The Secret Life of Swami Muktananda

by William Rodarmor

Illustrated by Matthew Wuerker

"There is no deity superior to the Guru, no gain better than the Guru's grace … no state higher than meditation on the Guru." - Muktananda

ON THE American consciousness circuit, Baba Muktananda was known as the "guru's guru," one of the most respected meditation masters ever to come out of India. Respected, that is, until now.

When Baba Ram Dass introduced him to the U.S. in 1970. Muktananda was still largely unknown. Thanks to Muktananda's spiritual power, his Siddha meditation movement quickly took root in the fertile soil of the American growth movement. By the time he died of heart failure in October 1982, Muktananda's followers had built him 31 ashrams, or meditation centers, around the world. When crowds saw Muktananda step from a black limousine to a waiting Lear jet, it was clear that the diminutive, orange-robed Indian was an American-style success.

At various times, Jerry Brown, Werner Erhard, John Denver, Marsha Mason; James Taylor, Carry Simon, astronaut Edgar Mitchell, and Meg Christian have all been interested in Muktananda's movement. The media coordinator at the large Oakland, California, ashram is former Black Panther leader Erika Huggins.

Baba Muktananda said he was a Siddha, the representative of a centuries-old Hindu lineage. According to his official biography, he wandered across India as a young man, going from teacher to teacher, living the chaste, austere life of a monk. In Ganeshpuri, near Bombay, he became the disciple of Nityananda, a Siddha guru of awesome yogic powers. After years of meditation, Muktananda experienced enlightenment. When Nityananda died in 1960, Muktananda said the guru passed the Siddha mantle to him on his deathbed, though some of Nityananda's followers in India dispute the claim. When Muktananda himself died, a sympathetic press still saw him as a spiritual Mr. Clean, and his two successors, a brother-sister team of swamis, continue to draw thousands of people searching for higher consciousness.

To most of his followers, Muktananda was a great master. But to others, he was a man unable to live up to the high principles of his own teachings. "When we first approach a Guru," Muktananda wrote, "we should carefully examine his qualities and his actions. He should have conquered desire and anger and banished infatuation from his heart." For many, that was a warning that was understood too late.

Some of Muktananda's most important former followers now charge that the guru repeatedly violated his vow of chastity, made millions of dollars from his followers' labors: and allowed guns and violence in his ashrams. The accusations have been denied by the swamis who took over his movement after the master died.

In the course of preparing this story, I talked with 25 present and former devotees; most of the interviews are on tape. Some people would only talk to me if promised anonymity, and some are bitter at what they feel was Muktananda's betrayal of their trust. All agree that Muktananda was a man of unusual power. They differ over the ways he used it.

"I don't have sex for the same reason you do: because it feels so good." - Muktananda

IN HIS teachings Muktananda put a lot of emphasis on sex - most of it negative. Curbing the sex drive released the kundalini energy that led to enlightenment, he said. The swami himself claimed to be completely celibate.

Members of the guru's inner circle, however, say Muktananda regularly had sex with his female devotees. Michael Dinga, an Oakland contractor who was head of construction for the ashram and a trustee of the foundation, said the guru's sexual exploits were common knowledge in the ashram. "It was supposed to be Muktananda's big secret," said Dinga, "but since many of the girls were in their early to middle teens, it was hard to keep it secret."

A young woman I am calling "Mary" said the guru seduced her at the main American ashram at South Fallsburg, New York, in 1981. Mary was in her early twenties at the time. Muktananda was 73.

At South Fallsburg, Muktananda used to stand behind a curtain in the evening, watching the girls coming back to the dormitory. He asked Mary to come to his bedroom several times, and gave her gifts of money and jewelry. Finally, she did. When he then told her to undress, she was shocked, but she obeyed.

"He had a special area which I assume he used for his sexual affairs. It was similar to a gynecologist's table, but without the stirrups." (To his later chagrin, Michael Dinga realized he had built the table himself.) "He didn't have an erection," Mary said, "but he inserted about as much as he could. He was standing up, and his eyes were rolled up to the ceiling. He looked as if he was in some sort of ecstasy." When the session was over, Muktananda ordered the girl to come back the next day, and added, "Don't wear underwear."

On the first night, Muktananda had tried to convince Mary she was being initiated into tantric yoga - the yoga of sex. The next night, he didn't bother. "It was like 'Okay, you're here, take off your clothes. get on the table and let's do it.' Just very straight, hard, cold sex."

Mary told two people about what had happened to her. Neither was exactly surprised.

Michael's wife Chandra was disturbed. Chandra was probably the most important American in the movement. As head of food services, she saw Muktananda daily, and knew what was going on. "Whoever was in his kitchen was in some way molested," she said. A girl I'll call "Nina" used to work for Chandra. One day, the guru remarked to her in Hindi, "Sex with Nina is very good." Nina's mother was later made a swami.

Chandra said she had rationalized the guru's having sex in the past, but was dismayed to learn it had happened to her young friend Mary. Aware of Muktananda's power over people who were devoted to him, she saw it as a form of rape.

The other person Mary confided in was Malti, Muktananda's longtime translator.

Mary said Malti wasn't surprised when she told her about being seduced by the aged guru. "She told me people had been coming to her with this for years and years," Mary said. "She was caught in the middle." Malti and her brother, who have taken the names Chidvilasananda and Nityananda, are the movement's new leaders.

Another of Muktananda's victims was a woman I'll call "Jennifer." She says Muktananda raped her at the main Indian ashram at Ganeshpuri in the spring of 1978. He ordered Jennifer to come to his bedroom late one night, and told her to take her clothes off. "I was in shock," she said, "but over the years, I had learned you never say no to anything that he asked you to do…."

Muktananda had intercourse with Jennifer for an hour, she said, and was quite proud of the fact. "He kept saying, 'Sixty minutes,'" she said. "He claimed he was using the real Indian positions, not the westernized ones used in America." While he had sex, the guru felt like conversing, but Jennifer found she couldn't say a word. "The main thing he wanted to know was how old I was when I first got my period. I answered something, and he said, 'That's good, you're a pure girl.'" Devastated by the event, Jennifer made plans to leave the ashram as soon as possible, but Muktananda continued to be interested in her. "He used to watch me getting undressed through the keyhole," she said. She would open the door and see the guru outside "I became rather scared of him, because he kept coming to my room at night."

Both women said the Ganeshpuri ashram was arranged to suit Muktananda's convenience.

"He had a secret passageway from his house to the young girls' dormitory," Mary said. "Whoever he was carrying on with, he had switched to that dorm." The guru often visited the girls' dormitory while they were undressing. "He would come up anytime he wanted to" Jennifer said, "and we would just giggle. In the early days, I never thought of him as having sexual desires. He was the guru…" Mary knew otherwise: she talked with at least eight other young girls who had sex with Muktananda. "I knew that he had girls marching in and out of his bedroom all night long," she said.

While his followers were renovating a Miami hotel in 1979, Muktananda slept on the women's floor, and ordered that the youngest be put in the rooms closest to his, and the older ones down the hall.

"You always knew who he was carrying on with," said Chandra. "They came down the next day with a new gold bracelet or a new pair of earrings." Around the ashram, said Mary, people knew that "anyone who had jewelry was going to his room a lot."

For a time, Muktananda's followers found ways to rationalize his behavior. He wasn't really penetrating his victims, they said. Or he wasn't ejaculating - an important distinction to some, since retaining the semen was supposed to be a way of conserving the kundalini energy.

Ultimately, Chandra felt it didn't make any difference. "If you're going to be celibate, and you're going to preach celibacy, you don't put it in halfway, and then pull it out. You live what you preach…"

After years of repressing their growing doubts about Muktananda, Michael and Chandra finally drew the line when they learned he was molesting a 13-year-old girl. She had been entrusted to the ashram by her parents, and was being cared for by Muktananda's laundress and chauffeur. The laundress "told me Baba was doing things to her," said Chandra. "I think he was probing around in her." The laundress suggested it was only "Baba's way of loving her," but Chandra was appalled.

Charges of sex against Muktananda continued. In 1981, one of Muktananda's swamis, Stan Trout, wrote an open letter accusing his guru of molesting Little girls on the pretext of checking their virginity. The letter caused a stir, but word didn't go beyond the ashram. In a "Memo from Baba," Muktananda merely

answered that "devotees should know the truth by their own experience, not by the letters that they receive… You should be happy that I'm still alive and healthy and that they haven't tried to hang me."

"Wretched is he who cannot observe discipline and restraint even in an ashram." - Muktananda

I N THE first of his eight years with Muktananda, Yale dropout Richard Grimes said he was "in a funny kind of grace period, where you're so involved with the beginning of inner Life that you don't really notice what is going on." But then he started seeing things that didn't jibe with his idea of a meditation retreat.

"Muktananda had a ferocious temper," said Grimes, "and would scream or yell at someone for no seeming reason." He saw the guru beating people on many occasions. "In India, if peasants were caught stealing a coconut from his ashram, Muktananda would often beat them," Grimes said. The people in the ashram thought it was a great honor to be beaten by the guru. No one asked the peasants' opinion.

Muktananda's ubiquitous valet, Noni Patel, was a regular target of his master's wrath. While on tour in Denver, Noni came down to the kitchen to be treated for a strange wound in his side. "At first, he wouldn't say how he had gotten it," Grimes' wife Lotte recalled. "Later it came out that Baba had stabbed him with a fork."

When ex-devotees talked about strong-arm tactics against devotees, the names of two people close to Muktananda kept coming up. One was David Lynn, known as Sripati, an ex-Marine Vietnam vet. The other was Joe Don Looney, an ex-football player with a reputation for troublemaking on the five NFL teams he played for, and a criminal record. They were known as the "enforcers"; Muktananda used them to keep people in line.

On the guru's orders, Sripati once picked a public fight with then-swami Stan Trout at the South Fallsburg ashram. He came down from Boston, where Muktananda was staying, and punched Trout to the ground without provocation. Long-time devotee Abed Simli saw the attack, but figured Sripati had just flipped out. Michael Dinga knew otherwise. Muktananda had phoned him the morning before the beating, and told him Trout's ego was getting too big, and that he was sending Sripati to set him straight. Dinga, a big man, was instructed not to interfere.

In India, Dinga and a man called Peter Polivka witnessed Muktananda's valet Noni Patel give a particularly brutal beating to a young follower: A German boy in his twenties, whom Dinga described as "obviously in a disturbed state" had started flailing around during a meditation intensive. The German was hauled outside, put under a cold shower, stripped naked, and laid out on a concrete slab behind the ashram. Dinga said the German just sat in a full lotus position, and tried to steel himself against what happened next.

Noni Patel took a rubber hose, a foot-and-a-half long, and beat and questioned the boy for thirty minutes while a large black man called Hanuman held him. "They were full-strength blows," said Dinga, "and they raised horrible welts on the boy's body."

There exists a long tradition in the East of masters beating their students. Tibetan and Zen Buddhist stories are full of sharp blows that stop the students rational minds long enough for them to become enlightened. Couldn't that have been what Muktananda was doing?

"It could be seen that way," said Richard Grimes. "For years we thought that every discrepancy was because he lived outside the laws of morality He could do anything he wanted. That in itself is the biggest danger of having a perfect master lead any kind of group - there's no safeguard."

Chandra Dinga said that as Muktananda's power grew, he ignored normal standards of behavior. "He felt he was above and beyond the law," she said. "It went from roughing people up who didn't do what he wanted, to eventually, at the end, having firearms."

Though the ashrams were meditation centers, a surprising number of people in them had guns. Chandra saw Noni's gun, Muktananda's successor Subash's gun, and the shotgun Muktananda kept in his bedroom. Others saw guns in the hands of "enforcer" Sripati and ashram manager Yogi Ram. The manager of the Indian ashram showed Richard Grimes a pistol that had been smuggled into India for his use. One devotee opened a paper bag in an ashram vehicle in Santa Monica, and found ammunition in it.

A woman who ran the ashram bakery for many years said she knew some people had guns, but that it never bothered her. The Santa Monica ashram, for example, was in a very rough neighborhood, she said, and the guns were strictly for protection.

"In an ashram, one should not fritter one's precious time in a precious place on eating and drinking, sleeping, gossiping and talking idly." - Muktananda

BY ALL accounts, devotees in the ashrams worked hard under trying conditions. In India, they were isolated from their culture. Even in the American ashrams, close friendships were frowned on, and Muktananda strongly discouraged devotees from visiting their families. A woman I'm calling "Sally" used to get up for work at 3:30 a.m. She said her day was spent in work, chanting, meditation, and silence. "Some days, you couldn't talk to anyone all day long. I would get very lonely." Recorded chants were often played over loudspeakers. Even a woman who is still close to the movement admitted that "the long hours were a drag."

Though he was Muktananda's right-hand man for construction, Michael Dinga worked "under incredible schedules with ridiculous budgets," putting in the same hours as his crew. In the six-and-a-half years he was with the ashram, he said he had a total of two weeks off.

As time went on, Dinga came to be bothered by what he saw as exploitation: "I saw the way people were manipulated, how they would work in all sincerity and all devotion [with] no idea that they were being laughed at and taken advantage of."

"Even a penny coming as a gift should be regarded as belonging to God and religion." - Muktananda

MUKTANANDA'S movement was both a spiritual and a financial success. Once Siddha meditation caught on, said Chandra Dinga, "money poured into the ashram." Particularly lucrative were the two-day "meditation intensives" given by Muktananda, and now by his successors. Today, an intensive led by the two new gurus costs $200. (Money orders or cashier's checks only, please. No credit cards or personal checks.) An intensive given in Oakland in May 1983 drew 1200 participants, and people had to be turned away. At $200 a head, Chidvilasananda and Nityananda's labors earned the ashram nearly a quarter of a million dollars in a single weekend.

There was always a lot of secrecy around ashram affairs, Lotte Grimes remarked. During Muktananda's lifetime, that secrecy applied to money matters with a vengeance.

The number of people who came to intensives, for example, was a secret even from the devotees. Simple multiplication would tell anyone how much money was coming in. And when Richard Grimes set up a restaurant at the Oakland ashram, he said Muktananda "had a fit" when he found out that Grimes had been keeping his own records of the take.

Food services head Chandra Dinga said the restaurants in the various ashrams were always big money-makers, where devotees worked long hours for free. On tour during the summer, she said, they would feed over a thousand people, and bring in three thousand dollars in cash a day. Sally said that a breakfast that sold for two dollars actually cost the ashram about three cents.

Donations further fattened the coffers. if somebody important was coming to the ashram, Chandra's job was to try and get them to give a feast and to make a large donation. $1500 to $3000 was considered appropriate. "There was just a constant flow of money into his pockets," said Chandra, "it let him get whatever he wanted to get, and let him buy people."

Muktananda himself was said to have been very attached to money. "For years, he catered only to those who were wealthy," said Richard Grimes. "He spent all the time outside of his public performances seeing privately anyone who had a lot of money."

A parade of Mercedes-Benzes used to drive up to the Ganeshpuri ashram with rich visitors, said Grimes. In Oakland, Lotte Grimes saw Malti order a list drawn up of everybody in the ashram who had money, to arrange private interviews with Muktananda, by his orders.

Devotees, on the other hand, had to get by on small stipends, if they got anything. Chandra Dinga, despite her status as head of food services, never got more than $100 a month. Devotees with less prestige were completely dependent on the guru's generosity. Sally once cried for two days when she broke her glasses, knowing she would have to beg Muktananda for another pair.

How much money did Muktananda amass from his efforts? Even the officers of the foundation that ostensibly ran Muktananda's affairs never knew for sure.

Michael Dinga was a foundation trustee, and used to cosign for deposits to the ashram's Swiss bank accounts, but the amounts on the papers were always left blank. In 1977, however, he got a hint. Ron Friedland, the president of the foundation, told Dinga that Muktananda had 1.3 million dollars in Switzerland. Three years later, Muktananda told Chandra it was more like five million. "And then he laughed, and said, 'There's more than that.'"

A woman called Amma, who was Muktananda's companion for more than twenty years, told the Dingas that all the accounts were in the names of Muktananda's eventual successors, Chidvilasananda and Nityananda.

Michael and Chandra Dinga finally quit the ashram in December 1980. They had served Muktananda for a combined total of sixteen-and-a-half years, and had risen to positions of real importance. Both knew exactly how the ashram operated.

Together, they went to Muktananda to tell him why they wanted to leave. The guru wasn't pleased. To get the Dingas to stay, Muktananda called on everything he thought would stir them. He offered them a car, a house, and money. When that failed, he started to weep. "You're my blood, my family," he said. Then Muktananda abruptly changed tack. "You've come on an inauspicious day," he said. "I can't give you my blessing." Next morning, he called Chandra on the public intercom and said she could leave immediately.

After they left, the Dingas say they were denounced by the guru, and their lives threatened.

"Muktananda claimed he had thrown us out because Chandra was a whore" said Dinga, "that she was having sex with the young boys who worked in the restaurant. Later he said I had a harem. In other words, he was accusing us of all the things he was doing himself." Muktananda also claimed that none of the buildings Michael had built were any good. When one of Michael's crew stood up for him, he was threatened physically.

Leaving all their friends behind in the ashram, the Dingas moved to the San Francisco area, but Muktananda's enmity followed them. Their doorbell and telephone started ringing at odd hours, and Michael saw the "enforcers" running away from their door one night. A cruel hoax was played on Chandra. Someone followed her when she took her cat to the vet, then phoned the vet's office with a message that her husband had been in a bad accident. Chandra waited frantically at Berkeley's Alta Bates Hospital for three quarters of an hour, only to learn that Michael was at work, unhurt.

Death threats started to reach the Dingas toward the end of April 1981, six months after they had left the ashram. On May 7, Sripati and Joe Don Looney visited Lotte Grimes at her job in Emeryville with a frightening piece of information: "Tell Chandra this is a message from Baba: Chandra only has two months to live." Another ex-follower said he got a similar message: If the Dingas didn't keep quiet, acid would be thrown in Chandra's face; Michael would be castrated.

The Grimeses and the Dingas reported the threats to the police. The Dingas hired a lawyer.

The threats stopped soon after Berkeley police officer Clarick Brown called on the Oakland ashram, but Chandra was badly frightened. Some ex-followers still are.

Michael and Chandra's departure sparked a small exodus from the ashram. Some of the ex-followers began to meet and compare notes on their experiences in the ashram. "We were amazed and rejuvenated," said Richard Grimes. "We got more energy from learning he was a con man than we ever did thinking he was a real person."

Just the same, the devotees who left the ashram are still dealing with the damage done to their lives. Michael and Chandra's marriage broke up, as did Sally's. Michael is only now coming out of a period of depression and emptiness. Richard and Lotte Grimes are bitter at having wasted years of their lives in the ashram. Stan Trout still considers Muktananda a great yogi, but a tragically flawed man.

Chandra Dinga has taken years to come to terms with her experience with Muktananda; "Your whole frame of reference becomes askew," she said. "What you would normally think to be right or wrong no longer has any place. The underlying premise is that everything the guru does is for your own good. The guru does no wrong. When I finally realized that everything he did was not for our own good, I had to leave."

Muktananda's two successors were at the Oakland ashram in May end I asked Swami Chidvilasananda about the accusations against her guru.

To her knowledge, did Muktananda have sex with women in the ashram? "Not as far as I saw," she said carefully. What about the charge that Muktananda had sex with young girls? "Those girls never came to us," Chidvilasananda said. "And we never saw it, we only heard it when Chandra talked to everybody else."

Chidvilasananda also denied that there was a bank account in Switzerland. When asked about the ashram's finances, she said that all income was put back into facilities. "We are a break-even proposition," the new leader said.

As for the alleged beatings, she said that Americans had their own ways of doing things. She said, "You can't blame the guru, because the guru doesn't teach that."

Why then, I asked, do the other ex-devotees I talked with support the Dingas in their charges?

Chidvilasananda replied, "I'm very glad they gave you a very nice story to cover themselves up and I want to tell you I don't want to get into this story because I know their story, too, and I do not want to say anything about it." When I said, "You have a chance to tell us whether or not you think these are accurate charges, falsehoods, or delusions," Malti's answer was: "I'm not going to probe into people's minds and try to find out what the truth is."

Two swamis and a number of present followers also said the charges were not true. Others say they simply don't believe them.

On the subject of money, foundation chief Ed Oliver conceded in an October 1, l983, interview with the **Los Angeles Times** that there is a Swiss account with 1.5 million dollars in it. And when I repeated Swami Chidvilasananda's denials about women complaining to her, Mary, the woman who says the guru seduced her in South Fallsburg, said, "Well, that's an out-and-out lie."

"The sins committed at any other place are destroyed at a holy centre, but those committed at a holy centre stick tenaciously - it is difficult to wash them away." - Muktananda

THIS IS a story of serious accusations made against a spiritual leader who is still prayed to and revered by thousands. Even his detractors say Muktananda gave them a great deal in the beginning. "He put out a force field around him," said Michael Dinga. "You could palpably feel the force coming off him. It gave me the feeling I had latched onto something that would answer my questions." Former devotees say Muktananda's eyes had a kind of light; when they first met the guru, he radiated love and benevolence. He also had a way of making his devotees feel special.

"I think he liked me so much because I wasn't taken by all the visions and the sounds," said Chandra, "that I understood that having an experience of God was something much more substantial and more ordinary." Chandra still feels that spirituality is the most important thing in her life. She says the gradual unfolding of the dark side of her guru's personality chipped away at her love and respect. "When you have a loved one you never dream that he might hurt you. At the end, I was devastated." Yet despite the unsavory conclusion to her ten years with the swami, Chandra still notes, "if I had it to do over again, I still wouldn't trade the experience for anything in the world."

In a way, the sex, the violence, and the corruption aren't the real point. Muktananda's personal shortcomings were bad enough, explained Michael Dinga, but "the worst of it was that he wasn't who he said he was."

A person can make spiritual progress under a corrupt master, just as placebos can actually make you feel better. But how far can a person really grow spiritually under a master who doesn't himself live the truth? There was a tremendous split between what Muktananda preached and what he did, and his hypocrisy only made it worse. His successors are now in a dilemma: If they admit their guru's sins, Chidvilasananda and Nityananda lose their god-figure, and weaken their claim to a lineage of perfect masters. But if they don't, people who come to them looking for truth are courting disappointment.

Stan Trout, formerly Swami Abhayananda, served Muktananda for ten years as a teacher and ashram director. He left in 1981. "My summary withdrawal from Muktananda's organization was also a withdrawal from what I had considered my fraternal family, my friends, and able all, my life's work," he wrote us. He sent this open letter after reading a draft of "The Secret Life of Swami Muktananda," in which he is quoted. - Art Kleiner

Letter From a Former Swami

by Stan Trout

I'd like to add this letter, if possible, as an appendix to the article on Muktananda by William Rodarmor. It is a statement of my thoughts and opinions of Muktananda after two years of deep deliberation following my discovery of his 'secret life'.

When I left Muktananda's service, I did so because I had just learned of the threatening action he had taken against some of his long-time devotees who had recently left his service. He had sent two of his body-guards to deliver threats to two young married women who had been speaking to other women who had been speaking to others of Muktananda's sexual liaisons with a number of young girls in his ashram. It was immediately clear to me that I could not represent a guru who was not only taking sexual advantage of his female devotees but was threatening with bodily harm those who revealed the truth about him. However, after I had left Muktananda and had make the reasons for my departure known to others still in his service, another issue came to light for me, teaching me something not only about Muktananda's, but about the nature of the organization and all other such organizations in which the leader is regarded as infallible by his followers, and is therefore obeyed implicitly.

When Chandra and Michael Dinga and later myself realized the truth about Muktananda and his secret sex life, there was absolutely no means available to present the evidence for a fair hearing or judgment. There was no recourse but to leave, for the guru was the sole appeal, and he was as accustomed to lying as he was to breathing. Yet his word was regarded by followers as so absolutely final that when each of us left and were branded "demons" by him, not a single soul among those who had been our brother and sister devotees for ten years questioned or objected, but unamimouly rejected us outright as the demented infidels he said we were. One has only to observe the way each of us who discovered the guru's secret life were treated by our former comrades to understand the power for evil inherent in any relationship based on the infallibility of the leader and the unquestioned obedience of the subjects…

It is clear to me that not only had the girls with whom Muktananda practiced his sexual diversions committed acts to which they had given no moral or rational consent, but so had the men who were

ordered to threaten them with violence, and so had I myself when I had followed Muktananda's orders to express to others opinions which I did not sincerely hold. It is a sad but perennial phenomenon: Out of a love for truth and for those who teach it and appear to embody it, we unwittingly set ourselves up for exploitation and betrayal. Our mistake is to deify another being and attribute perfection to him. From that point on everything is admissible.

I think the lesson to be learned is that we simply cannot afford to relinquish our individual sovereignty - whether it be in a socio-political setting or in a religious congregation. Those who willingly put aside their own autonomy, their own moral judgment, to obey even a Christ, a Buddha, or a Krishna, do so at risk of losing a great deal more than they can hope to gain.

About Muktananda himself I have thought a great deal. There is no doubt in my mind that he was an extraordinarily enlightened, learned, and articulate man who possessed a singular power, a dynamic personal radiance and charisma that drew people to him and inspired them to lay their lives at his feet. Surely such a power is divine; yet there is no way to justify the way in which he used this power. If God himself were to behave in this way, we would have to find him guilty of flagrant disregard for the law of love.

Some may say, 'He did no worse than any of us have done, or would do if we could.' And I would answer, 'No; he did worse than any of use have done or would have done in his place. For, though he was only human like the rest of us, he staged a deliberate campaign of deceit to convince gentle souls that he had transcended the limitations of mankind, that through realizing the eternal Self, he had attained holy "perfection." He planted and nourished false, impossible dreams in the hears of innocent, faithful souls and sacrificed them to his sport. With malicious glee, he cunningly stole from hundreds of trusting souls their hearts and wills, their self-trust, their very sanity, their very lives. No ordinary, good person could do this, no matter how he tried; his heart and conscience would not allow it.

Like all of us, Muktananda was only human. And, like all men who worship power, he was inevitably corrupted and destroyed by it. His power could not save him form the weakness of the flesh, nor from the wickedness and depravity that servitude to it brings. He ended as a feeble-minded sadistic tyrant, luring devout little girls to his bed every night with promises of grace and self-realization.

Muktananda's claim of "perfection" (*Siddha-hood*) was based on the notion that a person who has become enlightened has thereby also become "perfect" and absolutely free of human weakness. This is nonsense; it is a myth perpetrated by dishonest men who wish to receive the reverence and adoration due God alone. There is no absolute assurance that enlightenment necessitates the moral virtue of a person. There is no guarantee against the weakness of anger, lust, and greed in the human soul. The enlightened are on an equal footing with the ignorant in the struggle against their own evil - the only difference being that the enlightened person *knows* the truth, and has no excuse for betraying it.

Throughout history there have been many enlightened souls who have been thought great, who, in the pride of their perfection and freedom, have imagined themselves to be beyond the constraints of God's laws, and who have thus fallen from love and lost the glory the once had. Those glorious Babes and Bhagwans, thinking to build their kingdom here on earth upon the ruins of the young souls devoted to them, often succeed for a time in fooling many and in gathering a large and festive following, but their deeds also follow them and proclaim their truth long after the paeans of praise have been sung and wafted away on the air. "God is not mocked"; there is no freedom, no liberation, from His law of love,

nor from His inescapable justice. It is indeed often those very persons who have thought themselves most perfect, most free and ungoverned, who have fallen most grievously; and their piteous fall is an occasion for great sadness, and should serve as a clear reminder of caution to us all.

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