

MICHAEL A. SINGER

#1 *New York Times* bestselling author of
The Untethered Soul

THE
SURRENDER
EXPERIMENT

my journey into life's perfection

The
Surrender
Experiment

my journey into life's perfection

Michael A. Singer



HARMONY
BOOKS • NEW YORK

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Published in the United States by Harmony Books, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, New York.

www.crownpublishing.com

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available upon request.

ISBN 9780804141109

eBook ISBN 9780804141116

eBook design adapted from printed book design by Amanda Dewey

Cover design by Fort & Jess Morphew

Cover illustration by Shutterstock/David M. Schrader

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Acknowledgments

In truth, life is really the author of this book. She is the one who manifested the flow of events that were so powerful and fascinating they demanded narration. But life needed me to put pen to paper so her greatness was to be memorialized. To that end, she sent exactly the right people at exactly the right time to bring *The Surrender Experiment* into fruition.

It is with humility and heartfelt thanks that I tell you of the phenomenal job that my production manager, Karen Entner, did on this book. Her tireless and selfless service has instilled this work with a sense of commitment and perfection rarely found in this world.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank my editor, Gary Jansen, from Crown Publishing for all the hard work and great suggestions he contributed. As would be expected, life provided the absolutely perfect editor to assist me in giving this testimony to her greatness.

This book had many early readers, all of whom deserve thanks. I would like to single out James O'Dea, Ursula Harlos, and Stephanie Davis, who contributed detailed suggestions on draft after draft during the early stages of writing.

I now get to acknowledge you, the reader, for having the interest and taking the time to read about this phenomenal experiment. May we all learn to appreciate our lives in this amazing universe—little bit more each day.

Waking Up

The Premise

Sitting alone in a six-seater private jet at forty thousand feet is a very peaceful place. I fell into meditation and my mind became very still. When I opened my eyes, I absorbed the tremendous difference in my environment from when I had first moved out to the woods to be alone and meditate. Though I still lived in those same woods, my place of solitude had grown into a thriving yoga community, and I had become CEO of the public corporation that life had somehow magically manifested around me. It was now perfectly clear to me that all of these life experiences, including running a business at this level, were doing as much to free me spiritually as my years of solitary meditation. Just as Hercules used the flow of rivers to clean out the Augean stables, so the powerful flow of life was cleaning out whatever was left of me. I just kept letting go and practicing nonresistance, whether I liked what was happening or not. It was in this frame of mind that I was flying off to Texas to discuss the billion-dollar merger offer for my company from a powerful CEO whom I had never even met.

My Reflections, May 1999

Life rarely unfolds exactly as we want it to. And if we stop and think about it, that makes perfect sense. The scope of life is universal, and the fact that we are not actually in control of life events should be self-evident. The universe has been around for 13.8 billion years, and the processes that determine the flow of life around us did not begin when we were born, nor will they end when we die. What manifests in front of us at any given moment is actually something truly extraordinary—it is the end result of all the forces that have been interacting together for billions of years. We are not responsible for even the tiniest fraction of what is manifesting around us. Nonetheless, we walk around constantly trying to control and determine what will happen in our lives. No wonder there's so much tension, anxiety, and fear. Each of us actually believes that things should be the way we want them, instead of being the natural result of all the forces of creation.

Every day, we give precedence to our mind's thoughts over the reality unfolding before us. We regularly say things like, "It better not rain today because I'm going camping" or "I better get that raise because I really need the money." Notice that these bold claims about what should and shouldn't be happening are not based on scientific evidence; they're based solely on personal preferences made up in our minds. Without realizing it, we do this with everything in our lives—it's as though we actually believe that the world around us is supposed to manifest in accordance to our own likes and dislikes. If it doesn't, surely something is very wrong. This is an extremely difficult way to live, and it is the reason we feel that we are always struggling with life.

Nonetheless, it is also true that we are not powerless in the face of the events unfolding around us. We have been gifted with the power of will. From deep inside, we can determine how we want something to be and apply the power of our minds, hearts, and bodies in an attempt to make the outside world conform. But this puts us in a constant battle of our way versus the way it would be without our intervention. This battle between individual will and the reality of life unfolding around

us ends up consuming our lives. When we win the battle, we are happy and relaxed; when we don't, we are disturbed and stressed. Since most of us only feel good when things are going our way, we are constantly attempting to control everything in our lives.

The question is, does it have to be this way? There is so much evidence that life does quite well on its own. The planets stay in orbit, tiny seeds grow into giant trees, weather patterns have kept forests across the globe watered for millions of years, and a single fertilized cell grows into a beautiful baby. We are not doing any of these things as conscious acts of will; they are all being done by the incomprehensible perfection of life itself. All these amazing events, and countless more, are being carried out by forces of life that have been around for billions of years—the very same forces of life that we are consciously pitting our will against on a daily basis. If the natural unfolding of the process of life can create and take care of the entire universe, is it really reasonable for us to assume that nothing good will happen unless we force it to? It is to the exploration of this intriguing question that this book is devoted.

How can there possibly be a more important question? If life can manifest the DNA molecule on its own, not to mention create the human brain, how is it that we feel that we have to control everything on our own? There must be another, more sane way to approach life. For example, what would happen if we respected the flow of life and used our free will to participate in what's unfolding, instead of fighting it? What would be the quality of the life that unfolds? Would it just be random events with no order or meaning, or would the same perfection of order and meaning that manifests in the rest of the universe manifest in the everyday life around us?

What we have here is the basis for an amazing experiment. At the heart of the experiment is a simple question: Am I better off making up an alternate reality in my mind and then fighting with that reality to make it be my way, or am I better off letting go of what I want and serving the same forces of reality that managed to create the entire perfection of the universe around me? This experiment would not be about dropping out of life; it would be about leaping into life to live in a place where we are no longer controlled by our personal fears and desires. For lack of a better name, I have called this "the surrender experiment," and to the best of my ability, I have devoted the last forty years of my life to seeing where the flow of life's events would naturally take me. What happened over the course of these four decades is nothing short of phenomenal. Not only did things not fall apart, quite the opposite happened. As one thing naturally followed the other, the flow of life's events led me on a journey that would have been beyond my comprehension. This book shares that journey with you so that you can experience what happened when someone dared to let go and trust the flow of life.

Let it be clear right from the start, however, that this type of surrender does not mean living life without the assertion of will. My story of these forty years is simply the story of what happened when the assertion of will was guided by what life was doing instead of what I wanted it to be doing. My personal experience is that aligning one's will with the natural forces unfolding around us leads to some surprisingly powerful results.

The only effective way to share the results of this great experiment is to allow you to see how I got pulled into living this way and then allow you to experience the journey as I did. In what follows, you are about to encounter a set of life experiences that are bound to be very different from your own. I share these with you only because as human beings we have the extraordinary ability to learn from one another's experiences. You don't have to live as I did in order to be affected by what happened to me. The unexpected events that unfolded before me not only changed my life, they changed my entire view of life and left me with a sense of deep inner peace. Hopefully, sharing my surrender experiment

with you will encourage you to find a more peaceful and harmonious way to live your life and better appreciate the amazing perfection that unfolds around us.

Not with a Shout—But with a Whisper

My given name is Michael Alan Singer. From as far back as I can remember, everyone has called me Mickey. I was born May 6, 1947, and lived a fairly ordinary life until the winter of 1970. Then something happened to me that was so profound that it forever changed the direction of my life.

Life-changing events can be very dramatic and, by their very nature, disruptive. Your whole being is headed in one direction physically, emotionally, and mentally; and that direction has all the momentum of your past and all the dreams of your future. Then suddenly, there's a major earthquake, a terrible sickness, or a chance encounter that totally sweeps you off your feet. If the event is powerful enough to change the focus of your heart and mind, the rest of your life will change in due course. You are literally not the same person on both sides of a truly life-changing event. Your interests change, your goals change, in fact, the underlying purpose of your life changes. It usually takes a very powerful event to turn your head around so far that you never look back.

But not always.

In the winter of 1970, no such event happened to me. What happened was so subtle, so faint, that it could easily have passed by without being noticed. It was not with a shout but with a whisper that my life was thrown into utter turmoil and transformation. It has been more than forty years now since that life-changing moment, but I remember it as if it were yesterday.

I was sitting on the living room couch in my home in Gainesville, Florida. I was twenty-two years old and married at the time to a beautiful soul named Shelly. We were both students at the University of Florida where I was doing my graduate work in economics. I was a very astute student, and I was being groomed by the chairman of the economics department to become a college professor. Shelly had a brother, Ronnie, who was a very successful attorney in Chicago. Ronnie and I became close friends even though we were from totally different worlds. He was a powerful, wealth-driven, big-city attorney, and I was a '60s-groomed, college-intellectual hippie. It is worth mentioning just how analytically oriented I was at the time. I had never even taken a philosophy, psychology, or religion course while in college. My electives at school were symbolic logic, advanced calculus, and theoretical statistics. This makes what happened to me all the more amazing.

Ronnie would come down once in a while to visit, and we would often just hang out together. As it turns out, Ronnie was sitting on that couch with me on that fateful day in 1970. I don't remember exactly what we were talking about, but there had been a lull in our leisurely conversation. I noticed I was uncomfortable with the silence and found myself thinking of what to say next. I had been in similar situations many times before, but something was quite different about this experience. Instead of simply being uncomfortable and trying to find something to say, I *noticed* that I was uncomfortable and trying to find something to say. For the first time in my life, my mind and emotions were watching something I was watching instead of being.

I know that it is difficult to put into words, but there was a complete sense of separation between

my anxious mind, which was spewing out possible topics to talk about, and me, the one who was simply aware that my mind was doing this. It was like I was suddenly able to remain above my mind and quietly watch the thoughts being created. Believe it or not, that subtle shift in my seat of awareness became a tornado that rearranged my entire life.

For a few moments, I just sat there inwardly watching myself try to “fix” the awkward silence. But I was not the one trying to fix it; I was the one quietly watching the activity of my mind trying to fix it. At first there were only a few degrees of separation between me and what I was watching. But even a second the separation seemed to become greater and greater. I was not doing anything to cause the shift. I was just there noticing that my sense of *me* no longer included the neurotic thought patterns that were passing in front of me.

This entire process of “becoming aware” was practically instantaneous. It was like when you stand at one of those posters that has a hidden picture inside. At first it appears to be just a circle with lines and patterns. Then, suddenly, you see an entire 3-D image emerge from what originally looked like chaos. Once you see it, you can’t imagine how you hadn’t seen it before. It was right there! Such was the shift that happened inside of me. It was so obvious—I was in there watching my thoughts and emotions. I had always been in there watching, but I had been too unaware to notice. It was as though I had been so involved in their details that I never saw them as just thoughts and emotions.

Within seconds, what previously seemed like important solutions for how to break the uncomfortable silence was now sounding like a neurotic voice talking inside my head. I watched that voice tried out things to say:

The weather’s been awesome, hasn’t it?

Did you hear what Nixon did the other day?

Do you want to get something to eat?

When I finally did open my mouth to say something, what I said was:

“Have you ever noticed that there’s this voice talking inside your head?”

Ronnie looked at me a little weird, and then a spark lit in his eyes. He said, “Yes, I see what you’re talking about—mine never shuts up!” I distinctly remember making a joke out of it by asking him what it would be like if he heard someone else’s voice talking in there. We laughed, and life went on.

But not *my* life. My life didn’t just “go on.” In my life, nothing would ever be the same again. I didn’t have to try to maintain this awareness. It was who I was now. I was the being who was watching the incessant flow of thoughts pass through the mind. From the same seat of awareness, I watched the ever-shifting current of emotions pass through the heart. When I showered, I saw what that voice had to say while I was supposed to be washing my body. If I was talking to someone, I watched as the voice figured out what to say next—instead of listening to what the other person was saying. If I went to class, I watched my mind play the game of trying to think ahead of the professor to see if it could figure out where he was going with the lecture. Needless to say, it did not take long before this newly found voice inside my head really started to annoy me. It was like sitting next to someone in a movie theater who never, ever stops talking.

As I observed that voice, something deep inside my being just wanted it to shut up. What would be like if it stopped? I began to long for silence inside. Within days of that first experience, my life

patterns began to change. When friends came over to socialize, I no longer enjoyed the scene. I wanted to quiet my mind, and social activities didn't help. I began to excuse myself and go out to the woods near our house. I would sit down on the ground amid the trees and tell that voice to shut up. Of course it didn't work. Nothing seemed to work. I found that I could change the topic it talked about, but could not get it to just stop talking for any length of time. My yearning for inner silence became a passion. I knew what it was like to watch the voice. What I didn't know is what it would be like if the voice totally stopped. And what I never could have imagined was the life-changing journey on which I was about to embark.

Getting to Know Me

Even in my youth, I loved to figure out how things worked. So it was inevitable that my analytical mind would become fascinated by trying to understand my relationship to the voice inside my head. Before I could enjoy this intellectual fascination, however, I had to get over the fact that the personal mind was driving me crazy. Every time I saw something, that voice made some comment about it: *I like it...; I don't like it...; I'm not comfortable with this...; This reminds me of...* As I became more and more accustomed to watching all this, a few questions naturally arose. First, why is this voice talking all the time? If I see something, I'm instantly aware of seeing it. Why does the voice have to tell me that I see it and how I feel about it?

Here comes Mary. I don't feel like seeing her today. I hope she doesn't see me.

I know what I see and I know what I feel. After all, I'm the one in here seeing and feeling. Why does it have to get vocalized in my mind?

Another question that arose was who am I who keeps noticing all this mental activity? Who am I who can just watch thoughts come up with a complete sense of detachment?

I now had two driving forces awakened inside regarding this newly found voice in my head. One was the desire to shut it up and the other was the pure fascination and yearning to understand what the voice was and where it came from.

I mentioned that prior to this inner awakening, my life was pretty ordinary. I only say that in comparison to what my life became. I became a driven human being. I wanted to know about the voice I had discovered, and I wanted to know who I was—the one inside experiencing all of this. I began to spend hours on end in the graduate school library. But I was not in the economics section; I was in the psychology section. There was no way that others had not noticed this voice talking inside. It was so prevalent that you couldn't miss it. I scanned through Freud trying to find the answers to my questions. I read book after book, but I found no direct reference to the voice talking inside—not even mention any reference to the one who is aware that the voice is talking.

In those days, I would talk about the voice to anyone who would listen. They all must have thought I was crazy. I remember one encounter with my very reserved, highly cultured Spanish professor. I ran into him one day between classes and excitedly told him that I had come to understand what it meant to be fluent in a language. I explained to him that there was this voice inside your head that talks to you about virtually everything—what you like and dislike, what you're supposed to be doing right now, and what you've done wrong in the past. If that inner voice could speak in Spanish and you immediately understood what it was saying, then you were fluent in Spanish. If, however, the Spanish words made no sense to you until you did the mental work of translating them so that the voice would repeat them in English, then you were not fluent in Spanish. It made perfect sense—to me. I told him that if I were majoring in language studies, I would do my doctoral dissertation on that premise. Needless to say, my Spanish professor gave me a very odd look, said something very polite, and we

on his way.

I didn't care what he thought. I was on an exploration, a journey of learning beyond anything could have imagined. Every day I was learning so much about myself. I couldn't believe the amount of self-consciousness and fear being expressed through that voice. It was so obvious that the person was watching inside cared a great deal about what people thought of him. This was especially true of people I knew well. The voice told me what to say and what not to say. It complained incessantly when something was not the way it wanted. If a conversation with a friend ended with the slightest discord or disagreement, the conversation would keep going on inside my head. I would watch the voice wishfully imagine how the conversation could have ended on a different note. I could see how much fear of rejection and nonacceptance were being expressed through that mental dialogue. It was overwhelming at times, but I never lost the perspective of watching a voice talking inside. It was obvious it wasn't me; it was something I was watching.

Imagine if you woke up one day and a cacophony of noise was all around you. You wanted it to stop, but you had no idea how to stop it. That is the effect the voice was having on me. One thing was perfectly clear: that voice had always talked before. But I had been so lost in it that I never noticed it as separate from me. It was like a fish not knowing it is in water until it gets out. One leap into the air and the fish instantly realizes, "There's a body of water down there, and that is where I've always been. But now I see that I can get out."

I didn't like the voice of the mind talking all the time. It was just like an irritating noise that I really wanted to stop. But it didn't. For now I was stuck with it. As it turns out, however, I had not yet begun to fight.

The Pillars of Zen

Months went by and I was still on my own with my inner exploration. Little did I know the help was about to arrive unexpectedly.

I had a classmate in my doctoral program named Mark Waldman. He was a bright young man and an avid reader on a broad range of subjects. Like everyone else, Mark had heard me talking about my interest in the voice. One day he brought me a book he thought might help. The book was entitled *Three Pillars of Zen*, by Philip Kapleau.

I knew absolutely nothing about Zen Buddhism. I was an intellectual who didn't give religious matters a second thought. I was brought up Jewish, but not very much so. By the time I reached college, religion played no part in my life. If you had asked me if I was an atheist, I probably would have given you a blank stare. I had never even thought about it.

I started leafing through the pages of the book on Zen, and within minutes it became evident: the book was about that voice. My heart practically stopped. I had trouble breathing. This book was clearly about how to stop that voice from talking. Passage after passage spoke about quieting the mind. It used terms like the *True Self* behind the mind. There was no doubt that I had found what I had been looking for. I knew there had to be others who had gained the perspective of watching that voice of the mind instead of identifying with it. Not only was there an entire legacy of knowledge spanning thousands of years that dealt with the voice, but this book clearly discussed "getting out." It talked about freeing yourself from the hold of the mind. It talked about going *beyond*.

Needless to say, I was in awe. I felt a reverence for this book that I had never felt for anything in my life. I had been forced to read and study so many books in school. I now had in my hands a book that answered some real questions for me, like who am I that watches that voice talk. These were questions that I passionately wanted to know the answers to. Truth is, it was way beyond *want*. I *needed* to know these answers—that voice was driving me crazy!

What *Three Pillars of Zen* had to say was very clear and unequivocal. It said to stop reading, stop talking, and thinking about your mind, and just do the work necessary to quiet it down. The required work was equally unambiguous—meditate.

Before I even knew about meditation, I had tried sitting alone in order to make the voice stop talking. But that had never worked for me. With this book, I was presented a tried-and-true method that had worked for thousands of others. Simply sit down in a quiet spot, watch your breath go in and out, and mentally repeat the sound *Mu*. That's it. Now do that for an ever-increasing length of time each day. In Zen, the real work was generally done in a group setting called a *sessin*. In traditional settings, a trained person would walk around with a *kyosaku* stick. If you started to sleep or lost focus in another manner, you would get a smack on your shoulders with the stick. Zen was strict; there was no playing around. This form of Zen was serious work.

I didn't have a group or a teacher. All I had was the book and a very sincere yearning to see if these practices would take me where I wanted to go. So I started to do Zen meditation on my own. At least

was my best understanding of what Zen meditation is. At first I sat for fifteen or twenty minutes each day. ~~Within a week I built that to half an hour, twice a day. There were no fireworks or deep~~ experiences. But concentrating on my breath and the mantra was definitely diverting my awareness from the incessant chatter of the voice. If I made the mental voice say *Mu*, it couldn't say all the crazy personal things it usually said. I quickly began to like the practice. I looked forward to the times I had to put aside during the day for meditation.

I was no more than a few weeks into my experiment with Zen meditation when Shelly and I decided to go on a camping trip. We were joined by four friends, and together we drove our vans into Ocala National Forest for the weekend. I had a VW camper, so weekend trips were an easy affair. But this trip wouldn't turn out to be just another camping trip—this trip was destined to have a profound impact on the rest of my life.

We found a secluded spot in the woods that opened up to a pristine wetland area. Once we situated our vans, we were overcome by the quiet and beauty of the place. It dawned on me that this would be a good place to do some meditation. I was just a novice, but I was very serious about doing the practice and finding out what it would be like if the voice actually stopped. I asked Shelly and our friends if they could spend some time by myself. No one objected, so I meandered down by the grassy lake and found a nice spot to sit. The whole notion of meditating was so meaningful to me that from the start it was like a sacred experience. I picked a tree to sit under, just like the Buddha. Then, very dramatically, I told myself, *I'm not getting up until I've reached enlightenment.*

What happened under that tree that day was so powerful that even now my body shivers and my eyes begin to tear just to think about it.

Absolute Silence

I crossed my legs in a full-lotus position. I knew I wasn't proficient enough to hold that posture for long, but I thought I might as well start with the official meditation position. I straightened my back and neck, and I began to concentrate on my breath expanding and contracting in my abdomen. The Zen book instructed me to make the *Mu* sound way down in my belly, below the belly button. I watched my breath go in and out from way down there.

I was intending to sit for much longer than I had done previously, so I used my will to concentrate with extra intensity and sincerity. It must have made a difference because I went deeper inside than I had ever gone before. It seemed that concentrating on the movement of the breath in my belly created a force that linked the outflow of breath from my nostrils with the inner movement of my abdomen. Every time I breathed slowly out my nose, I felt a warm, inviting sensation throughout the area below my belly. The sensation was so nice that my attention naturally centered there. For a period of time, I simply lost myself in the beauty of the experience.

Some time later, the length of which I had no way of telling, the mental voice began talking about how beautiful the experience was and how this must be real meditation. Since my awareness was drawn to that mental voice, it was drawn away from concentrating on the breath. The meditation experience seemed to have run its natural course, and I began to come down to my normal mental state.

But this meditation session was supposed to be different. I had told myself I wasn't getting up until I had broken through. So I willfully began concentrating anew on the movement of the breath in my belly and on the sound of *Mu*. I lost myself once again in the warm flowing force that tied my exhalations to the warmth in my abdomen. The force became much stronger as I concentrated more deeply. Eventually, all consciousness of my body and my surroundings was gone. I was only aware of the effortless flow of warm energy that was building and expanding at the core of my belly. I was not there; only the flow was there.

From time to time, for brief moments, my sense of self-awareness would drift back into focus. The instant that started to happen, I would willfully focus on the feeling of the exhaled breath and the movement of my belly—and, instantly, I was no longer there. This experience of drifting in and out of the deep state went on for a prolonged period of time, perhaps hours.

At some point, I must have lost the will to refocus during one of those moments when self-awareness returned. I had been far gone in a very deep and peaceful place, but I started to come back. I don't know how long I had actually been sitting, but the first thing I became aware of was the pain in my legs. They hurt a great deal from sitting in a full-lotus position for so long. The voice of the mind had not started back up yet. I was just there, kind of dazed, but very peaceful and deeply mesmerized by the experience. I suppose I would have continued to come down, but an amazing thing happened. From back behind where my sense of awareness had been centering came a booming voice. It said very sternly: "DO YOU OR DO YOU NOT WANT TO KNOW WHAT IS BEYOND YOU?"

This was not the voice of the mind I was so used to struggling with. Ever since I first noticed the chattering voice, it was talking in front of and below where I sat inside. This new invocation came from behind and above where my sense of awareness was now situated. In any event, its steady challenge shook me to the depths of my being. I didn't feel the need to answer the question, because every drop of me yearned to go deeper. So I took a breath in, then deeply pushed myself into the outbreath, and I was gone.

When my sense of self-awareness began to coagulate again, my experience of being was very different from anything I had ever experienced before. I felt pain in my legs, but they were very far away and the pain had a warmth and beauty to it. As I regained some awareness of my body, I tried to lean my head a tiny bit forward. Nothing moved. It was as though my forehead was pressed against a wall. Something very solid was resisting even the slightest movement of my head forward. I immediately realized that the sheer intensity of my concentration had created a well-defined force that flowed outward from my forehead and curved back to the point in my lower abdomen where I had been concentrating. I know this must sound strange, but it felt like a magnetic field that was so strong I simply could not move against it.

This was not the only powerful energy I was experiencing. I had been sitting in a full-lotus posture with my hands resting on my crossed feet. In that position the whole of my hands, arms, and shoulders formed a closed circle. Now that complete circle had become another one of these force fields. I could neither move forward nor sideways—I was locked in what I can only describe as perpendicular energy flows. Whenever I breathed out, the flows became more tangible and intense. The entire experience was so completely enthralling that I did not actually regain awareness of my surroundings. I only came down far enough to see that my body was overcome by these energy flows. Then, once again, I heard: “DO YOU OR DO YOU NOT WANT TO KNOW WHAT IS BEYOND YOU?”

I immediately took a deep breath in and with great intention slowly exhaled through my nostrils. It was as though the outgoing breath pushing against the magnetic force fields created upward lift. The upward and inward propulsion began to drive me to an even deeper place, beyond any sense of self-awareness. One more breath in and out, and I was completely gone.

Perhaps you would like to ask where I went. That's reasonable, but I'm unable to answer that question. I only know that each time I came back, I was in a more elevated state than when I left. When I came back from nowhere the next time, everything was very different. There was no subtle resistance to having returned. There was no sense of urgency to hold on to the elevated state. There was only peace—deep, deep peace. And there was absolute silence, a silence that nothing could possibly disturb. It was so still that perhaps there had never ever been any sound here for all eternity. It was like outer space where there is no atmosphere, so there can be no sound. Sound requires a medium in which to travel. In the place I returned to, there was no such medium. I was truly experiencing the sound of silence.

Most important, there was no voice. There was not even the memory of what it would be like to have chatter in that sacred place. It was gone. All gone. All that was left was awareness of being. I simply existed, nothing more. This time no stern beckoning entreated me to go beyond. It was time to come back.

The first thing I noticed as I became aware of my surroundings was that the external energy flows I experienced earlier had drawn inward. I now felt a very beautiful flow of energy up my spine to the middle of my forehead. I had never experienced this before, and almost all my awareness was drawn to that point. Meanwhile, there was still great pain in my legs, but that wasn't a problem. It was just

the quiet experience of pain. No complaints, no mental dialogue about what to do about it. There was simply awareness, completely at peace with what it was aware of.

I managed to move my arms enough to unfold my legs from the lotus position. They were like dead weight, so I lay on my side for a while until they came back to life. It was so peaceful, so comfortable lying there. In time, I opened my eyes. What eased in through those openings was like nothing I had ever seen or dreamed of before. The wetland area before me appeared like a Japanese rice paper painting. It exuded gentleness and stillness. The tall grasses swayed in the gentle breeze, but the movement had a stillness about it. Everything was so quiet, so serene. The trees were quiet, the clouds were quiet, the water was quiet. There was absolute stillness in the midst of the movement of nature. My body was quiet, and there were no thoughts at all. I could have lain there forever melting into the peace that surrounded my sense of presence.

When I finally got up, the movement of my body was unfamiliar to me. I had never been a graceful person. I was definitely not the dancing type. But now every movement of my body was like a ballet. There was a graceful flow when my arms moved, and I really saw the difference when I began to walk. With each step I could feel every tiny movement of the muscles in my feet. I flowed from one step to the next, and the movement itself was intoxicating.

The amazing part is that this state lasted for weeks. When I rejoined my friends that day, the state didn't change. I felt no need to explain or describe what had happened to me during the two to three hours I was gone. I could hardly talk. Everything was so beautiful and tranquil. The silence, the absolute silence, even sounds outside did not disturb that stillness. The sounds were out there, but they seemed so far away from where I was seated inside. A moat of thick peace allowed nothing to reach the citadel of my elevated state.

From Absolute Peace to Absolute Turmoil

Shelly and I returned home from the weekend trip, but I could not relate to the life I was coming back to. I had changed completely in a matter of hours. My normal inner state had been transformed into a state of absolute clarity. Neither desire nor fear could touch me in those early days. Even thoughts faded away before reaching my seat of awareness. All I remember experiencing at that time was a powerful, unwavering sense of one pointed intention—*I will never leave this state. No matter what, I will never allow anything to take me from this place.* No voice in my mind had to say that to me; it was who I was. I was no longer Mickey Singer. I was the one who would never betray that peace or allow anything to disturb that transcendent stillness.

I was like a child having to learn everything all over again. I had to learn to eat in a way that was consistent with that peace. I used to smoke pot; I stopped completely. My state was crystal clear, and I didn't want to dull it one iota. I had to learn to go to classes and take tests while remaining perfectly centered. I was in a doctoral program, on full fellowship. I had to learn to use my intellectual mind without disturbing the peace that I now loved more than life itself.

During those next few weeks, I felt like I had been born anew. I found myself yearning to go back beyond. In fact, every time I sat down to meditate I was drawn back into an elevated state. Some veil had been torn aside inside of me, and it was now totally natural to pass back through it. I started waking up at three in the morning to be able to do prolonged meditations. Throughout the day, I would sit whenever and wherever I had the opportunity. Only a small part of my life was about my outer existence. What I was really about was learning to stay deep inside while my outer life passed before me, leaving me at peace.

I wasn't able to stay that detached for long, however. After two to three weeks, the unassailable inner peace began to develop cracks. These cracks allowed the voice of my personal mind to leak back into my sanctuary of silence. I struggled to get it back. Oh, did I struggle. But the struggling itself was inconsistent with the absolute stillness. There was nothing I could do. I had to just sit in helplessness watching as the Land Beyond My Dreams gave way to my noisy inner state. It never dawned on me that I could try leaving my outer existence in order to maintain the inner stillness. That effort would come a little bit later.

Though my deep inner peace had begun to fade, I never fully returned to my normal state. Even when the personal mind and emotions started back up, I was much further behind them than I used to be. There was also another major change: I was now experiencing a constant flow of energy rising up within me to the point between my eyebrows. It formed a vortex of pressure that forced my attention to that point. For example, if I was looking at something, it felt like I was concentrating my gaze through my brow rather than through my eyes. This didn't affect my ability to see; it just kept me closer to the meditative state at all times. Note that focusing on the energy flow was not something I was doing; it was something that was happening by itself. I was just aware that the flow had never been there before, and now it was always there.

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