, deeper into the garden. As he turned a corner on the path, he saw his grandfather coming towards him. He was smiling and held out his hands in welcome. John went towards him with eager enthusiasm. He had always liked his grandfather and was genuinely glad to see him. John noticed that there were a few changes in his grandfather’s appearance, and although he smiled his features seemed somewhat rigid, but these trivial differences were swept aside in the unexpected sight of him. His grandfather spoke and referred to some particularly happy times that they had spent together and then chatted amicably. With each recollection of the nice times with his grandfather, he relaxed, and gave a pleasant smile. Finally, his grandfather said that it was time to go.

“I will see you again,” he said, and turned back to the path. John watched him go and then retraced his steps to where he had left Gopas. He was waiting in the same place and Gopas put his hand on John’s arm and they soared swiftly back to the familiarity of the stony office, which Gopas used as a meeting point.

“Well. How did it go?” Gopas asked.

John told him about his meeting with his grandfather.

“I never saw the demon king,” John said. “I must have gone somewhere else,” and told Gopas what had happened.

As he described the meeting with his grandfather, Gopas began to smile and at the end of John’s account Gopas burst into open laughter. John felt annoyed at the way Gopas laughed and bluntly asked what was wrong.

Gopas shook his head in amused disbelief and became serious. Gopas leaned forward forward, as if to emphasize his words, and answered John’s question.

“Everything is wrong,” he told John. “To start with, that is not your grandfather, and to finish with, you thought it was. I will give you one guess who that was,” Gopas added with a smile.

John’s eyes opened wide in surprise. “The demon king?” he said, and with a slight tone of disappointment he said, “I really thought it was my grandfather.”

“Never mind,” Gopas replied. “You can get even tomorrow night”.

“How?” John asked eagerly, determined to outwit the demon.

“It’s quite simple. The thing is that he uses your memories and reflects what you are thinking. All you have to do is to change your thinking. Now, what was your grandfather like?”

“He was tall,” John answered, and had most of his hair, which was still quite dark.”

“That is enough,” Gopas interrupted. “Here is what you do. Think of a different image, such as short, fat and bald. Go home and meditate on it. Put a false memory in your mind and push the other aside. Keep thinking it all day and we will see what happens tomorrow night.”

All the next day John worked at changing the image of his grandfather. He drew little sketches and looked at them until he was almost convinced that his grandfather was actually like that, and he went to bed looking forward to the next encounter. When he finally fell asleep and went for his nighttime visit Gopas was waiting. Without warning Gopas shot a question at him.

“What was your grandfather like?” he asked John.

“He was short, fat and bald,” John answered and was surprised at his easy answer.

Gopas laughed. The familiar laugh reassured John and the next word confirmed his confidence.

“Good man,” Gopas said. “You have done it. Now let us see what happens.”

Gopas led the way and John went with eager anticipation. On his own, he went forward, and as expected, the garden was there and John waited. A figure came from behind the bushes. John concentrated on his new image, of a grandfather who was short and fat, and bald. The figure coming towards him was a perfect manifestation of John’s new thought. It was obviously the demon lord. John continued with the charade, trying to do what Gopas had suggested.

“Ask a lot of questions,” Gopas had said. “Make up false memories, but do not think of any detail.”

The figure spoke pleasantly, unaware that John was testing him, and tried to answer John’s questions. John did what Gopas had told him.

“Do you remember the trip to London?” John asked.

John watched and waited for an answer. His grandfather had never left Darjeeling and had no idea what London was like, and neither did John. The demon showed signs of agitation. The thin veneer of familiarity began to peel away and with John’s further persistence the human façade disappeared and John could see the demon in his true form. With the change, the garden scene disappeared and the demon image faded with it. John found himself alone and the usual pleasant laugh of Gopas indicated that Gopas had watched the whole transformation.

“Well, that is one lesson,” Gopas told him, but there is certain to be another. The demon knows what you did and my guess is that he will try to confuse you. All you can do is to be ready and try to outwit him.”

After the confusion over Eda and Rajik, John made up his mind that he would not do the same thing again. As he saw it his friendship with Eda was now too good to ruin by his nighttime attempts to work his way past different types of demons. He mentally put Eda in a watertight compartment and put his inner development in another one. All he had to do was to keep the two sides of his life well apart and then there would be no more chaos. After all, he kept his work life relatively separate, so as he saw it, all he had to do was to treat this situation in the same way. Unfortunately, for John the demon lord did not

see any such divisions and any activity might give an opportunity for a further attack. Of course, John could not discuss all this with Eda, although she was more than willing to discuss her attempts to make progress on the spiritual path, and when John asked how she was progressing, she explained a new point that Lama Nam Tso had discussed with her.

“He said that we are often guided in dreams,” she told John, “and he quoted a sutra from Raja Yoga, about learning from the wisdom that comes in dreams. Do you know anything about it?”

“No,” John replied. “Rajik is the one who can explain things like that. He is a Yoga student, in Jnana Yoga. He has mentioned it once or twice.”

John did not voice the question that came into his mind. He wondered how much the attainment of wisdom in dreams differed from his night time out of the body experiences. By the sound of things, it seemed that Lama Nam Tso used instruction in another nighttime dimension just as much as he used the daytime. John had discussed the subject with Rajik and he accepted the idea quite easily.

“After all,” he had said, “the real life is the life of the soul, and our concept of reality is really very limited.”

John had said nothing. Such out of this world ideas had never interested him, but in the past few years he had learnt that life is not restricted by neat boundaries; where solid objects were the only concept of reality.

Eda noticed that John had gone quiet.

“What’s wrong?” she asked. “Don’t you like the idea of night time instruction?”

John rubbed his nose in quizzical amusement. How could he tell her that he received nocturnal instruction that was beyond the level of dreaming? He shrugged his shoulders as if the subject was unimportant and made a non-committal remark.

“I suppose it’s OK,” he said, and changed the subject.

When he saw her again, on the next evening, Eda enthusiastically continued the subject.

“Guess what?” she said eagerly. “I had a clear dream that I was receiving instruction last night.”

“Really?” John asked with incredulity.

“Don’t start that,” Eda chided him. “You know very well what happened, because you were instructing me.”

John looked at her in concern. He knew that he had been with Gopas most of the night, receiving instruction on the wiles of the demons. One of the comments by Gopas jumped to the front of his mind.

“They are experts at changing their image,” Gopas said. “They can appear as anything. You know that, because you thought your grandfather was the genuine thing.”

John’s serious mood made Eda change her mood.

“There you go again,” she said. “All I have to do is mention dreams and you get upset. What’s wrong with it?”

She turned sideways on the couch and faced him. “You don’t like it do you?” she challenged.

John put his hand on hers in reassurance. “I think I will have to explain something,” he said. “It is not easy, but I will try.”

John paused as he considered how much he could tell Eda. He decided to say as little as possible and change the details so that his explanations were more acceptable.

“You know that I get special instruction from Nam Tso,” he told her, “but it is a bit complicated, so I never say much about it. One of the things he talks about is the dark forces, and how they operate. He says that they sometimes attack us at night, while we are sleeping. That’s when some people have nightmares, and sometimes he gives me an actual demonstration.’

John hesitated as he searched for words to explain his point, and decided to leave Gopas out of it.

“The thing is,” he went on, “that he was showing me something last night, so what that means is that it was not me you saw in your dream, but one of the dark forces trying to deceive you.”

He stopped, feeling rather pleased at the way he had avoided saying too much and waited to see her reaction. Eda pondered on it for a few moments and broke into a smile. “How intriguing,” she said, “and that explains something. In the dream, you were very serious and never smiled once. In fact, when I awakened I thought you were downright morbid. What should I do?”

“When do you see Nam Tso?” John asked.

“Tonight,” she replied. “I only see him for private instruction once a month, but I can go any time if I need to.”

“Good,” John commented. “Tell him exactly what happened, and tell him what I said. He will tell you how to deal with it.”

He felt relieved that she would not have to risk another night without some protection and he privately decided to seek extra guidance from Gopas as soon as he could. With that conclusion, John changed the subject before Eda could ask him any awkward questions, but he now felt impatient to deal with the demon lord, as he realized that it was the demon lord in another of his deceptive images.

Sure enough, that is what it was and Gopas was quick to suggest that it was now time to defeat this particular evil lord and pass on to something different.

“He will have another go at you,” Gopas explained. “When he does you must call on your Ishta with great force and that will dismiss him. You chose Ishvara, didn’t you?”

“Oh. Yes,” John answered, trying to get the situation in focus.

Gopas looked at him sharply. “You do not sound too sure. You must have faith in your Ishta, do you?”

John felt uncomfortable. “Not really,” he answered.

Gopas shook his head in concern. “It is important that you banish this lord completely, because in the next stage I hand you over to a new teacher.”

John turned in alarm at the announcement by Gopas. He knew that Gopas would only take him so far and that when they reached the level of the earth world, there might be a new program, but now that it was imminent he felt depressed. He knew he would miss Gopas. Gopas could see what John was thinking and cut in with a comment on the immediate issue.

“The only thing that matters at this very moment is having a firm Ishta to defeat the demon lord. Now, if you are not committed to Ishvara you could use mine. I am committed to Amitabha Buddha. That is different expression of the Buddha.”

John noticed that Gopas said it with a tone of pride and dedication and realized that he had to have the same attitude. Gopas answered John’s thoughts. “The great question is

who do you trust? You must trust in the lord, by whatever name. That is the point. Do understand that?”

“Yes.”

“Right.” Gopas went on, “What about me? Do you trust me?”

John never hesitated. “Absolutely!”

He spoke with great emphasis and indicated his complete confidence in Gopas. A flicker of a pleased smile showed for a moment but Gopas kept to the subject.

“The thing is, you must not keep changing. Amitabha Buddha is a great name to chant, and next to Gotama, it is well known. In this case, you must add my name and speak in the name of Gopas and Amitabha Buddha. That way, your trust in me transfers to the Buddha. Trust and devotion are the real force. Do you feel happy with that?”

“Yes. I do,” John asserted firmly.

“Good,” Gopas said. “All you have to do is to banish them and be firm with it. After that, he will leave you alone, but you will often see him at work in others. That is why you must be the master, as you may have to help someone else. Nearly all the demon lords are very busy, always looking for victims, and where you can you have to help them. It will not work if you are not the master.”

John nodded in agreement. He felt eager to defeat the demon lord, because he had tried to deceive Eda. This next battle was personal and John was ready to go into action.

Gopas made a final remark. “All you have to do is to go into their territory and as soon as he appears banish him. Each time you fail, it becomes harder. So, do not fail. Now, it is time to meet him”

With those words, Gopas led John to the area where they would confront the demon lord. Near it, Gopas stopped and turned to John.

“Now you must proceed alone, and this is the crucial test.”

John went forward, wondering what he would see this time. As he went on, the landscape changed until he was in the familiar environment of his childhood. A number of people were in the distance, and as they came nearer, John recognized them as his aunts and uncles who had long since died. One of his favorite aunts was leading them, and as they approached, she spoke in a soft soothing voice.

“Welcome to our heavenly home,” she said. “This is where we are now, and this is where your mother will come when she leaves the earthly life.”

John had often heard Rajik speak about the world of the ancestors and thought that this must be where he was. For a few moments, he accepted the new situation without any doubts, and then he remembered that he was expecting the demon lord. With that thought, he looked carefully at the vision of his relatives, and concluded that they were an illusion created by the demon lord. He knew that once he fully accepted the situation he would be in the web of his own distorted beliefs. With a mental jerk, he focused on the figure of his aunt and deliberately imagined her in a different form. This had worked with the grandfather apparition, and he knew that if he could change the memory image in his own mind then the demon lord would automatically change to match it. The figure of his aunt vibrated slightly and changed to the image of a wrinkled old woman that John was imagining. This was the confirmation that John needed. He raised both arms and extended them towards the group of illusory figures, and calling on Gopas and Amitabha Buddha, he firmly commanded them to be gone. With a sudden flash of movement, they all disappeared and behind him, John heard the familiar comforting laugh of Gopas.

“Well done,” he said. “That’s the way to do it. From now on you will have no more trouble.”

Back in the office cave, Gopas went through his usual summary and finished by telling him what the following test would entail.

“The next stage deals with meeting the different demons in the ordinary world. This is why it was important to defeat each one on his territory. In the next stage, you have to learn to recognize them in the world and then deal with them in the lower world. Once you have done that you will have mastered all the stages of power in the lower worlds and will be free to use them in your personal life. Alternately you could choose to go on, and if you choose that, you will change to a new teacher. It is all very straightforward and Nam Tso will explain it to you when the time comes. In the meantime, have a rest, and I will show you how to recognize our demon friends in the earth world.”

CHAPTER 6 – DEMONS OF THE EARTH WORLD

After the dream incident Eda became more convinced than ever that John had some special insight.

“Why don’t you tell me about your discussions with Nam Tso?” she asked him.

John tried to be nonchalant. He knew that he could never explain even half of the strange experiences that he had undergone in the past few years and he tried to dismiss it all as of no real consequence.

“It is not much different from what he tells you. After all, the only things he ever discusses are the ways of getting enlightenment and some of the experiences that we are likely to have.”

To his relief Eda accepted his explanations and made no further attempts to probe into the mysteries of the path he had chosen. While they were talking, Rajik arrived and John’s mother insisted that they all sat down and had a meal together.

“You are all continually dashing off somewhere,” she said reprovingly. “How you manage to find so much to do in our small town is a mystery.”

John disagreed. “Well, apart from seeing the lama and listening to his lectures there is the Save the Tiger Society. That is taking up more time than I expected.”

“Ah,” Rajik interrupted. “Talking of tigers, your tiger friend has been seen again, or perhaps it is a different one who has heard that there are tiger lovers here. I think we might have to turn your garden into a tiger sanctuary.”

“It already is. The pussy cat has taken it over completely.”

“Never mind the frivolous remarks,” John cut in. “What’s this about the tiger? We might have to do something, before the farmers try to kill it. Where was it and who saw it?”

Rajik described what he knew. The tiger appeared in the same area as before, but by all accounts, it was not the same tiger.

“The descriptions indicate that it is a younger tiger,” Rajik said.

“We will alert the members of the society,” John said. “We must find a way of sending this young tiger back to his own territory. Maybe we can drive him away before it’s too late.”

The conversation changed to personal matters, and although John normally enjoyed these human contacts, he took little interest in them, as his mind filled with concern for the tiger. During the next day, he was still preoccupied with the problem and by the time of the evening meeting, he had formulated a partial plan to get to the tiger before it could come to any harm. He put the suggestion to the small assembly as soon as they settled down after the general greetings and introductions to the subjects of concern.

“The best thing we can do is to contact all our friends and relatives in that area and ask them to let us know if anyone sees the tiger or knows that it is in their area.”

The members of the group readily agreed to do that, as it would help them to have an early warning of the tiger’s appearance, but the decisions as to what could be done next provoked more argument than answers. John cut in on their excited discussions. He rapped on the table with his knuckles and spoke seriously.

“It is obvious that we must do something, but I think we should do something more than the old fashioned banging of pots and pans to drive the tiger away. It generally works well enough as a temporary solution, but the tigers tend to come back unless they get a real scare. The noise frightens the tiger away. What we need is a bigger fright that will not harm the tiger. That way he goes back to the deeper jungle and keeps away from people.”

One of the members raised a hand, indicating that he wished to speak. John looked at him and nodded, hoping that there might yet be something constructive.

“There is one way,” the man said. “If all you want is a bigger and better fright we could use the Chinese method.”

“And what is that?” John asked with intrigued curiosity.

“Well, it is simple enough,” the member explained. “All we need are fireworks. You know, jumping crackers and big bangs. They sometimes use it to drive off other wild animals. By all accounts it works quite well.”

John pondered on this piece of information and asked for more detail. “Where did you learn that?” John asked.

“It was in a book about China. Apparently, they have the same problem with various animals and that is what they do. Just imagine a big thunder flash firework going off under your nose. There would be the noise and the sudden bright flash. With a few of those the tiger would be glad to get as far away as possible.”

John agreed. “There would be no doubt about that,” he said. “It sounds very dramatic and might be a bit traumatic for the tiger, but that would be better than getting shot. It’s worth a try. Where do we get the fireworks?”

“There’s a shop in the High Street. They sell everything like that,” another member said.

“Then it’s settled,” John said.

After that it was only a more mundane question of who paid for the fireworks and discussions with the treasurer settled that. In the end, they agreed that all members who had a telephone would have fireworks and be on instant standby to converge on the tiger when it appeared. Normally such sightings were in the evening or early morning and with luck the actions would not disturb the working day of the members. All they could do then was to wait and hope for a clear sighting

For the next two or three days it seemed that they were waiting for nothing. Then, early in the evening, the phone rang and John received a message saying that the action was in full swing. He got on his bicycle and pedaled furiously in the direction where someone had seen the tiger. It was on the edge of the tea plantation, where the jungle and bush land started. He knew the area well and took a short cut through the plantation. Most of the others were already there and it seemed that the tiger was in a small thicket just outside the plantation. John summed it up rapidly.

“We must not get all round the tiger,” he said. “Keep away from the jungle side and then he can escape. Otherwise someone might be in the way, and even get hurt.”

With that simple plan, they spread out and approached the thicket. John felt in his pocket, to make sure that he had the fireworks and a cigarette lighter. They had all agreed that cigarette lighters would be better than matches and the first person to see the tiger would throw a lighted firework and the others would immediately do the same, even though they had not see the tiger. On the outskirts, watchers would try to spot the tiger and ascertain that it had gone away. One or two had binoculars; it was like a military

campaign, where the invader had to be driven off. Some of the members had recruited their friends and altogether there were about twenty people, most of them armed with fireworks, all hoping to get a piece of the action. A sudden cry to John's right alerted him to a sighting of the tiger. He could see the man frantically flicking his cigarette lighter and holding it to a Chinese cannon. Then he saw the man throw it like a grenade. There was a sudden flash and an impressive bang. After that all hell seemed to be let loose. It was like a battle zone, with bangs and flashes in all directions, with jumping jacks crackling away like machine guns. It was more fun than a New Year party, and John could hear excited laughter as some of the hunters became more interested in lighting fireworks than in driving the tiger away. Finally, one of the watchers gave a shout.

"There he goes", he yelled, and John looked round just in time to see a striped tawny shape bounding onto the cover of the bigger trees. The tiger was not stopping to see what was happening and was in full flight. There was no doubt that the mission was successful and he impulsively gave a cheer that the others echoed as they realized that their efforts had been worthwhile.

Eda had been watching from a safe distance. "Poor tiger," she said. "He must have been scared out of his wits."

"Yes," John agreed. "That was the idea. With a bit of luck he will stay away from horrible people who throw firecrackers at him."

"I think you all enjoyed it," Eda admonished him. "You were like a bunch of school boys. I think they only did it for the excitement and they did not care about the tiger at all."

"You may be right," John replied, but either way the tiger will not be shot, or trapped for superstitious medicines."

With that closing remark, John dismissed the subject and turned his mind towards his more private personal interest. He was still waiting to see what Gopas had to show him as part of the completion of his training and for him the tiger incident was only a distraction. Now he could return to his meditation and inner action, which for him was far more interesting than chasing tigers.

By the next night, John was ready for whatever Gopas had prepared for him. He felt somewhat despondent that he would not be see Gopas and had some trepidation about

what his new teacher would be like. Still, that was some way off and he decided not to think about it, but to make sure that he completed this last stage with some merit. In retrospect, he realized that some of his mistakes could have been disastrous. He could see how much the guidance of Gopas that had helped him. Now he had one more short stage before he started on his new program, or he could stay on that level and concentrate on success in the outside world. That had been his original aim, but now that he had a better understanding of the wider framework, he wanted to know more. As well as that, his new friendship with Eda, who was seriously on the path for enlightenment, had changed his outlook, and he did not wish to stay behind if she was going on. All this continually occupied his thoughts and he would dearly have loved to discuss the details with Eda, but his vows of silence and secrecy prevented him from saying anything. He felt at times that it was indeed a lonely path but now he had started he felt that he must continue. In the meantime, his curiosity about the immediate stage also helped him to persist.

When he finally met Gopas again, he had difficulty in restraining himself from asking questions about this present stage, and he was relieved when Gopas started to explain some of the details.

“This stage deals with people, and demons, in the ordinary world. Things are not what they seem and most importantly many people are not what they seem to be. Your task is to learn to see things as they really are and to understand how many people, even in important positions, are really on a very poor level in their soul life.”

John listened carefully and recalled some of the details that Gopas had previously told him. He knew that everyone had an inner soul life but was not sure how this operated and what he would see in that situation. Gopas continued and his explanations helped John to see how mysterious the details were.

“There are two or three ways of seeing what a person is really like,” Gopas went on. The easiest and most common is the ability to see auras and your next teacher will help you with it. That method is operative in the normal worldly life, but there are many subtle details, which most people never develop. The immediate exercise, which is in the inner world, is to see what people are like in their psychic and spiritual life. Everyone has two sides to their nature, and this is the inner side, which is the product of their real attitude.

Most people hide their motives and put on a façade, but now you will see what some of them are like behind that façade.”

John thought all this extremely fascinating and was eager to embark on this inner sightseeing trip. He was curious to know how they would do it. Gopas continued to explain and John listened eagerly.

“We will begin with a consideration of your immediate work associates. Because you know them, it will be easy to focus on them. Of course, you must not reveal what you see to anyone. Should you do that, all your powers will begin to fade away, and Nam Tso will most certainly refuse to take you any further. The serious purpose in this exercise is to know whom you can trust when you are acting in the world of men. Now, are you ready?”

“Yes,” John answered.

“Good. Now concentrate on the people you know.”

John focused his mind on the main office and imagined the usual scene in there. He could clearly visualize the desks and the people and imagine the type of things they would generally say. As John concentrated, he heard Gopas say, “Keep your eyes open and watch carefully.”

John opened his eyes and kept the image of his work place in his mind. As if in that scene, Gopas stood before him, and the underworld stony office seemed to be part of that scene. The images merged and then changed. Instead of being in the workplace office, or even in the stony room, they were outside in a bleak and harsh environment. There were no trees and the ground was dry and dusty. Buildings, with tall chimneys, studded the landscape. Amongst them, larger buildings, like old-fashioned factories, looming over the houses. The scene gave the impression of soul-less work activity and the people blended into it and carried out their activities in an unfeeling automatic manner. John mentally recoiled from the scene and looked round at the people, looking for someone he knew. A voice behind him made him turn round. The speaker was one of the women supervisors who carried out the routine shipping orders. John had always thought of her as a pleasant helpful person who had strong religious convictions, and was what most people would call a good regular hard working citizen. Now she appeared as drab and uninspiring. Her clothes were crumpled and unwashed and her demeanor was almost one of stunted

growth. John was astonished to think that such a pleasant person could have an inferior inner life that the scene depicted.***

The woman spoke to him in quite a rational manner, and accepted John's presence as a normal event. John realized that for her, in that dimension, everything he could see would be normal by her inner standards. The whole scene, with its dreary overcast landscape, conveyed more than any lengthy explanations could. As he stood there in wonder, he understood why seers who had inner vision preferred to remain silent. This was only one more strange aspect of the soul life that everyone seemed to have. Explanations of it would be endless. Every new dimension was full of unusual events with even more unusual residents. For a brief moment, his mind reeled at the enormity of the endless phenomena. One realization after another flooded into his mind. He could now see why Vyasa had written such a lengthy analogy in the Bhagavad Gita. The scene of Krishna standing in the chariot with Arjuna on the battlefield was only an epic that explained one point. That was how to attain spiritual awareness and all the philosophizing in the battlefield was only a device for making the explanations. John vaguely wondered how he could possibly think of any device to explain all this, especially if he also included the visits to the lower worlds.

The woman spoke again and John came out of his reverie. She was waving her hand towards the oppressive looking buildings on the horizon. They reminded John of a line in one of the books he had read at school and he thought of the dark satanic mills described by William Blake.

It is better here than living over there," she said, as if here was good and acceptable.

"What is it like where you live?" she asked.

John was caught off guard by the bizarre situation in which she obviously thought of all this as normal, which it probably was in her values in that dimension. For a moment, he started to explain that this was only a reflection of her soul life.

"This is -," he started to say, then stopped as he realized what he was saying.

"This is what?" the woman asked.

John tried to speak casually, "Well, it's different."

She was ready to ask another question and he forestalled it by saying that he had to go. He turned and left her and then concentrated on Gopas. Immediately the scene changed and he was standing with Gopas.

“That was weird,” John exclaimed.

Gopas raised a hand, “We have not finished yet. “We have a few more places to visit. This time we will take an example of some worldly successful person who is known to be very materialistic. Do you know anyone like that?”

John replied immediately. “Yes. There is a man who lives -.”

Gopas cut John short. “There is no need for any detail,” he said, and then added, “We must be careful not to judge anyone. We are only concerned with insight. Just think about him.”

John focused his mind on the man’s house, which he knew very well. Almost immediately, the scene changed. He was in what looked like an old industrial city that had narrow crowded streets. The houses were all close together and were little better than hovels. One house in particular attracted his attention. As he watched, John saw the door open and the man came out. He saw John standing nearby and spoke to him in the type of haughty voice he used in the physical world.

“What are you doing here?” he demanded.

John was astonished. The manner did not fit the scene, but he realized that he could see the man’s real nature and what he saw did not match the inner reality.

“I was just passing by,” John replied.

“Then pass by, and do not stand there in front of my house.”

John looked at the man’s shabby and mean appearance and tried to be natural.

“All right,” he said, “I am going.”

As he moved off John wondered what his own appearance was like. He looked down at the clothes he was wearing and saw that they were shabby and nondescript and in keeping with the surroundings. In that dimension, he had adapted to the environment and was just like the others.

Once he was out of range of the man’s vision, he stopped and had a closer look around. There were many people going about their general activities and everything was similar to any busy city, but on a lower and meaner level. It was not like the slums of some large

cities, yet it had the same depressing air of decadence and futility. As he looked at the scene John understood that although a person may appear to be coping very well in the outside world, the inner life was really one of bleak unhappiness. He further realized the difficulty facing anyone who attempted to explain this inner reflection of the soul. With one last look, John again focused on Gopas and returned to the little stone office that Gopas used as his point of reference. John thought how strange it was that he could take that as the norm, in his nighttime activities, and go further into other dimensions, which all seemed quite natural once he was in them. He recalled the words of Rajik, who had repeatedly said that all the dimensions were an illusion, but they seemed real when they were experienced. He could see now why Gopas referred to the natural world as the practical reality and wondered what the true reality might be. He voiced his questions to Gopas.

“What is the basic reality?” he asked. “If these other dimensions are real when we are in them what is the true reality like and how does it all fit together?”

“You are asking mighty questions,” Gopas replied “Many wise men would like to know that and it is not possible to answer the question completely. The basic reality is very abstract. In our terms, it is spirit or Divine Consciousness. On the highest level, there is no multiplicity or even duality. We can only operate in the realms of duality and multiplicity. Everything we experience is only relative and we cannot describe the absolute. I have told you some of this before, but you seem to think there is a finite answer. Think about it. How can we describe the infinite in finite terms? Your task is to master the immediate dimensions, attain some insight into the infinite and above all, to experience your own intrinsic nature, which is the same abstract spirit.”

“I know what you are going to next,” John said. “You are going to sat, do not worry about it.”

Gopas laughed and John felt relieved to see such a human reaction. There were times when he thought all this inner wandering was a bit too much. Sometimes, when he passed the golf course, where the social elite demonstrated their prowess and their status he felt almost envious. For them it was a simple world of self-gratification, and enjoying the material benefits of life. For him it was a process of understanding bigger and bigger mysteries and spending half his time in the invisible worlds. He voiced his concern.”

“I can’t really see what it means. What is the point in it all?”

“I do not know why you have suddenly gone all philosophical, but will try to make it simple. The whole process is one of evolution and growth. Everything we see is only a tiny part of it. As an individual soul, our task is to return to the source, and to do that we have to wake up. All the way through we have the power of choice. You chose this path and this is a critical position. Nam Tso will explain more next time you see him. When you meet your friend Rajik, ask him to explain the lokas. It will help you to understand where you are and where you are going. As for everything else, just remember the main rule. As we think, so it is. That is the key to everything that happens.”

Gopas paused and looked very seriously at John. He took a step forward and put a hand on John’s arm.

“You will soon have a new teacher,” he told John. “It is inevitable if you want to move on. I shall miss you. You have been an interesting pupil, but now, like a school child you must go on to the next grade.”

Gopas smiled as he spoke, and added in a very serious tone, “Or you could leave the school.” He paused again, and added, “Nam Tso will explain.”

Gopas squeezed John’s arm with a show of affection and at his own emotional reaction he returned with a jerk to his body. He was sitting upright in his bed, conscious of a feeling of sadness. He had an attachment to Gopas, although he had not noticed it. Now, at the thought of parting he felt saddened. He looked at the clock beside his bed. It was three o’clock, which was the usual time that he returned to the ordinary world. His inner adventures seemed to start just before midnight and end at the same time, which was three o’clock. In thinking about it John felt a sense of security in the regularity and order of his nighttime experiences, and he realized that he could always see Gopas if he wished to do so. With that comforting thought he layback and fell asleep.

In the morning, his mother greeted him with her usual warm manner and John thought how wonderful it was to have his mother as part of his hone background. It gave him an anchor and a stability that balanced the strangeness of his inner life. Now, with Eda as an extra support he felt secure and stable and could see his inner experiences as part of a wider consciousness that overlapped into his daily life. His mother noticed his preoccupation and asked what he was thinking.

It's nothing really," John told her. "I was just thinking about these different teachings."

His mother smiled, "Now you are being evasive," she commented. "How are you getting on with your spiritual disciplines? You never say much about it. I learn more from Rajik than I do from you, but it seems that you do not tell him very much."

John looked at her concerned face. What she said was true; he never discussed his meditation path. Eda had accused him of the same thing. She said he was secretive and too introspective. For a few minutes, he pondered on the differences in their methods. He knew that he could not possibly say that he was working his way through the hell worlds and all the others, but felt that they deserved some explanation.

"Well," he said slowly, "I think I have chosen a roundabout route. You and Rajik, and Eda, seem to have the simple aim of enlightenment or liberation, but somehow I have chosen a difficult knowledge path."

"Oh yes, like Rajik. He is on the knowledge path," she replied.

He shook his head, "No, not at all. Rajik's knowledge is more philosophical, but I think mine is different."

He stopped, searching for words. The word that came to his mind was magical. He did not think it would be wise to say that he was on a course of magic and power. It would sound too fantastic. His mother waited for him to finish what he was saying.

"I think it is more technical," he said.

"You mean occult knowledge?" his mother asked.

"I suppose you could call it that," John agreed, "but I've never thought about it. I just see it as learning."

"Of course," his mother went on. "We all have to learn, but I think it wise to have a clear aim."

That last point sank deep into John's mind and it made him realize that perhaps his own aim was not as clear as it should be."

"Yes," he said, "I will have to discuss it with Rajik. There are a lot of things I want to ask him."

He left it at that and when he saw Rajik on the Saturday morning, he acted on the advice of Gopas.

“Tell me about the lokas,” he said when they were sitting down. “Tell me more about them. I have only gathered bits of knowledge. Can you explain what they are?”

Rajik leaned back in his chair. This was his favorite subject and he liked talking about it.

“This is a new approach,” he said to John. “I have told you about them before. All you do is to listen politely and ask for evidence. Why is there this sudden change?”

John took a sip of coffee as a means of delaying the answer. He did not like any personal questions, especially about subjects that he dare not discuss. He could hardly say that his teacher on the inner dimensions had told him to ask.

“Well,” he said slowly, “I am beginning to realize that I do not know very much about these things, and I know that you follow the knowledge path.”

Rajik accepted the explanation and leaned forward. “That is true, but knowledge is only one method. Eda is going for a more direct route. There are many ways to reach the spiritual kingdom, or the Western Paradise or whatever you wish to call it.”

“Yes. Yes,” John interrupted impatiently, “Never mind the introduction. I have heard all that before. Just make this loka system a bit clearer.”

“Right. I will keep it simple. Here we are, on the physical world. Beyond this world are six other worlds or levels, in different dimensions. The highest is the spiritual realm, and we, as souls, are supposed to work our way to that. That is why people meditate or choose a particular discipline. The popular concept is that if you want to go to heaven you must climb the ladder.”

“So, what is the big deal about all that?” John queried.

“There you go, arguing already. The big deal is that you do not have to wait until you died to climb the ladder, you can do it now. That is why people choose a particular discipline.”

“I can see that, but what is so special about it all?”

Rajik continued, “All the lokas, or inner worlds, have their own dualities, and difficulties. We have to work at it to develop insight, and it takes time. Starting with the physical world there are seven levels and the top one is what some people call the seventh heaven.”

And how many reach that?" John wanted to know.

"Not many," Rajik answered. "A few great Yogis have done it, but if we can get half way we can continue from there, after death."

"It all sounds very abstract to me," John protested.

"It usually does, but it is easier to think of the charkas. You know that there are different centers of consciousness. Well, the heart center is halfway. It is the first of the heaven worlds, and if we can reach that we do not have to be reborn."

"What about people who do not make any effort?" John asked.

"Oh, they stay where they are, and according to the teachings they will be back for sure."

"And what about all the others, Christians, and so on?"

"From what I have been told most of them go on and finally enter the spiritual kingdom. The only difference is that they do not understand it and just proceed on faith or belief. I prefer to know what I am doing. That is why I chose Jnana Yoga."

John was silent. Rajik's explanations left a big gap in his understanding. He raised another question.

"What about hell. Many of the scriptures speak of lower worlds. Where do they fit into your scheme?"

Rajik nodded his head vigorously. Ah, yes, but who wants to know about the hell worlds? What good is it? Jnana describes seven lower lokas but no real yogi would waste his time on them. It is as Vivekananda said, 'if you want ghost you get ghosts and if you want God you get God.' Anyway, as far as I can see it is all a lot of psychic chaos. Why bother with it?"

John lapsed into a deep silence. He could see that all his friends were busy trying to climb the stairs while he had gone down to understand what was in the cellar. He felt that he had perhaps made a wrong choice."

As if he intuitively knew what John was thinking, Rajik spoke again.

"Of course, all the great yogis understand all the hidden worlds. Some deliberately work in the lower worlds, to help lost souls, but for beginners it is better to keep climbing."

"Yes. I can see that," John agreed, "But where are these worlds really?"

“Now you are becoming all metaphysical. That is a big question and there are two answers. One is that they are different dimensions that interpenetrate our physical dimension. The other is that they are inner worlds and are experienced through contemplation and meditation. I think it is both. We experience them inwardly but they are in a different wavelength. By all accounts it is easier to tune in to the lower levels but the higher ones are very subtle and require a better mind control.”

John breathed a deep breath out as he leaned back and relaxed. He now felt that he understood better what he was doing. Before he could make any remark, a cheery voice broke into their discussion.

“There you are, loafing as usual.”

They looked up as Eda came towards their table. For John it was a welcome relief and a good excuse to change the subject.

“Sit down and tell us your news.”

Eda sat down and John ordered a coffee for her.

“Have you any more news of tigers?” he asked. “Or is everything quiet on the Eastern front?”

Eda smiled and shook her head. “No,” she answered, “We are all free to go back to sleep and continue with our cozy activities.”

Rajik chuckled in amusement. “Do you think we are asleep?” he asked. “Do you think we live a cozy life?”

Eda squared her shoulders and then leaned forward. This was her type of debate and John could see that they were in for a lecture and pushed his chair back, indicating that he was ready to stand up.

“I think we ought to push on,” he said. “We cannot spend all day here.”

“Good idea,” Rajik added. “I have lots to do. I will leave you two lovebirds to it, and you can work out how we can save the world. You will have to let me know when you have solved it.”

As he went off Eda turned to John, “That was deliberate,” she said heatedly. “Typical chauvinistic males, who think women do not know anything.”

“Sorry,” he said, “but I did not want to stay here. I want to do some shopping. Come along, you can help me.”

“I will, but I will get you for that. Wait until you get on your soapbox about something. And I will sabotage you.”

John laughed and led Eda out of the restaurant.

“What are you going to buy,” she asked as they turned into the main street.

“I thought I would go to that basket ware shop, and look for a basket for Tiger. He sleeps everywhere, and there are cat hairs on all the chairs.”

“You will have to put your hoodoo on him, and tell his little cat soul to be a good pussy cat.”

“Of course,” John said with a smile. “That’s why I am practicing on you.”

Eda linked arms with John and leaned her head on his shoulder. “I thought I was always a good pussy cat,” she murmured.

John squeezed her hand in affection and led her towards the shops.

After the shopping, when he was once again alone John pondered on the latest developments. The next day was Sunday, when he would have his weekly discussion with Lama Nam Tso. This time he expected it to be more than a discussion, and he felt slightly apprehensive at the thought of the changes that were obviously ahead.

When he sat down with the lama, he knew that he was right to be apprehensive. Nam Tso said nothing for two or three minutes and gazed at him steadily with a serious expression on his face. John felt that the lama was probing his mind, as he had done when they first met. This time the sense of investigation seemed stronger. John vaguely wondered how the lama did it and tried to imagine what he was thinking. Finally the lama spoke. “You have now attained what you desired,” he said in a somber tone, and stopped, as if expecting a response from John. John was amazed, He had never imagined that he would hear such words, and he was not sure what they meant. He groped for words and almost blurted out the question that came into his mind.

“Have I?” he asked.

The hint of a smile twitched the lama’s lips but he remained serious. “Of course,” he affirmed. “You said that you wanted power and that is what you now have. With practice, you can command spirits of all the lower worlds to do your bidding. Whatever you want in this world is now possible.”

John remained silent. He recalled some of the things Gopas had said, joking about becoming a great shaman. He had thought of it repeatedly. Yet, he was unable to understand why Gopas, and even Lama Nam Tso, had not chosen the path of power. After all, the ability to do anything and attain anything seemed very useful. It would give success in any venture. John brooded on the strangeness of it and recalled that his earlier aim had been to have the power to succeed. Yet, now that he had apparently reached that point it almost seemed pointless. He had pondered on the questions before. His mother, Rajik, and even Eda, had all chosen the path of enlightenment and liberation but he had chosen power. He wondered if this meant that he would not become enlightened or attain liberation.

The lama waited patiently. John breathed a deep sigh release as he attempted to cast out his doubts. He looked up and voiced the questions in his mind.

“What is the alternative?” he asked. “What happens if I want to go on?”

As he said it, John realized that he did not really know what going on meant. The lama was observing him critically.

“Go on to what?” he asked, forcing John to struggle with the question.

John could feel the tension building up within him. He felt that the lama was provoking a mental conflict over the decision that he knew he had to make. He tried to observe the thoughts that clashed in his mind. On the one hand, all his old concepts and conventional views echoed his earlier conditioned thinking. Opposing them was the new knowledge that he had acquired in the past few years. He knew that he could never revert to his previous attitudes but the next step eluded him. He struggled to answer the lama’s question and inwardly groaned at his lack of comprehension.

“To get a better understanding,” he said, and added, “To attain true insight.”

The lama nodded, as if in approval and John felt the tension subside. He waited for the lama’s reply.

“Yes,” he affirmed. “That is what you need. See Gopas and he will tell you what to do.”

That very night Gopas was waiting. He seemed to be in an expectant mood as if he already knew how the drama of John’s life was developing.

“Well,” he asked when John appeared in his inner domain. “What have you decided?”

John was tempted to make a flippant remark as he was convinced that Gopas already knew, but he answered the question.

“I have decided to go on, whatever that means, and I am hoping you can tell me. Apart from that, I cannot understand why the lama seemed pleased. I am beginning to think he has a secret agenda, and I am not in on it. What is going on? Why was he pleased?”

Gopas gave his usual laugh. “Well. You could say that he was pleased because you proved that he was right.”

“Right? Right about what?”

John was mystified and Gopas started to explain. “He knew that you had the inner light, and that is why he took you on. Not many have the chance to learn what you have learnt. He was fairly sure that in the end you would go on, and all that training was aimed at helping you to awaken.”

“I do not quite understand that. After all, Rajik and the others have chosen the upward path and they were not given any such training.”

“Quite right, but you would never have been satisfied with all that. In the end, you would want to know and understand. The others will be pleased enough to enter the Western Paradise, but you would still be asking questions. The lama knew all that. In any case, it is all a matter of karma. You are only finishing what you started earlier.”

“You mean, in another life.”

“In linear terms, yes, but it is more complex than that. You will understand eventually, but in the meantime I have to introduce you to Manias.”

“Who is Manias?” John wanted to know.

“He is your next teacher, and you will meet him in the flesh, and I will be there too. I will explain next time we meet.”

John was intrigued at the thought of meeting Gopas in the physical and was curious to know what he would be like. The thought of meeting his new teacher was an added attraction and he was impatient to know how the meeting would occur. That very night he received an answer, and Gopas explained what would happen.

“We will meet you in your favorite restaurant,” he told John. “We can have a meal together. This next Friday evening would be ideal. Can you manage that?”

John was surprised at the ordinary arrangement. Although he knew that Gopas lived in another town, he had never met him in a physical setting, and the ordinariness of the suggestion astonished him. In his naïve unawareness, he had vaguely imagined that they would meet in some clandestine setting that was far away from the eyes of the public. His hesitation made Gopas repeat his question.

“Can you manage that?”

He asked again, “or would you prefer another night?”

“No,” John assured him. “Friday evening his fine.”

“Good,” Gopas said. “We will expect you at seven o’clock.”

That concluded the meeting and John returned to his worldly setting, feeling sad at the thought that this would be the end of his work with Gopas. He was still thinking about it when he was having his breakfast. His mother looked at him thoughtfully.

“You are very quiet this morning. Is everything alright?” she asked.

John drew a quick breath as if preparing to explain then leaned back in his chair. He would have liked to discuss the situation with his mother, but his vow of silence prevented him. Instead, he made a half statement.

“I am thinking of changing my training,” he told her, “and doing something more like Eda.”

His mother approved. Although she knew nothing of the secret path of magic power, that John had chosen she had noticed that he never talked about spiritual subjects.

“That will be nice,” she commented. “That way you will be able to discuss things with Eda. It is always a big help to have someone to talk to.”

“Yes,” John agreed, and inwardly wondered how much he would ever be able to discuss with anyone, except people like Gopas. That made him think about the coming meeting and he decided to say something about that to his mother, so that she would not ask awkward questions.

“I have a business meeting at the end of the week,” he told her. “Two out of town representatives are coming to discuss their new program. We are having a business dinner in the restaurant. I think I will wear my best suit.”

His mother accepted the explanation. It was nothing new.

“I will get everything ready,” she said, “Thanks,” John answered, and thought to himself that he had somehow to get himself ready.

“It is time you went to work,” his mother prompted, “or you will be late.”

John stood up and put on his jacket that he had draped on the back of his chair. He kissed his mother on the cheek and went out, still thinking of the strange meeting on Friday. All the way to the office, he pondered on the new events. He could see that this was a big cut off point. He knew what he was leaving behind but he had no true idea of what lay ahead. As he approached the office, he concluded that he could only cross that bridge when he reached it, and he decided to leave it at that.

CHAPTER 7- SECRETS OF THE INNER SOUL

On the Friday evening, John was still trying to adjust his mind to the new situation. As he considered it his problem, he realized that he could not adjust to something that he did not understand and that he was looking for a guarantee that he was not making a wrong move. He prepared himself slowly, shaving and washing carefully to make sure that he was at his best. He chose a white shirt and an unobtrusive gray tie so that in his dark gray suit he looked like a typical businessman. As he studied his appearance in the mirror he thought how ridiculous it would be if Gopas and Manias were wearing conventional Indian clothes. Gopas had always worn very nondescript clothes in his nighttime meetings with John, and John had never thought much about it. Now he realized that he had no idea what to expect. Fortunately, the weather was cold and it was unlikely that Gopas would be wearing cotton trousers and a loose shirt. Still, there was no certainty that he would be wearing conventional clothing. His mother was watching him and he turned towards her. She was wearing an ordinary sari, of winter material with a loose wool cardigan over the top of it. John thought how easily she would blend into any scene, either in the shopping center or in a restaurant. His mother never worried about fashion and yet she always managed to look presentable, but he always felt torn between two cultures and was never quite sure what he should wear. His mother spoke.

“That looks smart,” she commented. “Just right for a business dinner.”

John was not so sure. After all, it was not really a business meeting, although he hardly expected Gopas or even Manias to be wearing a flowing robe with a necklace of talisman symbols. Either way, it was too late and he left the house thinking that after all it did not matter. He was still clinging to his conditioned thinking and behaving as if he were applying for a new position in business rather than a new position as a secret seeker.

Outside the restaurant, he paused, thinking one last anxious thought. He wondered what they would look like, and then he pushed the door open and entered. The bearer, who knew him well, was standing near the door. In his formal tunic dress and a white turban, he radiated a mood of formal serenity. John felt reassured. This was a good restaurant. It was evening. Everyone did dress for dinner, and the bearer’s greeting made him feel that things were all right after all.

“Good evening sahib,” he said, raising the back of his hand to his forehead, in conventional salaam. “Your friends are over here,” and led the way to a table in a discreet corner.

John wondered how the bearer knew that he was meeting someone, but he had no time to ponder on it. At the table were two men, in business suits. One was Gopas and John recognized him at once, but as they stood up to greet him, John breathed a sigh of relief at their conventional appearance, but his real interest was in Manias. John had a quick impression of a tall man with well-groomed graying hair and a clipped moustache that gave him a military bearing. He had no time to think anything else because Gopas was speaking.

“This is Manias,” he said to John, “and this is John.”

Manias held out his hand and gave John a strong firm handshake that indicated someone with firm resolve.

“Gopas has told me about you, and I am glad to have you on board.”

John noted the way Manias spoke and his choice of words. A service man, for sure, John thought. Gopas, with his usual insight said, “Manias was a major in the army.”

John was not surprised and waited for Manias to continue. Manias smiled, “Ignore what he said. “There will not be any parades, or kit inspections.”

The familiar laugh of Gopas added to the remark and John relaxed, feeling that here was someone he could trust and like. He felt immensely relieved. If the next stage was anything like the last one, he knew he would need a reliable teacher and guide and he knew that Lama Nam Tso had not failed him and he was again in safe hands.

The rest of the evening passed off with convivial ease and the only instruction was from Gopas.

“I will meet you as usual,” he told John. “We will go to a real office. Manias does not work downstairs, below ground level, and he has a different kind of space.”

John wanted to ask questions but Gopas waved them aside.

“All in good time,” he assured John. “We will see you tomorrow night, but we have to go now.”

He held out his hand and John realized with a pang of emotion that he would probably not see Gopas again in the physical world. He shook hands and held tightly for a brief

moment. Gopas put his other hand on John's hand, in a gesture of reassurance. Then he turned to go. Manias held out his hand and gripped John on the elbow with his other hand.' "I will see you tomorrow night, and we can discuss your new course."

With that he led the way out of the restaurant, and the two of them walked away swiftly, leaving John to wonder if it was all only a strange dream. On the way, home he contemplated the new situation. He was pleased that he had met Gopas and Manias in a normal situation. In the past, he had often wondered if he was imagining the whole series of events. Only the physical contact with Lama Nam Tso had convinced him that his inner life did have a genuine reality of its own. Now, with a firm contact with his new teacher he felt that he was on a better and safer path. He had never felt very safe in his earlier nighttime excursions. The environment had always seemed alien and he had struggled to master each situation out of a need to remain stable. Although neither Nam Tso nor Gopas had said very much he knew that his status as an initiate was a fact. The physical contact with Gopas and Manias had somehow sealed that, and he went home with a new confidence that from now on things would be better and even more interesting.

As he walked into the house, his mother came to greet him.

"Did your business meeting go well?" she asked.

John smiled, "Yes, very well," and added enigmatically, "We have got a new contract"

His mother saw nothing strange in that and changed the subject.

"Eda phoned. She says she has the chance of a job. You know she has been unemployed since she finished at the university. There is not much work round here, but she does not want to move away."

"What is the job?" John asked.

"I think it is something to do with education, some sort of an assistant to the area Education Officer. She will phone you tomorrow."

His mother continued with her work in the kitchen and John sat watching her. He felt a great sense of peace and stability to see such ordinary activity, and the news of Eda getting a good job made him more pleased than ever. He needed these ordinary events to help him to keep his mental balance on the tightrope he was walking between the

different worlds. He sometimes wondered if Nam Tso ever felt disassociated or whether he just switched on and off from one impression to another, as if that was all very normal. Perhaps it is for him, John thought, and then stopped his thoughts with a sudden mental jerk as he realized that it was already becoming normal for him. He was beginning to see the door to his bedroom as the doorway to the hidden worlds and seeing sleep as nothing more than a rest period for the body. Without realizing it, he was beginning to blend the waking and sleeping states. He sensed that he had a new direction. With that thought, he stood up, stretching his arms and yawning. "I think I will go to bed now," he said to his mother, and left the room.

In his bedroom, he sat down in the big chair and continued with his contemplation of the new events. It occurred to him that his life was in different packages, some of which overlapped. He mentally ticked them off on a list. There was his home life, with his mother as the firm support, and alongside that, there were his friends, with Rajik and Eda as central players. Beyond that was his work with all his business associates. So far, it all seemed very normal and ordinary, yet, behind this façade of normality was the steadily growing awareness of mystic insight and other world activities. Most people just had a religion that was established and acceptable. He had a secret interest that he could never discuss with any of his friends. He mused on the strange situation, thinking what a fantastic story it would make. He could call it 'the secret life of John Brown.' He smiled at his fantasy and shook off the daydreaming. The fact was that he could never tell anyone, and no doubt, Gopas and Manias had the same view. He was glad that he had met them. It helped him to accept his role as an obscure mystic traveler while at the same time he lived the life of an ordinary person. No doubt Gopas and Mamas did the same and for all he knew there were many other who also had a secret life which was hidden behind the façade of normality. The thought of that helped him to dismiss the last of his anxieties and he undressed and got into bed, thinking that tomorrow night would almost certainly be a new beginning in every way.

The next day he phoned Eda to ask about her new job. As he talked to her, he felt so grateful for her practical enthusiasm. He was beginning to see that she and his other friends were the necessary balance to his new private life, and enthusiastically joined in with her descriptions of her new job. Her duties were quite simple. She stayed in the local

office and assembled the reports, which she had to type out and file, while the District Education Officer visited the various schools and institutions.

“It is not much to start with,” she told John. “I am really only a glorified clerk, but it will get bigger, then I will have an assistant, but I do have a wonderful title.”

“And what is that?” John asked in amusement.

Eda giggled over the phone, and said in a mock pompous voice, “I am a Departmental Executive Assistant Officer,” she said grandly.

John laughed heartily. “I can see that I will have to call you burrah mem-sahib,” he said teasingly.

“Of course,” she responded and went on to explain the virtues of her new social standing.

Afterwards he felt slightly jealous, but cast out the thoughts by a swift rational analysis. Such trivial social titles were an echo of the British colonial framework that overlapped onto the Indian caste system. He shrugged it off, deciding that all this social snobbery were really only ego fantasies and they had nothing to do with true reality. It was really part of the game of role-playing. He resolved to enjoy it, and use it to hide his real activities as an initiate of the inner worlds.

That evening he went to bed early, eager to see what the new events would bring. He met Gopas in the usual manner and they stood together in the strange rocky space that Gopas wittingly called his office. Gopas looked serious and there was a touch of sadness in his voice when he spoke.

“This is the end of the underworld for you”. He told John. “Your new program will be in the higher worlds. Most of them are very earth like, but some of them are a bit abstract. You will have no trouble, and with Manias you will certainly succeed.”

“I shall miss you,” John said. “I had become used to relying on you.”

Gopas laughed, not quite in his usual easy manner, but he was still casual. “We all do the same,” he replied. “I had become used to helping you, but the whole program aims at helping us to stand on our own feet. In the end there are no cozy groups, but only awakened souls working together.”

“What are we working at?” John asked.

Gopas laughed heartily at John's question. " We are working at helping others to wake up. The entire agenda is to wake up and grow up. When enough people have done that we might be able to make some positive changes."

A host of questions flooded in John's mind, but Gopas stopped him. "You will have to save your questions for Manias. He is the expert. I am only a junior assistant."

From his tone of voice John knew he was joking and he had no doubt whatsoever that Gopas was a true adept, but he had no time to develop any further conversation. With a change of attitude, Gopas spoke briskly.

"It is time to go to Manias. Come."

He put his hand on John's arm and with the typical flurry of swift movement they were suddenly in a different setting. John looked round in amazement. Gopas had been right. This was a real office. There was not only a desk but there were extra chairs for visitors. Manias was sitting behind the desk, taking it all very casually, as if visitors always manifested suddenly in his secret office.

"Where are we?" John blurted out in spontaneous surprise. "Are we in the outside world?"

Manias answered. "No. This is an inner dimension, but it is not below the surface. Only the underworld is downstairs. We are now upstairs, in a different invisible dimension. There are no demons here, only evil people."

Behind John Gopas laughed with amusement. John felt that they were enjoying his amazement and teasing him with misleading statements. Gopas stepped forward so that he was facing John.

"You will get used to it," he said, "and now I must go."

He gave John's hand a quick squeeze and he was gone, back to the lower worlds, to guide someone else. The voice of Manias broke the silence.

"Sit down," he said. "We have a lot to discuss. Before we can go on I have to finish the last stage that Gopas was doing."

John sat down in a big padded swivel chair and mentally noted how solid and physical it felt. If he had not been told that he was in an inner dimension he would most certainly thought he was in the physical world. Manias gave him a few minutes to adjust his mind to the situation and then began to explain.

“Gopas has taken you the lower worlds that you have to master on the ego level and my role is to take you through the higher worlds that you have to master in order to transcend the ego. This is what Nam Tso wanted you to do.”

John gestured with his hand as an indication that he wished to speak. Manias paused and waited.

“Gopas told me that, but what is the difference between what I have done and what the others are doing?”

“I think Gopas has probably told you that already. Actually there is no difference in the outcome. All true seekers become spiritually aware. The only difference is in the approach. You will have a deeper understanding and because of that you will make better progress in the next stage.”

John nodded to indicate that he understood and asked another question.

“Gopas said that Nam Tso knew I had the light, but I do not understand that. Can you explain it?”

“Yes. I cannot only explain it but I will demonstrate it, because that is our first lesson. Everyone has the light,” Manias said and paused for a moment. “Well, nearly everyone,” he added. John waited while Manias pondered on how he could explain the subject.

“Basically, all normal people have the light. It is a tiny pinpoint of light, and you have learned about it before. With most people, it is very tiny and indistinct. It has to awaken, so that it shines. Nam Tso could see that your light was well developed. That is why he helped you, and our task is to help others to awaken. As Buddhism says, first gain enlightenment and then teach.”

“Will I eventually be a teacher?” John asked.

Manias smiled. “There are many other ways of helping. Some become teachers, and others do different work, such as Gopas. It all depends on the temperament of the devotee.”

“What is the work I have to finish now? You said there were a few things to finish.”

“Yes,” Manias answered. “That is what I am coming to. You see, not everyone has the light. That is something I must show you. Some have entered the human stream illegally. They have not earned the right to develop through the human dimension. They are demons on human form. There are two or three ways of recognizing them and that is

our immediate task. You must learn to recognize them because they can invade some of the higher worlds, although they cannot get very far. Without the light they eventually fall back.”

John was intrigued. Gopas had mentioned some of these points but they had never developed that knowledge. Now, he was beginning to see that some of the demons he had met face to face might still be a problem.

“What happens if I meet them?” he asked Manias.

Manias seemed amused. “That is where your early training will come in. You will banish them rapidly.”

“Like I did before,” John asked.

“In a way, yes, but not quite so dramatically. Gopas told me how you did it.”

John felt embarrassed. He recalled his theatrical approach, and he felt slightly irritated that Gopas had mentioned it to Manias.

Before he could make any further remark Manias spoke again. “To teach you a different perception, I will show you some people now. It is the same routine as with Gopas, but we go to different worlds.”

He stood up, and came round the desk and put one hand on John’s arm.

“Ready?” he asked.

John nodded. “Yes,” he said eagerly.

With the typical swift movement, they changed scenes. John stared in amazement. It was just a normal market area, with canvas shaded stalls and vendors sitting in the ground with their goods before them. People were wandering around in the usual casual investigation of the wares. It was all very normal and very real.

“Where are we?” John asked Manias.

“We are in another town, and what we are seeing is a reflection. I chose another town so that you would not see people you know. Now look at the people carefully.”

John tried to ignore the scene and look at the people.

“Look. See that woman in the red shawl, over there.”

“Yes,” John said, almost in a whisper.

“Good. Now look at her as if you are trying to look through her. Keep that steady and you will notice a tiny light flickering and moving in the upper part of her body and sometimes in the head. Can you see it?”

“Oh yes,” John answered. “It is fantastic.”

“Now, move your glance, and keep looking through them and tell me what you see.”

John was fascinated and questions flooded into his mind. He made an effort and pushed them aside. They could come later. He moved his focus to another woman and saw the same type of light. Then, he shifted to a man. The light was there, but not so clear. He kept moving his gaze, noticing that some had a steady light in the heart area and some had a steady light in the head, but most were faint and blurred. Manias nudged him and spoke in a low voice.

“There are two Buddhist monks on the edge of the crowd, to your right. Look at them.”

John shifted his head and focused on the two monks. One had a clear light in the area of the heart and the other had a very bright pinpoint of light at the top of the head.”

John kept moving his vision from one to the other and described what he saw to Manias.

“Excellent. Excellent,” Manias said. “That is good. Now we must go back and I will explain a bit more.”

John was disappointed and made one last sweep of the crowded market. He focused on a man who was arguing with one of the vendors, but could see no light. He whispered to Manias. “There is one there with no light. That big man, waving his arms and shouting.”

Manias looked where John indicated. “That is excellent,” he said. “Now we have a sample of all the states.”

Manias studied the man with deep interest and John waited impatiently for an explanation. Eventually, Manias spoke.

“We will go now and I will tell you what I saw.”

He put his hand on John’s arm and with a flurry of movement they were back in the office. John commented on how real it looked.

Manias smiled. "It is actually a reflection of my business office, like the market was reflection of a real market."

John was not surprised at that but was astonished at the reference to a business office, and queried it.

Manias gave a very broad smile. "Do you think that we find money growing on trees? If you have a body, you have to feed it and clothe it and look after it. I am an agent for a firm, and Gopas has a similar job. We pick jobs where we have no staff, so that we can come and go as we please."

"What about Nam Tso? How does he survive?"

Manias did not hide his amusement. Worldly questions seemed to have a humorous slant. "He has good support. In fact, he has a sponsor, one of his pupils. He owns the bungalow and provides for Lama Nam Tso. That is the advantage of wearing the robes. People help them, but we have to find a more practical method. Do you want to talk about that or do you want to know about the lights?"

John looked keenly at Manias. A little smile was on his lips. John was beginning to understand his style. He knew that Manias was gently chiding him.

"Of course," he answered. "I would really like to know about them."

Manias leaned back in his chair and John relaxed, waiting for the explanations. Manias spoke slowly, to make sure that John had time to follow.

"It is all very simple. The central unit of consciousness, that is, the soul enters into a body to gain experience. That would be fine but the unenlightened soul identifies with the physical body and even thinks that it is the body. The sole purpose of any guru is to break that bondage. In the beginning the light is clear enough, but by worldly influence and attachment the light becomes clouded by worldly thoughts."

"I see. That's why there are two types of lights, but what about the others?"

Manias cut him short. "We are coming to them. One thing at a time."

John waited while Manias considered the subject.

"First there is a clear light, in the heart, but not very bright. This should develop by spiritual teaching and right living, until it is a bright light. Unfortunately, worldly influence has the opposite effect and the light becomes imprisoned in a crystallized

thought form. A serious seeker breaks free from this, then like one of the monks has a pure heart light. He is then awakened.”

“What about the other monk?”

“That,” Manias said with emphasis, “is what we are after. The one with the light at the top of his head is enlightened, but he is not yet fully liberated. When that occurs the light is above the head, but there are many variations. It depends on the method of awakening but basically there is a development from a dim light to a brighter one and then a shift to the head center.”

John could not resist the question that came into his mind. “Can you see the light in people anywhere, like me?”

Manias smiled again. “Of course. So can Gopas.”

“And Nam Tso?” John added.

“Nam Tso can read you like a book. He could say where you have been. What you have done and a lot more, but he is only interested in awakening the light. When he finds someone who is awake, he tries to guide that person until illumination occurs. John deliberated on what Manias had said and asked another question.

“Why is he so interested in developing the light?”

“I should have made that clearer,” Manias replied. “There is a tendency to take a lot for granted. The thing is that the tiny star is the real self. That is the inner self, the true soul. We are so used to identifying with the body that we find it difficult to grasp that we are really beings of light. The light is the soul and that is actually the true self. The man with no light has no soul in that sense, and is probably from another world. The first thing we look for, with anyone, is the light, and a genuine teacher can always see it.

“I suppose that means that nobody can fool a real guru, is that right?” John asked.

“Correct,” Manias agreed. “A true guru knows what level you are at and what your intent is. Not many can attain that level. Many gurus are only teachers. You are very fortunate, because you have Lama Nam Tso.”

John nodded in comprehension and asked his final question. “What about that man without a light? I noticed that you studied him for a long time?”

“Yes. I did. He is from a lower world similar to some of the ones you have seen. He is not an evil demon, but sometimes they are. They usually have no conscience and no sense

of feeling. They stand out for their extreme selfishness and ruthless attitude. Fortunately, not many get through. The guardians of the human worlds keep them out, but you will meet some of them and you will know them by their colors. The next two lessons are very interesting, but we have done enough for now, and it is time for you to go.”

John stood up. By now, he was familiar with the routine and left Manias in his office for the comfort of his own bedroom. He lay back, pondering on the new events. They seemed less frightening than the events in the lower worlds. As Manias had indicated, this phase was more human. He felt disappointed that he could not share his experiences with anyone, but like the other incidents, it seemed wiser to say nothing. He sighed. It was true the path to enlightenment is a lonely path. Still, he did have his friends and his mother, and with that comforting thought, he fell asleep. The next morning John wondered if he could do the same thing with other people. He sat at the breakfast table watching his mother, when she turned her back towards him he tried the trick of looking through her, but could see nothing. He was still staring when his mother turned round.

“What are you staring at?” she asked. “Is something wrong?”

John fumbled for words. He would have to give explanation, and he decided on the usual ploy of giving a half-truth.

“It was just an attempt to see something. Someone said that we all have a soul light and that with practice we could see it.”

His mother laughed. “And how long have you been practicing?”

“Well, I have only recently heard of it, and I wondered if it were true.”

“It is true all right, but it takes a lot of practice. There is a book about it on the bookshelves in the lounge room, but it is not worth the effort. My teacher says, go for enlightenment and all the rest will follow. Why waste time on trivial psychic skills?”

John could not argue with that but the use of the word trivial worried him. He decided to ask Rajik. He knew about such things, although he had never mentioned that one. His mother looked at him intently.

“Are you sure everything is all right? She asked worriedly.

John felt embarrassed and offered another half-truth.

“It is the new course with Nam Tso,” he told her. “Some of it is very demanding.”

His mother looked relieved. “Is that all? What do you think? That enlightenment is an easy path.”

He relaxed at her remarks. He would have to remember that and searched in his mind for a convenient label.

“Well. I suppose there are spiritual tensions,” he said when he had found a phrase.

“That is an understatement.” His mother added, “and if you do not leave for the office now you will have business tensions as well.”

John laughed. It was always good to talk to his mother. She always understood. He kissed her on the cheek and went out, walking briskly to avoid being late. At the end of the workday, when the work demands had receded his mind went back to the question of whether seeing the light in people was trivial or not. He phoned Rajik immediately after his evening meal.

“Cone round,” he said. “There is something I want to ask you, and call for Eda, she usually comes in the evening.”

His mother waited until he had put the phone down then spoke, “Do want your coffee now, or will you wait for them?” she asked.

“I had better wait,” he said. “They will not be long.”

He went into the lounge room, thinking how fortunate he was to have friends he could talk to about these things. He was also pleased that the nighttime adventures were more understandable. Some of the demon confrontations had been a bit too strange. He sat down and called to the cat. “Come on Tiger. Have your bit of fun before the barbarians invade us.” The cat jumped on his lap and purred as he stroked it. Through the doorway, his mother watched. She was also pleased at these ordinary peaceful scenes. The peace did not last long. There was a loud knocking on the door and Rajik’s voice shouted, “Wake up Indra. Thou art a god.”

John and his mother laughed. Rajik was quoting from the story about Indra, when he entered into a pig and forgot he was a god.

“Very witty,” he said, as he opened the door “Are you implying that I am a pig?”

Rajik pretended to be serious. “I will have to meditate on that.”

John stood aside as Eda and Rajik came in. Eda put her arms round John and kissed him. "Take no notice of him. I do not think you are a pig. Just asleep," she added roguishly.

As they came inside, they waved to John's mother. Eda went up to her and they left the men to chat while they made the coffee.

"Well. What do you want to know?" Rajik asked.

He liked showing off his great knowledge of Vedanta and other Indian teachings and he listened while John explained.

"It's about the light. You know, the blue star was what I think you once called it. My mother has a book saying how to see it, but she says it is a futile skill. What do you think?"

Rajik brought both his hands together in a gesture of enthusiasm. He never missed the chance to play the role of a teacher, and his favorite subject was that of untangling the mysteries of mysticism. In words that were almost an echo of what Manias had said Rajik began to explain.

"The blue star is a tiny pinpoint of light that is an individual unit of consciousness. You might say that it is a spark of pure spirit, but the important thing is that you should see your own inner light. Seeing someone else's light is only a psychic gimmick. When you see your own light, you begin to become aware of your own spiritual identity. That is the real task."

John responded with his usual attempts to put his opponent on the defensive.

"And do you see this light?" he asked aggressively.

Rajik laughed. "There you go down the same old path. This is not a debate where the house votes on the best argument."

He stopped suddenly and became silent. John waited for a few moments and then pressed the question.

"Well, do you see it?"

Rajik became very serious and spoke slowly, picking his words carefully. "Many people who meditate see it. In the ashrams I have visited, they expect you to see it. The problem is that it is very subtle and only appears briefly. Many seekers who have reached that stage have difficulty."

John persisted with his question. “And you, what about you?”

Rajik looked squarely at John. “My answer will not mean anything to you. Either way, you have to find your own light. As for me, I do see it, but I have no control over it. It appears suddenly, when I am meditating, and then, goes. If I get a good meditation state, it is steady for a second. The important thing is that it indicates what stage you have reached. That is the beauty of Jnana Yoga. There are other lights and some sounds too, but they are meaningless unless you understand the framework. Our policy is to answer definite questions and otherwise say nothing, because it would be useless. Most people do not want to know. They prefer the so-called objective world of things and action.”

John was unable to make any answer by the entrance of Eda, with two cups of coffee.

“Here you are,” she said. “Never mind solving the mysteries of the universe. Come down to earth and be human for a minute.”

Behind her, John’s mother came in with two more cups and they all sat quietly, sipping their coffee. Rajik changed the conversation and raised a different question.

“Yes. Talking about coming down to earth reminds me. “All the local office people are trying to make up a cricket team, to challenge the plantation staff to a match. Do you know anything about it?”

John rocked his head from side to side and groaned. “Yes. I have heard about it. They are twisting my arm to play for the west plantation, and the eastern end hope to raise their own team. They say your lot can raise two teams, so there will be a series of matches and even a cup. I am not very interested.”

“Poor old chap,” Eda said with a flash of humor, “he’s getting past it.”

“No I am not,” John protested.

“That is OK then,” she retorted swiftly, “you can play.”

The rest of the evening was taken up with general conversation and John had no time to ponder on what Rajik had said until he was alone in his bedroom. When he had shut the door, he sat thinking about Rajik’s remarks. He felt dissatisfied at the thought of Rajik having an insight that he did not have. He had still not understood that Rajik’s approach did not aim at knowledge for its own sake but wanted it as an aid to a specific experience. Despite his unique experiences, John still thought that knowledge was power, and he did not understand that it was really the key to an expanded state of awareness. The

suggestion of inner changes had never occurred to him. Now, he was beginning to feel that he was missing out in a secret area of awareness that he had never suspected. He decided that he would ask Manias for further clarification. He did not like the idea that they had a secret agenda that would affect him and he was determined to find out what he was really supposed to achieve.

When he next met Manias, he asked Manias about it.

“What is the purpose of what we are doing?” he asked. “I am still not clear about it”

Manias leaned on the desk. John thought how weird it all was. With Gopas he was always conscious of being in another dimension, but here everything appeared so normal that it was hard to remember that he was in some type of reflection world, as if it were nothing more than a grand hologram where he was only acting out a fictitious role.

Manias spread out his hands, as if opening a book from which he was about to reveal the mysteries of life. “Gopas has told you many things but that was always below the level of the ego. The things we are doing now are only part of the transition stage. Gopas was supposed to have shown you the lights and the colors so that we could go on with the more subtle states of inner development. In the lower worlds, it was still a form of action, and in a way an exploration of an invisible outer world. We are moving into a more refined inner world of ideas and feelings. What you are learning now, about people, is part of what you must learn about yourself. Eventually you will see your own light, and from there, your progress will be rapid, because of all this experience. The others will progress more slowly.”

The last statement appeased John’s curiosity. He liked to think that he had the edge on his friends, even if he could not discuss it. He nodded his head vigorously, indicating that he understood.

“Good,” Manias said briskly. “Now let us go to our market place and I will show you another strange and mysterious phenomenon.”

He came round the desk to John and put one hand on his arm and they were away. They stood on one side of the busy market place, watching the people coming and going. John looked at the scene carefully, checking to see if it was exactly as before. He could see that it was not the same. The people were different and some of the stalls were not

selling the usual goods. It was all very natural and to all appearances was just a different market day. Manias kept his hand on John's arm and squeezed it gently.

"While I am touching you, you will be able to see. When I remove my hand, it will switch off. This time, stare at the solar plexus area and do not let your eyes wander to the side. Tell me what you see."

John did as Manias suggested and John described it.

"Ah," he said in surprise. "They are all surrounded with colors. Some are quite bright."

"Excellent. Now, try to remember what you see, so that when I explain you will understand. Can you see any lines in the colors?"

John stared for a few minutes and then answered. "Yes. Some have dark zigzag lines, and some have fuzzy wavy lines. One or two have dark dots and blobs in the colors and at the edge."

"That is fine. Have another good look and we will go back and I will explain the meaning of it."

John made an effort to get a strong impression, so that he would be able to understand what Manias told him.

"I think I have got it," he told Manias. "I will remember when you talk about it."

"Right. Then back we go."

Back in the office, John relaxed, elated by the unique experience and was eager to hear what Manias had to say about it.

Manias plunged straight into an explanation. "The colors indicate different states and qualities in the overall psyche. They indicate the physical health, the emotional condition and the mental state. The lines and dots indicate qualities and attitudes. Briefly, red is physical, orange is energy, yellow is the feelings, green is the higher emotion, the light blue is mental and the dark blue and violet are nearer the spiritual. As you saw, they are moving and changing all the time and all you can do is to get an impression of the dominant color. That indicates the level they are. The brighter and purer the colors are the better, and the darker and more clouded they are the worse it is. It takes time to see clearly but it is a useful tool and it is impossible for anyone to deceive you when you can read their color code easily."

“What about the lines and dots?” John asked.

“They are much more difficult and have a wide range of symbolism. It is a bit like chemistry, where the scientist looks through a spectroscope and can know what chemicals are there from the colors and the bars. It is a colored bar code and in time you will be able to read it without any difficulty.”

“Why is all this so important?” John wanted to know.

“There are only two real reasons.” Manias replied. “The first is first is to see who is ready to evolve. The other is to avoid wasting your time. The whole process rests on the principle of general and spiritual evolution. The Bodhisattva vow aims at helping all living beings, but we have a narrower aim within that approach. It is just one method amongst many.”

“I see,” John said. “And is that the end of this stage?”

Manias looked at his watch. That struck John as ludicrous when they were in a different timeframe. Manias noticed his puzzled look and clarified the situation. “Distance is unimportant in this dimension, but we have to consider the time it will be somewhere else. We have just enough time to go back to the market before they begin to close. Come, I will show you an easier method, which you could learn quite easily. He repeated the earlier routine and they were back on the edge of the market.

“This time we will walk amongst them. When we go, look into their eyes, but do not say anything.”

Manias led them into the market. He moved slowly, keeping pace with the moving mass of shoppers and sightseers. John drifted along with him, amazed at how real it all seemed. Manias stopped to look at the wares on a stall. John took the opportunity to put his hand on the wooden bench top. He pressed hard, astonished at how tangible and solid it seemed. The stallholder handed him a leather handbag, offering it at a bargain price. John took it, holding it firmly. He turned it over, examining it carefully. It felt and looked so solid that John had difficulty in remembering that they were not really in the physical dimension. He handed the bag back to the man and looked into his eyes. To his amazement, he did not see the eyes but only a color. It was a dull cloudy red. They moved on and John pretended to be looking at the goods for sale, but each time he looked into the eyes of the vendors. They all had a color. Some were a muddy brown color and

others were various tones of yellow. Many were orange, some very bright. A few were a dusky green, but most were in the orange and red end of the spectrum. When they had completed the circuit, and were back at the starting place, Manias squeezed John's arm as a signal that they were leaving. Almost at once, they were back in the office.

"What do you think of that?" Manias asked with unusual enthusiasm.

John was even more enthusiastic. "It is fabulous," he said. "I would like to learn to do that. I can see what you are aiming at. The color in the eyes would tell me the spiritual quality of a person, and I would know what level he is on."

Manias smiled in approval. "Yes, Gopas was right," he said, "I have a good pupil."

The remark reassured John. The quiet confidence of Manias was a big boost to his sense of inadequate knowledge. He felt that this had been a successful lesson.

Back in his bedroom, he reviewed the night's work. Seeing the aura had been easy to accept. Rajik had often said that some people could see the aura surrounding people. Until now, he had thought of it as a psychic phenomenon that had no special importance. Now, with the extra detail about the lines and the dots he could see more than ever that it was utterly impossible to deceive a genuine guru. Even so, he recalled that Rajik had referred to some of the skills as minor powers that would be a distraction from the main aim of enlightenment. Nevertheless, he was firmly determined to ask Manias to teach him how to see the color in the eyes. He was still thinking about it when he sat down for breakfast. His mother sat opposite and he could not help looking at her and trying to see if there was any color in her eyes.

"Now, what are you staring at?" his mother asked. "Have you been reading more books?"

John took her remark as an opportunity to discuss the subject. "Yes," he answered. "I have been reading about auras, and how they also show in the eyes."

He felt pleased at his clever response to her question, and wondered what she would say. He knew that she had read all the books on their crowded bookshelves and hoped that she would have something to say.

"You seem to be very attracted to seeing things," she commented. "Yesterday it was the little star. Now it is colors and auras. They are all very interesting, but psychic

phenomenon is not spiritual progress. In fact, it can be a distraction. You should ask Rajik, he knows about these things.”

John felt annoyed at the mention of asking Rajik. That is what she had said before. Ask Mr. Know all, he thought, but refrained from saying anything. Once again, it brought back his sense of inadequacy. He was having strange experiences and learning to do mysterious things, but from all accounts he was at risk of becoming stuck on the spiritual path and making no progress. Perhaps he should have chosen the same as Eda, and taken a direct path to enlightenment.

His mother noticed his moody silence. “Is anything wrong?” she asked.

John replied with some hesitation. “Not really,” he answered guardedly. “It is just that there seems to be many difficulties on the path and I do not seem to know much about it.”

His mother smiled. “No one knows much about it, especially in the beginning. You know, there are about twenty types of Yoga. One for every kind of temperament, and apart from that, there is Buddhism and the Shiva approach. None of the paths is easy. Some put the emphasis on knowledge, others say that devotion is enough, but they all take time. I am sure Lama Nam Tso is taking you on a good path, but you never talk about it. Either way, it usually takes years. After all, I started to search seriously when your father went home. You are nearly forty so that is how long I have been searching, and I have not completed it yet. My guru says that most only attain the final insight at the time of death. So, you have plenty of time.”

John remained silent. The reminder of his age made him feel more than ever that he was a late starter. His mother continued talking.

“I think you should get married and settle down. You still have a life to live and unless you want to be a shaman or a priest you may as well get married.”

“That sounds all right, but Rajik has never found anyone and he has decided that he will have to stay single.”

“I know. Poor Rajik has mentioned it many times, but it is not the same for you. You have Eda, but if you wait too long it might be too late. You should think about it.”

“I am thinking about it, right now. Do you think she would say yes?”

His mother laughed. “Try it and see. I am not going to reveal confidential secrets.”

“But I am quite few years older than her. Do you think it would work?”

His mother stood up. “It is time you went off to work. Just think about it. She is a good girl, and she is very spiritually minded and I am sure your lama has not said you can not marry.”

“Right,” John said, and went out of the house whistling as he walked down the garden path.

CHAPTER 8 - DARK ALLEYS OF DESIRE

At his next session with Manias John was still full of enthusiasm and felt pleased that so far, there had been no tests. He sat facing Manias, waiting to hear what interesting project he would have. When Manias spoke his hopes of an interesting experience faded.

“What you saw in the market place was only an indication of how different people are on different levels. Not every flower opens at the same time, and some are only buds. The important thing for you is to realize what level you are experiencing. In the lower worlds, you had to master your fears and the temptation to exploit your power. Now, you must master your desires. You will only do this by facing temptations that offer to gratify your personal desires. You may not be aware of them unless there is an opportunity for gratification. This testing period usually lasts for years, and some never get past this state. In fact, they choose to stay on that level.

“How is that?” John asked.

Manias smiled, but his face was serious. “You will understand soon enough, but I expect you to work through this stage fairly well. Gopas told me how well you did on a lower level, and I think you will do well now.”

John felt frustrated at the elusive attitude of Manias. He did not like the wait and see approach, but had to accept what Manias decided.

“Let us go,” Manias said. “I will take you there and from then on you will automatically go there. You will continue to do that until you overcome it.”

John had no time to ask any questions. Manias performed the familiar ritual of placing a hand on his arm and with a swift movement they were on the edge of a park, with people in the distance.

“Here we are,” Manias said in a somber voice. “From now on you are on your own.”

John felt a sudden pang of anxiety at the seriousness of Manias, but he had no time to ponder on it. A voice behind him attracted his attention. He turned round to see a young woman, very scantily dressed, in clothes that were more revealing than practical.

“Hullo stranger,” she said in a lilting voice.

The words of Manias flashed through John's mind, 'you will understand soon enough,' and John realized that this was it. Here was temptation personified. Like a sailor responding to the lure of a sire, John responded to the greeting.

"Hullo," he said, and was about to ask where he was when she distracted him again. Coming close, she took him by the hand and led him towards the group in the distance. As they drew nearer, John was astonished to see that all the people, sitting in groups, were in various states of undress. Not only were the women topless, many wore nothing at all. The young woman led John closer and he could see pairs of lovers indulging in amorous activities. On the edge of the groups, half in the bushes, others lay entwined in every type of erotic embrace imaginable. Instinctively John stopped, unsure whether he wanted to go any further. His young female partner pressed closer to him.

"Would you like to join in?" she said suggestively.

John took half a step back. The young woman spoke again. "You do not have to join in. We can amuse ourselves here."

He still hung back. He could feel the pressure of the girl's hand and the warmth of her body against his. He was amazed at how real it all seemed, and he remembered that he had felt the same astonishment in the other worlds. He recalled something someone had said, that all the worlds are an illusion, but they seemed real when an individual was in any of them. Rajik had often said that even the physical world was an illusion. His silence indicated to his new companion that he was not too eager to enjoy the delights of desire. With a sudden movement, she left him. He was not alone for long. Another lightly clad young woman approached him. He looked at her warily and to his amazement recognized her. It was Rona, the young woman he had met at the New Year celebrations. He had not seen her since she had transferred to the other office, and he had forgotten about her. She stopped before him. Her dress was as scanty as the woman who had just left him was. The material of her dress was so flimsy that John could see right through it. The old feelings for Rona returned with a new force. His heart pounded as his blood pressure shot up. He could feel the blood rushing to his sexual center and tried to move away. His legs refused to obey his intent and his feet seemed glued to the ground. He felt a lustful mist of craving descend on him, as Rona stood close to him. He watched her lips move, and as if in a dream, he heard her voice.

“Would you like to have your way with me?” she asked in a sultry cajoling whisper.

The last vestige of restraint departed from John’s mind. He reached out and pulled her towards him. He felt that her body was merging with his and they were melting into one amorphous mass of amorous anticipation. As he held her, one tiny flicker of rational thought struggled to warn him. With an effort, he said. “Not now. Maybe later.”

“I shall be waiting,” she replied, and reluctantly let him go.

With a further effort, he focused on his bedroom and with the familiar rush of movement found himself sitting upright in his bed. Although it was a cool night, he felt hot and realized that he was perspiring and that his heart beat was very rapid. He took a few deep breaths, exhaling slowly and trying to calm down. His thoughts were racing. He lay back, pulling the bedclothes up to his chin and tried to rationalize on the events. He spoke aloud, as if to reinforce his conclusions.

“This is worse than the lower worlds,” he muttered.

He thought of the lower worlds. Some of the difficulties were terrifying but he had always resisted by means of his natural aggression as well as the fear that helped him to resist. With this new test, there were no such reactions and he knew that some latent impulse in him eagerly wanted to succumb. He could see why some seekers never got past his state, and why some actually chose it. He contemplated the thought of continual sexual pleasures with no risk of scandal or condemnation in the outside world. It was certainly attractive. He had deeply desired Rona, and now was his chance to fulfill that desire, and in the outer world, he would still have Eda. The thought confused him and he pulled the bedclothes over his head as if to shut out the thoughts.

In the morning, after a fitful sleep, he got out of bed and went to the window. Everything looked so peaceful and normal. His mother was already up and had let Tiger out. John could see him sitting at the end of the veranda, washing himself as he enjoyed the morning sunshine. His mother’s voice echoed through the bedroom door.

“Come along dear, or you will be late.”

He sighed heavily. Everything seemed too peaceful and normal, but he knew that there was nothing normal about it, and as for peace, he felt there was only an invisible fog of conflict that was seeping into every corner of his mind. At the breakfast table, his mother steered the conversation to the question of settling down with Eda.

“Do not be late from the office,” she said, “Eda is coming early, to have an evening meal with us. It will give you a chance to discuss things with Eda.”

He mumbled an agreement, wondering what he could possibly discuss. Two days earlier, it had seemed a wonderful thought that he might marry Eda and pursue his spiritual quest alongside hers. What could he possibly say? To avoid any more discussion he stood up and straightened his jacket.

“I will have to rush,” he told his mother. “We have a big day today.”

On the walk to the office, he kicked at the loose stones in frustration and anger. It all seemed so stupid. Here was a chance to have his cake and eat it, and no one would ever know. No doubt Nam Tso, and Manias would go out of his life, and so what? After all, life was for living, and here was an opportunity to drink from life’s cup before it ran dry. Yet, something else kept bugging him. The favorite clichés of Rajik kept coming into his mind. There is no gain without a loss, and, there is no free ride, everything has a price, and so on. He groaned at the conflict and confusion in his mind and concluded that the best thing he could do was to avoid the inner world of desire.

“I will meditate before I go to bed,” he said to a crow that was sitting on a gatepost.

“Caw,” was the crow’s reply, and John had an uneasy impression that somehow he had done all this before. He looked at the crow. Crows can live to be ninety, he thought, and wondered if such age conferred any wisdom. At the office entrance, a voice called out to him. He turned round to see that it was Rona.

“Hullo,” she said, coming up to him. “I thought you had gone off to Mars. Every time I came to this office, you were somewhere else. How are things going?”

John shuddered at the question and looked at her with curiosity. She was just as attractive as before, and was so completely feminine that it was difficult to treat her just as a colleague. He avoided any serious answer and shrugged his shoulders.

“Oh, you know, just the same old thing, nothing special.”

Rona laughed. “You should get out more, and let your hair down a bit.”

John forced a smile. This was too much. He felt that fate was twisting the knife and watching him squirm. The appearance of the manager, with a sheaf of papers saved John from answering, and the instructions for him and for Rona put an end to the encounter. He was relieved to see that she went off in a different direction.

“I will see you later,” she said, as the manager led her away to carry out his orders.

As he was leaving the office building at the end of the day Rona came up, wheeling her bicycle.

“How nice,’ she said, “ knight in shining armor to escort me home. I will walk with you to my turn off.”

As they walked along, Rona made another strange remark. “Funny that I should bump into you today. I dreamt about you last night. John clenched his teeth, waiting for some awkward revelation.

“I cannot remember what it was about, but it must have been good, because I woke up feeling pleased.”

Her comment made him wonder what she would say if she really knew, but he was so intrigued at the thought of her having a dream that he ignored his doubts and made a non-committal remark.

Rona chatted on, mentioning that she had a new boy friend. “He is a bit stuffy,” she confided to John, “but you know how it is. We have to choose within our own religion. It is a pity, but women’s lib has not reached our corner of the worlds. We are still in the dark ages.”

John avoided any comment. He agreed with her, but wiser to avoid the subjects.

“I have a new girl friend,” he told her. “She is very interested in Buddhism and my mother likes her.”

“Well, there you have it,” she commented. “If the mums and dads think it is Ok then you have permission to live.”

John detected a note of resentment in her voice but was again careful to avoid any comment.

“Here is your turn off,” he said, as they reached the corner.

As she jumped onto the saddle, she made one last remark.

“It was really nice seeing you, “ she told him. “I will try and have another nice dream about you.”

John hissed as he drew a breath sharply. This was getting too much.

“I will be seeing you,” she said, as she rode off, then shuddered as he realized what she was saying.

The thought made him wonder what would happen if two people knew that, and were meeting on an inner dimension. The whole thing seemed so weird that he pushed it out of his mind and decided that he would have to meditate before I go to bed. He concluded that somehow he must work round all this.

In the house, his mother was preparing the meal.

“Eda is coming straight here from her new job. That way you will have plenty of time together.”

Yesterday, he would have smiled at the remark, now he frowned. He could see his mother was already making a wedding cake. In her mind, the bells were already ringing and she no doubt had a list of guests ready to send out invitations. He went into the bedroom to avoid any discussion. He sat down and mentally reviewed the developments. In the beginning, he had felt directionless and isolated, and female company eluded him. It was ironic that now that he had a clear sense of direction, and had finally found a mature young woman who liked him, he was still dissatisfied. On the face of it, everything was fine, but the inner worlds were beginning to overlap a bit too much on the present domestic scene. There was no one with whom he could discuss it. Manias had virtually said that he would see John when, and if, he got through the present stage. Nam Tso would not be any help. All he would get would be the usual platitudes, such as, ‘that is something for you to ponder on.’ Obviously, he could not discuss things with his mother, and Rajik would be no help whatsoever. His advice was always the same. You have to renounce and re-form, he was fond of saying. Unless you re-form it is a waste of time. You have to change your ways, or nothing will change. John could see that Manias was right, he was on his own. There was only one person who could resolve this madness, and that was himself.

A knock on the door broke into his thoughts. “Eda is here now,” his mother called out. “Hurry up.”

He took a quick look in the mirror, straightened his hair, and came out of the bedroom just as Eda entered at the front door. With eager affection, she went up to John and put her arms round him. As he responded, he felt a twinge of guilt as he remembered the events of the previous night. Although he had not accepted the offer of promiscuous pleasure, he had certainly thought about them. The demonstration of her genuine love

caused John to reflect on the difference between the different situations. I suppose one is love and the other is lust he thought as he started to philosophize. Eda waved a hand in front of his face.

“Hullo,” she said, pretending to call out. “I am here, still on the planet.”

John mentally shook himself and apologized to her.

“Sorry. I was pondering on my assignment,” he said.

“What assignment?” she wanted to know.

“You know, Nam Tso and all that. Go home and ponder on this.” He stopped speaking, realizing that Eda would ask him what Nam Tso had said. He always attributed any advice to his lama. After all, he could hardly talk about an invisible guru in another dimension. He vaguely thought that things were becoming too complicated and that the best policy was silence. His mother helped him to escape from any further questions. “Come along,” she called, “or the food will go cold.”

During the meal, John observed his thoughts as he looked at Eda. He caught himself comparing her with the voluptuous promise of a nighttime escapade with Rona. Although Rona had not made any encouraging move, he had sensed her physical appeal. He was beginning to see that her sensuality only had a thin veil of conventional social taboos. Behind the polite social conventions was a woman who reveled in the joys of a healthy body.

“What does Nam Tso tell you?” Eda asked conversationally.

John pretended to have a mouth full of food and searched for a simple answer.

“Only the usual stuff,” he said eventually. “You know; Buddhist philosophy, and all that. I find it a bit too abstract at times.”

His mother took up the conversation. “I agree,” she said. “I like to have a clear aim, with something to focus on. You know what they say, you get what you focus on, but abstract philosophy does not offer any scope for that.”

Eda joined in the discussion and John leaned back, thinking of what his mother had said. ‘You get what you focus on.’ That summed up the essence of the whole conflict. After only one contact with Rona, he was beginning to focus on attractions of a secret affair with her. His mother interrupted his thoughts.

“You are not eating,” she chided him. I made these special dishes just for you. I thought they were your favorite.” ”I’m sorry,” John said to her. “It is my fault, I had a late lunch and I think I ate too much.”

That was a lie, because he had not eaten any lunch. He was suffering from the same malaise. It was anxiety and desire in conflict with rational thinking. In the odd moments of clear thinking, it was all very simple. All he had to do was to reject the mad scenario. After all, no one was writing the script but him. He did not have to succumb to his sexual fantasies. Yet, when he thought about it the situation was more than a fantasy. As Rajik had tried to explain, all the lokas are an illusion, but they seem real when anyone is in them. He decided that he would ask Rajik to explain more about them, perhaps that would give him a clue as to how he could escape from this fantasy that was now becoming very real. His mother stood up and began collecting the dishes.

“I will give you hand,” Eda said as she took her plate away.

“No dear,” John’s mother said. “You look after John. Try to get him to talk about something sensible.”

She gave John a meaningful look as she said that. John winced. He got the message loud and clear. She was hinting that he should make a practical move towards marrying Eda. He stood up and Eda took his arm and led him into the lounge.

“Your mum is right,” Eda commented. “Something is bugging you, and I want to know what it is.”

John searched through his possible list of excuses. Whatever he said would be a lie, but there was no way that he could explain that he was thinking of having an out of the body nighttime adventure in the land of fantasy. What a pity, “he thought, “It would be different if it were Eda.” In that case, he could blend his invisible life with his practical life. Despite his confusion, a smile flickered across his face as he imagined a headline. The exciting adventures of erotic Eda.

“What are you smirking at?” Eda asked. “I just do not understand you. One minute you are moody and the next thing you are grinning at some secret joke.”

John looked at her. She was lovely. He must be mad to think of a fantasy woman. With a sudden impulse, he pulled her towards him. She responded with a warm embrace.

“You know what my mother is doing,” he said to her.

“I am not in on it. What is she doing?” Eda replied.

“She’s pushing us together. She thinks you would make a nice daughter in law.”

“Wow. Well that is jumping in at the deep end. Is this a formal proposition?”

John mentally retreated. “No, not really, I mean, well, I don’t know what I mean.”

“Good,” Eda said firmly. “That is what I like, a confused man. That way I can begin to sort him out. Anyway, I think your mum would make a nice mother in law.”

John looked past her, towards his mother in the kitchen. “My mother is dying to know what we are talking about,” he whispered.

“In that case I will go and tell her, then between us we can knock some sense into you, like she said. Now sit back and have a long ride. We will do the driving.”

John smiled at her assertiveness but as soon as she had gone, he began to doubt the wisdom of becoming more involved with Eda. As he wondered what the next remark would be, the phone rang. His mother answered it. “It is Rajik,” she called out to John. “He wants to know if he can come round.”

“Of course he can,” Eda interrupted. “The men can talk men’s business while we talk women’s business.”

John thought that sounded ominous. No doubt, they were plotting to complete their conspiracy of entangling him in matrimonial bondage.

“Yes,” he called back, and thought how helpful it might be to know a bit more about the invisible worlds.

When Rajik arrived they sat in the lounge room, drinking the hot coffee, while Eda and his mother got on with their women’s business behind the closed kitchen door.

“I am glad you came,” John said when they were sitting down. “I want to know more about the lokas. I am still not clear on parts of it.

“OK” Rajik replied. “Fire away, and all will be revealed.”

John smiled but secretly thought that he would not be revealing too much.

“You said there were different levels,” he said to Rajik, “and the outer world is only one of them. What exactly is the next level?”

Rajik shook his head slowly. “I have explained it before. I will start again, using the Sanskrit names. This world is Bhuloka, and the dominant theme is action. The next is Bhuvārloka, and the emphasis there is on desire. All the lokas relate to one of the

different centers, or chakras. The first one is at the base of the spine and it is the center of consciousness for action in the physical world. The second center is the center for sexual desire. Most people only live in these lowest two centers. If you look at the world, you can see that the main interest is sex and action, such as sport. That is the healthy action.”

“What is unhealthy action?” John asked.

“It is war,” Rajik told him. “So you see if there is no discipline we get uncontrolled sex and violence. What we have to do is to transcend the lowest two levels and move up. The third level is related psychic phenomena and other similar things. We have to transcend those three to make any real start. There is no progress until we do that. The others are on a higher level, leading to the spiritual realms, but there is not much use in worrying about them until we have mastered the physical level. Does that make it clear.”

“Yes.” John affirmed. “I have got it much clearer now, but how do we get past the lower levels?”

“All the scriptures say the same thing. They tell us to renounce attachment and renounce desire. It sounds simple but it is very difficult.”

”Well, how did you tackle it?” John asked.

Rajik gave cynical grunt. “In my case it was not too difficult. There was not much to renounce, and as for desire, well, it takes two to tango, so they say. In the absence of a partner, I only had to renounce something that I did not have. In effect there was nothing to give up, so all I had to do was to apply some rational psychology and work my way past it.”

A surge of compassion welled up inside John. He had never given much thought to how Rajik felt about these things. Once or twice, he had spoken of love, as if it were an abstract concept, and now John could see that for Rajik it was like that.

“So I suppose meditation is the big stepping stone to casting out desire and all that,” John added.

“More or less,” Rajik agreed, “especially Buddhism, but they do not talk about the lokas, or the chakras. Their aim is the same, but whatever path you choose you have to be something of a superman to get very far. According to the gurus, the big problem is identification. We identify with the body so we act as bodies.”

John gave a short laugh. "Yes. I can see it well enough. I understand the theory, but putting it into practice seems the real problem."

Rajik nodded in agreement. "That is why some people take refuge in a monastery, but even then they have problems."

The kitchen door opened and Eda came out smiling. "Have you solved your business?" she asked.

"More or less," John said, and carefully refrained from asking if Eda and his mother had settled their business.

"Good," Eda went on. "In that case you two gallant knights can see me home."

In his bedroom, before he went to bed, John sat on the bed and crossed his legs in a meditation position. He thought of what his mother had said. 'You get what you focus on,' they all seemed to say that. He did what Lama Nam Tso had recommended. He said, 'Concentrate on the point between the eyebrows and focus on the Buddha within.' That always calmed his mind but so far, it had not led to any special insight. As he meditated, his troubled thoughts subsided and he began to see the temptations as meaningless fantasies. After half an hour, he felt relieved of his wayward thoughts. When he felt that he had managed to cast out the remnants of his desires he got into bed and fell asleep. Then, despite his efforts, he found himself on the edge of the park, looking for Rona. Somehow, it seemed quite natural that he should be looking for her, and as if in answer to his unresolved desires she appeared and greeted him eagerly.

"Let us go to my house," she said and led him out of the park to a cluster of stone cottages. Turning into a side alley, she led him down a dark lane. In the lane were other low built cottages, many with their doors and windows open so that he could see inside. In all of them male and female couples were in various states of amorous abandonment. Yet, it did not seem at all imprudent. Rona stopped before a low doorway and led him inside. The only furniture in the room was a chair and a bed. Rona sat on the edge of the bed, and slipped her brief dress off and smiled at him with eager encouragement. In the back of his mind, a last flicker of conscience caused him to hesitate. Rona noticed his reluctance, and pulled her dress on and stood up.

"Come," she said. "I want you to meet someone."

John followed her out of the cottage and they went through the labyrinth of alleyways until they came to an open space, before a larger house. It reminded John of one his encounters in the lower worlds where he had met one of the lords. He was not surprised when Rona said, "This is the lord of this land." A tall figure appeared in the doorway of the house and descended the steps.

"This is the lord of pleasure," she told him. "Listen to what he has to say."

John looked at him with interest. He had the appearance of the Greek god Adonis and was incredibly handsome. Rona gazed at him with frank infatuation. The lord spoke and John listened to an explanation of why he should not reject the joys of his world.

"All is one," he said, quoting a Buddhist aphorism. "All things were made by God," and added, eternity is a long time. There is no need to go anywhere. You are in God's creation now. Why do you search when you can enjoy divine pleasure with celestial maidens? Rest in my world, for my world is permanent pleasure and this is a heaven world."

John had no words to argue with such a statement and did not resist when Rona led him back towards his little room. Yet, whispers of doubt crept into his mind and he was reluctant to go inside the cottage. Shouts of pleasure and laughter echoed from the adjacent buildings, but the lack of lighting and the low structure of the buildings gave an eerie ominous impression. He wanted to get away and thought of the first advice Nam Tso had given him. 'Think of your bedroom, or think of someone you love.' He focused on Eda and with a rapid movement, he found himself floating over the park and leaving the land of erotica far behind.

In his bedroom, he tried to review the details. It was hard to understand what was happening. He had felt so sure that his meditation had worked and contemplated on what more he could have done. He recalled the words of one of the teachers at the Christian school. He was always quoting fragments of the teaching. He remembered it clearly. The teacher had said that Jesus recommended 'when you have cleaned the house invite the Holy Spirit in, otherwise the demons will return with all their friends/' He had been reminded of it before, in the lower worlds. This time he realized that he had to reaffirm that and retain it. He sat up in a meditation position and went through his list of affirmations.

“ I will do that every day,” to the empty room, and went back to sleep.”

In the morning, he went to work early and as he approached the building, he saw the familiar figure of Rona, on her bicycle. He paused, then went on, determined to act normally. To his amazement, she rode past him and openly ignored him. Even in the building, when she had to give him some papers, she was terse and unfriendly. When she had gone, he brooded on the strangeness of the situation. It was almost as if she knew what had happened. Despite his curiosity he knew that he could never ask her, and at the end of the day he was relieved to be told that she would be going back to her own office. As he walked home, John thought of Manias. He had no way of knowing whether he had passed the test or not and concluded that he would only know by whatever happened in his nighttime experience. When he walked into the house, his mother greeted him and told him that Eda had just phoned.

“She wants you to phone back,” she said.

John picked up the phone and called Eda. Before he could say anything, she launched into an account of a dream she had in the night.

“I had the strangest dream about you,” she said. “There was a woman and you were running away from her, but something was holding you back. You called my name and I came to help, then you flew away. What do you think it means?”

John pretended to be mystified. “Some dreams are very symbolic,” he said, “ and they do not mean anything to us. It was probably some sort of anxiety dream.”

He changed the subject, asking what his mother had said.

“That is classified information,” Eda said with a laugh. “All you have to do is to be a good boy and do what your mother tells you.”

John smiled at the unwitting double meaning. He thought she was right on one point but said nothing.

At bedtime, he meditated again and focused on filling his mind with his love and faith as well as making an extra effort to renounce his old feelings. He went to sleep feeling better and woke up to find that the night had passed in normal sleep and there had been no events of any kind. He was pleased at that as it gave him time to consider what any deeper commitment might mean. The incident had made him reconsider what his training with Manias involved. He had no idea whether he could opt out of the program he was

on, as he had never considered that before. Although Rajik often said that the knowledge path was one of the most difficult, it had one great advantage. With knowledge, a seeker was better able to follow the old advice and look before leaping. In the method he had blindly accepted, he had virtually jumped in at the deep end without having one swimming lesson. He might as well as gone off to Africa and become an apprentice to a witch doctor. He reviewed everything he had done with Gopas. He had wanted power and he had attained power, then, he had decided that it was not enough and chosen to go on. Rajik often said that it was a journey of 'Neti, Neti', or not this, not that. In other words, it was trial and error. As far as he could see, there were only four options. There was blind belief, slow knowledge, direct experience or meditation aimed at a slow safe growth. Alternatively, he could throw it all out of the window and live for the moment and chase temporary pleasures, which most people seemed to do. In the end, he concluded that he had no choice and that he could not do much about it. In any case, another two nights had passed without any sign of Manias.

At the weekend, he avoided going to the Saturday meeting. Four nights had gone by and he had done nothing but sleep soundly. It had never occurred to him that he would miss his nightly adventures. In the past, almost every night had some experience even though it was often brief. There had been long instruction lessons with Gopas and repeated attempts to apply the principles Gopas discussed. He knew that he had achieved some unusual skills and had often practiced steering circumstances with harmless events that were safe. There was no doubt about it; his secret life and his even more secret powers had made his life more interesting. He decided that despite the difficulties he must go on. With that decision, he hoped that he might continue with Manias, but on the Sunday morning, he awakened with no recollection of any contact. In disappointment, he refused to go to his Sunday discussion with Nam Tso. He realized that he could ask the lama what was happening but he still felt a sense of guilt that he had contemplated rejecting him, and Manias, for an extended pleasure trip down fantasy lane.

On the Monday and the Tuesday, there was still no sign of Manias. In desperation, he decided that he would go to Nam Tso at the next weekend and ask him. His change of attitude must have pressed some type of release button, for that night, he found himself

once again face to face with Manias. John refrained from asking any questions and waited for an explanation. Manias looked very serious.

“You barely succeeded,” he informed John. “We waited to see if you had a relapse. Nam Tso contacted me when you did not go there. He thought you might be giving up everything you have achieved.”

John nodded. “I did think of that,” he said. “The temptation was so strong.”

“Yes, it usually is. It is no victory to win a little battle. I would have waited another week, to see if you did crack, but Nam Tso seems to think a lot of you.”

The last remark helped John to regain some of his composure, and he waited for Manias to continue. Some of his old arrogance had gone with his near failure and he realized that the books were right and that a seeker could slip back, even when he was almost at the end of the journey.

“How much more is there to do?” he asked, as he thought about it.

Manias leaned on his desk and gave John a hard look. “You have only just started on the second half and you are looking for the end. You should put all your effort into the immediate stage. That way there is less risk of failure, but I will tell you. It might help.”

John waited while Manias considered the situation. Eventually he began to explain.

“In the Buddhist framework there are the ten directions of space. They have six worlds and four heavens and all you have done so far is to work through the six worlds. The earth world and the sense pleasure world is part of the earth world, and there is the continual risk of slipping back. It is important that you weed out any last cravings or you will run into difficulties.”

“I see,” John said despondently.

Manias continued. “The first heaven is really a false heaven and we find it better to split it into two levels. The first is psychic and involves the minor powers, which you will have to avoid. The other is more emotional, or perhaps we might say, devotional. Many think they have completed the journey when they reach that stage, and it is very hard to renounce it and go on. So you see, every step up involves a battle, which you must win.”

He paused, looking even more serious. “The problem is that you have not actually won this last battle. You remember the challenge in the lower worlds, where you had to reject the lord face to face. You have not done that and some of these lords do not like

any challenge. There is nothing for it but to face him and make it clear that you are not staying down there. I must warn you that he is very skilled at using your own weaknesses to tempt you. I will give you more instruction tomorrow night and then you are again on your own. Do you understand?"

"Yes. I understand now. It is like the others but more human."

"Exactly," Manias said. "That is it in a nutshell."

All during the next day, John tried to clarify his attitude. He found it very difficult to understand his own feelings and thoughts. "The whole thing is too subjective," he kept saying. "There is nothing I can nail down."

By nighttime, he felt ready and went to bed early so that he could meditate for a longer period. Finally, he went to bed and drifted off to sleep. This time he was in the park with all its lurid attractions. He was not on the edge, as he was before, but right in the center of the different groups. It was impossible to ignore them. Whichever way he looked he saw the same provocative scenes, with invitations to join. Beyond them, he saw the lord of pleasure watching him. This time he had a companion. It was a beautifully sensual female counterpart of the male figure. John fleetingly thought that this was Venus herself and watched in hypnotic fascination as she came towards him. This is the test, he thought, and tried to strengthen his mind against her obvious charms. When she reached his side, he felt overwhelmed with a violent desire. He searched in his mind for a lifeline and recalled the advice to think of something else. Rajik always quoted Raja Yoga. Think of the opposite.' What, he thought, is the opposite? The only thing he could think of was Eda, and with the realization that if he lost this battle, he would probably lose Eda, he made a great effort and shouting aloud, said "No."

The assertion echoed through all his being and the female temptress shuddered and moved away. John grasped the opportunity and in a hissing voice repeated, "No, no, no."

His manner was so aggressive that the figure moved further away. John decided that he might be able to break the spell and leave. He focused hard on his home, and the bedroom. Suddenly he was there, with a sense of achievement. This time he was sure he had done it.

The next night Manias confirmed that he had indeed broken the spell. “There is still much to be done,” he warned John, “and you must not become complacent. You could slip back anytime.”

With that reassurance, John returned to his routine of attending the Saturday meeting and having a private interview with Nam Tso on the Sunday. Nam Tso repeated much of what Manias had said and added an extra warning.

“It is important that you pass through this next stage,” he told John, “otherwise we cannot take you to the real stepping stone to the higher worlds.”

John was intrigued but felt that it would be impolite to ask questions and left it at that. “Thank you,” he said as he left, and bowed to Nam Tso with genuine gratitude that he was still willing to act as his mentor.

Outside, he decided to walk the long way back to his bungalow. The weather was beautiful, and he wanted extra time to clarify his thoughts. The way led past the church, built by the earlier British residents. As he drew nearer, he could see people standing outside, chatting in groups after the morning service. When he was almost level with them, he saw that in the nearest group was someone he had certainly not expected to see. It was Rona. John looked round, thinking that he could go round the group and avoid her, but the road was too narrow. Rona saw him, and to his surprise spoke pleasantly.

“Hullo John,” she said. “Come and meet my boy friend.”

John went up, and Rona introduced him. He felt confused. He had never suspected that Rona belonged to the local church. He had assumed that she had a different religion. After a few minutes of conversation, he excused himself and went on, trying to make sense of things. He could see that he had jumped to a conclusion, when he first met Rona, and the ending of his friendship was a misunderstanding. Well, he thought, right or wrong it is too late, and in any case, the temptation would have been the same. He had chosen his path now, and the sensible course seemed to be that he stayed on it.

CHAPTER 9 – THE WORLD OF THE ANCESTORS

Now that he had recovered from the shock of failing to control his desire nature, John was wary when Manias informed him that he had another test to face. He was beginning to see that his journey through the hidden worlds was like the voyages of Ulysses. In that saga Ulysses had to find his way back home and at each island he met with difficulties and temptations. In his own case, he was not actually wandering, because he had a guide, but the difficulties and temptations were real enough. No doubt, the ancient Greek mystery schools dealt with the same theme of a lost soul trying to find its way back to the source. There were many questions that John would like to ask Manias, but he knew from experience what he would say. He would know when he reached the right level, and all he had to do was to concentrate on what he was doing in the present stage. Gopas had been the same. He said that knowing about anything, and understanding it were one thing, but mastering it was the difficult part.

After a period of silence Manias spoke. “All these tests are part of the process of taming the ego. It is impossible to awaken while the ego is dominant. You will understand this better when you have crossed the bridge. In the meantime, you must make more effort. Whatever part you have not mastered, you will eventually have to face it sometime. Therefore, you must do your utmost to overcome the problems as you meet them.”

He paused and looked at John for a sign that he understood. John wanted to ask what Manias meant by crossing the bridge, but refrained. He nodded in acknowledgement of what Manias had said and waited for him to continue.

“The first stage of this section is to avoid the temptation to acquire psychic powers. You have heard the advice to avoid wondrous sights and ignore voices. This may sound simple but the danger is, as the saying goes, that ‘curiosity killed the cat.’

John tried to imagine what Manias meant and waited for further explanation, but Manias said nothing and stood up, as an indication that they were about to leave. With the simple ritual of touching John, the scene changed and they were again in a park. John

looked round anxiously. He was beginning to see a park as a dangerous place where new dramas occurred.

“Here we are,” said Manias, and immediately departed.

This is it, John thought, and as he stood there, wondering what would happen he heard a voice. “Hullo John,” it said.

John looked around and the voice spoke again, calling his name. The sound came from a clump of bushes and John instinctively took a step towards it. Who is it? John thought and looked in the direction of the voice. The voice called again, with more insistence. “John.”

There was a note of urgency in the voice and John walked towards it. Invisible to John Manias was watching. He shook his head in silent remonstrance. John had failed the regular advice to ignore voices. The voice continued, calling his name. Unable to see anyone John turned to go away. Immediately the voice called out. “Don’t go. Do not do it.

The voice was insistent, and cajoling. “Listen to me, and I will tell you many things.”

John went right up to the bushes but could not see anyone. This is stupid, he thought, and looked round for Manias. He could not see him and after a few minutes, John decided that he would go home. He focused on his bedroom and with a quick movement found himself sitting up in bed. He reviewed the night’s events. As far as he could see the whole exercise was a waste of time and he lay down to go to sleep. As he lay down, he heard the voice calling.

John.” He listened, trying to decide where the voice was coming from. “Eda will bring you a present tomorrow,” it said, and then there was silence. He fell asleep and in the morning recalled the words saying that Eda would bring him a present. I will wait and see, he thought and all during the day, he kept wondering what the present would be. When he returned home, after the day at the office, he found a parcel waiting for him.

“A courier brought it,” his mother told him.

“Who is it from?” he asked.

“No idea,” his mother replied. “The courier did not say.” John took a pair of scissors from the kitchen drawer, eager to see what it was. He felt sure

that it was from Eda but wanted to see what it was. John unpacked the contents and felt inside. There was something soft and fluffy. He pulled it out.

“Oh,” he said in surprise. “It is a tiger.”

John looked at it. The tiger was in a lying position and was over twelve inches long. Tied on with pink ribbon round its neck, was a card. John took it off and read it aloud to his mother.

‘Hullo tiger man, I thought this would look nice on your bed’ and in brackets it said, ‘I thought this would be better than your teddy bear.’

“I haven’t got a teddy bear,” he snorted indignantly.

His mother laughed. “She knows that. Go and put it on your bed.”

John went into the bedroom and his mother watched from the doorway. It made a nice ornament.

“That looks nice,” his mother said, and went back to the lounge room.

In the bedroom, John stood admiring the tiger. As he stood there, he heard the voice again.

“Don’t keep it,” the voice said. “Don’t keep it.”

The advice made him feel worried and that caused an inner conflict as he thought about it. Why not keep it, he thought. What is wrong with it? Doubts and uncertainties plagued his mind. His previous sense of purpose was no longer clear. He had accepted that there were different levels of consciousness, and that different entities existed in their own unique framework, but that had somehow seemed very straightforward. He had always seen what was happening. Now, with this voice, that had already taken on a strange sense of reality he felt disturbed. He would like to ask Manias, but he knew that he had to resolve this situation without his help. He stood there, wondering what he should do, and the voice again spoke. “Throw it away,” the voice said. “Throw it away.”

On impulse, John went into the lounge and started looking at the titles on his mother’s bookshelves. His mother watched him and came up to him.

“Can I help?” she asked. “What are you looking for?”

“I wanted to check on something,” he told her, and wondered how to explain it. He decided to say that it concerned Rajik.

Rajik once mentioned a strange phenomenon. He said that some people heard voices. I wanted to check on it.”

His mother ran her hand on along the books and took out one book. “There is nothing much on my books, except this, It is by a Christian saint, She mentions voices very briefly and calls them locutions. She says there are two types of voices, one good and the other bad. You will have to search through it.”

She passed the book to John and added. “My teacher warned us against them. He said ignore them and refuse to acknowledge them, and that we should banish them. I did not really understand it, but have a look through the book.”

She went back to the kitchen to prepare the evening meal and John sat down. He looked at the title of the book. It was ‘The Interior Castle’ by Theresa of Avila. He vaguely recalled one of his teachers referring to it. He leaned back while he pondered on it. Two things that his mother said echoed on his mind. She had said ‘ignore them; and ‘banish them.’ Manias had repeated the advice to ignore them and earlier he had struggled to banish the demons in the lower worlds. He felt angry and duped. The thought of an elusive elemental spirit tormenting him was frustrating He wanted to catch it and crush it, but knew that in the thought world the problem would require a mental action. He put the book aside, to read later, and went back into the bedroom. He closed the door and stood in the middle of the room. Right, he thought, come on and let us sort it out. He closed his eyes, mentally visualizing an elemental, which he demolished with one blow. He sensed a swirl of activity in the air around him, and then a sudden calm.

“I’ve done it,” he said aloud, “and don’t come back.”

For good measure, he voiced a few choice oaths, feeling slightly frustrated that he could not grind it into the floor with his heel. He waited for a few minutes, half expecting a taunting voice to try some other negative suggestion. He went into the dining room to have his evening meal.

“Did you find anything useful?” his mother asked, when they were sitting down.

“I have not read it yet. What is it about, apart from voices?”

His mother smiled. It is not about voices. Saint Theresa only mentioned them as part of her description of the journey of the soul. Rajik would probably find it interesting. She

writes about the difficulties in the different levels. That is what Rajik calls the lokas, but she called them mansions.”

As his mother explained it. John had a quick flash of insight. “Right,” he said with sudden enthusiasm. I can see the whole plot. It’s the Christian’s Prodigal Son theme, and we have to find our way back to the spiritual kingdom.”

“Oh my word!” she responded. “I can see that sending you to a Christian school was not wasted.”

John agreed. “No, I don’t think it was, but why did you send me there anyway?”

“I wanted a good school, and I particularly wanted you to get a broader view of things.”

‘And has it worked?’ he asked.

“Yes. I think that overall you are doing very well. Rajik stayed within his own religion and he has visited every ashram he could find. I think his interest in your lama’s lectures is the first time he has ventured into foreign teachings, but if you want to know about lokas, he is the expert. Did he say which loka it was when a seeker hears voices?”

“No, he did not,” he said thoughtfully. “I think I’ll give him a ring and ask him round.”

“What about Eda? Isn’t she coming tonight?”

He shook his head. “Her cousin is here for a few days, so there is a family gathering. I’ll get on to Rajik now, and then we can have coffee together.”

“All right,” said his mother. “Don’t get up. I have to bring the dessert.”

He watched his mother take the dirty plates into the kitchen and waited until she came back with the dessert.

“It is a pity, but we cannot afford a bearer,” he commented. “Then, you would not have to run about so much.”

“Well, we can’t afford everything. We do have a gardener, once a week, and we do send the laundry out. I do not think any of the neighbors do their own washing. It is cheaper to pay a dhobi-wallah than buy a washing machine, and they iron the clothes as well. Some of the people here still have the lot, including a cook. All we need is money.”

“True, but times are changing. Now everyone has to tie their own shoelaces.”

His mother laughed. That is a fact. I remember the time when littler boys would call the bearer just to pick up something he had dropped.”

A rattle at the door indicated that Rajik had arrived. A head peered round the door. “Good evening Mem-sahib,” he called out, and salaam to the great sahib.”

They both laughed and John went into the lounge room to talk to Rajik.

“And what do you want to know this time?” Rajik asked.

“Who said I want to know anything?” John replied.

“Your mother, she said you had a book about lokas and wanted to discuss it.”

John went over to the bookshelves, and came back with the book his mother had given him. “It is this one. My mother says it is about the journey through the lokas, but this writer calls them mansions.”

Rajk flicked through the pages. After his inspection, he said, “I would like to borrow this, but what is your question?”

John leaned forward in a half confidential movement. “It is about voices. This book mentions voices, and I wondered what you might know about them.”

“Ah,” Rajik said in mock seriousness. “The voices.”

He laughed, and then said, “It is not funny really. By all accounts, some seekers run into serious trouble. As far as I can work it out it happens as soon as the seeker tries to move up. I told you last time that most people are only in the action and desire levels. From all accounts, the voices start when anyone tries to work through the next loka. That is Swarloka, and it is full of risks. As far as I can make out it is the area of psychic powers and pseudo magic. Many never get past that stage. This fakirs that you see in the city, smoking ganja all day are stoned out of their mind and that is the level. Some of them are continually talking to invisible entities, and I think that is where the voices are. A good guru will steer you past that stage, but some become entranced by the continual phenomena. I think that some of them like the voices and think they are making spiritual progress.”

”Did you ever hear anything?” John asked.

Rajik shook his head vigorously. “Nothing, but Jnana Yoga avoids all that. Devotion and knowledge are the safest methods.”

“What about Buddhism?”

“What is a wisdom path?”

“It is mostly knowledge, but it depends what type of Buddhism you use. I think Lama Nam Tso knows them all. It depends on what you are into and what you want.”

“Thanks for that,” John said with genuine gratitude. I get your point, go for genuine knowledge and have sincere devotion.”

“Correct,” Rajik affirmed. “Now, let us talk to your mother. I want to know about some new mountain plants I have bought. She is the great guru of mountain wildflowers, and I don’t know much about them.”

Later that evening, in the bedroom, John reconsidered his lack of wisdom. Despite the reminder to ignore voices, he had once again fallen for the distraction. More by luck than judgment, he had avoided becoming embroiled in a fruitless by path. Manias would probably rebuke him and in any case, there was still the problem of wondrous sights. John vowed that this time he would not let anything mislead him, and went to bed, hoping that he would be able to resist any further distractions. As he had expected Manias was not pleased with the lapse, but John noted that Manias was not angry either. Another bare pass, John thought, and concluded that he would most certainly have a test, with another psychic deception. After discussing it, Manias concluded with a typical practical remark.

“There is only one thing for it,” he said. “We will have to go on to the next stage and see how well you have learnt your lesson.”

John uneasily sensed that he meant that he must again jump in at the deep end and learn to survive by his own efforts. He had no time to deliberate, because Manias came round the desk, put a hand on his arm and they were again in a pleasant outdoor area. As soon as he was alone, John studied the scene, looking for signs of unusual visual phenomena. All he could see were groups of people sitting on the grass in the distance. He walked towards the nearest group. They were listening to someone telling the listeners to beware of deception. As this related to his immediate problem John sat down to listen.

“Who is the speaker?” John asked one of the listeners.

“He is a Bodhisattva,” was the answer.

John looked at the Bodhisattva with interest. He had never seen a Bodhisattva before but knew that they were highly revered and he decided to stay and listen rather than wander about and risk another misadventure. Had he thought it through he might have

realized that he was in the land of psychic phenomena, where things were not at all what they seemed to be.

The Bodhisattva stood up and started to lead the group along a grassy pathway. John moved along with them, curious to see where they were going. Inside his head, John heard a silent voice. ‘Not that.’ He realized that this voice was different. It was not outside, but was inside, and it was not a normal voice but was silent, more like a thought. He listened carefully as the inner voice spoke again.

“Look into their eyes,” it said. “Look at their eyes.”

John looked round at the group of disciples following their tutor. He looked into their faces, noting their pleasant expression. When he looked at their eyes, he realized that the inner voice was a warning. Their eyes were full of color, as they were in the people in the market place. This time there were no variations but all were the same murky reddish brown that had a sense of muddiness in them. He moved further along until he was almost level with their leader. As he turned, John saw his eyes. They were blazing with a malevolent glow that had the murky color of dried blood. John did not need any further inner voice to tell him what was happening. He knew that this was a demon. Inwardly he wanted to flee, but the group surrounded him, and he knew that would be unwise. I need help, he thought, and considered how he might obtain any help. He knew that Manias would respond and help him, but that would mean that he had not solved the problem by his own efforts. There were lords of the lower worlds who could help him, but they always expected some type of payment, usually as a form of service. As he considered them, he thought of the tiger lord. That is what I need, John thought, help from them. As he thought of it, a ripple of consternation went through the group. There were pointing to a shape that had emerged from the bushes. It was a huge tiger, and it padded towards them with ferocious glare in its eyes. The group fled, and foremost amongst them was the supposed Bodhisattva. John stood still, realizing that this was the answer to his silent call for help. The tiger stopped beside him and John stroked it as they walked back. At the edge of the grassy space, the tiger went into the bushes and John knew he was safe. The voice of Manias behind him made him turn round. John looked at Manias keenly, fearing another trick. He gazed into his eyes. The color was a beautiful ethereal blue. Manias laughed.

“Very clever,” he said. “You are learning.”

Once they were safely back, in his office, Manias explained what had happened.

“The illusory Bodhisattva was really the lord of illusion, and had you remained with him he would have offered to teach you some lower psychic powers. On that plane, there are many power seekers. What they are really seeking is power over souls, and it is a great victory for them to entrap a human. How did you work it out so quickly?”

John mentally debated as to whether he should tell Manias about the silent voice, and finally decided it would be better to mention it.

“It was the silent voice,” he told Manias. “It warned me to be careful and told me to look into their eyes.”

“Is that so?” Manias asked, and he leaned forward, with both arms folded as he rested on the desk while he studied John carefully. Eventually he spoke again.

“Not many hear the silent voice. It is too subtle, and in any case, it belongs to the next loka. This indicates that once you are through that you will progress rapidly. Nam Tso was obviously right, and if you had chosen the wisdom path, instead of the power path, you would have completed it by now. You would not have met Gopas, or me, and could have done it all with Nam Tso, or any physical guru.”

John felt very pleased and relieved that he had done so well and had ability, which would perhaps be of help in the future.

The voice of Manias interrupted his thoughts. “We still have one more challenge in this loka. You have to negotiate the world of the ancestors. We will do it tomorrow.”

As he stood up to leave, and return to his bedroom, John secretly smiled, thinking, this time I will be ready. In the bedroom, he lay down immediately, pondering on what Manias had said. He was sure that his mother would have a book on ancestor worship or that Rajik would be able to tell him something. It again made him realize how fortunate he was to have a mother who understood these things. He could see that she had been guiding him steadily all his life, waiting for the time when he would grow up and wake up.

As soon as it was light, John got out of bed and after washing and dressing, went into the lounge, to look through his mother’s books. He filled the kettle and boiled the water to make a cup of coffee. He had over an hour before he had to leave for the office. His

mother heard him clattering about and came in, with her dressing gown wrapped round her.

“What are you looking for this time?” she asked him.

“I’m looking for anything on ancestors, ancestor worship, or what happens to our ancestors.

“There are two books,” his mother said, reaching past him. She gave the books to him.

“Look at these while I make the coffee. Bring them into the kitchen and I will explain them.”

He sat down at the breakfast table, flicking through one of the books, looking at the chapter headings. His mother passed the coffee to him and again asked what he was seeking.

“I am not sure,” John told her. “Some people seem to think ancestor worship is important, but I have never heard Rajik say anything about it. I know about grandfather, but I cannot see why we have to worship them.”

“You do not,” his mother explained. “Some people do, but it is a dead end. The soul has to go past that level, to gain liberation. The ancestors are only in a temporary heaven, and they will have to come back again. If you develop attachment to them, they will attach to you. Your Buddhist lama will tell you, attachment will hold you back, and so will desire.”

She thought about it for a minute before continuing. “What we are told is that we should have love without desire, so from that we no doubt have to have love, without attachment.”

“It sounds simple, but I suppose it is difficult, otherwise the gurus would not go on about it,” John commented.

“You had better have your breakfast,” was his mother’s practical response, “or you will be late.”

While his mother prepared his breakfast John continued to look through the books, making a mental note of what he would read when he came home. His mother watched him, feeling pleased that he was looking for a deeper meaning in life than pleasure and promotion. She had often thought that if he had more money he would have spent it on

worldly attractions. Now, she could see that he that he was changing and silently thanked the lama for setting John on a new course.

All day John pondered on what the realm of the ancestors might offer as a test, and when he got home, he sat down to read the two books. He had hardly started when a rattle at the door indicated that Rajik had arrived. He always knocked in the same way.

“I was just passing,” he said, “so I thought I would drop in.”

He looked at the books John was still holding. “What are you reading?” He took one of the books and looked at the list of contents.

“Ah, ancestors,” and with a mischievous smile said, “they are all dead, you know.”

“That’s irreverent,” John answered.

“More like irrelevant,” Rajik retorted.

He sat down and waved a hand as if dismissing the subject. “Some of the people in one of the ashrams, where I stayed for a while, saw their ancestors, mostly in dreams I think, but it is only another distraction. What we want is liberation, and that is well beyond the ancestor level.”

John was careful not to show his delight at Rajik’s firm attitude. Obviously he had given the matter some thought, and best of all he had met seekers with some experience of the subject. He drew Rajik into a discourse on the subject.

“I am not very well informed on these things,” he said to Rajik, “You know my thinking, practical science and linear determinism. I am still trying to put it together, but what is wrong with the ancestor aspect?”

Rajik responded to the implication that he obviously knew more about the subject.

“I will forgive you,” Rajik said with a sly grin, “for admitting your crass ignorance.”

“Yes guru sahib,” John responded. “Can I sit at your feet while you enlighten me.”

Rajik laughed and started to explain. “It is quite simple when you think about it. When anyone dies he goes to another dimension, to enjoy what the Buddhist call the false heaven, That is, if he or she has not created such bad karma that they go downstairs, into the cellar. You know the teachings, that we create our own karma whatever level we have reached. Eventually, the residents in the false heaven have to move on, in the process of spiritual evolution. Now, the point is this, when they move up, we, down here, cannot

contact them. If they do not go on they only have one choice, which is to come back here.”

“You mean, in reincarnation,” John interrupted.

“Yes, you can say that, but the point is that only a few reincarnate. That is why the Buddhists are so strong on renouncing desire and attachment, and others encourage the seeker to think of the spiritual kingdom and God and so on. That is why some chant the lord’s name, so that at death that is what they think. Remember, when the assassin shot Gandhi, all he said was Ram. You know the old saying; you get what you focus on. So, why focus on a halfway house. Go for the top, I say.” “Well, I must agree. Thanks for that. It is obvious, press on regardless.”

“Exactly,” Rajik affirmed.

When Rajik had gone John went over the points he had made and tried to imagine how they fitted in to his program. The indication was that like all the other levels they would try to lure him into staying on that level. That is what happened with Ulysses. Each island offered him rest and pleasure. As a result, it took him a long time to return home. That thought made him determined to resist any temptation, no matter how attractive it was. He felt impatient to overcome this barrier, and as soon as he was with Manias, he voiced his views.

“Right,” he said, after greeting Manias. “This is where I face the ancestors,” and he stood up ready to go.

Manias smiled at John’s eagerness. “You will find this one easy. There are no villains. It is just a nice place to rest, and if you want to, you can do that.”

John considered the suggestion, but could not imagine any reason to do that. The only ancestor he really remembered was his grandfather and one or two aunts. Good enough, he thought. I will just enjoy it, and with the help of Manias, he found himself in his grandfather’s garden. This reminder of the time when a demon had posed as his grandfather made him wary, and when he saw his grandfather approaching he looked at him critically. First, he looked into his eyes, and then he tried the other techniques that had exposed the demon. Nothing happened and his grandfather remained the same pleasant person he has always been. This was clearly the ancestor world.

After greeting his grandfather, John looked at the garden. It was a brilliant profusion of gorgeous blooms.

“How do you get it like this?” John asked.

His grandfather smiled. “Everything is beautiful here. The earth world is drab by comparison. Come along, and meet your aunts. They are eager to meet you.”

Jon followed his grandfather still marveling at how wonderful everything appeared. When he saw his two aunts, he was even more amazed. Although their features were only plain by earthly standards, they looked radiant, glowing with an inner beauty. John was captivated and greeted them warmly. He sat down on the comfortable garden chairs and looked around again. There was no doubt about it. This was far superior to anything in the physical world. He looked at his aunts. They were studying him closely.

“Is anything wrong?” John asked.

They both laughed and one said, “No. We are just amused. We didn’t think you still had a body, down there, but we can tell now.”

“John was intrigued. “How can you tell?”

“You look heavy, sort of gross, and the light is not so clear.” What light?” John queried, thinking of the lights he had seen in the market place trip.

“The ones created by your thoughts and your feelings,” they explained. “We can see stress and problems. You should stay here. There is no stress here.”

John relaxed. It was true there were no difficulties or stress in this garden of happiness. He felt that he could stay there forever, and enjoy the blissful life of living in the permanent present of nonphysical existence. Finally, he decided that he would have to leave.

As he stood up his grandfather spoke, “We shall look forward to seeing you again.”” Of course,” John replied and concentrated on his bedroom. He noticed that he did not return with the usual swift movement, but lingered and moved off slowly. In his room, he sat in the bed pondering on the oddity of it all and decided to ask Rajik what else he knew about the land of the ancestors. He looked at the clock beside his bed and was surprised to see that it was almost time to get up. He lay back for one last review of the night’s adventure, realizing that he had gone into the cozy hypnotic state of spiritual joy.

During the day he pondered on how he could ask Rajik without mentioning that he had been to the land of the ancestors on an out of the body trip. Perhaps he could say that he had read something in a book, but he knew Rajik would ask to see the book. After further consideration, he concluded that the best approach would be to say that he had a dream, and describe the main detail as a dream. He phoned Rajik as soon as he could and told him about the supposed dream.

“That’s because we were talking about it,” Rajik said.

“Of course,” John agreed, thinking that this dream excuse could be useful any time. “Anyway, in this dream I was reluctant to leave and wanted to stay there. What do you make of that?”

“How interesting,” Rajik commented. “It reminds me of something similar. In a book by a yogi, it said that when souls reached the false heaven they did not want to go on and they most certainly did not want to come back. By all accounts they want to spend the rest of eternity in a pleasant halfway house.”

“What level do you think it was on?” John asked.

“I’m not sure, but there is one place where they say you can have joy and spirituality, but it is only a dead end. The rule is that we get what we are willing to settle for, and that’s the ultimate test.”

“Thanks,” John said. “Thanks a lot. You have answered my questions. I will catch up with you later.”

He rang off and sat down. The use of the word test made it all clear. That was the essence of everything. All the way through it was a test, to see what he would settle for, and fortunately, he had gone on. In the past, it had been more of a reaction. Now, he decided that he would make a conscious choice. From now on, he was determined to go forward, even though he did not quite know what that meant.

That night, Manias was waiting for him. “So you have worked it out and are going on?” he asked, when John had sat down.

“How do you know these things?” John asked. “It always amazes me.”

“It is very simple,” Manias told him. “The more we are tuned in to the same aim the more our minds overlap and I know what is happening.”

“Then, why can I not know what you are thinking?”

“You can. It requires training. That will come in time, but I want you to see Lama Nam Tso at the weekend. I know you usually go, but this time is important. He will give you the instructions for the next stage. It is important.”

“Very well,” John affirmed. “I will make sure I go.”

Manias terminated the meeting at that point and John had time for a night of ordinary sleep.

In the morning, his mother dropped a new mental bombshell into his mind. As he was sitting at the breakfast she asked him what he intended to do about Eda.

“I think you should make your intentions clear,” his mother said.

“Ho. Ho.” John said. “Is this an arranged marriage coming up?”

“Certainly not. You know what I think of all that. Some of us have heard of women’s lib. It is up to you two, and there will not be any dowry either.”

“My word. We are in the twentieth century and no mistake. Should I ask what you have got in mind?”

His mother pretended to threaten him with a clenched fist. “No. I am asking you what you have in mind”

John made no reply. His mother was only voicing his own doubts and uncertainties. He poured a hot drink slowly, using it as an excuse to give him time to think. There was not much to think about, because Rajik’s statement over the phone seemed to fit everything. It depends what you are willing to settle for, he had said. Now he had a choice. Was he willing to settle for Eda? She was intelligent; enthusiastic, young, attractive, a disciple of Nam Tso and his mother liked her. It seemed that the answer had to be yes, he would settle for Eda. Still, he had one doubt, but he could not discuss it. He decided to agree, but to delay the final answer.

“I agree with you,” he said. I have been thinking about it myself. Can I tell you on Sunday? I want to get it clear in my mind.”

“A good idea,” his mother said.

“Don’t say anything to Eda,” John added. “I will all myself.”

His mother beamed with approval. Things seemed to be developing nicely.

For the rest of the week John contemplated what Nam Tso might have to say and looked forward to the private meeting with both interest and trepidation. Finally, on the Sunday morning he was sitting facing Lama Nam Tso.

This is it, John thought, but remained quiet and waited for Nam Tso to speak.

Manias told me how well you have progressed, so now we are ready to cross the first bridge. Everything you have done so far has led up to this point. All the work in the lower worlds was only the result of your past karma. You started it, and you had to finish it. The most important thing was that you had awakened the light. Now it is time for you to learn to see your own light and make it grow.”

“What is the light?” John started to ask, but Nam Tso waved him to be patient.

“You have to see the light in others, in the market place. As for answering your question, I will quote Lin Chi, the great Chinese Master. He said, ‘in your heart is a True Man, of no fixed abode, who comes and goes at will. You should strive to see it.’ The True Man is the Buddha within. It is not enough to see the light and trust the inner Buddha to guide you. That is only a beginning. You have to realize that you are the Buddha within. Say it now.’

With some hesitation, John tried to make the affirmation. “I am the Buddha within.”

Lama Nam Tso shook his head. “More certainty, more certainty. You must meditate on that until it rings throughout your whole soul.”

John mentally repeated the affirmation and Nam Tso began to clarify the affirmation. The true man is your own inner guru. That is the lord within and is why you must trust in the lord. Yet, in the end, you are that inner man. The outer man is only the ego-body person, and the inner man is the Buddha within. The bridge is the mind and you must use it until the mind cannot take you any further. With effort, you will attain a clear realization that this is true. In the meantime, try to see the light before your eyes. The light comes and goes with great speed, and in the beginning it is difficult to see, but eventually it becomes slow and brighter. The best method is to love the inner lord, because the fact is that you and the lord are one, but this must be a personal experience. Do you understand?”

“Yes. I understand clearly. Gopas and Manias have explained it before. Now I can see it clearly.”

“That is good,” Nam Tso commented. “Do you have any questions?”

“I have one,” John told him. “It is a personal question.”

Nam Tso sat waiting while John sorted out his thoughts. “I have a girl friend,” John explained. “I have been thinking of getting married. How does that fit it?”

A little smile moved Nam Tso’s lips but he spoke seriously. “Some choose to be celibate, and if you can do that it is good. Others have celibacy forced upon them, because of their karma. The other should choose a wife and be loyal to her. It does not make much difference if the attitude is right. The girl you have chosen is Eda, is it not?”

John nodded. “Yes,” in a half whisper.

Nam Tso went on. “She is a good girl, and will be a great help to you. Soon she will understand many things that you know. Do not tell her that, but you have my blessing.” On the way home, John had to restrain himself from running. He wanted to rush home and tell everybody the good news, but as he walked, he thought about it and realized that he could not say anything. No one knew about his journeys in the hidden worlds, and he was unable to speak of them, so there was no point in saying anything. Even the lama’s approval of his decision to marry Eda would be better unsaid. All he could do would be to say that he had made up his mind and he would marry Eda. It seemed something of an anticlimax, but he could see that it would be better to keep the personal details secret and play it in a low key. By the time he had reached the bungalow, he had returned to his normal even view of things, and he went into the house ready to make a quiet statement. As he had expected, Eda was there, and they both looked at him expectantly. He deliberately said nothing and pretended that everything was quite normal. Finally, his mother broke into the general conversation.

“Today is Sunday,” she said, with a meaningful emphasis.

“Oh, is it?” he said, pretending to look at the calendar.

Eda was watching him carefully, and John knew that they had been talking and were expecting an announcement. Eda went up to him and looked up into his face.

“What’s the news?” she asked.

He could not resist one last teasing remark. “Well, my mother says it is time I got married, but I don’t know anyone who wants me,” he said with a straight face.

Eda raised a clenched fist. “You rogue,” she said and threw her arms round him. Over her shoulder, he saw his mother smiling.

“This calls for a celebration,” she said. “I have a bottle of wine in the cupboard, which I have saved for a special occasion.”

“Yes,” said Eda, “and this is it.”

CHAPTER 10 – THE WESTERN PARADISE

With Nam Tso's encouragement, John was determined to avoid any further mistakes, and in his next morning meditation, he sat quietly, hoping to see the tiny star that his teachers had described, but it eluded him. He found it hard to grasp the abstract concepts of the ninth century master Lin Chi. He had said 'you are a point of light. Do not let your senses mislead into thinking you are only a body.' John still thought of himself, as a very physical being, and it seemed an unreal idea. He had accepted the explanation that his out of the body experiences were the soul operating in another dimension. Even that had stretched his mind to the limit, but now he had no concept of a form to help him. In any case, even if he saw the light there was the frustrating question as to who was doing the seeing. In frustration, he abandoned his meditation and dressed for breakfast.

His mother was already preparing the morning meal and he sat down with a disgruntled sigh that attracted his mother's attention.

"Is anything wrong?" she asked.

John sighed again. "Yes. I think everything is wrong. I just do not understand what Nam Tso means. It sounded all right yesterday, when he explained it, but now it seems too far out, and I don't know where I am."

His mother passed his breakfast to him and sat down to eat her own. There was silence for a few minutes, and then she asked John to explain.

John waved his knife in the air, as if mentally remonstrating with the lama.

"Well, he is going on about seeing the light, and says that I should try to see it. He quotes Lin Chi, but I find it a bit too abstract."

"Oh. Is that all? They all say that. There is book on Lin Chi on the bookshelves, and Rajik can explain it. I found it difficult, but Rajik helped me to see what he meant."

"Rajik seems to know everything," John said with barely concealed resentment.

"That is no way to speak of your best friend. He started searching while you were only looking for a good time. He can tell you a lot, but you know that he says nothing unless you ask him."

“Yes,” John acknowledged. “I’m sorry. That was out of order. I will ask Rajik, but how do you see it?”

His mother smiled. “What do you want, a one sentence explanation, while you are getting ready to rush off to work?”

John relaxed. “That’s about it. All I can handle is one sentence, and that has to be simple.”

His mother shook her head. “Ask Rajik,” she said again, “but I doubt if he can tell you in only one sentence.”

He put on his jacket and set off for the office, determined to enjoy the morning sunshine. He thought about what his mother had said, and admitted to himself that he was fortunate to have Rajik as his friend. Her comments were true, Rajik never talked about these subjects unless he was asked. As he thought about it, he realized that his mother never said much either. The thought made him realize that he never said much. Although he knew he had not attained any experience of self-realization, he never discussed the things he did know. He had not even made any mention of his unique experiences to Rajik, or even to his mother. So why should they, or anyone else, discuss their experiences? There were probably many others with extra insight, and they said nothing. After all, why should anyone risk ridicule? Before his meeting with Nam Tso, John would have been the first to scoff. His new perspective made him see more than ever that Rajik must have earned his insights by a different discipline. With that conclusion, he felt a new respect for Rajik and decided to ask him for his help that very evening.

Rajik was more than willing to explain, and as soon as they were sitting in their armchairs, he asked John what he needed to know. John gave a general account of the problem and waited for Rajik to clarify the situation.

“I have explained most of it before and I cannot see why you have any difficulty. What exactly did Nam Tso say to you?”

John went over the details. “He told me to look for the light. He said I will see a tiny point of light, and he says that I am that light. He called it the Buddha within.”

“Well, what’s so difficult about that?”

“I do not see anything, and what’s more I just don’t get it. I do not understand that I am a point of light, and all that. I know that you have explained it before and others have told me about it, but I find it difficult to grasp.”

How long have you been looking?” Rajik asked.

“Ever since Nam Tso told me to look out for it, last Sunday.”

Rajik shook his head and bent over to hide his smile. “Some look for years, but it is not visible until a certain stage. So, why should you expect to see it easily?” Rajik commented.

John remained quiet. Rajik’s remarks made him feel better about the problem, but the thought of searching for years depressed him. Apart from that, the remarks by Manias and Nam Tso had led him to expect to see it. He decided to explain.

“Perhaps I have got it wrong, but I got the impression that my light was already well developed, and that I ought to see it.”

John’s obvious humility at his lack of knowledge made Rajik realize that Nam Tso must have said that John already had the light.”

“Right, I will go over what I know. I can only tell you what I have been told and what I see.”

John moved on to the edge of his seat, eager to hear of any personal experiences of Rajik.

“The first thing is that it is very tiny, especially in the beginning. The second thing is that it barely appears and is gone again. The mind must be quiet, and calm. The best thing is not to look for it. Just be observant. The harder you look the less chance there is of seeing it. Usually, it is to one side, but according to the yogis it is eventually steadier, in the center, and brighter.”

“Is that how you see it?” John almost demanded.

Rajik shook his head sadly. “No. I see it quite often, but I have no control over it. Sometimes it seems a bit brighter but any attempt to focus on it makes it disappear.” Rajik paused, “and it has taken me years to manage that.””

“I am beginning to see what happens, but there is still one big question.”

Rajik waited for John to express it.

“The thing is, if I see the light, and that light is my true self, who is seeing the light”

Rajik clapped his hands together. “Spoken like a true philosopher,” he said. “That is easy to answer. What they say is that there are two points of identity. There is the soul and the ego. That is to say, there is an inner and an outer man. In the beginning, the ego person identity sees the spirit soul identity. The big step is to take the central position and see the ego person as the lower self.’

“So, what you are saying is that I,” John tapped his chest, “the one sitting here, am only the ego body person.”

“That’s it. You, externally, are only the John person, but you have to transcend that and realize that you are the Atman.”

“Oh, right,” he said slowly. “That’s what my mother calls Ishvara.”

“True, Rajik went one,” Vedantists call it Indra.”

John spoke excitedly as he began to grasp the theme. “Yes. I remember one of the teachers at the Christian school quoting Jesus. He said ‘you are gods’. I thought it weird at the time. Now, I see what they are saying.”

John turned it over in his mind and then asked another question.

Well Rajik,” he said, “you studied psychology, didn’t you?”

Pajik nodded. “Yes, I did, for what it is worth.”

“Right. Now, the question is why doesn’t psychology mention these things”

Rajik laughed cynically. “The answer is that it is the same reason why philosophers do not mention it. They all think the physical body is the reality. For them the soul is a mythical concept, without any foundation or substance.”

“I agree with that, but the ashrams aren’t like that, are they?”

“No, they are not,” Rajik agreed,” but they are outside the system. The establishment has adopted western materialistic values. There are still plenty of believers, but they are only on the belief level. They have no experience and even less insight. That is why we are in the age of darkness. They call it the Kali Yuga.”

“Nam Tso was on about it. He called it the truth ending era, and says that we have to keep the teaching alive until the truth can again emerge.”

Rajik agreed and after a few more comments, he left John to ponder on the difficulties of carrying out Nam Tso’s advice. As he left, John thanked him for his help, and went back to his mother’s bookshelves to check on the things Rajik had said. To his surprise,

there were many references and it became clear that it was only a mystery to most people because they took no interest in it. As he had been like that until quite recently he could not condemn that, but realized more than ever how fortunate he was to know people who could help him, and he began to understand why Rajik had visited so many ashrams. Yet, the books, and even the people, only referred to external knowledge and did not say much about inner guidance from anyone like Gopas or Manias. The more he thought about it the more he realized his unique position and the more he knew that he could never talk about it. Any mention of meeting the ancestors would not convince worldly people who considered the physical world as the only type of existence. The consideration of it made him wonder what other worlds Manias might show him. So far, all the worlds had been ones where demons and lords were trying to entrap him or mislead him. Surely, he thought, some of the worlds must be better than that, and decided that he would ask Manias about it at his next meeting.

He did not have to wait long, for he was with Manias almost as soon as his body had fallen asleep. John had become used to the idea that his body slept while he, in his subtle body, was active in another dimension. He often thought it is time to put my body to bed, and increasingly found it amazing that most people thought there was only one world.

After he had greeted Manias he was ready to ask him about worlds that were not full of demons, but Manias forestalled him.

“So, you want to know about the higher worlds” Manias asked.

“Something like that,” he said, feeling slightly irritated at the way Manias knew what he was thinking. He sometimes felt that there was no privacy and that this continual extra awareness was going too far.

Manias dispelled his irritation by a new suggestion. “How would you like to jump a few rungs on the ladder and have a preview of a higher world?” he asked John.

“Yes. I would like that,” John assented.

Manias came round the desk and with the familiar actions took John to a different world. John had a quick impression of moving upwards into a more rarified atmosphere until they stopped on a hillside, looking down into a valley.

“We cannot go any nearer than this,” Manias told John, “because you would not be able to stand it.”

John looked down at the scene. Everything was beautifully clean and ordered, with neat houses set in pristine gardens. The mood was one of tranquility and utter serenity.

“Where is this?” John asked.

“Don’t worry about it. We are three levels above the one you have reached. Just enjoy the trip and remember it, to inspire you.”

John looked at the residents going about their activities. They all seemed very busy and immersed in their thoughts.

“They are all working on different types of service,” Manias informed John. “They are always helping the ones on lower levels.”

John studied them closely. They were dressed in loose robe-like garments, but the most noticeable appearance was the radiant glow round each one. They almost shimmered, and they were of different faint tinges of blue and pink, with some of them surrounded by a faint violet hue.

“The colors are like the ones you saw in the market place.” Manias went on, “but as you see they are purer.”

“What is the glow?” John wanted to know.

“That is the tiny light that you saw in the people, but here it is greater, so that they are all beings of light.”

“Is this a heaven world?” John asked next.

Manias smiled. “Not exactly. These are what some people call gods. They were all humans once. The heaven worlds are to the side, and lower. These are dedicated workers who are helping to carry out the Divine Plan.”

“What is that?” John asked in curiosity.

“Even they do not know. All they do is to carry out instructions and help others on lower levels to evolve. There are levels above them, but you would not see anything. It would all appear like blinding light to you.”

John continued to look at the peaceful scene, thinking of what Manias had just said. He turned to ask another question. Manias shook his head firmly.

“We must go now,” he said, and before John could reply, they were back in the office.

In contrast, it seemed heavy and dull, and even Manias looked earthier, even though they were not on the earth level. Manias explained a bit more. “We had to leave. It was

affecting us too much. I would be able to stand it, but it would be too much for you. If you stayed too long, you would find physical life distressing. That is why some yogis live in remote places.”

“Do we all finish up like that, in a heaven world or in that world?” John asked.

“Eventually,” Manias replied. “It is all a process of evolution. We have to evolve emotionally, mentally and spiritually. People on the earth world can only think of physical evolution. They think they are bodies. That is the first bondage that we have to break, after that the soul will evolve naturally.”

“And seeing the light is a step towards that?” John asked Manias.

Manias looked pleased with John’s question. “That is exactly right. We all have to find our own light, and after that the light will shine naturally.”

The answer made John determined to do that. The thought that he was inferior, in a gross body, depressed him. After seeing the residents of a higher world, he felt trapped in a lower world that was not as bright as it might be.

Manias broke into his thoughts. “Now you have something to think about,” he said, “but it is time you were going.”

John stood up and bowed his thanks, and with a firm thought, he was back in his bedroom.

Four hours later it was time to awaken and do his morning meditation. With the night’s experience still in his mind, he made an extra effort to apply Rajik’s advice and be more patient, and less forceful. His half hour period passed without incident. John remained seated in his meditation position, thinking of the beautiful the scene in the valley. He sat there, with his eyes closed, and suddenly a tiny twinkle of light to one side attracted his attention. He remained still not even moving his eyes, then, it was gone. He excitedly rushed through his morning shave and as soon as he had dressed, he went into the kitchen, where his mother was making the breakfast.

“Do you want tea or coffee,” she asked as he greeted her.

“Tea will do,” he said, eager to get the mundane problems out of the way.

His mother looked at him with expectance, half expecting him to say something unusual.

“I think I saw the blue light,” he announced.

“Really!” his mother said with keen interest.

She quickly finished the breakfast preparation and passed him his plate. Sitting opposite him, she waited for John to say more. Between taking a bite at his food, he repeated what he had said.

“Is that all you have to say?” said his mother impatiently. Tell me, exactly what did you see?”

John went over it in his mind. “I was sitting still, at the end of my meditation, and a little star appeared to my right. It stayed for one or two seconds and then disappeared. That is the light, isn’t it?”

His mother carved up her egg, while John waited impatiently. It occurred to him that his mother had never said that she had seen the light. He knew she had meditated for years, but like everyone else, she seemed to say nothing. At last, she answered.

“Yes. I think it is. If you did see it, the light will appear again. It will not always be in the same place, but eventually you will know that you were not imagining it. Of course, it could be imagination.”

The last statement put a dampener on his enthusiasm and he felt like saying ‘thanks for nothing’, but refrained from any caustic remark. Instead, he put a question to his mother.

“Is that how you first saw it?” he asked as casually as he could.

“Yes,” she answered. “Eventually it got brighter and sometimes it stands till, right in front.”

He felt like shouting ‘bless you’. The answer was what he really wanted to know. From now on, he would be able to discuss that sign of his progress with his mother, as well as Rajik.

“I’m a lucky man,” he said, thinking aloud.

His mother looked at him quizzically but made no answer. In her usual practical manner, she reminded him not to be late for work. He went off whistling, giving the cat, Tiger, a quick stroke as he went down the verandah steps. The sunshine seemed more pleasant than usual and he strode off with a springy step.

By the end of the week, he was convinced that he had experienced three clear sightings, and he was impatient to discuss it with Lama Nam Tso. He decided not to

mention anything to Rajik. After all, according to Rajik, it was a slow process, and Rajik had implied that he had experienced intermittent impressions for years. He did not want to struggle for years, and was counting on something the lama had said. He had told John that when a seeker had transcended the ego, that progress was rapid. “The battle has to be fought many times,” Nam Tso had told him, and had emphasized that the big weapon was knowledge. “Most seekers do not understand the signs,” he had said, “so they take longer.”

John was determined that with the knowledge of the people he knew, as well as Manias, he was not going to take one day longer than necessary.

At the Sunday morning, meeting Nam Tso listened with intense concentration to John’s descriptions of three consecutive experiences of the blue star.

“It is a good sign if you continue to see it regularly,” Nam Tso explained, “but there is a period of growth. In your case that started a long time ago, that is why we had to finish your spiritual development.”

John listened to each word with acute attention, waiting for any extra clue that would assist him.

“You can help the light to develop, the lama added. “When you see it, take notice of what you are thinking. Some do well when they chant the Buddha’s name; others may have a favorite mantra, or devotional thoughts to the lord. It is the attitude and intent that creates the fertile ground. Find your key mood and use it to encourage the light to grow.”

John thanked him with deep gratitude and bowed his respect to the lama when he left. On the way home, he sat down on a seat overlooking the valley. It was certainly a most beautiful place and another wave of grateful thanks welled up in his mind. As it did, John felt sure that he had a quick glimpse of the blue star near the front of his eyes. He sat there considering it, recalling what Nam Tso had said. ‘Observe your thoughts’ was his advice. John pondered on it. He had been thinking at that moment. He realized that was probably the key, for despite his many faults he had a genuine sense of gratefulness that he had such helpful people around him. He considered his earlier problems and his conflict over Rona. That was desire, he thought. He reviewed what Nam Tso had said. ‘Once the ego is transcended, even briefly, progress is rapid.’ The thought caused him to formulate a clearer approach. As he saw it, the ego and the desire nature were the two

villains who wanted to sabotage the light. In that scenario, it was obvious that gratitude was not an ego quality. He smiled as he thought of it. Nam Tso had given him a big clue and he was determined to use it. Nam Tso had said that the battle maybe short or long and John decided that for him it would be short.

At his next meditation, he deliberately contemplated his good fortune at having helpful friends. To his delight, the little star appeared almost at once, glowed brightly in front of him and then disappeared. John sat there thinking of Lin Chi's words. 'You are that lone point of brightness listening to me at this very moment.' That means that I am the light, John said to himself. He was still thinking about it when his mother knocked on his door.

"Breakfast in five minutes," she called.

At the breakfast table, he asked his mother a question about it.

"What is the best way of developing the light?" he asked.

"Well, I do what Rajik suggested," she told him.

At the mention of Rajik's name John noticed that this time he did not react, but consciously felt pleasure that he had Rajik for a friend. In the past, he had swing between gratitude and resentment. Now, he noted that the resentment was absent. He listened as his mother continued.

"We were discussing Raja Yoga, and he pointed out a Sutra in Part One. It said, 'The quickest method is intense devotion to Ishvara.'

"Oh. I see. That's why you put flowers in front of the stature of Ishvara."

"You should discuss it with Rajik. He has a marvelous encyclopedia of yoga. It seems to cover everything."

John could not resist a comment. "Ah, an encyclopedia. Then he is not such a know all after all."

"Now you are being unkind," she remonstrated.

"I suppose I am, but I often wondered how he knew so much. Anyway, the thing is that Ishvara is the individual soul, and I am that soul."

That's it," his mother said, standing up, "and now this soul must clear the table." John laughed. "In that case I had better take this soul to work," and added, "he will not like that."

On the walk to work, he tried to sort it all out and mentally made a list. He thought there are I, the soul and I, the ego person, and I, the rational man. “I think I will stick to the rational man,” he muttered to himself, and left it at that.

As the days went by, John improved his mental attitude and found that his meditation and sight of the blue star improved. Yet, his attempts to cultivate devotion to Ishvara were useless. His mother listened to his account of his difficulties and finally passed a critical judgment of his complaints.

“You are still too mental,” she told him. “You have used the word rational three times in the last half hour. Both you and Rajik still think it is a mental problem that can be solved with the right book, or a change of view.”

John remained silent, reviewing what he had said. His mother was right, he was still trying to work it out.

“What else am I doing wrong?” he asked.

His mother looked thoughtful. “I don’t think you understand the meaning of devotion. Devotion is more than dedication. It includes love. That is why Bhakti Yoga is so helpful.”

“Right,” he said after a long pause. “What we want is more Bhakti. Love the lord and all that.”

“Just so,” his mother said and left him to think about it.

“That night, as he was undressing to go to bed he had a sudden thought. Why not meditate now, and focus on love. He immediately sat on the bed in a meditation position and tried to think of love for Ishvara, but he could not break away from thinking of it only as a concept. It is useless, he thought, and as he thought it, he mentally heard the silent voice. Love thy neighbor, it said. John shook his head in a sudden act of surprise. That was a Christian saying, and he had heard it many times in the Christian school. Disregarding that, he pondered on the saying. Why neighbor, and what neighbor? The answer jumped into his head. His neighbor was Eda. She only lived two streets away. That was it. If he could feel his love for Eda and transfer it to Ishvara, he might succeed. He settled down for another attempt, meditating on Eda. It was easy to focus on love for her. Then, by a shift of focus he thought of Ishvara. A cold shiver rippled up his spine as

he felt an unusual change of emotional tone. After a few minutes, he stopped and got into bed, still thinking of Ishvara.

His next sense of awareness was that he was walking up a mountain path and he saw a figure moving towards him. The figure was in a flowing robe and seemed to be gliding over the ground. As the figure came nearer, John could see that it was a young man with a radiant glow all round him. Golden rays shot outwards into the heavenly blue of the background. The man raised one hand in greeting and spoke. "Welcome," was the brief greeting.

John remained silent, awestruck by the vision before him. He did not know what to say.

"Come," the young man said. "I will show you my garden."

John followed as the figure led the way into a grove of trees. Within them was the most beautiful garden. John could not restrain his amazement and stared wide eyed at the fountains, and flowerbeds and brightly colored birds that flew about the garden. This was a personal paradise.

The radiant figure of the man spoke again. "This is all yours, waiting for you."

Before John could think of anything to say, he found himself alone. There was no sign of the garden and he seemed to be in an area near the place of Manias. As he thought of Manias, he moved quickly, with a familiar rush, and found himself with Manias.

"What happened?" Manias asked. "You are usually earlier."

John explained, and told Manias every detail of what he had done.

"You must tell Nam Tso," Manias insisted. "This is what he has been working for, and is why he helped you. He was confident that you would do it, but you still have a lot to do, and at least two more levels to work through before you attain the right level. Go now, and see me when you have seen Nam Tso." xxx

John left, thinking to himself that love is certainly the main key. At the next meeting with Nam Tso, he went over it all again. Nam Tso listened to John's description of the shining being and when John had finished Nam Tso started to explain what had happened.

"Because of your change of attitude the soul was able to approach the ego identity. Actually, they are two sides of the same coin, and eventually the ego becomes absorbed

in the spirit, like a caterpillar that becomes a butterfly. Most seekers do not go that far and retain some sense of ego. Yet, in reality, you are the shining being and you have to experience your identity from that position. This is what the yogis call self-realization. Some see the shining being in a near death experience, but the best way is in meditation. The garden was a glimpse of the Western Paradise. Manias knows what to do next, but you are nearly at the end of your journey.”

After a few more explanations, John bowed his respects to Nam Tso and walked home. In the bungalow, Eda and Rajik were waiting to hear the latest report.

“Now,” Rajik said, after greeting John. “It is your turn to tell me something. Your mother says that you have had a break through.”

John explained what had happened. “I am not sure where I am, even now. They say that there are many minor awakenings but only a few major ones. From what Nam Tso said I am nowhere near being home and dry.

“Rajik was very thoughtful as John went over the details.

“The garden is what Vedanta calls Indra’s garden, and by all accounts indicates a definite step forward. The part that interests me is what you did by the use of Bhakti. It was love that opened the door. I have pursued knowledge for fourteen years and I still have not done what you have done. Perhaps I ought to change to Bhakti after all.”

John remained silent. He could not reveal that he had help from Manias. “Yes,” John finally said, “I think love is the magic formula.”

“Of course,” Eda said, “I could have told you that, but talking about love reminds me.” She turned to Rajik and went on. “You know that we are planning to get married, don’t you.”

“Yes,” Rajik answered, “there are signs which even I can’t miss.” “Well,” Eda continued, “We are not having a fully traditional wedding. That is too much. It will be a western style, but we shall have a priest from the local temple. What we need, is a coordinator, you know how it is. We would like you to do it.”

“Why not?” Rajik replied. “I would be delighted to do it.”

John’s mother had stood listening. “Good,” she said. “Now that all that is settled, we can have our morning coffee, and signaled for Eda to help.

CHAPTER 11 – THE LORDS OF WISDOM

At his next meeting with Manias, John had a brief preview of the next stage.

“Now that you have crossed the first bridge we can start on the journey to the next one,” Manias told him. “We will go immediately, and I will explain as we move around.”

By now John knew that they would first appear in an open area, such as a park. That always gave him time to realize where they were. This time, as anticipated, they were in a park, watching people walking along the paths. John looked about him. It all appeared very normal and earthlike.

“Are we somewhere on the earth?” he asked Manias.

“No,” Manias replied. “This is a mental world, and it is very similar to the ordinary earth world. There are differences, which you will notice when we move about. There is only one warning. Do not touch any of the people. You can touch objects and you can talk to the people but you must not touch them. It would harm them.”

John looked at the people walking about in the distance. They were very human but seemed shorter. He could not see one tall person anywhere.

“There are no tall people here, are there?” he asked.

“No, and they will know immediately that you are only a visitor. They are used to that.”

As they walked, John noticed how everything was neat and orderly. It was like an ideal model of the earth world and the only big difference was the slightly smaller bodies of the people. They left the park and walked towards a large building that had the appearance of a school. In the grounds surrounding it young men and women passed by. One or two greeted Manias, as if they knew him.

“Do they know you?” John asked.

“Oh yes. You might say that this is my hometown. I am from here.”

John looked at Manias in surprise and realized that Manias was not very tall. Previously he had not thought much of it, but now he realized that Manias would blend into the scene before him and appear to be as a local citizen.

John's mind was full of questions. What do these people do? What was their religion? How long did they live? These and other questions flooded his mind.

"Come over here," Manias said as John started to talk. "Let us sit on that seat and I will explain a bit more."

"They live about twice as long as people on the earth, in the gross physical world. That is because their bodies are not so gross, and this is why you must not touch them. Although you are here in your subtle body, and your physical body is asleep, your construction is different. Even if you were not as tall they would know that you are a stranger, from another dimension."

"Do they know about other dimensions?" John asked.

"Yes. They have courses about them. They know that there are many worlds below this one, but they are not interested. They are only concerned with the higher ones." "What is their religion?" was John's next question.

"They do not have religions. They are not interested in beliefs. For them everything is a matter of rational knowledge. They do not have Bibles and scriptures, but have a practical rational philosophy, and they think in terms of mental and spiritual evolution. In common terms you could say that there are no religions in heaven, because heaven is beyond factional interests."

"How do they explain the other worlds?"

"I think I might have told you," Manias replied. "A lot of what I say comes from here. Their concept is that all matter in their world is on the same frequency, and matter on the earth world is on a different frequency. They exist in the same space, like radio waves, and it needs training to operate in another dimension. They have some unusual sciences here, and actually have a means of observing life in some of the other worlds."

"Really?" John said in astonishment. "You mean like turning on a TV and having a live broadcast?"

"That is a good analogy," Manias replied.

"I wonder what they think of the earth world," John said. "Do they say anything about it?"

“Generally, they seem to think the earth people are stupid. Events like wars, violent crimes, robberies and commercial competition do not happen here. Such activities are not very intelligent behavior and I doubt if it would even occur to them to do such things.”

“Why are the earth people like that?” John wanted to know.

Manias laughed. “It’s a little thing called the ego, or perhaps it is a big thing, down there. Here, the ego is refined and purified. On the earth, it is undisciplined. It is a chaos of raw egos all attacking each other. The people here think the world is suffering from ego mania, and to the people here it appears as a hell world.”

“As bad as that?” John queried.

Manias laughed again. “Well think about it. They do not have politics here. There are social councils and they operate in terms of philosophy, and there is no commercial capitalism, so there are very few areas for aggressive ego actions. In any case, children are educated to become aware at an early age. There is a lot of emphasis on individual development rather than competitive assertiveness.”

“If it is so nice here, why do you go to the earth world?” was John’s next question.

“You are asking serious questions,” Manias answered. “The thing is that all souls evolve through all the worlds. When they reach a higher world they can stop there, and enjoy life on that level, or they can go back to help the others.”

“I see,” said John. “It is like a Bodhisattva who sacrifices his Nirvana to help mankind.”

“That is the supreme example, but reaching that stage is difficult. It is progressive. Gopas is an adept of the lower worlds. I am an adept of the intermediate worlds, but a true Bodhisattva is a master of all the worlds.”

“What about the people on the higher world, when we went to look at them. What are they?”

“They are the lords of wisdom, but some of them work in this world. We will meet one or two later. They stay in special schools and do not go outside. They instruct the people here, and some of them instruct people from the earth world.”

”Like you?” John interrupted.

John remained silent for a few minutes, and then asked a personal question. “In that case, where do I fit in?”

“I will answer that, and then we must go. An adept is a specialist, and usually concentrates on one or two areas. You are an initiate. You have to understand these things, and master some things, but you are only a generalist. Nevertheless, you are in a very useful position and can do things that I cannot do, because you have a normal earth body. Neither Gopas nor I have typical earth bodies. As a result, we live very restricted lives. It is like that with the lords of wisdom, when they come down to the world we are in now.” “I don’t know very much, do I?” John said quietly.

Manias smiled and put a reassuring hand on John’s hand. “You are learning, and now, let us go.”

The next day, after his evening meal, John sat watching the news on the television. This time, because of some of the things Manias had said he took particular notice of the news items. What Manias had implied was true. The reports were mostly negative. At the end of the news, he switched to another channel, to observe their news. They had a few extra items, but even they were depressing. Quite clearly, the TV screen reflected a world that was not at peace with itself. It was almost all drama and conflict, and when he began to think about it, he realized that the TV offered violence as entertainment. His mother came in and he was about to comment on it when she informed him that she was going out.

“I am going round to see Eda’s parents,” she told him. “We are trying to sort out the arrangements for the wedding.”

“But we haven’t picked a date yet,” John protested. “Even Eda is not in a rush.”

“I know that, but surely it will be in the next few months,” was his mother’s reply.

“Probably,” John answered.

Just as she was leaving, Rajik arrived, and John was able to transfer his views on the news items to Rajik.

“I agree,” Rajik said. “My guru says that we should not watch the news. He says that it has a bad effect and he keeps saying that our aim is liberation from this world. So, why watch it?”

“And I think I will have to agree with that,” John added. “You keep mentioning your guru but you have never said who it is, and where is he?”

“He resides behind that little temple, about two miles up the road. I only go once a month, because it is a long walk.” Rajik explained.

“And what else does he tell you?”

“All the usual stuff. I told him about your break through last week end, and said I was thinking of changing to Bhakti.”

“What did he say to that?” John asked.

“He said that it was about time, and told me that there is a limit to what knowledge can do, and he said what others say as well, that devotion is quicker. He said that love demolishes the ego quicker than anything does, and that there is often hate when the ego is too strong. Brittle is what he called it. He says that the soul is like the kernel of a nut, surrounded by a hard shell. That is the ego, and we have to break the shell to get at the nut, inside.”

“They all seem to say the same thing. My mother got a new book last week. She gets them by post, and her latest book is about the Sufis.”

“They are the mystic aspect of Islam, aren’t they?”

“Yes. It is interesting what the author said. He says their aim is to transcend the ego and experience the spirit of God.”

“That’s a tall order,” Rajik commented. “How do they say anyone should do that?”

“My mother read it out,” John replied. “There were four stages. They listed belief, a search for knowledge, understanding and then realization, which I suppose is God realization.”

“How interesting. They start with belief but have to go beyond it. What happens at the end, when they have no realization?”

“I said that their attitude was to say nothing and quoted that he who knows God is silent.”

“Very wise,” Rajik said. “Strong believers probably would not like what they said. The great Yogis are the same. They say nothing.”

The news was still on, with the sound turned down and they both stopped talking as a picture of a tiger appeared on the screen. The news- reader said that poachers in the neighboring province had killed a tiger, and the police caught them with the dead tiger.

“I hope they throw the book at them,” John said vehemently.

“They are doing that because stupid people think tiger medicines are some kind of magical cure.”

“Well, I suppose it is stupid,” Rajik remarked, “ but the British killed them just for fun. They called it sport, and killing a tiger was proof of being a macho man.”

“Yet, people still do it in other parts of the world. They have to kill animals to prove their manhood. No wonder we are in the Kali Yuga,” John added, and changed the subject because it distressed him too much.

Two nights later John saw Manias in the usual meeting place.

“We will go to see some of the lords of wisdom again. I will show you my guru, but you must remember what I said before, and just observe. I will explain later.”

They arrived at the same place as the last time, and Manias led the way to a tall building and went inside. John followed, noting the beautiful construction.

“This is the local hall of learning, what you would call a university, but they do not teach book knowledge.”

Manias guided John down a corridor and entered a large lecture room. They sat at the back, looking down on a stage where someone was sitting at a table.

“That is my guru,” Manias said in a low voice. “These people here are in my group and we get regular instruction. You will have to learn to come here, but you will have a different teacher. The teachers are lords of wisdom who teach people on the level below them. Then, we teach on the level below us. That way we all slowly move up.”

The lecturer stood up and started to speak. He was explaining some of the inner mysteries of creation. John sat listening, not fully comprehending everything that was said. After a while, Manias signaled that they must leave and led the way outside. As soon as they were clear of the building Manias whisked them both back to his office.

“That,” Manias said with emphasis, “ is where you will really learn something. There were two types of students, ones like me, and others, who only operate in the world. Many new ideas come from here, but most people do not know that, and think they have discovered it themselves. If they were enlightened, they could make conscious contact. That is what you are learning. You will then have a choice of how you will work.” “Is that the end of my training?” John asked Manias.

Manias shook his head. "You now have a very difficult task. You have to get to the next level without any help. As the Buddhists say, you have to cross to the far shore and make a leap from a hundred foot pole."

John knew that crossing to the far shore meant go beyond the furthest limits of the rational mind, but the hundred-foot pole mystified him. As he opened his mouth to speak, Manias held up his hand.

"That is all I intend to say. You will know when you have done it. Things are somewhat different there. I will see you when you have done it."

Back in his bedroom, John considered what Manias had said. He wondered how he could get past the mental level. The more he thought about it the more it seemed a futile idea. In any case, he thought, what is beyond the mental level? In frustration, he fell asleep and did not awaken until his mother knocked at his bedroom door. He looked at the clock. He had missed his morning meditation and would have to hurry to have his breakfast before leaving for work. All during the day, he kept thinking of the strange idea of transcending the mind. It did not seem to make sense and in the evening, he phoned Rajik to ask what he thought. He did not mention Manias but said that Nam Tso had suggested that he should get past the mind. Rajik came round after the late dinner, and they sat in the lounge room trying to unravel the mystery of retaining awareness without actually thinking. For once, Rajik did not have an immediate answer. They were still debating the problem when Eda turned up. She listened to what they were saying then impatiently broke into their intellectual discussion.

"Sometimes I think men are stupid," she said. "They think that they can solve all problems by working it out."

"Well, how would you do it?" John asked.

Eda tossed her head. "Not like that. I would use my women's Intuition."

"Very clever; just like that. How practical," John retorted.

Eda laughed. "You can reason until you are dizzy, but what you two need is more faith."

John looked at her in stunned silence.

"Now what have I said wrong?" she asked.

"Nothing. That's exactly what Kant said." John replied.

“And who is Kant? Eda demanded.

John explained. “He was an eighteenth century German philosopher, and he said, ‘there comes a point beyond which reason cannot go, and there has to be a jump forward in to faith.’

“Well, there you go. Now, who wants coffee?”

As Eda went into the kitchen Rajik looked very thoughtful, and murmured something in a low voice.”

“What’s that?” John asked him.

“I was thinking of my own problem, “Rajik answered. “You see what it all boils down to is that the magic formula is love and faith. All this knowledge is useful but it is not the best tool for opening the door.”

“I am beginning to agree with that,” John added, “but I still think it is helpful to know what is happening, and where we are going.”

“I certainly cannot argue with that, but from now I think devotion and faith must be on the agenda.”

“Yes,” John agreed, and they stopped the discussion as Eda brought a tray with the coffee.

That night John decided to do what he had done before. That was to meditate before he went to bed and focus on jumping past the monkey mind. ‘You cannot think your way to enlightenment,’ Nam Tso had once said, and John decided that somehow he would use faith to make the leap. Yet, despite his efforts he was unable to make the necessary change of attitude. Three weeks went by without any sign of any new insight. In desperation, John decided that he would make one more effort, and if nothing happened, he would abandon the futile quest and settle for the level he had already reached. He mediated in a relaxed manner, half convinced that he was wasting his time, and finally got into bed and fell asleep.

Almost immediately, he found himself in a different environment. Tall figures were walking about and he looked at them with curiosity. He could not distinguish males from females and thought that they all looked the same. He looked round at the scene. As with the other journeys he had arrived in an open space. Buildings were visible in the distance,

but John felt no wish to go nearer. One of the people walking by came up to him. “A Buddhist,” he said, half as a question and half as an affirmation.

“Yes”, John answered. “How do you know?”

The stranger smiled. “We know. We just know. It is clear enough that you are new here, but we do not have any Buddhists here.”

“What do you have?” John asked with curiosity.

“We do not have anything. There are religions here. We know about them, but we are only interested in divine truths. There are no beliefs and no temples, just pure wisdom.”

“Like the lords of wisdom?” John asked.

“Yes, but they are further on, in the next dimension.”

John thanked him and said that he had to go. He waited, and then thought of Manias. He was hoping that he could go directly to him. He appeared in front of Manias with the usual flurry of movement and stood there amazed that he had done it.

Manias seemed to be waiting and welcomed him with enthusiasm. “So you did it?” he said.

“I think so,” John replied.

“Tell me what happened,” Manias commanded.

John explained. He went over the main points. “The people were tall. I could not distinguish between male and female. They seem to know by an intuitive process and they do not have religions.”

“Bravo,” Manias said, clapping both hands together. “That is it. You most certainly managed it. You will not need to go there again, but you have to develop the ability to know in the way they do. It is intuition, and then, with your rational mind you can bring it onto the level of understanding.”

John sat down in astonishment and asked a question that was in his mind. “Why do they look so similar? Which are male and female?”

Manias laughed. “Don’t worry about it. You are not going to live up there. They are all naturally bisexual, hermaphrodites.”

John smiled back at Manias. “I don’t think I want to live up there,” he said, “but I like the idea of instant knowledge. I must work at that.”

Manias suddenly became very serious. “You now have a choice to make. “You can teach here, and perhaps help Nam Tso, or you can help me. I need an assistant, but there is no pay and no prestige. It would be as secret as before. Apart from that, you would live a normal life. What do you choose?”

John did not hesitate. He had anticipated such a possibility. “I would like to be your assistant,” he said.

Manias smiled broadly. “I thought you would. I am pleased. Now, you can concentrate on your wedding preparations.”

John stood up; he felt like hugging Manias, but maintained his reserve and bowed formally.

“Thank you,” he said. “Thank you for everything.”

As John turned to leave, Manias spoke. “I shall be waiting.” He bowed in acknowledgement of John’s attainment, and spoke again.

“Lama Nam Tso will complete your awakening.”

John returned the bow and returned to the familiar setting of his bedroom, wondering what Nam Tso would tell him.

CHAPTER 12 – THE BLUE LORD

At his next meeting with Nam Tso, John sat down and waited for the lama to speak.

Nam Tso looked at John and remained silent for a few minutes.

“As you know, we are pleased with your decision, but it is still necessary to seal your attainment.”

The lama leaned forward slightly, looking steadily at John. In the past, this had always unsettled John, but now he remained calm. The lama nodded as if approving of John’s calm control.

“You are already aware that you are the inner Buddha, but you have to complete the process. I will explain, so that when it occurs you will understand what is happening.”

He paused, with his usual manner of allowing one point to sink in before proceeding to the next one. He continued slowly, “You have seen the shining being, but that is only the ego self seeing the spiritual self. We call this ‘the minister seeing the prince’. That is the Buddha within. When you have grasped that you are that spiritual self you reverse the position and see the ego. We call this, ‘the prince seeing the minister’. Yet, there is one further position. That is ‘the prince seeing the king’. The king is the Tathagata, the Father Buddha or Supreme Lord.”

Another long pause followed while John digested this information.

“Each seeker sees it according to his own values, but the principle is the same. You will see it tonight, in an out of the body experience. It is easier to do it that way. Many people do experience it but dismiss it as a dream because of ignorance. You will be fully aware and be able to bring it through into your waking consciousness. That is the aim; conscious awareness of your spiritual nature.”

The lama’s manner indicated that there was nothing more to say, but he added one last comment.

“When you experience this it is usual to remain silent, but in your case you can tell Eda and Rajik, as it will help them. Your mother already understands these things.”

The last remark astonished John, but as he sat there thinking about it, he began to see that this explained many things about his mother's approach to life. The lama waited, watching John carefully. When he raised his head the lama gave a slight nod, indicating that it was time to go. John rose and bowed and the lama returned the bow. John left the room and walked home slowly. The lama's comment about his mother had amazed him. Yet, when he thought about it the situation seemed obvious. In retrospect he could see that his mother was fully aware of what she was doing and aware of her spiritual identity. He had assumed that his mother was only quoting books. He felt ashamed of his stupidity as he realized that his own progress was largely due to her careful guidance.

The rest of the day seemed to go slowly because he was eager to see the final experience. When he went to bed, he was careful not to be too tense and meditated on the affirmation that Nam Tso had advised. As he meditated, he felt fully convinced that he was indeed the inner self and that the body and the ego, were really extensions of that self. Finally, he decided to lie down and fell asleep. The beginning of the experience was almost the same as the first time, when Nam Tso had met him in the garden at his initial out of body experience. Nam Tso appeared, but did not lead him into another world. They remained where they were. Then, with a single action of Nam Tso placing his hand on John's head the scene changed.

John found himself alone in what appeared to be a boundless space. The shining figure appeared before him. Nam Tso's words rang in John's mind. This is 'the minister seeing the prince'. Suddenly there was a change and John felt that he was now the shining being. Before him was another figure. This is 'the prince seeing the minister', he thought. The ego stood before him and John studied it closely. The figure was dark and covered all over with a finely wrinkled sheath that gave the impression of an endless existence. The figure seemed to be distressed and uncertain, as it confronted John in the role of the prince. John impulsively put his hand on the figure's arm to reassure it. As the figure relaxed, John's attention focused on another figure on a slightly higher elevation. The ego figure moved away and John was now facing a tall imposing figure that radiated light and serenity in all directions. He thought, 'this is 'the prince seeing the king'', and gazed at it in awe. The figure was in a glowing robe that shone like burnished gold. The features were strong and serene but the most remarkable impression was that the skin was a deep

blue. The face, hands, and feet that were clearly visible were a deep lustrous blue. This is Rajik's blue lord; John thought and studied it carefully. As he inspected it, the appearance changed into that of the shining being and then that of the ego minister. Then, to his utter astonishment it changed into an appearance of himself. It was like looking at a reflection in the mirror, but there was no frame. In incredulous awe, John watched as the appearance changed again. Now it was Nam Tso. John tried to grasp what was happening, and as if in answer to the thought, the figure changed into that of the Buddha and again changed to the appearance of Kwan Yin. In quick succession, like images from a projector the figure took on the appearance of different deities. As he watched John felt the limits of his own identity blurring and began to realize the meaning of the statement, 'all is one'.

Finally, as a reaffirmation of his own position he was again looking up at the blue lord and looking down at the ego minister. With that, the visions faded and John was again with Nam Tso.

"Do you understand now?" he asked John.

"Yes," John replied, cutting off the urge to say 'I think I do'.

With a sudden movement, Nam Tso vanished and John found himself in his bedroom. There was no hope of any sleep after such an experience and John spent the rest of the night sitting in his armchair, gazing at the moonlit garden, and reviewing the meaning of the experiences.

At the breakfast table, his mother noticed his introspective mood and asked if he felt unwell.

"I am all right," he told her, "but I had an interesting experience in the night. I will tell you tonight, when Eda and Rajik are here. I think you will understand it, and no doubt Rajik will have read something that will help."

His mother had to be content with that as it was time for him to walk down to the office.

"Phone Eda and Rajik and leave a message for them to come round," he said as he left.

By evening, his mother was so keen to know what the special news would be that she prepared an early dinner. John was amused and wanted to tell his mother immediately,

but decided to wait. In the cold light of day, the whole experience appeared so unworldly that he was beginning to think that he would not be able to describe it. Finally, with dinner over, and the arrival of his two friends it was time to speak. They sat in the lounge room, with Tiger, the cat sitting on the rug.

“Right,” John said. “I want to tell you what happened in the night. Nam Tso has given me permission to tell you, but I do not wish anyone else to know. It is all rather unbelievable, but I know that you have read enough to understand what I say.”

The others waited expectantly and John decided to give a little introduction before recounting the actual experience.

“You know that all the teachings talk about transcending the ego and experiencing the spiritual self. Some talk about self realization and some talk about God realization and some go beyond that.”

He paused and looked at the.

“Yes. We know that. Go on.” Rajik replied.

“Well, the thing is,” John went on, “is that Nam Tso offered to show me the difference, and it was in a nighttime out of the body experience.”

Eda gasped as he said that and Rajik leaned as far forward as he could and almost fell off the chair. Only his mother remained unaffected, but she also listened intently for the next words.

“I was shown the shining being, and the ego and the Lord, one after the other.”

In calculated words, it did not seem so remarkable and he finished by quoting Nam Tso.

“He said that if we discussed it would be helpful.”

“I think I will make the coffee now,” his mother said. “I think we all need a minute or two to grasp that.”

When they were sitting again, John turned to Rajik. “What do your books say about it?” he asked.

“Many of them explain it,” Rajik replied, “but your account helps to make it clearer. The Lord is Shiva, or the Father. He is always blue, in the paintings. The prince is the individual soul, Isahvara, is the son. In Vedanta, it is the Atman, and the blue lord is Krishna. That is why Krishna speaks to Arjuna, in the Bhagavad Gita. The lord is telling

the soul that he must defeat the dark forces. Brahma is the Holy Spirit, and is beyond the lord. That is the stage when the Yogi says, 'I am that', but only a rare few go that far. I can see now that it is all very simple. All we have to do is to do what they all say, and transcend the ego. From what you have said the rest follows naturally."

"So now you can be a guru," Eda said, teasing him.

John shook his head. "I do not think so. A genuine guru goes beyond that stage. Ask my mother, I am sure she knows that."

They looked at her expectantly.

"Yes," she agreed. "Our task is to wake and grow up, and experience the soul. That is really something". The rest follows from that."

"Ah," Eda said. "That's why they all say that we should ask 'Who am I'?"

John and Rajik clapped in a humorous gesture of agreement. . "Well done," they said together.

"But, when you do it. Do not tell anybody." John added. "They will not believe you."

To John, this seemed to be the end of his search, but his guardian angel had one more experience to give him. Unaware of this, John tried to establish a secret routine, where his daytime life appeared very normal and ordinary and his nighttime life was one of mystic action, which he never discussed. For a while, this seemed to work, but slowly he developed an inner restlessness that began to disturb him. In spite of his best efforts, he felt increasingly agitated and began to search through his mother's books for explanations of his dissatisfaction, but found nothing. To add to the strange sense of isolation that was creeping over him, Eda went away for a few days. Even Rajik seemed to be busy and phoned to say that he could not him on Saturday morning visit. There was only his mother, but in any case, he could not discuss a situation that he could not define.

His mother watched this new phase with concern. It was obvious that John was agitated, although he had said nothing. Even so, his mood was like a loud voice complaining about life.

"You should meditate before you go to bed," his mother said, as if he had voiced his inner thoughts. John shrugged his shoulders and said nothing, but went into his bedroom. He sat there, feeling almost bitter that in spite of everything he was not at ease. Suddenly the view of his bedroom disappeared and there seemed to a gray mist surrounding him, as

if he were in a cloud on a mountaintop. Everything was silent. The cicadas in the garden were strangely quiet. Even his breathing made no sound and he noticed that it was barely active. He put one hand on his chest, but could not feel the beating of his heart. His point of observation seemed to be above his body, yet he was conscious of everything that was happening to it. The mist before his eyes swirled and parted and he could see an angelic figure approaching him. This was different from any of his earlier experiences and beyond description. As he watched the figure appeared to dissolve and become one with the mist that surrounded him. With that, he felt his heart begin to beat again and the view of his bedroom reappeared. To his astonishment, he saw Manias standing before him. With his usual smile, Manias asked him a pertinent question.

“How do you feel?” he said.

John whispered an answer. “I feel weak and my body feels enormously heavy.”

Manias laughed, and John felt reassured.

“That will pass,” Manias told him. “It is only a temporary contrast.”

“What happened?” John asked.

“You had a deep near death experience,” Manias told him. “I was watching to see if it would happen. Not everyone experiences it. You are very fortunate.”

John pondered on the last statement and finally asked what it meant.

“Why did I see the angelic figure?” he asked. “Surely I should have seen the Buddha. After all, I have followed a Buddhist discipline.”

Manias laughed again. “There are no factions in heaven. What do you think, that you take your personal views with you.”

John was not satisfied with that answer. “In that case, why anything?”

Manias shook his head, and became silent for a while, then began to explain.

“Everything that you have experienced before was in the realm of the mind. A lot of Buddhism is a mental approach. The Diamond Sutra goes beyond that, but it is very abstract. The figure was a symbol of the pure spirit, so was the surrounding mist. In our language, you had crossed to the far shore, which is beyond the mind. Do not try to describe it. Cling to your vision and the spirit will slowly displace all mental concepts.”

“And what will I have then?” John asked in concern.

“Well, you will not need concepts,” Manias explained patiently. “You will have spiritual awareness. Do not worry about it. You are in safe hands. Now I must go.” Just have faith,” he added.

With that, Manias disappeared and John was alone, pondering on this new situation. He still wanted words as an answer. As he considered it, the words of the priest at his old school came to his mind.

“Some fortunate few have a personal resurrection. Few are willing to work at it, yet we could all attain it.”

John thought about it and decided that Manias was right. His approach was too mental. He decided that there was nothing more to think, and nothing to say about it. As he switched off the light he thought, “That’s it. We should switch off our nonstop thinking, and give the spirit a chance.’ He smiled as he caught himself philosophizing. A scratching at the door interrupted his thoughts. He opened the door and let Tiger in. The cat walked across to the chair and jumped on to it, curled up and went to sleep.

“That’s the way to be,” was John’s final thought, and mentally switched off his thinking and followed the cat’s example.