



MOTH & THE FLAME
THE GOLDEN LOTUS

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Before leaving India, I had consulted the Master about right livelihood, a way to earn without compromising ethics, in an environment conducive to spiritual practice. I was already too familiar with uncongenial workplaces. ‘There is a crying need in North America to provide wholesome, artfully prepared vegetarian food in an atmosphere of mutual respect,’ I opined. ‘Once people discover how delicious, healthy and inexpensive it is, many will embrace a compassionate diet. For those already vegetarian, there are no places to dine out. I’d like to establish a vegetarian restaurant, provide literature on health and spirituality while earning an honest livelihood. Perhaps it may also become a channel for the Master’s teachings.’

‘**Good idea!**’ he replied positively, and added, ‘Master Power will be extending all feasible help, both inside *and* outside!’ I knew about the *inside* help; it was most comforting to know about the *outer*. And, it came to pass, in ways far beyond my expectations.

Back in Vancouver, a *for rent* sign in a defunct second-hand store caught my eye. Within moments of entering I began to experience a slightly blissful state. While not normally prescient, I was certain that *this* was the future home of the business. I was about to discover how clearly fixed mental images can manifest in the objective world through unrelenting effort. Others may call this process *creative visualization*.

A lease for the store and a four-bedroom suite upstairs was negotiated on a hope and a prayer. Those with means whom I initially approached had no interest in investing in my risky scheme, but a humble bank-teller saw the vision and agreed to co-sign a \$1,000 loan—a huge sum in those days. Another \$500 soon arrived unexpectedly in the mail from a family friend. After settling the modest rent, phone and utility deposits, I negotiated the purchase of the entire assets of a failed restaurant nearby for \$500. Within two months the Golden Lotus—Vancouver’s first vegetarian restaurant—came into being on a \$1,500 budget and 12-16 hour work days. Many unique and wonderful people were drawn through the doors like bees to honey, some as customers, some as employees, some as questers. Quarters upstairs housed the growing circle of workers and the living room became a communal meditation space. While there

is a golden lotus on the inner planes, the worldly lotus began to bloom, and many were attracted to its fragrance.

The late sixties saw Vancouver swarming with Vietnam war protesters and hippies. The threat of nuclear holocaust loomed; President Kennedy had been assassinated; drugs were rampant and the young and disenchanting took up the popular refrain: 'turn on, tune in, drop out.' A few were serious seekers who responded to the message of the Masters, which emphasized tuning in to a higher principle and the performance of work and service as a form of devotion. The Lotus was not merely a business; it was a refuge from drugs and junk food, a transformative catalyst for positive redirection, a tent in the caravan of *Baraka*. *Baraka*, the Sufi term for Grace, requires a focal point, a place in the material world from where transcendence can manifest. Like a trader's caravan, tents are pitched, wares displayed, sold and bartered. When the job is done, tents are folded, the caravan moves on, and sets up shop elsewhere. The *wares* are the seeds of change and renewal. On a higher level, it is *Baraka*; to the world, it is a paradigm shift. Dynamic grace is a constant, like a Kaaba-stone, while the place, people and time may shift and re-shuffle to revolve about its hidden locus.

Intrinsically I was a loner and my naivetè in the art of administration resulted in many valuable, sometimes humorous, sometimes difficult lessons in humility. Quitting was never an option, no matter how tough it got. Whenever the spirit triumphed over human foibles and limitations, the result was pure joy—the joy of service to one's brother or sister, no matter how humble or fallen. In the fine balance between work and inner practice, when service comes before self, lives are transformed—to the degree that responsibility and receptivity are embraced.

As with most new, undercapitalized ventures, particularly the restaurant genre, the finances of the Lotus were frequently uncertain. In the early days when nary a soul showed for dinner to eat the many varieties of delicious creations so artfully prepared, I would ask my co-helpers to join me in meditation in our spotless kitchen. Within ten to fifteen minutes of focusing on the all-surrounding Light, a crowd would inevitably appear at the door. Our vocation was a front for mystic and platonic love, not love a front for material gain.

It wasn't uncommon for customers to feel exhilarated and unusually peaceful after eating our *satvic* fare. *Satvic* is a Sanskrit term for pure or true. Hippies would ask, 'What are you putting in the food, man? It's making me *high*.' The secret ingredient was simran, loving, mental repetition of the charged names, while preparing and

serving. Master once told me, “Whatever you say simran over, with full attention, becomes *parshad*.” Sacred thought has profound effect; like wind, it’s invisible, but everything it touches is moved. Spiritual uplift is a by-product of inner *practice*, often felt even by unwary bystanders.¹

After a highly complimentary, tongue-in-cheek feature review by well-known columnist, James Barber in a local paper, the Golden Lotus became a very popular *in kind of place* (and thus I began to learn the value of public relations). Along with the ever-expanding clientele, many seekers arrived at the door wanting work and a place to stay. As long as everyone agreed to follow the rules, they were welcome to visit or stay upstairs. Amazingly, the rather monastic rules—including regular meditation and celibacy—were accepted and experimentally followed. Like all others, I drew no wage in the first nine months, although everyone’s basic needs for food, shelter, clothing, medicine, transportation, books and spending allowance were taken care of. Before the year was out, bills and loans were repaid and all began receiving hourly wages, benefits, room and board.

The numbers attending our weekly gatherings outgrew the upstairs and the venue shifted to the YWCA. Walking through the neighborhood, I could relate to the quandary of the user, the turned-on, the tuned-in, and the dropped-out; I had been there. Every poor lush, every desperate junkie, every paramour and thrill-seeker is intrinsically after bliss. *Truth, Consciousness and Bliss* are the qualities of the awakened soul, but true bliss cannot be found through the physical senses, wine, drugs, money, fame or possessions. When the Emperor Babar offered Guru Nanak a goblet full of *bhang*, a preparation made from marijuana, he demurred and sang:

*The intoxication from opium, bhang, and wine
Leaves one poorer in the morning,
But the intoxication of Naam is such that
Day and night, Nanak is absorbed in its ecstasy.*

According to the Masters of *Sant Mat*, intoxicating drugs of any kind as well as alcohol—another drug—cloud the mind and impede spiritual unfoldment. And, Sant Kirpal Singh warned, drug dependence could lead to a lower animal rebirth.

In the beginning, Kuldip Nagra generously shared her delicious Indian recipes and culinary skills. By trial and error, I learned some arts of cooking and nutritious food preparation. The first full-time helper to appear was Norah Lee, one of God’s originals. Then in her fifties, Norah had varied successful careers behind her in real estate, as horseback guide, plumber, and bulldozer operator (*Time* magazine ran a full page photo-article on her in the early 1950’s).

Several years earlier, Norah had been bankrupted after guaranteeing a loan to a slick promoter. In the aftermath, her only possessions were a little Nash Rambler car, which she lived in, a set of clothes, one pair of shoes, and her book of hymns and inspirational songs. When her shoes wore out, come ice or snow, Norah went barefoot for the rest of her long life. Before coming to the Golden Lotus, another Sant Mat guru had initiated Norah, but the absence of any spiritual experience kept her seeking. "When I was living at Yasodara Ashram on the shores of Kootenay Lake," she explained, "I came across Kirpal Singh's book, *Naam or Word*. That night Master entered my soul, filling me with his marvelous splendor and love." I asked Norah, "Wouldn't you like to be initiated?" She replied, "It's not necessary; Master has already done it." I assured her that he had indeed established his spiritual connection with her, but to be able to develop it to a greater extent would require formal initiation. Eventually, she agreed.

Norah was very skinny, but strong as a big man. Once she went on a forty-nine day fast while working ten hours a day in the kitchen. Her only food was the juice of half a lemon every two days. Forty days into the fast, Norah decided to reorganize the storage room, and was throwing around 100lb. sacks of brown rice like they were only 25.

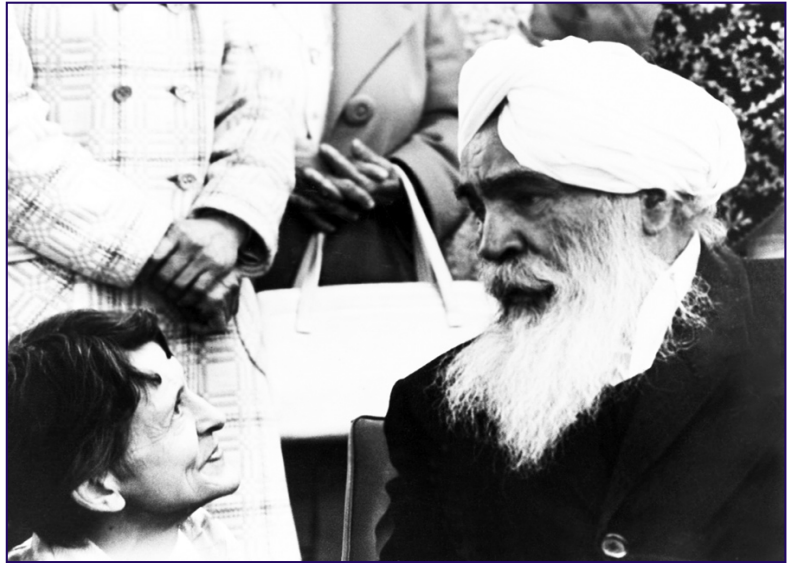
Whenever I tried to pay her, she wouldn't hear of it, saying, "The good Lord has directed me here to be of service to my fellow man. After all my money was gone, I decided never to work for material wages again. I'll be happy to just have a little corner to stay in, and if there's anything I can do, that would be a blessing for me." I assured Norah that if it were in my power, she would always have a home and never want. For more than twenty years she lived with us. Embodying the spirit of the *faqir* or renunciate, Norah often spent entire nights in meditation, her scrawny neck enclosed by a cardboard collar of pins to waken her in case she nodded off in sleep (*not* a practice the Masters endorse), but once she made up her mind, none could change her.

'So Norah,' our friend Herb asked, 'what is the secret of your good health and long life?' She snapped, 'I always stayed away from doctors and men!'

Cheerful, iron-willed, songs of God on her lips and in her heart during the good times and the not-so times, this remarkable woman/angel moved through life, frequently helping others in need. Many poor souls were the grateful recipients of her unsought largesse (after an uncle had left her an inheritance).

November 8, 2006, on her 94th birthday, Norah checked out from

the earth-plane, and her usually strongly wrinkled face was remarkably clear and 'young' looking. She was on her way, having left her body 'like a hair out of butter.' The day before, when a nurse had asked how she was doing, Norah replied in a strong, clear voice, 'I'm fine! And I'm going to die in my bed tonight!'²



Norah Lee with her spiritual Master, Vancouver Airport, 1972

David Leeworthy was another original—one of many seekers who came through the Lotus, contributing to, and gaining from it. He was a tall slender lad with long wavy hair and dreamy, far-off eyes. A few days after our first meeting, he described a life changing experience, '...walking down the hill on Fourth Avenue, looking westward towards the Lotus, I saw Kirpal Singh sitting cross-legged—about the size of a pea—right where the restaurant is located. His form kept expanding, until it filled the sky.'³

1964, the year that I had come to the Path of Light, brought with it a new way of thinking, speaking, and living. With a daunting vow of celibacy, I tried to see all as sisters, mothers and brothers. After three years of continuous practice, the benefit of what the saints call *Ojas*—the power accruing from transmuting base energy into meditation and service, began to manifest. *Ojas* reduced the requirement for sleep from eight hours to four, and enabled the achievement in seconds of concentration of what would otherwise have taken many long hours. It allowed the body to work without fatigue, and the frequent cuts sustained in the kitchen healed within hours. *Ojas*, which is gained over a long time, is, however, easily lost in a burst of anger or a wave of lust.

Such commitment does not go untested, especially amongst the young and vibrant. Carnality sometimes entered my mind, but I kept busy and dared not forget that the Master within was watching everything. His personal and specific-to-me advice in Kashmir, 'Avoid being alone in a room with the opposite sex,' saved me on at least one occasion, when I felt like a canary about to be devoured by the cat. I was given a new life, and if this body which had been renewed

and consecrated were to be given, it would have to wait for its life-companion.

Intimations of Return: In early September of 1968, Bruce King, an architect friend and I drove 300 miles to the interior of British Columbia in search of reportedly free Crown land in the hopes of eventually establishing a permanent meditation center. After the second day of exploring, we camped by the roadside under a canopy of brilliant stars and rolling sagebrush hills. After meditating for an hour, I fell asleep. In the early morning came an auspicious dream, *which was not a dream:*

*It is India; my job is sweeper in the courtyard of the Master.
This courtyard, however, is that of Kabir Sahib. My broom is the
Indian type, short of handle and I use it in the Indian fashion,
squatting. The dust, sacred dust, billows 'round, becomes bright,
flying into and through my eyes into infinite, luminous space...*

Upon waking, this consciousness was suffused with wondrous and intoxicating possibilities. As soon as a public telephone was found, I called the Lotus and asked Elighte if any letter had come from India. Indeed one had, and in it Master granted permission for Bruce, Misha Howard and my unworthy self to come to him.

*The Masters see more in a brick than you do in a mirror.
They were bathing in the Divine Bounty before the world existed.
They lived for lifetimes before bodies were born.
They saw the harvest while the wheat was still seed.
They understood the meaning when it was unformed.
They found the pearl before there was an ocean.*

—Rumi

1. I once typed a letter from the Master in response to a housewife who asked if she had to continue cooking meat for her non-initiate husband. The Master advised her to continue preparing him non-vegetarian food, but while doing so she should engage in sweet Simran of the five holy names, and in due course, her husband would automatically lose the desire to eat meat. And it came to pass.

2. Account courtesy of Kolin Lymworth who was with Norah near the end.

3. In 1970, David went to India and studied with the great Master for two months. After a personal interview, Kirpal Singh commented to a bystander, *'He will become the source of many books for many people.'* David, who later changed his name to Kolin Lymworth, founded Banyen Books in Vancouver, which has grown to become one of North America's largest alternative bookstores.