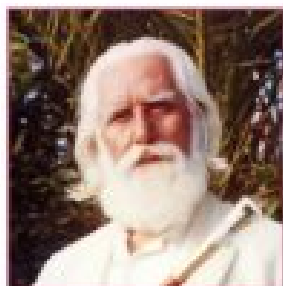




Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov

The Life of a Master in the West
by Louise-Marie Frenette



Journey...
Omraam
with Louise-Marie Frenette

*A Paradigm for
the New Millennium*

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Omraam Mikhaël
Aïvanhov

The Life of a Master in the West

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Louise-Marie Frenette's Website:

www.lmfrenette.com

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Who is Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov?

‘He was my best friend, said the old man called Kyril. He was also my spiritual Master.’ And reaching into his pocket he brought out a photograph of the man who had been his guide, his model, his friend. We were sitting on a bench in a small garden in Sofia. In front of us was the grave of Peter Deunov, the founder of the brotherhood which had been Mikhaël’s spiritual family. The roses, the vine-covered trellis laden with grapes, the warmth of the sun... all spoke to us of the old brotherhood estate, now reduced to this tiny park in the midst of the Bulgarian capital.

The year was 1992, and I had undertaken to write a biography of Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov, this great Bulgarian-born spiritual Master, who had traced a new path, a way of life which he called 'the path of Light'. In the course of seven long years of research I was to find that he was even more extraordinary than anything I could have imagined; a creator of beauty, love, and brotherhood for the whole human family; an architect of a new age on earth.

'You were born four hundred years too soon,' he was told. Yes. As we listened to him, in France, in Switzerland, or in Canada, we sometimes had the same thought. What he wished for humanity still seemed so remote, so difficult to achieve. And yet he himself was so much a part of the incarnate world, and his teaching was so well adapted to our needs that we knew we were right to hope. And we still hope. Indeed, our hopes grow stronger and stronger.

As one era drew to a close and another

– the era of Aquarius – began, Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov spoke constantly of brotherhood and love, of light and purity, of all that can help the children of this world to rediscover that they are the sons and daughters of God.

The power of his teaching lies in this: it is of primordial importance to transform ourselves, but it is equally important to transform the world into a garden of paradise. Today, men and women, even children, are becoming more aware than ever before of the necessity of helping each other, of becoming one family united in love and peace.

A Golden Age for humanity – that was his vision: a universal brotherhood embracing the whole of humankind; the kingdom of God become an earthly reality. This is why, when he spoke of Rama, the great legendary being who brought about a Golden Age to the world in the distant past, his voice resonated with

such enthusiasm. He *saw* what it could be.

PART I

YOUTH



1



Everything
is
Foreshadowed
in
Childhood

Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov was born in

the little village of Serbtzi in Macedonia at the dawn of the 20th century. It was in the early morning hours of January 31, 1900, as the first cockcrow announced the light of a new day. Grandmother Mountain, massive with its domed summit, watched over the sleeping village. In the gardens the trees crackled in the bitter cold, but in the house of Mikhaël's parents, a great fire blazed in the hearth. To the surprise of those present, the newborn did not cry: 'When a child returns to earth, it cries. But I didn't, I was told. I smiled.'¹

Mikhaël was born early, at eight months, and Dolia, his mother, feared for his life. Before the day was out, she had the village priest come and baptize him. In the Macedonian villages at that time, life was so harsh that the chances of survival were slim for a premature baby.

Dolia had lived with her husband's family since she had married Ivan Dimitrov at the age of fourteen.² She had become part

of a large family of farmers, all of whom, men and women alike, shared in the work, taking turns laboring in the fields or tending to domestic chores. In the rural areas – particularly in these isolated villages – families helped each other, pooling their efforts with their neighbors, sowing and harvesting together in one plot of land after another.

Like all the children in her village, Dolia had learned to work in the house and garden since the age of four. When her turn came, she labored with the others in the fields until nightfall, carried heavy buckets of water to the field-workers, or looked after the many children. She was not an ordinary woman. Short and slight, she possessed a great inner strength. Spontaneous and outgoing by nature, gay and generous, she was full of affection for her family and friends. She rapidly became an indispensable element of harmony in her new family who learned to rely on her kind heart and ready sense of humor.

At the time of Mikhaël's birth Dolia was twenty-four, and matured by the traumas and hardships of life in an unforgiving environment. Her first-born, a boy, had died as an infant, and her second child, a girl, was about six. In her ten years of married life she had already experienced the loneliness suffered by many women at the time. Conditions in the mountain villages were so precarious that the men often went to seek their fortune in the towns or with the charcoal-burners in the forests. With hope and physical strength as their only resource, they left their wives and children, convinced they would soon find the work that would make them rich. The successful ones visited their families briefly every two or three years, returning home for good only when they could no longer work.

Like many other married women, Dolia had endured her husband's absence for long periods at a time. A few years after their marriage, Ivan had established his own charcoal business in Bulgaria, in a

forest on the outskirts of the Black Sea port of Varna. It was a long way from Serbtzi and his visits home were rare.

Mikhaël's childhood was thus marked by the absence of his father, but also by the constant political and social upheavals, by insurrections and terror. At the beginning of the 20th Century, Macedonia – like Bulgaria and most of the Balkans – was still subject to Ottoman rule. The region, whose population included some two million Bulgarians, was in a state of social and economic stagnation. Coveted by its neighbors, it was the arena of ongoing skirmishes between Turks, Serbs, Greeks, and Bulgarians, all of whom laid claim to it. For decades, the people had known nothing but armed incursions, abortive popular uprisings and cruel reprisals. Again and again, at the first warning of the approach of soldiers, the women fled to the woods with their children to hide.

More than once Dolia had to flee into

hiding. As Mikhaël was to recall later: 'One day my mother had to leave the house in a hurry and run to hide in the forest. She was carrying me in her arms and we hid in a tree, but we could not stay there because it was full of ants.'

In addition to difficulties of this kind, Dolia experienced other personal sorrows: not long after Mikhaël's birth, her seven-year old daughter died suddenly. It was not in Dolia's nature, however, to pine or withdraw into herself. She went about her work, taking her full share of responsibility in her husband's family and in that most precious duty of all, the education of her son.

* * *

We have learned of the events of Mikhaël's youth from his own accounts as well as those of his mother, his family and their friends. In her old age, Dolia was like all grandmothers: she liked to tell her grandchildren about the important

events of her life. And later, Mikhaël, who lived in France from the age of thirty-seven, would stimulate his audience by interspersing his talks on spiritual, philosophical, and cultural subjects with first-hand accounts of his youth, of his experiences, of the ordeals he had endured and the discoveries he had made.

One of the events which occurred in his early childhood seems to have had real importance for him, for he talked about it many years later. Dolia also told the tale. One evening the family was all gathered at home with some neighbors when Mikhaël, who was only a few months old, suddenly stood upright and took a few steps unaided. Everyone was astonished for he was far too young to walk, and in the midst of the exclamations of surprise, one of the old women in the room declared: 'That child is really out of the ordinary! I foresee a brilliant future for him.'

But Dolia remained silent. She was wor-

ried: the fact that her baby had walked months before his body was ready for such an effort was in itself mysterious, but she also had the feeling that the incident had a special significance for his life. Instinctively she was afraid of possible repercussions and glanced anxiously at two of the women present who were greatly feared by the villagers. They were said to practice black magic, and no one who had seen the terrifying effects of this was inclined to take the matter lightly. None of the villagers dared to refuse them admittance to their home.

That night Mikhaël suddenly became very ill and his condition worsened rapidly. Dolia sent at once for her mother who was a skilled healer, but even she was hard put to it to save her grandson's life. Mikhaël was eventually cured, but he was late in learning to walk.

He would say one day:

I interpreted this incident later and real-

*ized that I had to be subjected to a very severe trial before being able to walk. And this is what happened. I saw then that everything is foreshadowed in childhood, but we pay no attention. There is an extraordinary science here.*³

Mikhaël's grandmother, Astra, had been one of the countless victims of those troubled times. In 1875 or thereabouts, she had been widowed and her life thrown into disarray when her husband was killed and their house destroyed during an armed raid on the village. Pregnant at the time with Dolia – Mikhaël's mother – she found herself alone and forced to work as never before to provide for the needs of her family.

Astra was a remarkable woman. She was widely known for her skill as a midwife and reputed to be one of the region's finest healers. As has always been the case in countries in which medical services were unavailable, those who lived in rural areas were accustomed to call on a

local healer for help in sickness. For the most part these were women with a keen intuition and an exceptional knowledge of nature – gifts often passed on from mother to daughter – which enabled them to relieve suffering and sometimes to cure even serious illnesses. In the region of Mount Pelister, toward the end of the 19th century, people came from far and near to consult Astra. Thanks to her knowledge of the healing properties of plants, she successfully treated people suffering from a variety of illnesses. Many of her remedies included secrets handed down from ancient times, particularly those involving the beneficial properties of aromatic plants, the magnetic currents found in certain spots on earth, and the influence of sunlight and stars on the human body.

Astra's work as a midwife meant that she was often called out at night. Without hesitation and seemingly tireless, she often trudged miles through deep snow to a distant cottage or farmstead. Pay-

ment for the services of a midwife traditionally consisted of a towel and a piece of soap. Rarely did she receive more. And as the financial rewards for her work as a healer were hardly more lavish, she earned barely enough to support her small family. From her patients she received a great deal of love and gratitude – veneration even – but times were hard for all, and money was scarce.

* * *

Mikhaël was probably four or five when he first took part in one of his country's most beautiful customs. On New Year's Day, small boys became the messengers of good fortune, invested with the power to call down blessings on their neighbors and friends. Warmly wrapped up against the cold and carrying a twig of dogwood decorated with colored ribbons, they went from house to house, tapping each person present with the twig while reciting wishes for good health and abundant harvests in the new year. The adults

thanked them by putting an apple, some sweets or a sugar bun into the bag carried by each child.

Some of Dolia's neighbors, eager to receive the first blessing of the year from Mikhaël, begged his mother to send him to them very early, before the other children. Dolia awakened him before dawn, dressed him, and before they set out together, made sure that he remembered the greeting he was to recite. It must have been hard for the small child to brave the darkness and battle against the snow and the cold wind, but he knew the meaning of what they were doing, for Dolia had explained it to him, and he did his best. The deeper meaning of this custom remained forever in his memory, for while still a young child, he had begun to discern the symbolism of the little things which made up his everyday life.

Four things to which Mikhaël was particularly attracted were significant: he loved threads and every kind of string, the

water gushing from a spring, fire, and tall trees. These four 'childhood passions', as he called them, played an important part in his development, pointing him very early in life toward the reality that each one represented. Threads came to symbolize the complexity of relationships that bind human beings and the different elements of creation to each other. The clear, transparent water that flowed from the ground spoke to him of purity. The fire that gives light, warmth and life led him gradually to a 'solar' philosophy. Tall trees awoke in him the love of heights.

At the age of four, with infinite patience, he picked up and treasured every scrap of string, every thread of wool or cotton he could find. One room in the family home had a particular fascination for him: in it was a loom and around the walls hung skeins of brightly colored thread. From the doorway, he watched his cousin weaving, spellbound by the movement of her hands as they danced over the warp, gradually transforming the separate

threads into a piece of cloth. It was then that he began to have his first dim perception of the true meaning of threads, which speak not only of binding and unbinding, but which can be woven into something useful, beautiful and durable.

One day when the weaver was out, Mikhaël ventured into the room and stood by the loom, gazing with fascination at all the bright threads stretched over the frame. Suddenly, moved by an irresistible impulse that seemed to well up from the depths of his being, he seized a pair of scissors, and barely conscious of what he was doing, cut them all off the loom. He was still there, clutching his precious harvest of colored threads, when his cousin found him. And what a to-do followed: seeing her loom stripped of all its threads, the poor woman cried out in horror, and as other people arrived, a bewildered and angry tumult surrounded him. But Mikhaël, although he realized that what he had done was wrong, clutched the beloved threads to

his heart, hearing only the small voice within which spoke to him of their importance. Telling of the incident years later, he said: 'I just looked at them. I could not understand why they were so upset!'

It goes without saying that he was punished by his mother, who had to spend the best part of the night repairing the damage. Only years later did he really understand the hidden symbolism of this strange childhood passion. In previous incarnations, he explained, he must have been aware of the significance of threads and learned to tie and untie them:

Obviously, at that age, it was unconscious, but there was certainly a hidden intelligence urging me on. It was simply in order to show me that nothing happens by chance, for the day I understood those childhood passions which seemed so strange, I discovered a whole wonderful world. Life itself is simply a question of threads, nothing but threads...⁴

The correspondences linking the physical and the spiritual worlds never ceased to fascinate Mikhaël. Throughout his life he worked to create links between these two worlds.

His second great passion, his love of water, was born in him when he was not yet five. While exploring the land around the family home, he found water bubbling from a tiny spring and flowing away under the foliage. Intrigued, he lay face-down in the grass for a long time, watching this marvel of nature. In the days and months that followed, the spring drew him like a magnet. Fascinated by the transparency of the water, he spent hours gazing at it, astonished to see that it never stopped flowing. If someone asked where Mikhaël was, the answer was always: 'Mikhaël? He must be by the spring.' And that is where they found him.

The image of the spring took root deep within his mind. As a child of Aquarius, he was always drawn to water: rivers,

waterfalls and the sea were a constant source of wonder and delight to him.

Of his four childhood passions, however, it was his love of fire that was foremost. The fires set by the peasants to burn off weeds or stubble, the oil lamp that lit the evening meal, the tiny votive light that burned before the holy icon, the flames blazing in the fireplace, all these manifestations of fire enchanted him. At the age of five he began to light his own little fires of straw or twigs, just for the pleasure of watching them burn. For a time, no one caught him in the act, but eventually this dangerous pastime ended in near-disaster. One day, while exploring his parents' hay-loft, he found some rotten straw, so black and ugly that he decided to put a match to it. 'It's too old. It must be burned,' he told himself.

Without hesitation, raking it into a heap, he set it alight and watched the leaping flames, thinking he had never seen anything so beautiful. Before long, however,

his delight changed to concern as the fire became more than he could handle and he realized his helplessness. Suddenly, alerted by the smoke, the adults came running in with buckets of water to throw on the blazing straw, while the little boy, still half engrossed in his delight, began to realize that this new escapade was serious and would certainly cost him his supper. Taking to his heels, he ran to take refuge with his grandmother Astra.

For Mikhaël, Astra was the good fairy who always protected him and cared for him when he was ill. In his eyes she was a truly exceptional being. Her hands were skilled in bringing little children into the world, and her immense knowledge enabled her to restore sick people to health. Many years later in Paris, Mikhaël spoke of her several times, and in his talks there are references to her remarkable lore and the wisdom and skill she manifested. He would say that it was because such great love overflowed from her that she had received the gift of healing.

A special relationship of tender affection and understanding united the old woman and her grandson, and if one of his pranks ended badly he would always run to hide with her. He was convinced that no one would know where he was and he was always surprised when they found him there. But it was his grandmother's 'clairvoyance' that really astonished him:

She always seemed to know what was going on inside me and I could not understand how. But as soon as she saw the anxiety in my eyes, she immediately said: 'Aha, I see you have been up to mischief again!'⁵

And sure enough, on the day of the fire in the hay loft, seeing that anxious look in his eyes, she exclaimed: 'Ah, you've done something naughty again!'

'How do you know?' asked Mikhaël uneasily.

'I can see it in your face!' she replied, and to give him time to summon up the

courage to face his mother, who ruled him with great firmness, she added:

‘Never mind! Come and hide with me.’

* * *

In spite of the remorse he experienced after that disaster, his love of fire did not diminish any more than his love of water. In his words:

Ever since I was born I have had a special leaning toward fire, and although, when I was young, I used to set fire to barns, later I understood that I would do better to leave physical fire alone and set fire to my own heart and the hearts of others.⁶

Instinctively, he sensed the role of water and fire in nature, and his passion for them presaged their importance in his life and his teaching. The beauty, the purity, and the symbolism of these two elements would always be a source of nourishment

and inspiration to him, as well as key instruments in his spiritual work.

But fire and water were not the only natural phenomena for which he had a passion; there were also trees. He had a special affection for the tall poplars in the village, whose leaves whispered in response to every breath of wind and whose soaring trunks made him dream of great heights. As soon as he was strong enough to climb from branch to branch all the way to the top, he would perch there for hours, looking out over the surrounding countryside. Delighting in the beauty of nature that revealed itself to him in all its splendor, he felt like a bird, ready to spread his wings and fly. Dolia knew that when Mikhaël was not near the spring, he was sure to be found in the highest branches of a tree.

This passion for heights revealed a marked tendency in his character which became constantly more imperative, an innate impulse to look at everything from

the highest possible point of view. Later, he would recall the experiences of his childhood and use the example of a child perched at the top of a tree, who can see things that his father, in spite of his great learning, is incapable of seeing from ground level. He would speak of the importance of placing oneself above circumstances and events, so as to see farther and understand more clearly the meaning of life.

* * *

The natural environment in which Mikhaël spent his early childhood was harsh. Serbtzi was in a rugged, mountainous part of Macedonia, dominated by the great mass of Mount Pelister. At the beginning of the 20th Century, physical conditions in these parts were still very primitive. The houses were without comfort, and people slept on beds of straw covered with mats. In winter, the snow and icy winds made all outdoor work

painfully laborious, and the villages were cut off from each other.

Most of the schools were one-room huts, built of a wooden frame filled in with mud and straw. They were heated by wood-burning stoves, and if anybody had the misfortune to break a window it was replaced with paper to keep out the cold, for there was no money to buy a new pane of glass. In winter it was the duty of each of the thirty or forty pupils to find a log in the forest and carry it to school with them. If some of them forgot their contribution, the cold gradually crept back into the classroom toward the end of the day, making it impossible for the children to pay attention to their lessons.

During his first year of school, Mikhaël was enthralled when the teacher read the Bible account of creation. It was a revelation of such beauty that he was eager to share it with his family. As quickly as possible, he learned the story by heart, and when he was ready to recite it to them,

he did so with such detail and contagious enthusiasm that the adults listened in astonishment, taken aback both by his knowledge and his talent as a storyteller. For the rest of his life, Mikhaël had a special fondness for the Book of Genesis. The picture of God, whose word creates such wondrous things, remained alive in his mind for many years.

On his sixth birthday Mikhaël received a booklet about St Athanasius, whose feast fell on that day. Captivated and deeply moved by the beauty of a life of great purity and loving dedication, he decided then and there that he too would become 'impeccable'.

This little book marked an important milestone in his life and followed on a decision he had made two years earlier: 'At the age of four I had made up my mind not to marry.' This was a surprising choice in one so young, and although he did not understand it himself, he was

deeply convinced it was the right thing for him.

As with all true mystics, his great sensitivity urged him not only to seek beauty in the world around him but also to withdraw into himself in search of the divine source within. While still a small child he was capable of concentrating for hours at a time on some phenomenon of nature, and he often went off alone to reflect on some words of his mother or grandmother that he had taken to heart. But he was a high-spirited child, and as he sometimes said, 'my behavior was not always very orthodox', and the emotions triggered by the life of St Athanasius were soon eroded by the reality of life at school and the difficulties occasioned by his impetuosity.

Indeed, the little boy's turbulence was often a problem for his neighbors and a cause of concern for his mother. There is no doubt that the energy and exceptional inner strength with which he was

endowed would prove indispensable for his future work, but his curiosity about everything often led him into trouble. Although his family were ready to recognize that he meant well, they could not help but be angry and administer punishment when his good intentions ended in disaster. When the neighbors, exasperated by his experiments with fire and the explosions of his firecrackers, complained to his mother, she always stood up for him and asked them to be patient.

‘You don’t know what he’s really like. He is troublesome now, but just wait: you’ll see how he turns out.’

She often thought back to the day of his birth. The priest who had baptized Mikhaël, a holy old man much venerated by all the villagers, had surprised everyone by drinking to his health. They knew that he never touched alcohol, but that day he raised his glass in the traditional toast: ‘*Na Zdrave!—Good health!*’ Then, turning to Dolia he added: ‘Truly, I have

never known such a thing. This child is different from others. He is destined for great things, but he will have to choose between good and evil.'

Dolia told her son one day that she had consecrated him to God from the moment of his conception. She could not know then that he would one day become a great spiritual Master and guide for thousands, but she dreamed of having a child who would be 'a true servant of God', who would devote his life to spiritual work. While she was carrying him, she had constantly wished for him all that was most beautiful and perfect, and while he was growing up she always appealed to what was best and most noble in his character.

Mikhaël used to say that his mother had been his first model. The education she gave him left an indelible mark. With unerring intuition she always found simple words and images which appealed to his heart and mind and helped him

understand that his turbulent energies could be used constructively. She was always calm and never beat him for his pranks, neither did she try to force him to change. Instead, she appealed to his intelligence by painting a vivid picture of what he would become if he behaved badly or, on the other hand, if he learned to control his impulses.

‘Now you know what is in store for you. The choice is up to you,’ she used to say, repeating the Bulgarian axiom:

Krivdina do pladnina; pravdina do veknina: That which is twisted will last until noon tomorrow; that which is straight will last for all eternity.

Her methods had a powerful effect on the child. Each time she spoke to him in this way he longed to throw himself into her arms and beg for forgiveness. ‘But although I cried for hours, for she had touched me deeply, I didn’t do so. My pride held me back...’ Dolia had appealed

to the best in him, to his most noble ideal, and he could not forget her words. His love for his mother went very deep, and the example of her patience, her selflessness, and her love played a crucial role in his life: 'It was she who taught me to love and respect all women.'

His grandmother Astra was also an important influence in his life. He spent long moments at her knee listening to fantastic stories, to mystical legends and fairy-tales, vivid accounts of the epic battles between black and white magicians in which good triumphed over evil. Naturally, Mikhaël was always on the side of the white magicians, and although he knew in advance that every tale would end in the victory of good, like all children he thrilled to a whole array of emotions as he listened to the dangerous adventures of his heroes.

In the absence of Mikhaël's father, the essential task of forming and guiding the growing boy fell to his mother and grand-

mother. These two exceptional women were always by his side to sustain him with their love and wisdom, to help him to discover his innate possibilities and teach him to channel all his forces in the service of light. They had no way of knowing what the future held for this child—the extreme poverty, and the derision, calumnies and betrayals that he would have to endure before his mission would be fulfilled—but they prepared him to the best of their ability for his future work.

Some of the family elders also had considerable influence on him. Most of them had no book-learning and had never been to school, but their attitude manifested such kindness and dignity that Mikhaël considered them living examples. He had a special admiration for one old man who was also called Mikhaël. When he talked, weighing every word and every gesture, he seemed to the child the personification of wisdom. Like Astra, he was a wonderful story-teller, and whenever he came

to spend the evening with the family, he regaled Mikhaël with tales of the triumph of love over hatred, of light over darkness. These old folk tales, full of esoteric symbolism, nourished the child's mind and stimulated his ideal to become a true champion of the light.

Notes

1. O.M.A., Talk on August 13, 1978.
2. In Bulgaria, as in Russia, children are called by the family name to which is added the first name of their father. Thus Mikhaël would be called Mikhaël Ivanov Dimitrov, meaning Mikhaël, son of Ivan Dimitrov. For most of his life he would be known as Mikhaël Ivanov. Note that the final 'v' in Bulgarian is pronounced as 'f'. This is why, when Mikhaël first went to France, he would spell his name as 'Ivanoff' so that it would match the pronunciation. It was only

later that the surname Ivanov was changed to Aïvanhov.

3. February 3rd, 1963.
4. 'We must Never Sever the Link' in *Cosmic Moral Law*.
5. March 27th, 1945.
6. 'Three Kinds of Fire' in *The Splendours of Tiphareth*.

2



‘Hear, my Son...’

In 1907, a few months after Mikhaël’s seventh birthday, a tragic event changed the course of his life. One day, as he was walking by himself outside the village, he saw a troop of armed men on the road. They were still some distance away but approaching rapidly. In alarm, Mikhaël ran as fast as he could toward the village,

shouting a warning to a group of peasants at work in the fields and gesturing to them to flee. With great presence of mind he led them to the river where they would be concealed by the tall reeds that lined the river bank. With his mother and other members of the family and all the villagers who had been warned in time, Mikhaël spent the rest of the day and well into the night plunged to the neck in the icy water, while the soldiers looted and set fire to the houses, shooting all those who had been unable to flee.

That night Dolia made up her mind to leave with Mikhaël and join her husband in Varna, in the north-east of Bulgaria. Sadly, this meant leaving Astra, who decided to remain in the village with those who planned to rebuild their houses. For Mikhaël, who had such a close relationship with his grandmother, the departure from Serbtzi must have been deeply distressing. In haste, with a small group of villagers who had also decided to leave, Dolia and Mikhaël set

out for the north, traveling mainly on foot or in mule-drawn carts, avoiding towns and villages for fear of meeting other bands of marauders. After a while they were able to board a train that took them to the Black Sea coast.

In 1907, Varna, the ancient Black Sea port of Odessos founded by the Greeks in the 6th Century, was a city of some 40,000 inhabitants. On their arrival, Dolia and Mikhaël found temporary shelter with a Macedonian friend, while Ivan looked for something more permanent in the vicinity of his office in the Turkish quarter. The accommodation he found for them was a single room in the home of another Macedonian friend. It was a spacious house in Pleven Street—now renamed Kapitan Petko Voïvoda Street—which had once belonged to the *bey*, the Turkish governor of the district, and the present owner had taken in several families of Macedonian refugees, each of which occupied one room.

For the little boy, the difference between this new home and his former environment was extreme. At the time, the Turkish quarter was virtually a slum, a labyrinth of narrow, dusty alleys and miserable shacks in the south-east of the town, close to the sea. Many of the houses had a secret door concealed within the walls leading into the next house—a useful precaution in these troubled times, when the Ottoman police were still very active.

Relations between the families of the neighborhood—Turkish, Macedonian, and Bulgarian—seem to have been amicable enough, and the children spoke both Bulgarian and Turkish. But all that Mikhaël saw and heard was unfamiliar, not least the Turkish priest—the Mullah—who occasionally visited the owner of the house and his numerous tenants. There were no more fields of wheat, no fresh vegetables or milk. All their food had to be bought from the market stalls or shops.

Although Mikhaël's parents were quite well off at this time, they always lived simply like those around them. It was because of his work that Ivan had chosen to live in the poorest quarter of the town, but his business had been established for about ten years and was now a prosperous concern with twenty or more employees working in a large tract of forest outside Varna. He was in a position to make plans for his son's education.

After the first few months, Mikhaël began to feel more at home in the town, but his first spring in Varna must have seemed very different from that he had known in his native village. Here, the peach and almond trees were coming into flower, and the occasional walnut tree was breaking into leaf in the backyards and spare plots of land. Even the Turkish quarter took on a festive air when its few meager trees began to blossom, but it could not compare with Serbtzi, where with the coming of the first warm days,

the whole of nature seemed to burst out in an explosion of joy.

Every year on March 1, it was the custom for young and old alike to celebrate the approach of spring by wearing a red and white pompon or bow, while the girls plaited ribbons in their hair. The significance of this age-old tradition had long been forgotten, but it was still honored both in town and country. Naturally, Mikhaël knew nothing of the symbolism at the time, but many years later he explained that red and white represent the masculine and feminine principles at work in nature.

The decorations were worn until the appearance of the first storks, omens of good fortune, when it was the custom for everyone to make a wish. Dolia, like all the other mothers, made two little balls of red and white wool for Mikhaël to wear, and soon the coming of the storks gave him the opportunity to make one of those wishes that are born only in the hearts of

children. For weeks after those first days of spring, every bush, railing, or lamppost was decorated with discarded red and white pompons and ribbons.

For Mikhaël, the highlight of this period was the feast of Easter. His family, like most Bulgarians, belonged to the Orthodox Church. Each evening Ivan lit the small votive lamp in front of the icon in their home while the family prayed together for God's protection during the night.

The people of Bulgaria had been Christian since AD 865, during the reign of King Boris I, and throughout the five centuries of Ottoman rule the majority had held staunchly to their Christian faith. But the dioceses in Bulgaria were subject to the Greek Orthodox patriarchate of Constantinople, and little by little, Greek had replaced Bulgarian as the language in the churches and even the schools. At the beginning of the 20th century, however, the vernacular was beginning to come

into its own again. Not many years before, Konstantin Deunovski, the priest in charge of the local parish, had restored the liturgy in Bulgarian. Ten years later, it was Peter Deunov, the son of this priest, who was to become Mikhaël's spiritual guide.

During the week before Easter a great bustle of preparations went on in all the families. On Holy Thursday, quantities of sweet rolls had to be baked, and hard-boiled eggs painted. The first egg was always painted red, the color that symbolizes life, and placed before the family icon. Other eggs were then painted all the colors of the rainbow. Toward eight or nine o'clock on Saturday evening, the faithful gathered in the church for the liturgy that would last until the early hours of Sunday morning. For Mikhaël, this was the high point, a ceremony that was a magical manifestation of light. The shimmering vestments of the celebrants, the golden crown studded with precious stones, the voices of men and women ris-

ing in great waves of sacred music that filled the church, the shadows that gradually receded and disappeared as the congregation lit their candles—all this impressed itself indelibly on his memory. Looking at the multitude of flames that lit the people's faces, that dissolved the darkness and illuminated the gold of the icons, he had the impression¹ that cohorts of fire were on the march.

But the ceremony lasted for several hours, and he was relieved when at last he could go out into the fresh air and join other children in the game of striking their eggs together, each attempting to break others while keeping their own intact. The broken eggs were eaten on the spot, while the one that survived unbroken was placed before an icon in the church until the following year, as a symbol of life.

* * *

At the age of eight Mikhaël was already

very attentive to all that went on around him. Each experience in these years of childhood was necessary to his future understanding of the inner workings of the material world: he was eager to see how things were made. He adored fireworks and everything that had any connection, however remote, with fire. The long moments he spent reflecting on each new discovery were vital to his intelligence, which sought instinctively to draw the right conclusions from the phenomena stored in his memory. Paradoxically, he often seemed to be absent, as though his soul floated on a higher plane, as though his spirit had not fully taken possession of his body.

As he explained later, the first years of life are a special period during which a child often lives outside itself, as if in a cloud, while subconsciously preparing to receive the spirit. The length of this period may vary considerably; in his case it lasted until he was nearly nine. Instead of mixing with other children and taking

part in their games, he often stood aside and reflected about things.

For no apparent reason I was subject to occasional feelings of sadness that swept over me. In the eighth month of her pregnancy my mother had had a deeply distressing experience, and that distress had taken root in me. I have always had to struggle against this tendency. ... As a child I would watch other children playing without joining in their games. I would not play or run about or sing with them. I just stood and thought.²

It was during his eighth year that he began to associate more with other children, but in such a neighborhood Mikhaël's choice of playmates was very limited. Most of the children he met in the streets were wild and unruly. The urban population of those times was deeply marked by interminable years of civil war and a brutal political regime, and the children, left to their own devices, often formed gangs and fell into bad

ways. On several occasions they tried to lead him astray and persuade him to steal or join in their vandalism. They soon learned that although his dynamic temperament and his openness and eagerness to explore and learn about everything made him as adventurous as any of them, he could never be persuaded to wrong another human being.

My mind was busy with other things. What would I have become if I had joined them? Why did I refuse? I have thought a lot about that since. In any case my doings were not always very orthodox! I often got up to mischief, I set fire to things and set off explosions, but I refused to join those ruffians. I was a ruffian myself, but all alone. I was not about to join the others. Independent and free... And the invisible world was watching over me.³

At the same time, he was so guileless and so ignorant of their sly ways of avoiding punishment that he often became their

scapegoat. When they took to their heels after some misdeed, he remained glued to the spot with nothing to say in his own defense. And as he never named the true culprits, he was often beaten in their place. Even his mother punished him sometimes, when he had been with a group of children that had done some serious damage. But Mikhaël was not completely naïve: after igniting a fire-cracker he was quick to run away, even though he knew he would have to face the music when he returned home, for the neighbors would have already complained to his mother.

One day, however, having been falsely accused yet again, he was so upset by his parents' lack of understanding that he decided to leave home. Not knowing where to go, he wandered down Dounavska Street to the railway station, where he spent some time watching the passengers coming and going, and thinking about his situation.

Suddenly, the busy scene lost all interest for him. Anxiety gripped him when he realized that, for the first time in his life, at eight years old, he was faced with a serious problem that he was quite unable to resolve by himself. Night was coming on; it was growing rapidly colder, and in spite of his unhappiness, he was beginning to be hungry. Above all, he had no idea where he could sleep that night. Unable to bring himself to return home, he decided that his most urgent problem was to find somewhere to spend the night. Leaving the station, he set out briskly in the direction of the sea. To his relief the solution soon presented itself in the shape of a large bale of straw. 'That will do perfectly,' thought Mikhaël to himself, and it was with a sense of real freedom that he slipped under a layer of straw and, forgetful of his empty stomach, was soon fast asleep.

Meanwhile, Dolia was scouring the streets in search of him. As the evening wore on she became more and more wor-

ried, unable to prevent herself from imagining all the terrible things that might have happened to him.

Early next morning Mikhaël was awoken by a railway worker, who asked him what he was doing there.

‘I’ve left my family...’

‘What, left your family? Go home right away or I’ll hand you over to the police!’

Mikhaël plucked up courage and made his way home, where his parents greeted him with exclamations of joy. His mother, who understood him so well, hugged him close, without a word of reproach.

Reassured and comforted by such a welcome, Mikhaël realized that nowhere in the world could he be better off than with his own family. He had to admit in all honesty that in leaving home he had wanted to make his parents feel that they misunderstood him. Speaking of this in

later years, he said that afterwards his 'inner counselors' had talked to him at length about his behavior, and he had taken what they said to heart. But most human beings, he added, behave in this way toward their heavenly parents: they want to be free and independent, so they 'leave home' and look for happiness elsewhere. 'We want to punish God for reprimanding us and trying to get us to mend our ways.'

* * *

The happiness that Mikhaël enjoyed in his family lasted barely a year and a half. In the autumn of that year his father fell seriously ill and within a few days was at death's door. Realizing the gravity of his illness, Ivan worried about leaving his wife alone to fend for herself, Mikhaël, and Alexander, the new baby of three months, and advised Dolia to marry a good friend of his. On October 3, 1908, he died.

Dolia knew nothing about her husband's business and was at a loss to know what to do to save it. A number of people took advantage of her ignorance to cheat her out of her due, and by the time they had had their way, she found herself at the age of thirty-three with two children, in mourning for her husband, and almost destitute. Her anguish was so great that her health was seriously affected for a long time.

In this time of distress Mikhaël did his best to take care of his mother. He prepared the meals, looked after his baby brother and tried to keep their room clean and tidy. He had been doing his share of domestic chores for some time by then, so it was not this aspect of the situation that he found hardest: it was his mother's extreme desolation that alarmed him. Not quite nine years old, he felt terribly young and helpless. One day, at last, help was forthcoming: the Macedonian friend who had sheltered them on their arrival in Varna appeared at the door

laden with a big bag of food. She had come to take care of his mother and the baby.

As soon as Dolia was up and about again she took steps to save her little family from utter ruin. After discussion with the shareholders of her husband's business she finally succeeded in obtaining some compensation for all she had lost: she was given the use of a house in Dounavska Street, not far from where she had lived for such a short time with Ivan.

Their new home was a small, rustic house built of wood and cob in the Turkish style, divided into tiny rooms. A separate kitchen in which they could have their meals was built at right angles to the main building. Part of the ground floor was set off from the house to serve as a stable, and to Mikhaël's great delight, a buckthorn had taken root in the floor of the stable and grown out through the window, shading the front of the house with its luxuriant foliage.

The security afforded by this little house was relative, for Dolia had no income, and in those times it was almost impossible for a woman alone to provide for herself and two children. Once the period of mourning was past, seeing no alternative, she agreed to marry the friend Ivan had spoken about, a widower with one small boy. In the course of their marriage they would have two daughters and a son.

Now, at least, Dolia was not alone, but as her husband was not always able to earn enough for their needs, with time their extreme poverty only seemed to get worse. In spite of her efforts to save every penny, Dolia often found herself unable to provide the children with the food they needed. Like all housewives of her country, she spent long hours spinning, weaving, or sewing their clothes, but she had no money to buy shoes for them, and for years they went barefoot.

Later, Mikhaël would say that it was the difficulties of this life of poverty that had

allowed him to cultivate the most essential moral qualities and acquire strength of character and will-power. The obligation to rise above material privations had helped him to develop his innate mysticism. Like so many other young children in those troubled times, he was deprived of a father, but Dolia, his unassuming but tireless guide and mentor, was a little lamp that illuminated his path.

In the spring following his father's death, an apparently insignificant incident threw a tiny ray of light on one of the aspects of his future. Several comrades arrived one day in great excitement to tell him that the gypsies had pitched their tents in the town. Nomadic gypsies or romanies were a familiar part of the Bulgarian landscape. They claimed to have come originally from India—their language contained a number of words of Indian origin—and every spring they moved from village to village, camping with their tents and caravans wherever there was work to be had in the fields. On

the outskirts of the towns they set up as showmen, fortune-tellers or tinkers.

One of the gypsies that had just arrived in Varna was a well-known clairvoyant, and Mikhaël decided to go with his friends to see her. He had long been familiar with the existence of clairvoyants and healers, and his mother had often told him amazing tales about the famous clairvoyant Cortez. What would this gypsy woman have to say about his future? As soon as he approached, without looking at his hand as was customary, she said: 'You have many enemies.'

'How can I have many enemies?' asked Mikhaël in astonishment.

At nine years old... Many enemies? Flustered and obviously ill at ease, the old crone added:

'Don't worry. You have many friends as well.'

But Mikhaël protested:

‘Why do you keep saying something different?’

Her only reply was a surly mutter:

‘I can’t tell you more than that. Everything is mixed up in my head.’

Without looking at him, she held out her hand as though to ask for money, but almost immediately withdrew it and hurried off to her wagon. Mikhaël went home disappointed that the old gypsy woman had not lived up to her reputation. It was only many years later, faced with the destructive forces that would try to crush him and destroy his work, that he was to remember the old woman’s words and the veiled prediction they contained.

* * *

During the school holidays, Mikhaël had his first experience of work when he was taken on as an apprentice by the local blacksmith. For months he had been watching from a distance as the smith

worked. Each time he saw a piece of metal change from dense, opaque black to a glowing, incandescent red, his fascination grew, and he was drawn back again and again to the spectacle. What impressed him the most was to see that, when put into the hot coals, the metal itself became like fire, and became burning hot, malleable and luminous.

One day he made up his mind: abandoning his observation post by the door, he walked boldly into the smithy and asked to be taken on as an apprentice. He was hired on the spot, and the first thing he learned was to pump the bellows that kept the fire hot. Not long after this, his dream came true: the smith, seeing his perseverance, agreed to teach him to hammer a piece of incandescent iron and give it a new shape.

Mikhaël watched closely, and each time the big burly man in his leather apron brought his hammer down on the anvil, he did the same, trying to keep to the

same rhythm. To his delight, every blow produced sheaves of sparks which fell all around them. Many of the sparks burned his bare feet, but he continued undeterred. In the evening he returned home exhausted, his feet covered with blisters, and proudly handed his mother the twenty *stotinki* (cents) he had earned that day.

Mikhaël's apprenticeship at the forge lasted several weeks. It was an opportunity for him to observe and reflect on the phenomenon of fire, on the behavior of the smith, and on the effect the work had on himself. This, his first job, seems to have been an event of importance in his youth. In later years, he was fond of talking about how a flame communicates its heat and light to metal. He compared a human being to a piece of iron, saying that each of us, in contact with divine fire, is capable of becoming radiant, luminous, and full of warmth.

His love of fire led to other discoveries

as well. One day he noticed that this element that had such a vital role in nature could be extremely beneficial for his health. Intuitively, he understood that a wood fire contained subtle, curative elements.

It is only now that I understand what I did. My subconscious must have retained memories of a past in which fire had played a role in my life. I held my hands out to the flames and through the tips of my fingers I received the solar energy, the life and health that filtered into me. ... The vital energy of trees can be transformed into health, happiness, and joy if you know how to do it ... and I went to sleep with a feeling of great love and gratitude for the warmth. When I woke up I was cured...⁴

It was about this time that Mikhaël first discovered music, and it came about through his encounter with a strange character known to the inhabitants of Varna as 'the madman.' Once a well-

known conductor, he had lost his mind owing to a great personal tragedy. Since then, asking permission from no one, he had taken up residence in the clock tower near the cathedral and spent his days wandering the streets, a beatific smile on his face. When children laughed at or tormented him, he simply smiled and patted them on the head. Sometimes, to the delight of passers-by, he broke into loud and soulful song.

It was this eccentric being who first introduced Mikhaël to music. He became fond of the little boy who listened with such respect to his singing and who never tried to bait him. When Mikhaël climbed to the top of the clock tower in search of him, the old man welcomed him warmly and sang for him. Little by little, the child became familiar with the music he heard in this way, and soon he was proud to be able to say:

‘Sing me something from *Trovatore*. Sing an aria from *Aida*.’

At this, the old man would close his eyes, letting inspiration come to him. Then, his expression radiant, he would jump on the pendulum of the great clock and swing from it, singing all the songs his young friend asked for. There was something about those arias that appealed to Mikhaël's sense of the romantic. Poetic scenes filled his imagination and mystical sensations seemed to flow through his whole being. He listened to his strange teacher for hours, often joining his voice to his, and was soon able to sing a great many classical arias. These new horizons transformed his life and from then on he developed a passionate love of music.

Once a child discovers music, other doors are open to him, for there is a subtle link between the arts, each one stimulating and nurturing the others. Thus Mikhaël also learned to love the theater and the cinema, but as he had no pocket-money he could never buy a ticket for the performances. One day he decided to try to slip into the cinema by mingling with the

crowd of spectators, and to his delight, no one noticed or stopped him. Emboldened by his success, he returned again and again, often seeing the same film or play several times in succession. Before long, this became much easier when some of the actors befriended him and gave him free tickets.

Stimulated by the theater, his powers of observation developed rapidly. In the years that followed, Mikhaël studied with passionate attention the subtleties of the actors' technique. Some seemed to him colorless and without personal magnetism. Listening to them he was astonished to realize that their tears, laughter, and anger were all equally unconvincing. There was a hollowness behind their words, while others could so easily make their audience laugh or cry, or transport them to a world of dreams. An Armenian called Chaxtoun was particularly remarkable: as soon as he came on stage a thrill of anticipation ran through the audience. Even when his back was

turned, his whole being vibrated with such an emotional charge that the audience held their breath.

In spite of his youth, Mikhaël sensed the invisible reality underlying the things he observed and was deeply struck by the realization that the spiritual essence emanating from a human being is capable of moving great numbers of people, even the most apathetic. Also, when he saw two actors having a drink together one day, after quarrelling violently moments before on stage, he realized that the theater reflected life. Those actors were like enemies, who, meeting in the next world after death, understood how stupid they had been to fight over things of no importance. Once they realized that the purpose of all the obstacles, criticism, and opposition they had encountered was to teach them something and stimulate their development, they were able to embrace and forgive each other.

* * *

That year, Mikhaël's life entered a new phase. He was now nine, and his childhood was slipping away. The death of his father, his mother's illness, his new responsibility toward his young brother, the self-discipline that his work in the smithy had required of him—all these things had matured him and prepared him for the powerful spiritual shock that came to him at this time.

Once again, it was a book that occasioned the event. Without fully realizing what it was, he borrowed the Book of Proverbs from the school library, and although still a little young for reading matter of this kind, was bowled over by certain passages about wisdom. He had the feeling that one in particular was directly addressed to him:

*Hear, my son, your father's instruction,
and do not reject your mother's teaching;
for they are a fair garland for your head,
and pendants for your neck. My child, if
sinners entice you, do not consent.*

The effect these words had on him was extraordinary. Of course, he did not understand all that Proverbs said about wisdom, but he took the book home to reread the passages he liked best, those that filled him with ardor and nourished his ideal of becoming a great sage. Touched to the depths of his heart, his gaze turned inward:

*There was a great upheaval within me: tears and sighs, and the longing to become a saint, a prophet. What a transformation! I cried for three days and nights, asking God to forgive my 'crimes.' Not that I had committed any crimes, but in my conscience I felt that I had!*⁵

This new impetus to his heart and mind was the beginning of a spiritual ascent that continued without flagging amid all the difficulties normal to a growing boy. From this time on, he was committed to a personal quest for wisdom, and the orientation of his life began to take shape. Having been 'absent' until the age of nine,

he had suddenly taken possession of the 'three rooms of his house'—mind, heart, and will. Everything was changed, and he did his best to live according to the precepts of the Book of Proverbs. With lightness of heart he determined to avoid any experiments that might endanger his own peace of mind and that of his neighbors.

But at that age, in spite of his spiritual ardor, the shock of his encounter with Solomon's wisdom could not transform him completely. As he himself admitted, the flame that had been lit within him gradually burned lower as the year went on, and his dynamic temperament led him to revert to his favorite pastimes.

And even when I was a little older, ten or eleven, I still set off firecrackers and explosions with black powder. I just loved that! But, of course all the neighbors came pouring out of their houses and I took to my heels... That was cowardly, I know, but if I hadn't run away there would have been nothing left of me. My

*instincts told me that, you see. I had developed my own radar, my antennae... But, of course, running away couldn't save me, because by the time I got home my mother had heard about it from the neighbors.*⁶

The strategic battles waged by the children of the neighborhood also provided a good outlet for his surplus energies. Before he completely discarded the ways of childhood, two more reminders would be necessary, one when he was ten, the other two years later.

One day, out for a stroll with a comrade, he came to a peddler's stall and began browsing through a booklet about a saint who had mastered his passions and become a great sage. Reluctantly, he put the book down, thinking, 'Ah, if only I could buy it!'

'It's only one lev,' said the peddler.

For Mikhaël that was a lot of money, and

regretfully he turned away and walked on.

‘If heaven lets me find the money,’ he said to his friend, ‘I’ll buy the book and give what’s left over to a beggar.’

Suddenly he stopped; there at his feet was a lev. The book was his! Back in his room, he lost himself in the story, and once again an overwhelming enthusiasm for beauty, purity, and wisdom swept over him. At the same time, he reproached himself bitterly for his failure to live up to his ideal of perfection. Concentrating with all his might, he repeated over and over again: ‘I will be a saint, a prophet.’

It was in the summer following his twelfth birthday that another book sounded a final alert. Mikhaël was spending the summer holidays in the forest outside the town with his stepfather and his fellow charcoal burners. While making himself useful in small ways, he spent much of his time watching the men at

work as they cut two-foot lengths of wood, stacked them in a tall pyramids, and then covered them with soil, taking care to arrange small vents to ensure the minimum ventilation required. Two weeks were spent on these preparations, and another two weeks passed before the wood was completely charred and ready for use. The sacks of charcoal were then loaded on a donkey cart and taken to the town for sale.

The charcoal burners, who were fond of the young boy and treated him as their own son, built a tiny cabin for him in a tree, which he could reach by a ladder. One day, to give the boy something to do to while away his time, one of them took a small book from his pocket and handed it to him. When Mikhaël saw that it was a book of the Gospels, he climbed up into his tree to read it in peace.

The Gospels were not unknown to him, of course, for he heard passages read aloud every Sunday in church, but his

encounter with them that day in the quiet of the forest was an experience of a totally different kind. As he read, his fascination grew, and the compassion and loving kindness of Jesus moved him deeply. It was when he reached the description of Jesus delivering a man of the demons that possessed him that something happened in his soul: he had a vivid sensation of being actually in Palestine with Jesus. He saw the poor wretch whom no one could control; he saw Jesus drive the demons from him and send them into a herd of swine; he saw the swine hurtling down the cliff and drowning. Unable to detach his gaze from the man who had once been possessed and who now sat at Jesus' feet, whole and perfectly calm, he found himself admiring his intelligent, sensitive face, his eyes illuminated by a new light of hope. And he sensed the crowd standing all about, dumbfounded by the metamorphosis they had witnessed.

Mikhaël found himself immersed anew in

the atmosphere of Solomon's wisdom. He could think of nothing but that poor, crazed man who had been restored to his senses:

Again I wept. Again I determined to become a saint and a prophet. Again I saw myself as a worthless creature who spent his time pestering others. My mother had always taught me to behave wisely and rationally, but my good resolutions had never lasted very long. But this time was different. This time everything within me was in tumult because of that passage that had so impressed me and particularly because of those few, simple words describing the man sitting there, his mind restored to a state of peace and quiet.⁷

That long holiday in the midst of nature, far from the noise of city life and the distracting presence of his boisterous comrades, gave Mikhaël the setting he needed to assimilate this new spiritual experience in which Jesus had become his

model. He felt happier and more at home in the forest than anywhere else. In the presence of all those trees he had a deep sense of contentment that seemed to rise from some mysterious memory hidden in the very cells of his body.

It must have been shortly after this encounter with the Gospels that he resolved to purify himself by fasting. As his mother recounted, at the age of twelve, he and two comrades decided to fast for as long as possible.

They went and hid in a cabin on the shore of a nearby lake. His friends soon abandoned their fast, but as they kept Mikhaël's hiding place secret, I spent several days searching everywhere for him, until one of the boys made up his mind to tell me where he was. When I finally found him I gave him the most severe scolding he had ever had from me, after which I burst into tears. Then I took him home and gave him a cup of light broth.

Although in this case the two other boys had been unable to stay the course, there were many occasions on which Mikhaël's friends followed his example. His influence with them was already considerable, and without realizing it himself, he was often their leader.

* * *

The social context in which these children were growing up was extremely violent. Periodical outbreaks of war and insurrection ravaged the country, and the political situation was as unstable as that of Macedonia. The Ottoman yoke had been thrown off in 1908, but the country was still not at peace. Four years later, in October of 1912, church bells rang out in Varna and throughout Bulgaria, announcing the mobilization of all the men fit to fight. The First Balkan War had begun. It did not last long: on December 3, an armistice was signed, and when the people of Varna learned that Turkey had

lost almost all its territories in Europe, they poured into the streets to celebrate.

Like all the children of his time, Mikhaël had often heard of the atrocities perpetrated under Ottoman rule, and on the day of the armistice he joined in the general enthusiasm. Accompanied by a few friends, he ran to the Turkish legation with the intention of pulling down the Ottoman flag, the symbol of tyranny and injustice. Of course, it was he who climbed onto the roof, but just as he managed to remove the flag from its staff, the police appeared, and his comrades vanished into thin air. With no time to escape, Mikhaël was left, still clutching the flag, to face the music alone.

Flanked by mounted police, he was marched through the town to the police station and told to wait. At first, standing in a corner of the room watching the men, he thought they looked very severe and felt sure he would be punished. Perhaps he would even be put in prison. But

it was not long before he realized that the policemen could barely conceal their smiles as they whispered among themselves. In the end, with a half-hearted reprimand that deceived no one, they sent him home. Amused by the audacity of this young boy who had done something they were not at liberty to do, they could not find it in their hearts to punish him. They knew that for him and his comrades that flag represented oppression and tyranny. All children dream of heroic deeds, and Mikhaël was no exception.

For the next few years, he spent his summer holidays doing temporary work in various factories and workshops. The experience satisfied his eagerness to learn about life, to understand his fellow workers and the complexities of human relations. Also, he was delighted to be able to contribute what little he earned to the family's finances.

The different settings in which he

worked provided ample matter for observation and reflection. His first experience was in a tailor's shop and lasted no more than a day, for he soon found the work too foreign to his nature. To have to sit down all day long was torture to him, and after only a few hours he was so overcome with boredom that he fell fast asleep.

A little later he applied to a local candy factory which was hiring workers. The foreman explained the task to him, but Mikhaël did not begin immediately. Only after watching the other employees to see how they carried out the different tasks did he start to work with concentration and precision. On that first day in the factory he was surprised to learn that the workers were free to eat as many candies as they wanted. Enthusiastically availing himself of this permission, he was puzzled to see that each time he helped himself, his fellow workers exchanged amused glances, but it was not long before he understood, as his appetite for sweet things vanished. He was never to

forget the lesson: too much of a good thing spoils all the pleasure.

At another time he worked in a factory that produced pastels. By then he was beginning to be at ease in the working world, and once he had mastered the techniques he had been shown he ventured to invent a new method by which he achieved the same result as his fellow workers in less time and with less effort. His initiative won him a bonus from his employer, who had been watching this enterprising young worker.

Thanks to these summer jobs, Mikhaël learned the rudiments of several different trades, including that of mason and carpenter. All that he saw and experienced during these years became matter for reflection: the way people worked, the way their work affected them, the relations between employers and employees, their discussions and disputes. He gained valuable insight into the problems, joys, and pains of their daily lives.

Notes

1. Our references to Mikhaël's thoughts or feelings or his state of mind are strictly based on his own reflections described in his talks. The same is true for the reported dialogues.
2. May 5, 1943.
3. July 29, 1980.
4. August 24, 1958, and 'The Power of Fire' in *The Fruits of the Tree of Life*.
5. 1960 (Exact date unknown).
6. Ibid.
7. July 17, 1966.

3



The Aspirations of Adolescence

At the time of Mikhaël's youth, a child who wanted to learn had no problem finding books, for most towns and villages in Bulgaria boasted a reading room.

In fact, the public reading room was considered, together with church and school, to be one of the pillars of society. Mikhaël was already a regular visitor to the school library, and several of his teachers, aware of his thirst for learning and the extreme poverty of his family, were always ready to lend him books.

At home, however, he did not have the peace and quiet he needed for study and reflection. His brother Alexander and his stepbrother were both much younger than he, and he now had two baby sisters. Dolia, seeing how much he suffered from his lack of privacy, managed to arrange a small room for him, with a window looking out onto the roof of the kitchen. This room soon became a cherished haven in which Mikhaël passed long hours reading and learning to meditate.

His reading had already introduced him to the major themes of initiatic science of ancient Egypt, Greece, India, and Tibet, and at the age of thirteen he encountered

the Buddha, who was to become for him a model second only to Jesus. Influenced also by his study of Hindu philosophers, he began to practice yoga in order, as he said later, to develop his will-power and his 'secret faculties.' A book by the American yogi Ramacharaka, author of several books about Hatha-yoga, made a powerful impression on him. On learning that the aim of Hatha-yoga—based principally on a technique of rhythmic breathing—was to lead adepts to the mastery of their thought processes through breath-control, Mikhaël began to practice these exercises every day with unrelenting resolve. Between the ages of twelve and fifteen his psychic and spiritual development seems to have been extremely rapid.

But books on spirituality were not the only kind that interested him; he also devoured adventure stories, and the novels of Jules Verne in particular opened fascinating new horizons. He sensed that authors like Verne, who were capable of describing as yet unknown physical phe-

nomena, must possess a highly developed intuition which gave them direct access to the invisible resources of nature. It was also in this sense that the study of chemistry held his attention for quite some time. With his mother's permission, he transformed the horse's stable into a laboratory, and by some prodigy of economy known only to herself, Dolia bought him a glass retort. His predilection for fire and eruptions being well known, no one was surprised when the first thing he did was to make some explosive.

Mikhaël was passionately interested in everything around him. His temperament continually drove him to get to the bottom of things, to investigate and extract the last drop of life-giving sap from every new discovery. The more he learned, the more convinced he became that every physical phenomenon was matched by a corresponding spiritual phenomenon. Thus the drop of mercury, like a bright, mobile jewel rolling in the hollow of his hand, showed that impurity tarnishes and

divides, whereas purity ensures integrity and unity. Once broken into smaller drops and sprinkled with dust, the mercury could never become one again.

Gradually, however, Mikhaël was no longer content to confine his experiments to the physical plane. The object of his quest was on another level, and he turned his attention to the study of psychic phenomena. His first introduction to the books of Louis Jacolliot opened marvelous new perspectives on the powers of thought and the existence of mysterious, invisible forces that could be used by human beings in the visible world. Jacolliot claimed that while in India he had witnessed public demonstrations of the fantastic powers of fakirs: he had seen them plant a seed and within a few hours, by the power of thought alone, cause it to grow and produce flowers and fruit.

Mikhaël's reaction to this was to reflect that the tremendous power behind such exploits should be used for a nobler pur-

pose than to impress the idle onlooker. He was determined to work on a higher plane than such fakirs. But first he needed to find out whether he was actually capable of getting results through mental concentration alone.

One of his first experiments took place in the *Morskata Gradina* (the Garden of the Sea), the park that runs along the shore of the Black Sea from north to south of Varna. Seeing that all the seats in the park were fully occupied, he focused on a man sitting on a distant bench, repeating in his mind: 'Get up. Go on, get up!' Within a few seconds the man stood up and walked away, and Mikhaël sat down in his place. He was still young enough to have a great sense of satisfaction as he took that seat... he had earned it!

He repeated the experiment several times to be sure that the result was not a question of chance. In the same way, he practiced sending mental suggestions to his friends, directing them from a distance

to make some harmless gesture: he persuaded one of them to take off his beret, another to pick up something from the ground. On one occasion, seeing a comrade coming toward him, he concentrated on his right foot to make him stop walking. But when he saw the boy pause and lean against a tree with a worried expression on his face, he was overcome with remorse and hurried over to reassure him as best he could. Fortunately, everything was soon back to normal.

By the time he was fourteen, Mikhaël had begun to be aware of the mysterious powers of his own subconscious, and with this came a glimpse of the breathtaking possibilities before him. Judging by the experiments that absorbed his attention at that time, he was already familiar with concepts recognized by many different philosophies. He was aware, for example, of the existence of man's subtle bodies—astral, mental, causal, buddhic, and atmic—and of the system of the *chakras*,

those subtle force-centers lying along the spinal column.

Exactly when Mikhaël discovered that human beings have the power, consciously or unconsciously, to leave their physical bodies and move about on the invisible planes is not known. He may not yet have been familiar with the spontaneous disassociation that is often triggered by the trauma of an accident or a surgical intervention, but we do know that several years later he was able to enlighten an ex-serviceman who told him that, when in a coma, he had found himself outside his physical body and had watched the surgeons at work on him as he lay unconscious on the operating table. But certainly, by the time he was fourteen, Mikhaël knew that the great mystics experienced phenomena of this sort, and it is evident that he had already discovered them for himself, for he began to introduce his friends to the idea that they too had this power.

From his extensive reading, he knew that if you can induce a 'higher state' in people, they will be capable of supernatural perceptions. He wanted so much to give his friends a chance to perceive these new horizons, in particular the splendors of the invisible world that were beginning to be revealed to him. When he proposed experiments of this kind to his friends, several of them agreed to let him hypnotize them. To be on the safe side, he invited their parents to be present. On his very first attempt, he succeeded in putting his subject into a disassociation trance, and the parents saw for themselves that their son could feel nothing in his physical body, for his etheric body was detached from it. One day, however, Mikhaël had great difficulty in bringing a subject out of his trance, and recognizing the dangers of this science which could so easily be used to dominate others, he abandoned it once and for all.

The experiments of those early years were no more than a preparation for

things of far greater importance which lay in the future. It is impossible to say how many techniques he attempted to master before abandoning them when he realized that they could be used to exploit others. Later, he always advised everyone not to use such practices without a very serious reason.

* * *

If the power of thought was one of Mikhaël's most important discoveries during his adolescence, the yoga of nutrition was another. At the age of fourteen he had an apparently banal experience which caused him to reflect on the hidden properties of food. One morning his mother found that she had nothing to give him for breakfast before he left home for the day. She did, however, have some flour, and with this she made a small bread roll for him. For Dolia, bread was the one great staple that could always be relied on when one had no money to buy anything else. While kneading the dough

and thinking of her eldest son, who so often had to make do with an inadequate diet, she infused it with all her energy, every ounce of her strength. When Mikhaël came home that evening, he asked: 'Mother, what did you put into that bread?'

He was both intrigued and impressed, for having eaten it he had not felt hungry for the rest of the day. Dolia told him: 'While I was making it, I prayed that it would sustain you and give you strength.'

Mikhaël found that his mother was far wiser than most of his teachers. He could not count the number of times she had given him good advice. But as usual, he needed to understand for himself the question of the energy contained in food. One day, when he had nothing to eat but a small piece of bread and a morsel of cheese, it occurred to him that he should chew each mouthful for a long time so as to draw from it all its hidden qualities. The result of the experiment was aston-

ishing: a powerful sensation of well-being, joy, and peace flooded him, and he became aware of a host of subtle energies flowing from the food into his whole being.

His intuition thus confirmed, he reflected that the food we eat possesses a secret life of its own, far beyond its physical properties, and that it is important to eat slowly. Gradually, he understood that the mouth is especially designed to absorb the subtler energies contained in food, while the stomach assimilates principally the physical elements. On the other hand, he also began to see that his digestion was greatly influenced by physical conditions, as well as by his feelings, at the time of eating. He noticed, for instance, that his muscles were sometimes tense during meals, and realizing that this tension drained energy from his body, he began to do a few simple exercises of relaxation before eating.

For him, nutrition represented a form of yoga, a beneficial exercise, a life disci-

pline. He ate only when he was hungry, partly because he felt much better when he did so, but above all because he wanted to 'subordinate the ordinary way of life to the spiritual life'. From this time on, in taking what he needed to sustain the life of mind and body, he always tried to choose elements that were pure: water from unpolluted springs, natural food, books that inspired and elevated the mind.

In spite of these options which should have contributed to his fitness, his health at this period was not good; the poverty of his family and constant privations left him an easy prey to infection. During the greater part of the year he went barefoot, wearing his one pair of sandals only when it snowed in winter to make them last longer. In the mornings when there was no food in the house, he went to school without breakfast and sat through his classes, drowsy from hunger. Fortunately, when he fell ill, his mother always managed to pull him through, and he devel-

oped a lasting gratitude for the devotion and patience with which she nursed him.

Dolia, learning from her mother's example, had developed her own gift for healing. Sustained and guided by the principles that had guided Astra, she had also followed her intuition and made discoveries of her own. In particular, she had found that by passing her hand lightly over a patient's solar plexus she could sense the nature of the ailment and the treatment that was called for. Mikhaël often saw her helping people in this way and wanted to know how she did it: 'Mother, how do you heal? What do you do to a patient?'

Dolia reflected for a moment before answering.

'On my own I am weak, but when I am with someone who is ill, I forget everything else and put my whole soul into healing him. I start by calling on God, on his power and love, and think of nothing

else. My love for the sick person is so great that my soul becomes a conductor of universal love, and when I pour that love into him he is healed.'

For Mikhaël, always so keenly aware of the importance of links, Dolia's words were truly a source of inspiration. 'She says she is weak, but her love is powerful,' he thought to himself. Thanks to her great faith, she was a humble intermediary, holding in her hands, as it were, the wire through which a powerful current flowed from the divine world and restored the sick to health.

This was the current that Mikhaël was constantly seeking in his own life, this link with the spiritual worlds which can be forged into an indestructible bond through prayer and meditation. At this stage of his life he was striving for it with so much ardor that he had difficulty in paying attention to life at school, which seemed to him unutterably boring.

At the *Kniass Boris Lycée*—the King Boris School—which he attended until the age of fifteen, Mikhaël was considered a mediocre pupil. ‘I was the class dunce,’ he often said, adding: ‘I know you don’t believe me, but it’s perfectly true!’ At an age when his fellow pupils were thinking of renown, a future profession, marriage, and children, Mikhaël was thinking of something quite different. The truth is that he was passionately interested in anything that could contribute to his spiritual growth and attached little importance to everything else. The teachers, not knowing quite how to judge a boy who failed to conform to the established norms of behavior and whose mind was so free of conventional stereotypes, gave him only average marks.

Because of this great longing to become perfect and full of love, I devoured books, meditated, and did all kinds of experiments. My studies suffered as a result.

I was simply not interested in anything at school—neither the teachers nor the books.¹

For his intellectual formation he relied more on the public libraries and reading rooms than on school, and it was only thanks to his exceptional memory that he managed to assimilate what was taught in the classroom, for, as his parents could not afford to buy even the basic school texts, he had to borrow them from his classmates and skim through them during recreation periods. In class he always sat at the back, where he went unnoticed and was rarely questioned by the teachers so that he was free to pursue his own reflections and concentrate on essentials. Accustomed to examining all that he heard and read, and filtering out anything that seemed superfluous or trivial, his mind was developing freely, unconstrained by academic norms. In spite of his dynamism and the influence he had on his schoolmates, Mikhaël preferred to remain in the background and rarely

intervened in group discussions. If it had not been for his integrity and his exceptional openness to others, no one would have noticed him.

The most important aspect of his school experiences was the understanding he gained of his fellow human beings. Observing the teachers, he recognized that some were dreary and governed by routine while others had the presence and personal magnetism he had seen in certain actors. With the same clear-sightedness, he observed his fellow-students and determined not to become like so many who recited the lessons by heart without understanding what they were saying. Mikhaël never tried to be top of the class: such an ambition simply made no sense to him. The undeniable influence he had over his comrades was not that of a brilliant student, it was far subtler. Years later, one of his teachers described the young Mikhaël to her son:

As a boy he was extremely intelligent

and had exceptional inner strength. He was always surrounded by a little group of comrades who were very attached to him.

On the rare occasions that the teacher called on Mikhaël to answer a question, a murmur of pleasurable anticipation ran through the classroom. Then, knowing that he needed a moment in which to collect his thoughts and find something interesting to say, pupils and teacher alike waited in silence. Even when he had not been able to study the lesson, he was usually able to draw on his extensive reading and recount an adventure or an excerpt from a play that had struck him as important. His vivid imagination and sense of fun led him to integrate into his tales amusing details that lightened the austere atmosphere of the class. In spite of themselves, even the most severe teachers had to smile, and most of them, slightly perplexed by the extent of his knowledge, gave him a passing mark.

World War I brought many changes at the school. When Bulgaria allied herself to Germany in 1915 in the hope of regaining her Macedonian territories, many of the teachers were called up, and those who replaced them did not always have the necessary competence. Three of these substitute teachers left a lasting impression on Mikhaël, each for a different reason.

The first, a math teacher, was incapable of maintaining discipline in his class. The boys laughed at his mannerisms and amused themselves by goading him into losing his temper. But Mikhaël felt sorry for him and refused to join in. He recognized that it was the man's sensitivity and lack of control over his own emotions that somehow caused his pupils to be so unruly. One day, when the teacher had stormed from the class, slamming the door behind him, Mikhaël leaped to his feet and spoke up in his defense: 'I was so indignant that I was almost insulting!' And because of their affection for this

quiet boy from the back bench, his classmates promised to mend their ways. But their good resolutions lasted no more than a few days, and it was not long before the teacher gave up the unequal struggle and resigned.

He was replaced by a little man who, though outwardly insignificant, had a perfect grasp of his subject and was always completely calm. The discipline in his class was exemplary. The contrast between this teacher and his predecessor gave Mikhaël much food for thought. He began to realize that quite apart from the knowledge and competence of a teacher, it was something that emanated from him that made others react as they did. This teacher was no less sensitive than the first, but he won the respect of his pupils because of his inner strength and emotional control. Also, he had a quality of presence which the other had lacked.

The third teacher, a violinist, was a stiff and silent man, whose dry, authoritarian

manner intimidated his pupils. One day, probably following a discussion about the rhythm of respiration, Mikhaël abandoned his usual reserve and talked to him about the Hindu breathing techniques that he had been practicing for some time. To everyone's surprise, instead of snubbing him for his impertinence, the teacher questioned Mikhaël about his practices, relaxed visibly, and accepted his offer to lend him a book on the subject.

Human behavior was a topic that never failed to fascinate Mikhaël. At that time he was already beginning to formulate his ideas about will-power and about the self-mastery that enables one to keep control of one's emotions. In his view, sensitivity was very important: it was far better to be sensitive and to suffer than to be like a stone. Commenting on this later, he would say that the more one develops spiritually the more sensitive one becomes, but he always insisted on the

importance of developing self-control and sensitivity in tandem.

At this period of Mikhaël's life, his ideal towered before him in the distance, like the glittering peak of a mountain. To reach that peak he would need tremendous will-power, of that he was convinced, and he set about reinforcing his will in every way he could think of. In his family, his neighborhood, or at school, the need for self-control arose many times a day, and he took every opportunity to practice it. In fact, his resolute character sometimes led him to commit gratuitous acts of bravado in order to prove his courage to himself—or to his comrades. At school, he drilled himself to endure the offensive behavior of an arrogant youth who, believing himself to be a writer of genius, constantly heaped ridicule and sarcasm on those whom he considered less gifted. 'I never answered him,' Mikhaël said later, 'because I practiced a special kind of yoga.' On one occasion, however, after humiliating some of

his schoolmates in public, the bully turned his attentions on Mikhaël once again.

Mikhaël's mysterious influence in the school was probably a source of envy to this boy, who hoped to provoke a reaction by insulting him, and for once Mikhaël caught fire. Jumping to his feet, he looked his adversary in the eye and proceeded to describe his character as he read it in his face, until, completely deflated and speechless, the boy sat down. From that day on, his attitude toward Mikhaël changed radically and he began to seek his company. He who had been used to attacking others without risk of retaliation had finally come up against a strength that commanded his respect. He had discovered that silence and patience are not necessarily signs of weakness.

Mikhaël's friends could not help but realize that his basic orientation was toward the spiritual life but that there was not a

trace of bigotry in him. He was as capable as they of youthful enthusiasm, and his fiery temperament made him eager for new experiences, always ready for ventures that kindled his interest. The only activities in which he systematically refused to take part were those that might wrong others. He always took an interest in what was going on in his neighborhood and saw that several of his young comrades were fast becoming delinquents. At a certain period during his adolescence, he witnessed several tragic incidents, and although he rarely talked about them in later life, they remained vivid in his memory. One day he spoke of having seen some of his comrades gunned down by the police as they tried to run away. Others had been caught and sent to prison.

Without going into detail, he declared that he had always retained a certain independence and freedom, and that he had been 'protected by the spiritual world' from the difficult milieu in which

he was growing up. He was already conscious in those days of a strong bond with the invisible beings that dwell in light.

* * *

Adolescence, the age of noble sentiments, utopian dreams, and heroic decisions was for Mikhaël a period in which to explore a variety of emotional and intellectual experiences. Like other youngsters, he dreamed beautiful dreams which faded one after the other. At the age of fifteen, it was time to make specific practical decisions about how he should work toward his ideal. What would he do in life? What field would he choose?

At one point his ambition was to be a scholar, a university professor. Later, he began to write mystical poems and tales, weaving spiritual truths into a tapestry of visions and prophecies. He put a stop to this phase when he realized with a lucidity beyond his years that much of the poetry he liked aroused hazy, melancholic

sensations within him and made him hypersensitive and vulnerable. It debilitated him by imprisoning him in the world of feelings. He was already aware of the moon's influence on human beings and knew that the world of emotion was linked to the lunar cycle. Sensing intuitively that true poetry, the poetry that touches the most sensitive chords in the human heart, belongs to the higher, more spiritual planes, he resolved to linger no more in the world of the emotions, but to 'look for true poetry in the sun'. Although he continued to rank poetry above both music and painting, he no longer composed any. He turned his attention instead to philosophy and science.

At this period his most cherished dream, that of becoming a true sage, was growing ever stronger and more insistent, pushing other ambitions into the background. He was spending more time in the practice of yoga and in meditation, and when not at school, he read for hours. His thirst for

knowledge was fuelled by the works of the great authors of all time, available in translation in every good public library. Mikhaël perused all the major philosophical and spiritual works he could find and soon became familiar with the sacred scriptures of humanity's great religions. The spiritual teaching of Gautama Buddha had a special place in his heart, and he continued to read everything he could find on the subject. Among his favorite Western authors were Emerson, Berkeley, Steiner, Blavatsky, Spinoza, and Paracelsus.

One day, exploring the shelves of a library, he discovered a book on palmistry by the French author Adolphe Desbarolles and became passionately interested in the art of divination by reading the lines of the hand. What first caught his attention, however, were the writer's comments on the nature of magic: *'Magic is a comparison between two worlds'*. Until that moment Mikhaël had thought of magic as 'the ability to command the spir-

its and work miracles', but pondering Desbarolles' statement in relation to his long-standing awareness of the importance of links, he realized that it expressed an important truth:

You cannot compare two things unless there is a link between them. That is what a comparison is, therefore, first and foremost, a connection. True magic is the comparison between the divine and the physical worlds which is made possible by the link between them. Without this link there can be no magic... The whole of my philosophy is based on this little thread, the fragile link between the two worlds.²

From his earliest youth Mikhaël had been interested in how different realities can be linked. Later, in his teaching, he would give different examples of formulas that could be used to activate that link and harness the forces of the invisible world for one's own benefit and the benefit of others. One might say, for instance: 'As

the sun rises in the heavens, so may the sun of love rise in my heart...' He compared this link to a power line carrying an electric current which can be transformed into the diverse forms of light, heat, or movement. In the course of his life, as he penetrated the heart of this idea, the elements of nature became an integral part of his spiritual work.

At this time, wanting to understand what people hoped to find in the practice of magic, and having heard that spiritualistic séances were being held in a house in Varna, he decided to go and find out for himself. A few sessions were enough to convince him that the participants were mainly seeking to satisfy their appetite for money, power, and sensual pleasures. It was not what he was looking for, and he returned to his books.

His interest in the art of palmistry having been triggered by Desbarolles' book, Mikhaël now began to study it seriously. Whenever his friends allowed it, he took

an impression of their hands in plaster of Paris so that he could study them at leisure, making careful notes of his observations. If no plaster was available, he would sprinkle a little powdered charcoal on a person's palm and take a print on paper. His natural aptitude for clairvoyance was developing steadily, and after examining the prints he sometimes told his friends what he saw in their future. Years later, some of them were impressed to find his predictions coming true. One in particular, a musician at the height of his career, was to say that he had been a shy, self-effacing adolescent when Mikhaël had foretold a brilliant future for him in music.

The recent discovery of radio waves opened yet another field of spiritual reflection for him. It is not clear whether his research in this field began when he was fifteen or some years later, for when he spoke of crystal sets in his talks it was always in reference to the spiritual discoveries of his youth. When he said, 'I

was very young at the time...' he could just as well have been twenty-five as fifteen. We do know, however, that crystal sets were already available in 1913, and at some point, Mikhaël, who could not afford to buy one, built one of his own.

In order to tune in to a station, he only needed to position a needle on the surface of the crystal, and he was quick to see in this crude but effective instrument a symbolism which could be applied to his everyday life: *contact was achieved only if the needle touched a live spot*. Also, he noticed that he was not always capable of finding that spot. The analogy between this phenomenon and the spiritual life was plain:

I understood that if we are incapable of picking up the countless messages and currents that crisscross the universe, it is because we have not tuned our crystal sets to the right wavelength. So, this is what we must try to do every day: tune in to the transmitter, that is to say, adopt

*the proper attitude, turn toward that Polar Star whom we call God. Only if we do this shall we obtain his blessings: light, love, joy, and health.*³

All these dreams, all this research led Mikhaël to a succession of choices, each of which brought him imperceptibly closer to the role he was to play in life. When he decided not to dedicate his life to science, it was because he understood that he was destined to tread a different path. In his own mind he had to admit that 'to become a brilliant scientist at the University was nothing' compared to spiritual research. When he turned his back on the dangerous ambiguities of spiritualism, it was to pursue the study of palmistry, an art which presented no such dangers. And when he gave up writing poetry, it was to turn to philosophy and also to music, for which he was developing an ever greater need.

This need was so intense, in fact, that he constantly regretted being unable to play

an instrument himself. Seeing his more prosperous schoolmates arriving for music lessons with their guitars or violins only accentuated the feeling, for he knew that his family could never afford the violin he longed for. One day, however, he received an invitation which compensated in large part for this lack: the sister of one of his neighbors, an excellent pianist, invited him to come and listen while she played. After this, he spent hours, sitting cross-legged in a corner of her studio, learning to analyze the effect the music had on him and, above all, to use it to 'fill the sails of his meditation', as the wind fills the sails of a boat. Often, he paid little attention to the music itself. It was simply a great force, an impetuous wind that lifted him and sped him toward the sublime regions to which his soul aspired.

* * *

Music was not the only heaven-sent gift Mikhaël received at this period. A friend

gave him a prism, and with a sense of wonder he discovered the splendor of the seven colors contained in sunlight. From this moment on, the thought of the seven rays was always with him, and that small piece of crystal became the starting point of a life-long reflection on light. He juggled with fascinating ideas: white light is one, but when passed through a three-sided prism, it is refracted into seven different colors. Similarly, every human being is a prism with three facets—heart, mind, and will—which, when correctly positioned in relation to light, receives all the wealth of the seven colors, symbols of the seven virtues.

In order to understand the physics of the refraction of white light, he began to study scientific texts and conduct experiments which opened new horizons for him but which also gained him a growing reputation as a very strange boy. Undeterred by what others might say about him, he daubed the window of his room with red paint and meditated in the col-

ored light that filtered through the glass. After studying the effect of this color for a few days, he washed off the red and repeated the experience with orange, and so on through the spectrum. When it came to violet light, he found to his astonishment that flowers wilted and his friends fell asleep after being exposed for a time to the special atmosphere it created. As for himself, he soon found that violet light helped him disassociate from his physical body and 'fly away to other worlds'.

Intrigued by these discoveries, he went on to other experiments. He mounted different colored sheets of cellophane on a cardboard frame and spun it in the light of a powerful lamp, so that enchanting nuances of color were projected on the walls. Seated in the lotus position, he contemplated all this beauty around and within him, as his soul soared and expanded in space. Through closed eyelids, he felt that he could actually see the brilliant light and color in which he was

sheathed. His heart overflowed with love, and his sole desire was to pour out his life for the good of all humanity.

One day while meditating, he was inspired to create a design that would be a visual representation of perfect harmony. After several attempts, he finally drew a circle, on the circumference of which he placed six circles of equal diameter, thus creating the stylized form of a rose. He then painted the figure with the colors of the spectrum. Intuitively he had rediscovered the ancient symbol of the Rosicrucians. Having written beneath the rosace the opening words of St John's Gospel, '*In the beginning was the Word*', he hung it on his wall. The contemplation of this perfect geometrical figure gave him an extraordinary sense of well-being. But he was still not satisfied, and to enhance its effect, he found a way of spinning it slowly on its axis.⁴

His passion for beautiful colors led him to discover realities that astonished him,

so far were they above those of the visible world. He had a clear perception, for instance, of the correspondence between the seven colors of the spectrum, the seven notes of the musical scale, the seven days of creation, the seven bodies of man, the seven heavens, and the seven archangels before the throne of God. As his intuitive perception of the link between colors and virtues became stronger, he drew the logical conclusion: by being as pure as prisms, human beings allow divine light to enter them, thus becoming capable of developing the virtues that correspond to the seven colors. Every time Mikhaël gazed at his mystical rose, he was transported to a dazzling world of peace and happiness. With the passing months the symbol seemed to grow and blossom within his soul.

* * *

While all these spiritual experiences were a source of great joy to Mikhaël, they also led him to demand more and more of

himself. He scrutinized his life, his behavior, his activities, and concluded that what he saw was a disaster. Disgusted by his 'mediocrity', he resolved to replace it with something very great that would demand such striving that he would never have time to tire of his efforts. He implored heaven to transform him:

For years, when I was young, I would implore Heaven to transform me. I would say, 'What can I do for you? I'm feeble, stupid, mediocre, worthless. Do you really want me to be like this for the rest of my life? I warn you, I shall not be much use to you like that; in fact you'll have a great deal to complain about! So, hurry up and take it all. Make me die, if you like, but come and take possession of me. I can't go on living as I am now. Send some Angels to help me, send me all kinds of pure, noble, intelligent creatures. It will be to your advantage because, if you don't answer my prayer, I'll never do anything right and it will be all your fault!' And my threats seem to

*have done the trick. They realized that this troublesome fellow had got them with their backs to the wall! After much discussion and scratching of heads, they decided that they had better give me what I was asking for because, if they left me as I was, I could do a lot of damage.*⁵

His occasional reflections about this period of his life show that he judged himself very severely, and in the light of his desire for perfection could see only his weaknesses and failings. His sights were set so high that he could not be satisfied with what he had already achieved, and the religious education he had received meant that he was constantly in conflict with what he saw as evil. Fortunately, he did not allow his spiritual exercises to isolate him from others, and his practical common sense, his generosity, and his openness to others certainly saved him from going to extremes. Thanks to his practice of meditation and contemplation, he was gradually learning

how to control and transform his nature without destroying himself.

We are not very well equipped to fight against evil, whereas evil is extremely well armed, it has a huge arsenal to back it up, and in the face of that we are powerless. Only heaven, the divine dimension within each one of us, is all-powerful. Heaven has all the means it needs, but we... who are we to stand up to the forces of evil? When I was young, I too was taught to fight against evil, to try to uproot and annihilate it, and that is what I did. But I was torn apart, literally dislocated by my efforts, because it is totally exhausting to fight continually against yourself, against something you do not understand, and this was what I was doing. Later, when I began to reflect, to look for other ways, and to link myself more and more to the divine world, I understood that this was not the right method.⁶

In later years he often spoke of a very

intense phase of spiritual work that began when he was fifteen, as though all that had gone before was totally negligible. And yet, judging from his own accounts, two years previously he had already realized the importance of regular meditation and conscious breath control in achieving inner equilibrium. He would one day tell a group of his followers that the practice of rhythmic breathing could be of incalculable benefit to one's intellectual, emotional, and psychic life: 'It can even help to balance our sexual energies and make it easier for us to contact the most exalted entities of the invisible worlds.'

It was at this time that Mikhaël left school in order to devote every minute to his spiritual exercises and research. His mind and heart were already steeped in the age-old truths of initiatic science, and he began now to study other texts treating of Hindu philosophy and ancient theosophy. But in spite of the inner peace that this work brought him, he was very much

alone. He had barely known his father, and there was no one in his immediate surroundings to whom he could turn for guidance in his spiritual development.

His mother was a constant presence of love and solid common sense, but neither she nor anyone else was in a position to warn him of the danger of prolonged breathing exercises without the supervision of an experienced guide. His family, who witnessed his strange behavior, sometimes wondered if he was not slightly deranged. Why did he not behave like other boys of his age? His experiments with color, his unusual eating habits and frequent fasts seemed ridiculous.

At the age of fifteen, by strength of character alone, Mikhaël had already surmounted many of the difficulties inherent in the harsh conditions of the times. Progressively he had succeeded in harnessing his prodigious energy in the service of a spiritual ideal. Ready to sacrifice

everything for that ideal, he was gradually becoming utterly fearless. And yet he was convinced that he needed a spiritual Master. Following his intuition, he began searching in earnest for the being who would help him to develop and channel both his spiritual impulses and his exceptional psychic powers.

This deep-felt need to put himself in the hands of a sage was the expression of a demanding conscience. In the East, a spiritual Master has always been considered the greatest treasure any human being can possess, and those who choose the path of spirituality are capable of giving up all their worldly goods in order to find a true Master. Born at the frontier between East and West, imbued as he was with Hindu and Buddhist philosophy as well as the teaching of the Gospels, Mikhaël adopted this attitude wholeheartedly. All his life he would say that a spiritual Master inspires and stimulates, that 'he is a link with heaven, a path that leads to the summits'. It is the mental

image that a disciple forms of his Master which becomes his true inner Master, and it is this inner Master who opens the doors of the spiritual world to his disciple.

There can be no doubt that the models that Mikhaël chose at different ages corresponded to and answered the needs of each phase of his life. In his early years it was naturally to his mother that he turned. Later, Jesus and Buddha became his chosen models. At the age of seventeen, without in any way relinquishing his close bond with them on a higher plane, he strove to resemble Peter Deunov, the spiritual guide he was to find on the physical plane. Many years later, after the death of Peter Deunov, when he himself was recognized to be a spiritual Master, he often spoke of a 'timeless being', the Master of all spiritual Masters, with whom he had had a special relationship since the age of twenty. Also, at the center of his life there was always the sun, that unique model, dispenser of light,

heat, and life. Often he would say: 'I want to be like the sun.' But above all it was the desire to resemble his heavenly Father that most consistently inspired his efforts.

At the age of fifteen, however, he was still searching fervently and sometimes with painful intensity for his first spiritual guide, and the words of the Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner were often in his mind: *'When you love an exceptional human being, that love creates a bond between you, and the qualities of that being enter into you.'* These words sparked a conviction that was to accompany him all his life: to model oneself on an exalted being is always to one's advantage, for that ideal spurs one on to greater heights.

In the hope of finding such an 'exalted being', Mikhaël began to attend the sermons of Orthodox priests and Protestant ministers, but he always returned home disappointed by what he had read on their faces while they commented on the

Gospels. Refusing to be deterred by each successive disappointment, he listened to dozens of speakers. Finally he gave up and returned to his books, consoling himself with the biographies of exceptional beings, the great benefactors of humanity. What he read stimulated him and nourished his thirst for perfection and beauty, but the painful fact still remained: he found himself as alone as if he had been in a desert. Family and friends ridiculed his quest and criticized his unusual behavior, reproaching him for his all-absorbing interest in the things of the spirit. The few with whom he sometimes spoke of what was closest to his heart showed only lukewarm enthusiasm for his ideas.

The general lack of approval, however, failed to turn him from his chosen path, and he continued to call on the higher beings in whose existence he firmly believed. In fact this perseverance and determination were characteristic of him throughout his life. Even as an adolescent

he was not easily daunted by mockery and criticism. This did not mean that he was indifferent to the opinion of others, but he was gradually learning to master his feelings and be free to pursue his goal. His convictions were based on his spiritual experiences and were too deeply anchored within him; they did not allow him to be intimidated or discouraged.

And yet, the living, visible guide he longed for was still no more than a dream, and at one point his solitude became so acute that he felt the need for something concrete to cling to, some physical symbol of that unknown spiritual Master. He found an old armchair, which he carefully cleaned and set in a place of honor in his room. The empty chair represented for him both a promise and a sign that his Master would soon reveal himself.

One day, thanks to his many hours of reflection and meditation, he had a flash of intuition, a certitude that somewhere in Tibet or India there existed a brother-

hood of high initiates dedicated to helping humanity, to spreading the light. He had a strange but clear conviction that he had known and worked with these beings in the remote past, and that they would play an important role in his life. From this point on he considered them his spiritual companions and thought of them constantly, receiving from their presence an extraordinary mystical impetus. At the same time, the sun, source of light in the world, remained a constant inspiration to him.

Mikhaël was truly a solar being. Even as a young boy he seems to have understood that the mightiest and most perfect fire, the fire that is never extinguished, was the sun itself. And as his understanding of the vital importance of light grew, so did his love for it. For him, the sun would always be the most perfect image of God, the one great source of life, light, and warmth on earth. Already at this time, whenever he had the opportunity, he attended the sunrise and spent long

hours meditating in the park, where he had a view over the sea to the east.

Notes

1. January 19, 1946.
2. 'We Must Never Sever the Link', in *Cosmic Moral Law*.
3. 'A Question of Attitude' in *Love and Sexuality II*.
4. For an explanation and illustration of the Mystic Rose, see 'Au Commencement était le Verbe' in *Au Commencement était le Verbe*.
5. 'Justice' in *Cosmic Moral Law*.
6. 'Working on the Personality' in *The Key to the Problems of Existence*.

4



Illumination

Mikhaël had reached a key period of his life. He had worked long and with single-mindedness to open his mind to wisdom, to purify his heart, and to strengthen his will. He had tirelessly implored God to come and dwell within him, and now he was ready to receive the Spirit. When he spoke in later life of the illumination he received at the age of fifteen and a half, he linked it to the mystical experience triggered by the Book of Proverbs at the age

of nine. This later experience, he said, was the occasion on which he took possession of himself for the second time.

It was during this period that an essay entitled *The Over-Soul*, by the American philosopher Emerson, had an very powerful effect on him. At about the same time he came across a text which described the human aura and the splendors of the invisible world. The combined influence of these two books was to be decisive, but it was apparently the description of Buddha's aura that led him across the threshold of ecstasy.

One summer morning, as usual, he went to the seashore to watch the sunrise, and climbing a slight rise, sat down in an orchard. He had been meditating for a little while when he sensed the presence of heavenly beings around him. Suddenly bathed in a nimbus of brilliant light, he was plunged into a state of ecstasy.

The sparse references he made to this

illumination in later life evoked an image of dazzling beauty, but he clearly found it impossible to express the essential core of the experience. It could never be described or shared with others. We know only that he saw 'a mysterious being', one of those heavenly entities that manifest as pure light, the sight of which leaves such a profound impression that a mystic feels as though he had seen God. Later, he commented:

I had never abandoned my desire to become like Buddha, like Jesus. This was still primordial in my mind... and it was so beautiful that I was beside myself. To see such a being, with all those colors, all that light! He was almost invisible in the extraordinary luminosity that surrounded him. I found myself flooded with light. I was in a state of bliss, of ecstasy so immense, so powerful, that I no longer knew where I was. It was a delirious joy; it was heaven; it was the universe! Ever since then I have felt that if God were not all beauty I could not believe in him. It

*is beauty that remains in my mind as the one essential: neither power, nor knowledge, nor wealth, nor glory. Only beauty!*¹

The vision he had been granted was perhaps that of his higher self, that cosmic element that is an integral part of every human being and of the same nature as the divine spirit, a particle of God, a luminous quintessence. In a state of ecstasy, a mystic looks into the mirror of God and sees this part of himself which is divine. And it is when the identification of the two 'selves'—the higher and the lower—is achieved that he is united with the universal soul and attains true self-knowledge.

Immersed in an ocean of ineffable beauty, Mikhaël was beyond the common bounds of time and space. His whole being seemed to expand without limits. The illumination was so intense and the rapture so all-absorbing that he felt as though he were on fire. He felt his brain

burning. His whole being seemed to have become a living flame. And just as this divine illumination became more than he could bear and he sensed that he was about to be reabsorbed into cosmic light, he lost consciousness.

The loss of consciousness is a frequent corollary of ecstasy, a protective mechanism that the visionary must accept in order to avoid destruction. The intensity of the light and the expansion of being brought about by divine love is so great that the physical human envelope needs this protection when it reaches the limits of its capacity.

Did Mikhaël's illumination last a few minutes or a few hours? He never said. But when he recovered consciousness and found that the state of ecstasy had vanished, a sense of desolation swept over him. He felt like a dry, empty husk and strove in vain to recapture that exquisite joy, for he could not resign himself to living without it. After a mystical

experience of such intensity, he felt that all that had gone before was mere heedlessness and mediocrity.

For days, he was barely aware of being on earth. His mind still absorbed in the contemplation of the splendors he had discovered, he could neither sleep nor eat. His only nourishment came from the divine forces that had filled his being, and his yearning for the beauty of the invisible world awoke in him the overwhelming desire to create the harmony of that world here on earth. Many years later, speaking about certain spiritual experiences, he explained that in ecstasy all the wastes in one's organism are burned away, that the mystic's being is totally renewed and purified. His physical body is changed and transfigured; even the texture of the skin is transformed and the face illuminated. He added:

In this contact with divine grace which enfolds you and warms you through and through, you feel yourself inundated by

*an infinite sweetness, peace and happiness. This is the greatest privilege. You can only weep with pure, wonderful emotion. At that moment you are ready for any sacrifice; you glimpse eternal life; you see the greatness of God.*²

Spontaneously, Mikhaël began to live in ever more conscious union with the brotherhood of glorious souls that he believed in. As though by a miracle, he found a book which confirmed his presentiment of the existence of a community of exalted beings who for centuries had gathered in the Himalayas to help and enlighten humanity. Deeply moved by this corroboration of his intuition, Mikhaël called them his 'Himalayan Brothers'. He thought about them constantly, calling upon them and uniting himself with them in his mind, participating in their work of love and light. He contemplated 'the splendor of this brotherhood of glorious souls' who, free of all hatred and rancor, dwelt in perfect harmony and devoted themselves to the

good of humanity. The revelations he received from them filled him with joy.

Mikhaël was overflowing with such happiness that he had only one thought: to devote his life to helping others. In his eagerness to share his divine experience with his family and friends, to enable them 'to vibrate as he had vibrated', he described to them the beauty of a life lived in the light of the spirit. He lent them the book that had so inspired him, convinced that if they read it, they too would be electrified, impelled to transform their mentality and their way of life.

We know from one of his teachers and from members of his family that although Mikhaël's friends had always been impressed by his intelligence and his knowledge, they remained skeptical about his spiritual practices. But now they became aware of a new, subtle quality that emanated from him. He was no longer the same. He seemed to be lit from within, to be incandescent. Hoping to

achieve a similar fulfillment, some of them began to meditate, to study initiatic science, or to adopt a vegetarian diet, but although Mikhaël did his best to help and encourage them, he saw that they soon tired of their efforts. 'Why do you persist in nourishing your old mentality?' he exclaimed. 'Get rid of it! It is the cause of all your problems. Put something better in its place.'

But not one of them really understood him, and eventually he left them in peace. He was alone with his sublime ideal, and the realization that there were none to share it often distressed him deeply. How could these truths have such an effect on him and none at all on others, he wondered. When he saw their indifference to the beauty of the spiritual life, he blamed himself for being unable to convince them. 'I felt so small and inadequate,' he confessed one day; 'I was sure I was not intelligent enough to convince them.'

In the long run, many of his comrades

jeered at him and held him up to ridicule, for they could not feel at ease with his ideas. They found them too exalted and the demands he made on himself too stringent. They were unwilling to follow him on the steep slopes leading to the summit. But their derision did not deter him. His passion for the light continued to radiate from him. His whole life was now firmly founded on a certainty that would become the corner-stone of his mission.

Mikhaël did not owe his personal initiation to an earthly spiritual Master. His ardent efforts had been rewarded with the greatest gift a human being can receive from the spiritual world: he had already found the inner guide who would be always with him. It is clear that, like other great beings before him, the divine seal was upon him. This period of his life was one of profound inner initiation. Between the ages of fifteen and seventeen he was to know the joy of frequent mystical experiences, and by the time he met

the spiritual guide who was to accompany him on the physical plane, he would have mustered all his forces, tested his capacities, and purified his whole being.

The irresistible impetus that drove him to seek the purest form of Christ-consciousness—that inner consciousness that links a highly advanced human being to the divine principle at work in creation—obliged him to distance himself to a certain extent from his family and close acquaintances. Henceforth nothing would stop him. Ceaselessly and single-mindedly he pursued his work, reaching such a state of physical exhaustion that, before the year was out, he would be overcome by a life-threatening illness.

To say that Mikhaël was absorbed by his spiritual work to the exclusion of all else would be inaccurate. An unerring instinct always brought him back to the physical world and its countless possibilities. He enjoyed using his manual dexterity to draw, to do odd jobs, or to make

something useful. Mindful above all of the demands of family life and his responsibilities as the eldest son, he continued to take temporary work whenever he could find it. For two months in the summer of 1916, while World War I was still raging in Europe, he was hired as a secretary in a food rationing center.

As always, he enjoyed watching those around him. The supervisor of his section was a tall, stout man with a loud voice, and Mikhaël noticed that it was easy for him to impose his opinion on the other employees, who never raised their voices. And yet he was very popular with them, for he was always cheerful and friendly. This made Mikhaël reflect on his own behavior. As he once said: 'I always spoke softly, with the result that everybody made me wait.'

We find here, not for the first time, one of the paradoxes of his temperament: in spite of his strength of character and all that he had already experienced, there

were still times when he was paralyzed by ‘unbelievable shyness’. His friends may not have noticed it, but for Mikhaël it was a hidden sore. It irked him to have to walk up and down in front of a shop before he could summon the courage to go in, or to stutter and stammer when he had to speak to a stranger.

One day he decided to cure himself of this affliction by autosuggestion. In the evening, before going to bed, he focused on a bright spot placed in the center of a circle and repeated to himself, over and over, that his shyness was cured. He pictured himself doing all the things that he was too shy to do in real life. He repeated the exercise more than once, and thanks to his powers of concentration, the results were remarkable. Several times he was able to induce in himself a state of hypnosis and fall into a deep sleep, and before long he found that he had rid himself completely of the problem that had caused him so much embarrassment. Talking in later years about this and other

youthful experiments, however, he always emphasized that, at the time, he had not known of the danger to the nervous system of methods of this kind. He was always careful to warn people against attempting such exercises without suitable preparation.

At some point during this period he began to frequent one of the principal bookshops in Sofia. The capital was some 280 miles from Varna, and although at the time of Mikhaël's youth the journey by train cost nothing, the trip must have taken him most of the day and brought him home late at night. On his first visit to this shop, he was leafing through some books on the shelves when the owner, who had been watching him, picked up two or three booklets and handed them to him, saying: 'Look, this is what you should be reading.'

Mikhaël looked at them and wondered what could be so interesting about them. He had already read so many articles and

brochures which had left him unsatisfied. Nevertheless, he smiled at the man gratefully, saying: 'I believe you sir. Thank you for showing me the best you have.'

Returning to his perusal of the shelves, he picked out several books by Rudolf Steiner, whose work he continued to study. How it happened he never knew, but on his way home he was cruelly disappointed to find that he had lost his books. This was a great blow, for his contribution to the family expenses left him little money for his own intellectual nourishment. The pamphlets, however, were still in his satchel, and he began to read them.

They were like nothing he had ever read before. The plain, simple language spoke directly to his heart. At the same time, many of the questions in his mind found answers that were intellectually satisfying. The author of these booklets, Peter Deunov by name, lived in Sofia, and Mikhaël thought to himself: 'He is head

and shoulders above all the others. How can I meet him?’

As it turned out, he was not to meet him for several months, but his quest for a spiritual Master was finally drawing to a close. He had begun to glimpse a light at the end of the tunnel. It was still dim, still no more than a promise, but it was there. Later, he often returned to that shop in Sofia, whose owner lent him books and invited him to sit in his office, where he could read in peace. Mikhaël and the older man were soon fast friends.

* * *

His burning thirst for knowledge, for all the knowledge of the universe, drove Mikhaël to read without pause from morning to evening and often late into the night. There were days when he devoured six or seven hundred pages, often reading while eating so as not to waste time. The flame that burned within him since his ecstasy was so intense that

he went to extremes with his meditations and breathing exercises, not noticing that he was seriously undermining his health.

Having become accustomed since the death of his father to frugal and insufficient meals, he often made do for the whole day with some raw cabbage or bits and pieces from his mother's store of pickled gherkins, peppers, and celery. He did not mind the sensation of weightlessness induced in him by this inadequate diet. On the contrary, he took advantage of it, for it made it easier to disassociate, but he grew thinner and thinner, and his face became deathly pale. And as he never had enough sleep, he often dozed off at the most inopportune moments. Not knowing how to improve the situation, he thought it was enough to force himself by will-power alone.

Mikhaël's mother watched all this with deep concern. Convinced that the evil came from his books which influenced his thinking and led him to extremes, she

threatened to burn them. Mikhaël's only response was to lock himself in his room to avoid such a catastrophe. When she knocked on his door and pleaded with him to go to the park for some fresh air, he refused to give in. Repeating gently that she must not worry, that he would go later, he continued to do the only thing that seemed to him worth doing.

Dolia wept. She was at her wit's end. Her neighbors and the other members of the family kept repeating: 'You must not let him go on like that. He's going to die!'

One day, defeated by her own fears and the insistence of others, she threw Mikhaël's books into the fire. But even this did not deter him: he continued his spiritual exercises, his deep breathing, fasting, and meditations as before. Speaking many years later of his behavior at this time, he said: 'It was so exaggerated it was a kind of madness.' He felt that he was devoured: 'Ah, but it was such a flame, such light...'

Once again Mikhaël's family and friends were convinced that he had taken leave of his senses. They could not understand that he was simply 'mad with joy'. They could not know that the ecstasy that had triggered this seeming folly was the culmination of a long maturing, the climax of the spiritual work he had accomplished since the age of twelve. Such excessiveness is almost inevitable in these forceful and determined beings who are destined to accomplish great things, but for their family and friends, the need for such extremes is hard to understand. They often cannot accept the seemingly outrageous discipline, the superhuman drive toward perfection of one who has grown up in their midst and whom they believe they know well.

In the period between his illumination and the first meeting with his long-sought Master, Mikhaël had other mystical experiences, but we do not know exactly when or in what order they occurred. About the most remarkable of

these we know little. When he spoke of it, he said only that one day, while doing his deep breathing exercises, he felt a drop of fire enter his lungs and inflame his whole being. The sensation filled him with such inexpressible delight, such an exquisite sense of sweetness: 'I could only weep in a transport of joy. I was in ecstasy.'

Later he understood that this fire had been a drop of ether, of prana, a particle of the cosmic spirit, of the fire that is capable of melting and transmuting obsolete forms and creating a new being. As usual, he spoke modestly and with detachment of this exceptional phenomenon, and yet it seems that what he experienced that day was a second birth, the birth in the Spirit by which a human being is consecrated for a sacred mission. This pervasion of his being by the Christ-Spirit took place without witnesses; those he lived with saw no more than a pale reflection, a new radiance in him, whose source remained a mystery.

Also in this period, he was snatched one day from his physical body and borne far away to the heart of the cosmos, where all is music. Suddenly he found himself as one with the universe, at once rock, tree, flower, mountain, and star. Vibrating in unison with the powerful currents that passed through him, he became acutely aware of the essence of all being:

*The whole world sang... the stars sang; plants, stones, and trees sang. Everything sang. And the harmony was so glorious, so sublime that I felt myself expanding until I feared that I would die. ... I wish you might all hear what I heard, if only for a few seconds. It would give you some point of comparison, some idea of the true nature of music.*³

Mikhaël had achieved, that day, one of the rarest and most beautiful experiences it is possible for a human being to have. He had attained a truly exceptional level of vibration. But the human body is not built to withstand such stress for long,

and the ecstasy lasted only a few seconds. If it had lasted any longer, it might well have put an end to his existence in this world,⁴ and sensing that he was in danger of being pulverized, he cut it short:

*It was fear that brought me back. Not the fear of death, but the fear of being unable to continue my work on earth. If you have been given a task to accomplish on earth, you have to go through with it. I could not simply abandon it.*⁵

In the months and years that followed, his yearning for the joy of that precious experience was so great that he could not avoid a sense of regret at having put an end to it, a regret all the more poignant because he could never hear music to equal it on the physical plane. But the memory of those indescribable moments steeped in the music of the spheres would continue to give him courage in difficult times and serve as an absolute yardstick: his appreciation of a piece of music was never governed by the norms commonly

accepted in society but by that measure alone. He was to say later that each planet has not only its own particular color, but also its own note, and that the symphony of those notes varies with each hour of the day.

This intensely mystical period of Mikhaël's sixteenth year was, nevertheless, fraught with certain dangers. His ardent temperament led him sometimes to the edge of the abyss, and his prolonged exercises of pranayama nearly ended in disaster. Yogic breathing techniques are based on an ancient tradition of Hindu mysticism which attaches great importance to the role of the spinal column and its seven chakras or etheric force-centers. At the base of the spine lies the formidable force known as Kundalini, which has a close affinity with sexual energy. When aroused by the use of certain techniques, it can release tremendous psychic forces.

Mikhaël did not know enough to be on

his guard against the danger of practicing certain techniques without guidance. He probably did not know that the ancient Sanskrit treatises of pranayama were made intentionally obscure in order to prevent neophytes from experimenting with them without the supervision of a skilled teacher. One day, while engaged in rhythmic breathing, he was suddenly seized by an agonizing pain and felt as though his brain were about to explode. His whole being was on fire. Appalling currents flowed through him, and he suffered atrociously. Sensing that he was in mortal danger, he was gripped by terrible fear and made a tremendous effort to subdue the Kundalini-force and oblige it to retreat. Summoning all the strength of which he was capable, he concentrated his thoughts and called on the powers of the invisible world to save him, and at last succeeded in putting this extraordinary force to sleep again.

Had Mikhaël not escaped this destructive power, he might well have lost his mind

or died in terrible torment. And yet this trial by fire was something he had to go through; without doubt, it belonged to the body of knowledge and wisdom he needed in order to teach the great truths of initiatic science. Later, when talking of these things, he never encouraged anyone to awaken the Kundalini-force. On the contrary, he always emphasized that the best way of furthering one's evolution was to purify oneself, to work patiently and with perseverance to perfect oneself. The virtues and psychic gifts and powers would come quite naturally, he maintained, when one was ready for them and capable of controlling and using them in the service of light.

* * *

Early in 1917, worn out by his frequent fasts and excessive spiritual exercises, Mikhaël fell seriously ill. He had recently become interested in the methods of hydrotherapy with which the German therapist Sebastien Kneipp obtained

many cures. In the hope of purifying his system and regaining his physical energy, Mikhaël decided to try the Kneipp method. For several weeks he took his baths in the old stable that still served him as a laboratory, but the unheated building with its floor of packed earth was so cold that he ended by catching a chill. He became so ill and sank so rapidly into a state of deep torpor that his mother, fearing the worst, called in a doctor who diagnosed typhoid fever and put the household in quarantine. Dolia nursed her son night and day, watching over him while his condition gradually worsened. Burning with fever and racked by fierce headaches, Mikhaël alternated between a state of delirium and longer periods of total prostration.

For a whole month he hovered between life and death. In his periods of delirium he clamored for books. He wanted nothing else, only books. He did not think about getting better or even about the possibility that he might die. He was

interested only in learning, in knowing everything there was to know, in reading all the books in the world. Restless and tormented by a burning thirst, he continued to ask for philosophical, spiritual, and scientific works. In particular, he begged for those of Spinoza, one of his favorite philosophers. In their anxiety, his parents did their best to satisfy him. Somehow finding those precious books, they brought them to him and laid them on his bed. Mikhaël, barely conscious, would mumble his thanks and clasp the books lovingly for a few moments before putting them by his pillow, with the feeling that he was getting better. But when the fever brought back the delirium, he begged for still more books.

At one point the tiny flame of life burned so low that it seemed certain to fail altogether. Dolia was in tears, convinced that he was going to die.

But Mikhaël was not yet destined to leave this world. Throughout his illness some-

thing had continually been at watch within him. In his lucid moments he had often been aware that it was within his power to work mentally to cure himself. He was far too weak to concentrate for long, but whenever possible he willed with all his might to accept the suffering in every fiber of his being and allow it to purify his organism. Years later he made a strange but certainly true comment about his recovery: 'I cured myself through suffering.' When at last he was out of danger and his strength was slowly returning, his craving for books had disappeared. He continued to read, but never in the same way.

Mikhaël's 'terrible illness of purification', as he called it, seems to have been an integral part of the intensely mystical phase he was going through. It was also the prelude to a vision that made a deep impression on him. One evening, when in the state of somnolence that lends itself particularly well to such phenomena, he had a vision of a tall, arrogant being splen-

didly clad in black. Looking at the dark eyes in which a terrible intent smoldered, Mikhaël sensed that this being, whose whole demeanor spoke of power and authority, wished to possess him and communicate that power to him.

Almost immediately there appeared a second figure in stark contrast to the first. Dressed all in white, he was radiant with light and inexpressibly beautiful. His eyes spoke only of love and benevolence.

In a flash of intuition Mikhaël understood that he was being given a choice. Fascinated though he was by the immense powers this dark being seemed to be offering him, deep in his heart he was fearful of something terrible that emanated from that somber visage. Suddenly he understood: the forces of darkness and destruction were trying to win him over to their side and use him for their own ends. Turning back to the second apparition, he felt irresistibly drawn to him because he had 'the very face of

Christ, the image of sweetness, goodness and self-sacrifice'. There was no possible hesitation, and the instant his choice was made, the being of darkness vanished, while the being of light gazed at him for a moment with an expression of infinite sweetness before disappearing in his turn. It was the splendor of this being that he was to describe in later years. 'I can never forget it,' he said. 'I was dazzled by his beauty. It was *the beauty* that captivated me.'

This vision constituted a milestone in Mikhaël's life. He sensed that he had been absolutely free: free to choose between putting his considerable psychic powers in the service of his own self-interest or in the service of light. That night he made up his mind that he would use those powers only in the pursuit of a selfless spiritual goal.

Other choices he made at this period were equally unequivocal. He was deeply impressed, for instance, by a text of

Paracelsus in which he states that the loss of a man's semen is a loss of life. Mikhaël would say later that his encounter with this statement played a decisive role in his life, that it led him to reflect at length on the question of sexuality and to make an important decision. A decision that was possible only because he already shared the conviction of Paracelsus. Resolving not to give physical expression to his sexual energies but to sublimate them in the service of a mystical goal, he would use them throughout his life as one uses hydraulic pressure to raise water to the top floor of a building, the 'top floor' being a symbol of the mind, the brain, the seat of the 'thousand-petalled crown chakra'. Without repudiating or stifling these energies, he would gradually develop a balanced philosophy of sexuality deeply respectful of human beings and their evolution.

* * *

During his long convalescence in the

winter of 1917, Mikhaël began to hear talk of Peter Deunov, the author of the booklets his friend at the bookshop had given him. He was said to be a spiritual Master, a clairvoyant and musician, who had a great many disciples. On the insistence of Church authorities, who disapproved of a teaching which drew not only on the Gospels but also on the ancient tenets of initiatic science, Peter Deunov had been expelled from Sofia and was now living in Varna. He had taken a room in the Hotel Londres, not far from where Mikhaël's family lived.

One day while Mikhaël was taking some gentle exercise out of doors, he saw a man of medium height and vigorous appearance coming rapidly toward him. In an instant he had passed, but not before Mikhaël had glimpsed his face. Moved to the depths of his being, he murmured to himself: 'That must be Peter Deunov!' The face he had seen expressed such nobility that it could belong only to him. Incapable of thinking of anything else, he

made inquiries which confirmed his intuition. It was truly Peter Deunov. Without hesitation, Mikhaël set out for the hotel to make the acquaintance of the author whose writings had so inspired him. When he was shown into his room, he saw a grey-haired man whom he recognized instantly as the one who had passed him in the street. He was sitting at a table playing the violin, while the person with him sang softly in accompaniment.

‘When you knocked,’ said Peter Deunov, ‘we were singing a song that I am composing. You can sing with us.’

A little taken aback by this unexpected greeting, Mikhaël obediently sat down and tried to sing with them, but his vocal cords refused to make a sound. Without seeming to notice Mikhaël’s embarrassment, Peter Deunov continued to play his violin, humming the melody with the young woman, who was a member of the brotherhood he had founded. Gradually

Mikhaël recovered his composure and began to sing with them.

When the song was complete and written down, Peter Deunov laid his violin on the table, turned to his guest, and engaged him in a lengthy conversation. From time to time he picked up the Bible, read a passage, and commented on it. Mikhaël's hunger for clear and honest explanations was at last satisfied, and he would say years later that from the first time he met Peter Deunov there had been an 'inexplicable bond' between them. It was as though they had recognized each other.

Mikhaël was eager to learn Peter Deunov's opinion on many subjects, particularly on the question of clairvoyance. By then he already knew a good deal about spiritual, extra-sensory, and occult phenomena and was familiar with the philosophy of several initiatic schools of both East and West. But here at last was a man reputed to be a great clairvoyant,

who could speak from personal experience.

Mikhaël's first question, 'How can I become clairvoyant?' received an answer that surprised him. Instead of explaining a method, Peter Deunov simply said:

'Through love. You must develop your love. Your clairvoyance will be far greater if you work in this way.'

Mikhaël was touched to the quick. On reflection he realized that until then he had been looking for 'deep mysteries, for things that transcend concrete realities'. That very day he decided he would never make a deliberate effort to develop the gift of clairvoyance, but would work only by means of love. The ability to see invisible realities on a higher plane would grow within him naturally, without any special exercises or conscious effort. He knew that although certain methods are effective, they can also be dangerous, for they can destroy a person's inner equilibrium.

From that day on, he 'worked to understand the truth and to sense the beauty hidden in all things, in trees, in flowers, in fruit'. In his eyes this was the highest form of clairvoyance.

*I understood that the ordinary kind of clairvoyance does not rise above the level of the vicissitudes of our lives, and that there is a higher form of clairvoyance which is open to the immensity of God's glory.*⁶

After this first meeting, Mikhaël often saw Peter Deunov at dawn, as he walked through the park on his way to the sunrise. At this early hour the *Morskata Gradina* was deserted, and Peter Deunov would gravely lift his hat to this youth of seventeen who went out so early each morning to contemplate the rising sun.

* * *

Mikhaël's boyhood was coming to an end. He would soon be an adult.

A study of his life as a child and a teenager reveals a certain number of paradoxes. When he talked about those years, he would say, on the one hand, that he had been very limited, a mediocre student, and someone who was always making experiments which annoyed other people. On the other hand, he spoke of spiritual experiences which were decidedly out of the ordinary, saying: 'You see, even if you are small and weak, if you put your hand in the hand of your heavenly parents, you can end by transforming yourself.'

Each successive spiritual experience, beginning at the age of six, corresponded to a phase of his awareness of God's presence in his life. By awakening his desire to be useful to humanity, each new phase brought him also to a new awareness of his friends and family. His enthusiasm, his yearning for perfection and his instinctively fraternal spirit made him long to share with them all the treasures of beauty and light he had glimpsed at the

height of those experiences. This concern for others is so strongly present in his life that it must be seen as one of the principal traits of his character.

Notes

1. December 9, 1968.
2. January 28, 1951.
3. April 19, 1945.
4. 'Everything in the universe moves and vibrates. Nothing is totally immobile. 'When an object reaches a certain level of vibration, its molecules disintegrate and decompose, returning to the original elements and atoms from which they came. These atoms, obeying the Law of Vibration, fall apart in their turn and become once more the countless corpuscles of which they were composed. Finally, when the corpuscles themselves disappear, we can say that the object is composed of Etheric

Substance.' *Le Kybalion*, Bibliothèque
eudaique, Paris, 1917, p. 97 (Our translation).

5. August 21, 1954.

6. August 1, 1963.

PART II

THE DISCIPLE



5



The Beginning of a New Life

In the course of history, Bulgaria, the homeland of Orpheus, was variously known as Thrace and Moesia before receiving its present name. A land of

ancient myths lying at the frontier between East and West, it was particularly well placed to serve as one of the principal cradles of the esoteric tradition in Medieval Europe.

Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov sometimes said that the Mysteries, taught for thousands of years in the temples of Egypt and India, had also been faithfully preserved in an initiatic center deep in the heart of Bulgaria's Rila massif, known only to true adepts. One of these ancient adepts, the mysterious Magus Boyan who had developed great psychic powers in the course of his initiation in India, was at the origin of a charismatic religious movement in Bulgaria known as the Bogomils. The spiritual renewal inspired by this movement, however, was short-lived, for the Bogomils boldly condemned those in high places for their dissolute way of life, with the result that many were exiled or burned at the stake. Some, fleeing the torment in Bulgaria, settled in other European countries where their ideas influ-

enced such initiatic movements as the Knights Templar and the Cathars.

It is in the spiritual tradition of initiates such as the Magus Boyan that Peter Deunov takes his place. His teaching rested on the key elements that were those of the Bogomils—the light, self-mastery, and purity—but had none of their austerity. Neither did he teach that the physical world was created by the powers of evil, as did the Bogomils and Cathars. In his turn, Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov would say that the Cathars' yearning for liberation was based on their perception of life on earth as a terrible misfortune, and this, he insisted, was an error: our task is to work here in the physical world, to bring about the kingdom of God on earth.

Peter Deunov, born in the region of Varna in 1864, was the son of an Orthodox priest. After studying theology and medicine in the United States, he had returned to Bulgaria in 1895. There he

undertook an intensive and wide-ranging study of phrenology, traveling to towns and villages throughout Bulgaria to study the relationship between human character and temperament and the shape of the skull. It seems that he also devoted much time to meditation, laying the groundwork for a spiritual brotherhood. It was in 1900, at about the time of Mikhaël's birth, that he began to give public lectures, and nine years later, with a good number of disciples at his side, he organized the first in a series of summer conventions for his followers near the small town of Ternovo, half-way between Sofia and Varna.

Peter Deunov's explanations of the esoteric meaning of biblical texts breathed new life into traditional Christian doctrines, but it was not long before his work met with strong opposition. The rapid rise of this spiritual movement which drew inspiration not only from the Judeo-Christian tradition but also from ancient initiatic teachings was a source of

concern to religious authorities. A teaching based on light and the notion of cosmic justice implicit in the doctrine of reincarnation seemed to be a condemnation of their own teaching and way of life. In 1917, the government yielded to pressure exerted by the Bishops and expelled Peter Deunov from Sofia.

Hardly had the exile settled in Varna—a town he knew well, having spent part of his youth there—than he began to give public lectures. He was then fifty-three and recognized by many as an authentic spiritual Master. His talks soon attracted a large following, for his words manifested a vision of reality which was both original and profound and spoke to a deep need in his contemporaries. His style, however, was unusual: he sometimes interrupted his discourse to hum a melody that had suddenly come to him. Gradually, he developed and refined it and asked his audience to sing with him. He was also an accomplished violinist

and over the years composed a great many mystical songs for his fraternity.

Mikhaël soon became one of Peter Deunov's most devoted followers, but Dolia wept when she learned that he was following a teaching that was not sponsored by the Church. As a fervent member of the Orthodox community she had difficulty in understanding her son's enthusiasm for the brotherhood. In an attempt to allay her concern, Mikhaël tried to interest her in the spiritual philosophy that was becoming so important to him and invited her to attend some of Peter Deunov's talks with him. To please him, Dolia finally agreed, but her first contact with the brotherhood was not a success. Peter Deunov continued to be harassed by the religious authorities, and some of his enemies had followed him to Varna, where they attempted to hinder his spiritual work by hiring hooligans to create disturbances during his talks. It was a veritable persecution, and Dolia wanted no part of it. 'Don't worry,

Mother,' Mikhaël tried to reassure her; 'the Master says that the police will be there next time to protect us.'

The protection materialized as promised: several policemen were stationed in the back of the hall before the lecture began, and Peter Deunov spoke without interruption. However, this was not enough to convince Dolia to attend more meetings. Her path was not that of her son, but she respected his options. 'If this is what is right for you,' she told him, 'then I am with you.'

Deeply grateful for the freedom she gave him, Mikhaël lived in a permanent state of joy and enthusiasm. At last he had found what he had sought for so long: a spiritual Master who was closely linked to the divine world, a sage whose life was devoted to the enlightenment of humanity. And this sage dispensed a teaching whose source lay in the highest spheres of the invisible world, a teaching which had been preserved for centuries in the

ancient temples of the world. As Peter Deunov once said to the members of his brotherhood:

Do not say that the doctrine I teach was invented by someone called Deunov. Say that it is the teaching of the Fellowship of Light. Tomorrow someone else will appear, with another name. The greatness of all those who have come into the world lies in their transmission of the truth just as it was given to them by God.¹

For Mikhaël, it was the beginning of a new life; his quest for perfection was now channeled in a more definite direction. He felt extraordinarily rich to have found one of the most precious treasures that any human being can have: a spiritual Master. He realized that this new teaching confirmed and brought into perspective all that he had discovered and practiced in the last few years, and this gave him great joy, for although he was aware of the dangers inherent in his excessive

exercises, he could not always restrain himself. He knew that he needed a guide in order to make progress in the spiritual world and looked to Peter Deunov to give him the advice and teach him the methods he needed. One day he told Peter Deunov of a terrifying experience he had had. Many years later, he referred again to that experience:

My longing to study these things was so overpowering that one day I disassociated from my physical body and launched out into space in search of the archives of the cosmos. I reached such a great distance from the earth that I began to be afraid when I found myself in this unknown space. Being out of my body, I had consciously reached the universal archives, and I was suddenly faced with that great universal abyss which is spoken of in the Bible. I do not know why I was suddenly afraid to enter. I felt myself to be so far out in space that I was filled with dread, and to my shame I turned back. [...] That was my first expe-

rience with the archives of the Universe and I talked to the Master about it [...] I told him that I had been afraid of disintegrating, of seeing all my cells disappear in space. Fear is a truly terrible state of mind. [...] When you find yourself very, very far from the earth, with nothing underfoot—for we always feel the need to cling to terra firma—it is a terrifying experience. [...] The Master confirmed that I had, in effect, reached the universal abyss, but that as I was not yet ready to enter, it was as well that I had turned back. I thought a lot about that experience and I learned a lot by it. I meditated at length and began to be more prudent.²

The failure of his first attempt to penetrate the most sacred regions of the universe incited him to ponder and weigh things more carefully. Peter Deunov, who recognized the efforts he was making, often encouraged Mikhaël to come and talk to him in his hotel room. The young man always arrived for those interviews with a series of questions, and as the

answers he received were often abstract and symbolic, he was obliged to reflect at length in order to understand their hidden meaning.

To help him remember what he had heard, he developed a method all his own. Instead of taking notes during the interview, he tried simply to become a receptacle, to absorb his Master's words not with his intellect but with his heart, in order to grasp the beauty and the spiritual dimension of Peter Deunov's words. Back in his own room, he concentrated on what had passed between them, reviewing the whole conversation in his mind over and over again, until he remembered every word, every detail. Only then did horizons open before him that he could not have imagined during the meeting. Convinced that whatever he received through the intermediary of Peter Deunov was precious beyond words, he practiced this method faithfully for many years.

In one corner of Peter Deunov's room

stood a large incense-burner, and in cold weather he would revive the fire by stirring the coals with a small poker. As Mikhaël watched, captivated by the grace of his movements, he reflected that the subtle harmony of his gestures could not fail to have a profound influence on those around him. But if the young Mikhaël was a skilled observer, he soon saw that Peter Deunov was as well. When he walked to the door at the end of an interview and turned to say good-bye, he saw that his way of walking and of opening the door were being closely observed. Struck by this, he began to scrutinize his own gestures and correct anything that did not seem aesthetically pleasing.

Mikhaël's desire for perfection frequently led him to the Master in search of advice. One day, knowing of his skill as a phrenologist, he asked Peter Deunov to analyze his features and tell him how to correct the faults they revealed. The Master complied, and his comments seem to have impressed the young Mikhaël

deeply: 'Your forehead,' he told him, 'is designed in accordance with the musical laws of divine harmony.'

He added that his chin expressed stability, and then gave him some advice about how to correct the aspects that were not perfectly balanced. When Mikhaël said that he too would like to study phrenology, Peter Deunov smiled and replied: 'You already have that science within you.'

This response may have seemed surprising, but as Mikhaël was to say later, he had begun to realize that while the Master was answering a question he often knew the answer already, and that Peter Deunov was simply bringing to the surface truths that lay hidden within him.

After his long and lonely quest in the world of books, Mikhaël found great comfort in the burgeoning community that had become his spiritual family. The teaching he was studying so ardently ful-

filled his aspirations, for it embraced not only initiatic science and philosophy, but also meditation, prayer, music, methods of breath control, and even rhythmic physical exercises designed to harmonize the whole being. In this teaching he found light, wisdom, and brotherly love.

‘This is the new life,’ he said to himself, ‘a life that is all giving, not taking.’ But what could he give? Certainly not money. His only wealth lay in his love and his thoughts, and these he dedicated wholeheartedly to the Master Deunov and his spiritual mission. Every morning, he devoted himself to this work, picturing Peter Deunov as inexpressibly beautiful, surrounding him with a wealth of magnificent colors, projecting on to him every imaginable quality and virtue. His passion for subtle links urged him to unite mentally with this spiritual Master at every possible moment, for in his eyes he was a vital link in the ascending chain of highly evolved beings that binds us to the Creator. By uniting with him, thereby

forging a bond with the most sublime hierarchies, he received an abundance of spiritual benefits which both fuelled and intensified his hunger for perfection, his quest for God.

* * *

Mikhaël was not to enjoy this ideal situation for long. Toward the end of 1917 the time came for him to do his military service. He was devastated. The very idea of being a soldier horrified him, for he wanted no part in any form of human violence. He, whose ideal was one of love, sharing, and mutual support, had already spent his whole life in a world ravaged by wars and insurrections, a world of terror and brutality. And now, with the First World War in full spate, the Balkans were tragically affected by the conflict.

As soon as he received his conscription papers, he went to tell Peter Deunov. 'I was crying,' he said later. 'I did so want to

stay with him and continue going to the sunrise.'

This reaction is revealing. Of all the sacrifices military service would demand of him, the most difficult to accept was the separation from his spiritual Master and the impossibility of practicing the 'yoga of the sun'. To his surprise, Peter Deunov's response was to laugh, and Mikhaël, hurt by this apparent indifference, fell silent. But then he thought to himself: 'I cannot expect a great Master to share in the sorrows of a little disciple like me.' As he was to learn later, Peter Deunov often assumed an air of gaiety in the face of another's sadness in order to dissipate the negative vibrations and induce a more positive reaction. After a few moments, however, his expression changed completely, and looking at Mikhaël with the love of a father, he said: 'You will soon be freed in an extraordinary way. You have no idea what heaven has in store for you.'

In truth, Mikhaël's military service was brief. Shortly after his arrival in camp he fell ill with jaundice and was transferred to the infirmary, where he was treated by a sergeant whose medical competence was limited to the use of tincture of iodine. Peter Deunov's prediction soon came true: Mikhaël was declared unfit for military service and sent home to recuperate. When he was better, although still pale and thin, he went to see Peter Deunov, who told him: 'Your liver has been damaged.'

'What should I do to get better?'

'Every morning before eating, you must drink a cup of water. Drink it slowly, chewing each mouthful and concentrating on what you are doing. You must also talk to the water. Tell it, "Dear water, we are going to work together to repair what is wrong in my body."'

Perplexed, Mikhaël thought to himself: 'Water? That is his remedy?' Without

really believing in it he nevertheless obeyed, for he was convinced that it could only be to his benefit to follow his Master's advice, even if it were mistaken. While he knew that genuine Masters who work with the forces of light never demanded submission from their disciples, he also knew that obedience was very beneficial, for it could help one to acquire humility.

Mikhaël began his treatment and with the first mouthful experienced an extraordinary sensation: it was as though he were tasting water for the first time. It was an elixir on his tongue. As an agreeable light-headedness took hold of him, his consciousness seemed to expand and become keener and more receptive. While his thoughts focused on the pure water, his whole being responded to the mysterious properties of this element he loved so well. Before long, he felt his strength returning, and the extreme exhaustion resulting from his recent illness was soon a thing of the past.

Peter Deunov had reminded him of a reality with which he had long been familiar without fully understanding all its implications: the subtle, secret properties of water. But Mikhaël was still not satisfied and began to look for ways of improving his health further. Meditating on the unity indispensable to a human body, he thought to himself, 'The organs function well only if they obey a higher authority which regulates their activity. How can I make contact and communicate with that authority? How can I enable it to take possession of its inner kingdom?' He thought of the cells and organs of the body as 'a realm that was governed very imperfectly by its human owner', and he pondered how to communicate with the true king of that realm.

By means of fervent meditation he succeeded in raising his mind to the level of his higher self, that omniscient element that dwells in every human being, and it was then that the existence of an extremely potent point at the back of his

head was revealed to him. He began to concentrate on this spot and permeate it with all the light he could imagine. Years later he would tell his followers that by focusing the mind on this spot it is possible to communicate with one's higher self, so that it infuses new energies into one's cells.

I can give you an exercise which consists in concentrating on the occiput, the region at the back of your skull. Try it for a few minutes and you will notice that something begins to happen: your whole body begins to vibrate and you feel as though sparks were coursing through you. But this is not an exercise that should be continued for long: as soon as you feel a tension, a tingling, as though you had touched a nerve center that made your whole body vibrate, it is time to stop. The first few times you must be very careful and be sure not to go on for too long.³

Gradually, thanks to his regular efforts,

the physical debility he had suffered for years disappeared.

From this point on, although he now had a spiritual Master with whom he intended to work for many years to come, Mikhaël knew that he would continue to make important discoveries on his own, almost independently of Peter Deunov's influence. His later comments on this period of his youth are revealing: all his experiences and discoveries sprang from an inner dynamic, not from any external stimulus. Since his illumination, his invisible guide had been continually present within him, and it was he who inspired his spiritual work, while Peter Deunov was the touchstone of his progress, the sage in whose presence he gained perspective on many things and learned to confirm his intuitions and discoveries. Peter Deunov's role seems to have been to provide occasional concise explanations that served as a leaven for the ideas already taking shape in Mikhaël's mind, and to guide him with

care toward that which he needed to learn, but in fact—as Mikhaël himself was to say—he was guiding Mikhaël toward an unknown Master who belonged to another dimension.

In the spring of 1918, Peter Deunov offered Mikhaël the occasion for a very special spiritual experience: by teaching him to use the technique of disassociation more effectively, he led him for the first time to the causal plane, one of the higher planes of being, each of which has its specific vibratory field and which together constitute the different levels of energy in the cosmos. At the time, Peter Deunov was a guest in the home of a disciple who lived among the vineyards to the north of Varna. One day when Mikhaël went to see him there, he invited him to return early the next morning, saying that he wanted to take him up into the hills for the sunrise.

In his teaching, Peter Deunov attributed great importance to the sun and encour-

aged everyone to attend the sunrise during the spring and summer. He taught them to assimilate the sunlight in order to transform it into virtue and communicate it to others. It is clear that he did not teach them to consider the sun as a sort of God or object of worship, but simply to nourish themselves with its light at the moment when its energies were most beneficial.

At the prospect of this excursion Mikhaël was too excited to sleep that night, and in his anxiety to be at their meeting place in good time—the house where Peter Deunov was staying was some distance from his home—he was up long before dawn. He was so happy to be walking along beside the Master—'I was as proud as Punch to be with him!'—that he could not stop talking, but he ended by noticing that Peter Deunov only smiled and barely answered. The message was obvious and Mikhaël fell silent.

The sky grew gradually lighter, and the

only sound was that of their footsteps on the path as Mikhaël prepared himself to meditate. They reached the highest slopes just as the sun burst into view, rising over the sea. Speaking of this experience many years later with some of those who followed his teaching, Mikhaël would say: 'The color of that great solar disk was so marvelous that I longed to drink its light.' And he suggested that they too learn consciously to breathe in, to drink in the light of the rising sun; to see it as a veritable elixir of physical and spiritual health.

After a short meditation and some breathing exercises, Peter Deunov said: 'Now we are going to lie down.'

He stretched out on the grass with his back exposed to the sun's rays and Mikhaël, overcoming his first surprise, did the same. He soon felt the heat of the sun warming his skin through his clothes. His back became a great battery charged with solar energy, and pervaded by a deep

sense of well-being, he sank into a state that closely resembled sleep. When he came to himself, he had the impression that Peter Deunov had returned at the same moment. Although he had no clear memory of what he had seen, he sensed that he had experienced something exceptional; his whole being reverberated with a mysterious bliss. Peter Deunov, smiling at him, asked: 'Do you know where we were?'

'No, Master,' replied Mikhaël; 'I would be glad if you would tell me.'

'We went to visit the causal plane, but the entities that received us told me that you must not be allowed to remember what you had seen. That is why I was obliged to draw a veil before your eyes. But you can feel, can you not, that something happened?'

'Oh yes, Master. Yes!'

Mikhaël knew that what he had experienced was important for his soul. It

seemed to him that the very air was filled with vibrations from the higher planes, that the whole of nature was enchanted. After a moment of silence, the spell was broken when Peter Deunov took some food from his knapsack and they ate together before going down to the town. For the rest of that day, Mikhaël lived in the memory of the morning's experience, and from then on he often accompanied Peter Deunov to the sunrise. After a long meditation they disassociated, and the Master guided his young disciple with extraordinary love and attention, giving him the opportunity to learn 'the realities of the invisible world.'

* * *

While it was given to Mikhaël to become familiar with the realities of worlds unknown to most human beings, he was not allowed to remain in ignorance of the realities of the physical world in which he lived. At the age of eighteen he was called on to make one of the important

decisions that his future mission required of him. The occasion was provided by a man who had been a consul in the United States and who had recently returned to Bulgaria after traveling about the world. Author of several books about spiritualism and passionately interested in magic, he had brought back from his travels all kinds of fetishes, magic mirrors, and ritual robes which he intended to use in his experiments. Once he became president of a group of spiritualists, however, he had been obliged to admit that his psychic abilities were meager, and he was looking for a young man gifted in this way to help him implement his plans.

One day Mikhaël received an invitation to the ex-consul's home in a fashionable neighborhood of Varna, and a dazzling proposal was put to him: in exchange for his services, he was offered a good salary, free room and board, and the use of a library well supplied with books on the occult sciences, magic, and extra-sensory

phenomena... 'And whatever else you want,' added the consul.

Word of the abilities, the purity, and the spirituality of this exceptional young man had reached his ears, and with his assistance he could foresee extremely interesting prospects in terms of communications with the spirit world. He was prepared to pay a good deal for his collaboration. For Mikhaël, this was the classic temptation of wealth and power: unrestricted access to an excellent library, the freedom to experiment with extrasensory phenomena, and the money that would enable him to help his mother and live at ease himself. His first reaction, however, was to consult Peter Deunov and to do as he advised. When Peter Deunov counseled him in no uncertain terms to have nothing to do with the ex-consul or with magic of any kind, he was not surprised; he had already arrived at the conclusion that the truly magical element in the ascent toward perfection was the presence of a spiritual Master, and

that psychic accomplishments were of secondary importance:

I did not know much about human nature, about the cupidity and perversion of men or the fascination of danger. Fortunately, as I did not want to be led astray, I never did anything without consulting my Master, Peter Deunov. There are a great many different ways of selling one's soul to the devil! You do not need to make the kind of pact with the devil that is described in books on witchcraft; you only need to obey the dictates of your own selfishness and greed. Each time you do so your soul loses some of its light.⁴

At the age of sixteen Mikhaël had already chosen between the two beings who had appeared to him in a vision. But that did not dispense him from the successive choices that all human beings have to make to reinforce an initial decision, however firm. Free will remains, and our options must constantly be renewed. Fortified by Peter Deunov's wisdom, he per-

severed with his spiritual exercises, working continually to purify his motivations.

Speaking later of his psychic powers—and in particular of his clairvoyance—he said that at that period he had sensed a great inner effervescence, and that he often had revelations about people's past lives. Whenever possible, he asked Peter Deunov to verify the truth of those revelations. But before long he realized that to reveal such things could be dangerous, that he had no right to lift the veil that divine wisdom draws over the memory of human beings: 'If they knew what terrible things they had done to each other in the past, how would they react today?'

Mikhaël's dearest wish was to help his friends to advance, but how could he be sure of what he could tell them without doing them more harm than good? Because he was in doubt about this he adopted the habit of denying his gift of clairvoyance. It is evident, however, that

he perceived emanations and the aura surrounding each human being, an aura which cannot lie, for its colors express the physical and spiritual state of health of the individual. Occasionally he could even see the luminescence of Peter Deunov's aura and capture the fragrance of the spiritual perfume emanating from him.

Peter Deunov, aware of Mikhaël's decision in respect to his clairvoyance and knowing his interest in the art of divination by chiromancy, warned him that it was an extremely subtle science which was very difficult to master.

'If you want to understand what a hand reveals,' he explained, 'palmistry alone is not enough. You also have to use phrenology, which studies the shape of the skull, and physiognomy, which enables you to know a person's character as indicated by his facial features.'

Mikhaël thus began to study the three

disciplines together, and not long after this, Peter Deunov held out his hand for him to read. Deeply moved, Mikhaël examined it in silence and was immediately struck by the length of the line of Saturn. Then he noticed a line which started at the Mount of Venus and, crossing the life line, the head line, and the line of Saturn, ended on the other side of the palm. The Master, who had been watching Mikhaël's expression, asked:

‘Do you see that line? What does it mean?’

‘It is the line of great ordeals,’ replied Mikhaël without hesitation. Then, instinctively looking at his own hand, he saw the same line. For a moment he was speechless. So that was it! Peter Deunov knew that he had the same line. He had only shown Mikhaël his hand to help him to understand something important: he too would have to endure great ordeals.

‘For the time being you will have the best

possible conditions and receive the help you need to advance,' said Peter Deunov. 'Heaven will give you many blessings. But a time will come when the forces of darkness will put obstacles in your way and try to prevent you from going forward.'

'It should be possible to get by,' said Mikhaël with a smile, unable to grasp all that those words of warning implied.

The Master then decided to reveal further aspects of the ordeals that he would have to face later, and after listening attentively, Mikhaël asked when these trials would take place.

'In the twenty-sixth year,' replied Peter Deunov.

'In my twenty-sixth year,' thought Mikhaël to himself. But he was mistaken. He was then eighteen, and Peter Deunov's ambiguous answer meant that his worst ordeals would begin twenty-six years later. And in fact it was in 1944 that his 'descent into hell' began and contin-

ued until he touched the depths in 1948. Not wanting to impose too heavy a burden on Mikhaël, Peter Deunov had been deliberately vague.

In the meantime, the fraternity was growing rapidly and counted several hundred members who considered each other as brothers and sisters. In this they were heirs to an age-old tradition of mankind, for human beings have always had the nostalgic dream of one great family in which they could live in a spirit of love and mutual support. Throughout the ages, many such fraternities have seen the light of day in different countries, different social classes, and different religions. The members of Peter Deunov's brotherhood strove to express this ideal through the harmony of their life together, and as a reminder in times of difficulty that they all belonged to the same family, they addressed each other as 'brother' or 'sister'.

By 1919, the summer conventions at Ter-

novo had been a regular feature for ten years. The site of the gathering lay among the vineyards on the outskirts of the town, and as there was only one small house, the participants camped in tents and held their activities in the open air. This year Peter Deunov had arranged for Mikhaël and one of his friends to join them, and when they arrived from Varna they found several hundred participants already gathered from the four corners of Bulgaria. Mikhaël and his friend, at nineteen years old, were the youngest.

During this convention Peter Deunov talked at length about light. He asserted that the science of light and color would be the dominant science of the future, and that light, seemingly so inoffensive, was in reality the greatest force in creation.

That summer was a time of great happiness for Mikhaël: he was happy to be with his spiritual family again, and above all he was happy because of his relationship

with Peter Deunov. One day, in conversation with a woman who often acted as Peter Deunov's secretary when he traveled, Mikhaël spoke of the Master's kindness, affection, and consideration. In return he received a warning which opened his eyes to other aspects of the life of a disciple and prepared him for what was to come. The woman exclaimed:

'Brother Mikhaël, you will see later on! He is like that with the brothers and sisters in the beginning, but after a while he becomes much more severe. That it how it was with me, and I thank Heaven that he shakes me up from time to time. You do not yet know what a Master is.'

In effect, it was this same summer that Peter Deunov began to treat his young disciple differently:

At Ternovo we had to build a path. We had collected all the cement, flagstones and other things we needed. We both

worked but it was the Master who began. Then I saw that my work did not look much like his. I was so eager and so happy to be doing this job with the Master that I was going too fast. But the Master had engaged me in this work to teach me something. He found that the flagstones I had laid were uneven; they were not lined up correctly. I corrected my mistakes, but the Master found other errors and so on until the end. He did not say anything while I was working, but once I had finished he found fault with it. [...] The Master was re-educating us. He obliged us to see that our attitude and that of society was too mediocre—it was incapable of building character. He stimulated us to seek perfection in every area of life.⁵

Notes

1. *L'Enseignement du Maître Deunov*, by a group of Bulgarian disciples. Publication E.T.

Courrier du Livre, 1990 p. 62. (Our translation)

2. June 14, 1944. He spoke of this experience in the context of explanations about the *Akasha Chronica*, the mysterious subtle matter which exists in the cosmos and which records all that happens in the universe; all thoughts, words, and actions.
3. 'The Higher Self II' in *Know Thyself: Jnana Yoga I*.
4. 'Youth, a World in Gestation', in *Youth: Creators of the Future*.
5. April 2, 1944.

6



Year After Year I Worked...

Ternovo, one of the ancient capitals of Bulgaria, is built on a cluster of steep rugged hills. Mikhaël liked the picturesque little town with the river Iantra

winding through it, but he loved even more the beautiful countryside all around. That year, after the summer convention, he decided to remain there with one of his friends and devote all his time to spiritual work in this peaceful natural setting.

The two youths were lent an empty villa belonging to a member of Mikhaël's family. Surrounded by trees, the house stood in the middle of vineyards not far from the town. On entering the house one of the first things they did was to open the windows, but in one of the rooms they found the space between shutter and window filled with honeycombs, and a swarm of bees at work. Fascinated by the spectacle, they watched for a long time and agreed not to disturb them. From then on, Mikhaël lived in that room as though in a hive, observing the different phases of the bees' communal life. The delicious, heady perfume that filled the room helped him to meditate. Ever after, he had a special affection for these tiny

creatures who 'give us a magnificent example of an advanced form of society'.

This two-year retreat in Ternovo was an important phase in Mikhaël's life. He read and meditated to his heart's content, often into the small hours. Without fear of interruption, and with the heady perfume produced by the bees to help him to disassociate, he was free to multiply his out-of-body experiences and explore space—as he called the regions to which he traveled in his astral body. His one desire was to understand the structure of the universe and see how all its different elements hang together. Utterly fearless, taking little care for his life, he succeeded in reaching the loftiest spheres of the invisible world. As he would say later, he 'explored the higher worlds of ideas and archetypes, the laws and principles that govern creation'.

Year after year I worked with only one idea in mind: to contemplate and comprehend the structure of the universe. For

*years, it was the only thing that interested me. I spent days and nights out of my body, striving for a clear vision of that structure, of the bonds that tie all the disparate elements together. I knew that everything else was unimportant. The only thing that mattered was to see the overall structure.*¹

At one point he began to concentrate on the distant past of humanity. To go millions of years into the past was a terrifying experience, for he found himself in front of 'nothing'. After many other experiments he attempted to project himself billions of years into the future, and once again was seized with dread. When he spoke about this second experiment later he did not explain the reason for his fear. He simply concluded by saying that eternity is not a temporal reality, it is a state of mind, and that we all have the potential to change a great deal in our present state by concentrating on the future; that through concentration, 'you can touch a nerve center of eternity

which is capable of sweeping away all that exists’.

Although his experiments were sometimes terrifying, he did not let this deter him. His thirst for knowledge of the invisible world continually urged him on. All these perceptions, ecstasies, and discoveries were part of the inner initiation that had been working within him ever since his illumination. The perfection of the symbols he saw and described so vividly is a clear indication of the spiritual maturity he had already attained. He would explain one day that if one meditates for a long time on an idea, a geometrical form which corresponds exactly to the idea on which one is meditating will gradually take shape in one’s subconscious—or superconscious.

He continued his exercises of mental concentration, working with the power of thought so as to become more and more capable of tuning into the wavelengths of the higher worlds. And he con-

tinued, always with the same enthusiasm, to share his discoveries with his friends. But he had not lost his love of mischief and was quite capable of doing something spectacular just for the fun of it. Many years later he told of one such incident:

When I was still very young there were certain exercises that I loved to do. One day I was with some friends at the top of the Musala, and the lakes of Rila and the other peaks were hidden by fog. It was so thick that we could barely see each other. Just for fun, I asked my friends, 'Do you want to see the view? Tell me what you want to see and I'll show it to you.' Well, one of them asked to see the third lake—or perhaps it was the fifth—I do not remember exactly. I had climbed the Musala so often that I knew exactly where each lake or peak of the Pirin-Rhodope mountains was, so I stretched out my hand in the direction of the third lake, the fog cleared, and the lake appeared. Of course, they all exclaimed

in surprise. Then I lowered my hand, and gradually the lake was once more hidden by fog. Then someone else wanted to see the Macedonian mountains. I stretched out my hand in that direction and once again the fog lifted and the mountains appeared. After that the sun came out. My friends were absolutely dumbfounded. For the first time they understood how powerful thought can be. This story is absolutely true. I know that the invisible world is listening to me. I cannot lie to you.²

After relating this incident he added that if it is possible to act on external clouds it is even easier to work on those that obscure our inner world. By mentally focusing rays of light on them, one can dispel them and regain inner peace and joy.

In spite of the intensity of his research, Mikhaël was never satisfied. Conscious of the importance of continual purification to allow the currents of divine life

to flow freely within him, he decided to fast for ten days. After two or three days he experienced a thirst which continued to increase as the days went by. He was obsessed by water. All his dreams were of springs and rivers at which he drank without ever quenching his thirst. On the seventh day he picked up a piece of fruit and sensed that when he breathed in its perfume he received a subtle nourishment that satisfied him completely. It was then that he understood more profoundly than ever a truth that he would refer to all his life: fruit—indeed, all plants—contain subtle, etheric elements that can nourish us if we are not too satiated to assimilate them. For the last three days of his fast, before gradually resuming a normal diet and his usual rhythm of life, he continued to nourish himself solely on the emanations of fruit.

At this period of his life Mikhaël often continued his spiritual exercises far into the night, with the result that he was sometimes too tired to awake in time for

the sunrise. Although he regretted this, it seems that he could not resign himself to working less. One fine day, however, something happened that enchanted him: at dawn a small bird alighted on his window-sill and began tapping on the glass with its beak. The following morning and every day after that, the bird returned and took up its tapping, and Mikhaël responded as to a friend: 'All right. I'm getting up at once!'

Then he put some bread-crumbs on the window ledge and the bird, singing merrily, flew off in search of others to join in the feast, while Mikhaël thanked heaven with all his heart for this gift of joy from the kingdom of the air. Mikhaël had always had this special relationship with birds. Throughout his life, they often served as messengers to bring him answers he was waiting for from the invisible world. At one time or another, most of his friends witnessed such incidents which pointed to a rare harmony

between a human being and the natural world.

Years later, one of those friends, a young man called Alexander, described to his daughter his first meeting with Mikhaël.

We met on a train. I was seventeen at the time and was traveling alone. Standing in the corridor outside my compartment was a young man, a little older than myself. He must have sensed that I was looking at him, because he suddenly turned round and smiled at me with an extraordinary expression of radiance and warmth. I was tremendously struck by the spiritual beauty that shone from him. I stood up and went out to the corridor and leaned on the window beside him. We talked about all kinds of things and discovered that we both lived in Dounavska Street: he at one end in the Turkish quarter, and I at the other end. Then he talked about his Master and told me that he was on his way to a convention at Ternovo. At first I wanted to

go with him, but finally we decided that we would meet again in September in Varna, and he would give me some books and take me to the Master's talks.

This was the beginning of a lasting friendship. Alexander became a member of Peter Deunov's brotherhood and attended his talks regularly. In the Spring he accompanied Mikhaël when he went to meditate in the park at sunrise. One morning as they were sitting on a bench in front of the rising sun, a bird came and perched on Mikhaël's shoulder. Mikhaël was deep in meditation and did not stir, but Alexander was distracted and watched his friend for a long time. After a while, as the bird remained perfectly still, he could not resist murmuring:

‘Mikhaël, you know there's a bird on your shoulder?’

‘Yes, I know,’ replied Mikhaël.

Then, opening his eyes, he talked to the bird with all the affection a human being

can feel for a small animal. It was obvious that there was a genuine communication between those two beings, so different from each other.

The bird listened, added Alexander, and seemed to respond with little movements of its head. There was such tenderness in Mikhaël's gestures and such an extraordinary light in his face that I have always remembered that moment.

* * *

Mikhaël seems to have had many friends, but he would say later that in Bulgaria he had always remained in the background, and those who knew him confirm this. Yet there is ample evidence that he had remarkable influence on his contemporaries. According to his family and friends he was much sought after and people were always coming to ask his advice. He attracted them like a magnet. With the fire that burned within him and his radiant energy drawn from the higher

planes, he was a being who led others irresistibly toward new horizons. One might think that people would have been uneasy in the presence of such intensity, but his high spirits and unfailing sense of humor always gave it balance. Also, his affection for his friends was so genuine and warm that they easily forgot the supernatural and almost intimidating aspects of his behavior, his research and his work.

At one point, several young friends went to live with Mikhaël in Ternovo to pursue their spiritual work in a favorable atmosphere, and gradually the house became a focal point of spiritual life in which other young friends found encouragement and support. They spent their days reading, meditating and working in the house and garden.

One day they were surprised to see a youth, dressed in rags and with every appearance of being a fugitive, emerge timidly from among the vines. Without

hesitation, they welcomed him and offered him something to eat. The boy was trembling with fear, but gradually, reassured by their attitude, he told them his name was Dimitri and he was being hunted by the police. He had belonged to a group of anarchists of which only he had escaped death; all his comrades had been executed. Mikhaël and his friends invited Dimitri to stay with them as long as he wished. It was a courageous gesture, since at the time—two years after the end of World War I—violence was rife in the country and the political situation was increasingly unstable. Groups of agrarians, communists, fascists, anarchists, and Macedonian revolutionaries all contributed to the general unrest, which was even further intensified by the presence of thousands of refugees from the devastated war zones.

Dimitri had long conversations with these young men whose ways astonished him: they were vegetarians, they meditated, they loved to watch the sun rise,

and they lived in an atmosphere of harmony. It was the integrity of his own character that had first led him to rebel against the injustices of society and join the anarchists in the hope of building a better world through violence. But bitter experience had opened his eyes, and he was spontaneously drawn to the philosophy of love and peace that inspired his new friends. Yet it was difficult for him to believe in this sudden reversal of his fortunes. To hide or flee at the first sign of danger had become second nature to him, and the adaptation to a life of peace did not come easily. Mikhaël, observing him with affection, thought to himself: 'It is as though he missed the torments of the past.' Gradually, however, Dimitri's native qualities reasserted themselves and blossomed in the friendly atmosphere of the group. He became particularly attached to Mikhaël and remained ever after a faithful friend.

In the meantime, Peter Deunov had received permission to return to Sofia

and was now giving lectures in his own home. In many ways, however, his work was becoming increasingly difficult. In the past he had often had to take a stand against those who wanted him to make life easier for them or who sought his protection and hoped for miracles. In their anger and disappointment some of them turned against him and began to spread criticism and false rumors about him, and he was now faced with a difficulty that confronts almost all spiritual guides: the bitter recriminations of one-time disciples.

Several young brothers, worried by these negative rumors, went to consult Mikhaël, who was vehement in defense of Peter Deunov. He had far too much respect and affection for the Master to believe such criticisms or to question his decisions. But this time of difficulty for Peter Deunov was also a period of trial for Mikhaël. He was nineteen, and the young men with whom he lived often turned to him, confident that he could enlighten

them and give them good advice. It was not a role that he chose for himself. On the contrary, he had stayed in Ternovo in order to devote himself to a life of contemplation. But in spite of his desire to remain in the background, he could not hide the fire that burned within and shone from him. And it was here that another test awaited him. Just as he had known the lure of power at the age of sixteen, it was inevitable that he should now be tempted by the exercise of authority. Later, he spoke with the utmost simplicity of how, during his second year with Peter Deunov, he had once spoken 'as a Master' to some members of the brotherhood.

As soon as he had spoken, he realized that he was in danger of seeking glory for himself, just as three years earlier he had been in danger of using his powers for his own ends. He reproached himself bitterly for having abandoned his habitual discretion and self-effacement. It was at this point that Peter Deunov's attitude,

for reasons known only to himself, changed radically. From then on, he ignored Mikhaël completely. Commenting later on the Master's reaction, Mikhaël said: 'If you only knew how I suffered! How I regretted what I had done!' Adding that, in reality, it had been no more than a childish mistake, but that Peter Deunov must have seen it as the sign of a danger from which he wanted to protect him.

Mikhaël's inner strength coupled with his deliberate self-effacement aroused admiration in some and envy in others. When the latter spread the rumor that the Master was displeased with his decision to live in Ternovo with his friends, Mikhaël became the object of criticism and denigration. He also suffered greatly from the change in his relationship with Peter Deunov, and for years puzzled over his apparent coldness. He could not know that the Master had decided to keep him in the background until it was time to entrust him with his unique mis-

sion: to carry his teaching to France. Occasionally, however, Mikhaël was deeply moved by a rare and unexpected gesture of approval and support on the part of Peter Deunov. One of his best friends, a young guitarist called Ivan came to see him one day and told him:

‘Mikhaël, I was just talking about you with the Master. He said you had one of the keenest minds he had ever met; that your intelligence was as fine as a thread of silk, capable of penetrating everything.’

Mikhaël understood the message, which seems to have had special significance for him at this stage of his life. Peter Deunov must have known that what he said to Ivan would be passed on. The attitude of indifference he had adopted towards his young disciple was probably intended to fortify him in preparation for his future work. He knew how much Mikhaël loved him. He also knew both his extreme sensitivity and his exceptional inner strength, and apparently had decided to

deprive him of the consolations of a personal relationship. His attitude toward Mikhaël was often enigmatic. The explanations or advice he gave were not easy to understand, often no more than a glimpse of light through a half-opened door, for he knew that nothing would deter Mikhaël from exploring new horizons, that he was capable of finding for himself all that his soul needed. Peter Deunov was leaving him free to advance alone so that he might reach his full potential more rapidly.

Mikhaël thus went forward alone but never in isolation. As often as possible he participated in the three- or four-day excursions Peter Deunov organized to Mount Vitosha, a 7,500 foot peak to the south of Sofia. The Master would set out in the middle of the night accompanied by the most courageous of his disciples, giving them an occasion to fortify their will and powers of endurance. The ascent lasted several hours, taking them first through a thick forest crisscrossed by a

confusion of streams and torrents, and then, once above the tree line, to a desolate landscape of gigantic boulders which streamed down the slopes like great petrified rivers. From the summit, an immense, level plateau strewn with enormous rocks, they contemplated the grandiose spectacle of the rising sun.

In addition to these excursions, which he loved, Mikhaël joined the other members of the brotherhood as often as possible for meetings in Peter Deunov's house. He would slip in quietly and take a chair at the back, or if the room was full, remain standing by the door. When the Master entered, those present greeted him by raising their right hand, palm forward, to the level of the forehead. As the Master responded in kind to this beautiful, ancient form of greeting, his face seemed to glow and become radiant. Mikhaël, who had sometimes wondered why his expression changed at this moment, realized that the ambience born of the respect and love of his disciples was an inspira-

tion for him, a stimulus which manifested as light on his face.

While listening attentively to what the Master was saying, Mikhaël often watched the expressions on the faces of those present. The spontaneous exchange between speaker and audience always fascinated him. In his eyes, every teacher was a medium, and it was the ambience created by the audience that enabled him to communicate the message dictated by the spirit.

Paradoxically, it was Mikhaël's desire to come as close as possible to Peter Deunov's thought that led him to remain in the back of the hall. The physical distance stimulated the powers of perception not only of his eyes, but also of his soul and his mind. After a talk, he listened silently to the discussions between the Master and his audience, observing that some of the disciples presumed to give Peter Deunov advice publicly. The Master listened to them, sometimes

putting them in their place, but more often than not smiling at their vanity and letting them have their say. As for Mikhaël, in the course of these discussions he did not try to attract attention or display his knowledge. If he had once been tempted to assume an attitude of authority, he had since renounced it completely.

* * *

In the school of Pythagoras, one of the ordeals least expected by new students was the flood of scorn and unfair criticism to which they were subjected, sometimes for a long time. Very few were able to endure the corrosive effect of such treatment, but those who did so were admitted to initiation.

Instinctively, from the first moment of his relationship with the Master he had sought for so long, Mikhaël longed to undergo ordeals that would purify his heart and strengthen his character. In the

course of these first two years, he often begged Peter Deunov to chastise him, to put him through the 'seven retorts', the traditional vessels of the alchemists in which mercury is separated from amalgam or other impurities by volatilization. He repeated that he was willing to be ground to powder and put through fire in order to be purified and become an exceptional being. Each time he spoke in this way, the Master listened closely and smiled without speaking. For months, Mikhaël wondered: 'Does he agree? Will he do what I ask?'

When he was twenty the time came for him to be put through the first retort. Peter Deunov's attitude of indifference was already painful to Mikhaël, but something more painful still had to be faced. One day, probably in 1920 during a convention of the brotherhood at Ternovo, he was put to the test in a way that affected that most sensitive part of his being: his attachment to his spiritual Master. After speaking to the brothers

and sisters gathered around him in the open air, Peter Deunov suddenly turned on Mikhaël and one of his friends in bitter condemnation. Feeling himself the target of all eyes, Mikhaël was paralyzed with shock. While the Master rebuked him, it was all he could do to maintain a calm expression that revealed nothing of the deep hurt caused by the harsh words and pitiless tone of voice.

Later, as the participants silently dispersed, most of them shunned this disciple who had been so publicly denounced. His own reaction was to withdraw to reflect and fast. In the days that followed Mikhaël told himself repeatedly that Peter Deunov must certainly have had a reason for lashing out at him in this way. 'With all my might,' he said later, 'I worked to purify myself with light.' Then, pale and thin, but with his soul 'reaching toward the heavens' he returned to see the Master. As he entered his room, his whole being expressed the respect and trust which had never fal-

tered, and he spoke as a child to his father:

‘Master, purify me. In your great wisdom, root out all that is useless and bad in me. I want only to be like you.’

The light within Mikhaël was so bright and the fire so intense after those days of purification and fasting that he had ‘a sensation of burning, as though flames were leaping from my mouth’.

This phenomenon in which flames blaze from the face of a mystic in a state of spiritual concentration is well known to those who have studied the lives of great saints and visionaries. An intense work of purification floods the face with light, and the mystic experiences a burst of light streaming from the center of the forehead, between the eyebrows. Mikhaël was aware both of what was happening to him and of Peter Deunov’s amazement.

Suddenly, the Master’s face was transfigured. Smiling lovingly at his young dis-

ciple, he shook hands with him, and the smile and the grip of his hand expressed something quite out of the ordinary. But he did not say a word, and Mikhaël, who never expected any favors, accepted his silence.

This exchange, sober though it was, sufficed; the message he read in it was all the recompense he needed. He already knew that initiation, which once took place in a temple, was now given in everyday life when it was least expected. It was this realization that spurred him on to fortify his will so that he would be capable of accepting whatever vexations and humiliations came his way. Instinctively, he learned to use the fire that had burned within him since the age of fifteen to propel himself ever forward on his chosen path. Peter Deunov saw this clearly, and during this same period at Ternovo, he said: 'Mikhaël, part of your fire has become light.'

* * *

His public ordeal, however, had serious consequences. In the fraternity, many of the brothers and sisters avoided him, convinced that one thus stigmatized by the Master must be wholly contemptible. Some even became his sworn enemies and in the future would do him great wrong. They may well have had reasons of their own for their antagonism: the candor with which Mikhaël expressed his opinions and his absolute frankness were often disconcerting and inconvenient; his habit of analyzing everything in the light in order to discern and discard all impurities left no room for complacency. Whatever their reasons, Mikhaël sensed that, from now on, if he was to preserve his integrity and be faithful to the unerring intuition that he called 'the God within', he would have to accept that most of the brotherhood considered him to be disgraced. Keeping a firm grip on his sensibilities, he bore in silence every manifestation of enmity and derision, every petty vexation. But he received with gratitude the occasional encourage-

ment of those who came to tell him, alluding to the classical ordeals of initiation: 'Be glad, brother Mikhaël, for the Master loves you very deeply.'

It was only much later that he himself felt sure of that love. In the meantime he was determined to bear whatever came, to accept every ordeal and every demand Peter Deunov made of him. To his mind, true love consisted in striving, come what may, to be as radiant as the sun.

The year 1920 was an important one in Mikhaël's life. Apart from the ordeal at Ternovo, he would speak later of 'an extraordinary event' that had occurred in this period. Without giving details, he later alluded more than once to 'a great Being' who had accompanied and guided him since that time. It is possible that this event took place in the mountains in the region of Rila or on Mount Musala, where he had had several mystical experiences about which he said very little.

More is known, however, about one experience he had at the age of twenty, for he described it later. It occurred during his first camp at Rila with the brotherhood. One of the most beautiful parts of the massif known as the Seven Lakes was a region greatly loved by Peter Deunov. From 1920 on, he often camped up there for a few days with groups of disciples. Toward the middle of summer the snow had melted from the highest peaks and the mountains revealed themselves in their stark majesty. This splendid region with its steep slopes and tumbled masses of boulders was well chosen, for while it demanded considerable physical exertion on the part of the campers, it also provided an ideal setting for meditation and contemplation.

Those who took part in the first camp were both exalted and much tried by the experience. In the first place they were poorly equipped, having neither tents nor sleeping bags. In addition, the weather was bad throughout their stay.

On these summits, even in summer, the climate is harsh. The noontime sun is uncomfortably hot, while the nights are icy. The campers could not sleep for the bitter cold and the gusts of rain sweeping over them as they lay shivering in their blankets.

One morning, an elderly sister asked Mikhaël to accompany her to a higher altitude. After climbing for a long time they eventually reached a place in which nature seemed to have retained its pristine beauty of eternal purity and youth. The silence seemed as fragile as a crystal that the slightest sound would shatter into a thousand fragments.

Settling down on a large rock, Mikhaël began to meditate. The slopes all around were covered in a deep carpet of moss, scattered here and there with great boulders. Suddenly Mikhaël thought he was hallucinating as the landscape became wondrously animated before his eyes. The life that pulsated gently in the nature

around him gave to each element its own subtle light. Every stone, every blade of grass glowed with a mysterious radiance, and Mikhaël understood in a flash that every created thing, from the grains of sand on the beach to the stars in the heavens, is made of light. Spellbound, transported by wonder, he was unable to take his eyes from the indescribable beauty before him, a beauty hidden from human beings until they are given the privilege of seeing it.

It is easy to understand why, after experiencing such ecstasy in the light, Mikhaël continually sought to contemplate the splendor of the rising sun which spoke to him of the splendor of God. Mount Musala, the highest peak of the Rila massif, which was a long way from the campsite, drew him like a magnet; at times he spent the night at the summit from which he could watch the dawn coming up and catch the first rays of the sun as it rose over the surrounding peaks. Ever since his first childhood meditations high in

the poplars of his home village, he had dreamed of the summits. In his eyes, the true temple of God is nature, at the center of which the sun, the giver of life, is the celebrant. He understood that a country's highest peak represents its causal body, that subtle body that dwells on the higher planes of the invisible world. He also knew that the forces and powers necessary to the materialization of ideas on the physical plane are to be found on the causal plane, where the obstacles encountered on the physical plane do not exist.

Ever since his first excursion to Musala two or three years earlier, in response to a profound intuition about his future, he was in the habit of linking himself in a special way with France. Creating an association in his mind between the highest peak of his own country and Mont Blanc, he called down light and heavenly blessings on the people of France. Strangely, he dreamed of taking to the French the teaching that filled him with such joy, never suspecting that Peter

Deunov would one day entrust him with this very mission.

* * *

At the end of that summer, Peter Deunov called Mikhaël to him and told him: 'Mikhaël, you must go back to school and finish your studies.'

Thunderstruck, Mikhaël could only stare at him in silence. He had left school five years before. He was now nearly twenty-one, and Peter Deunov was asking him to go back to the classroom with boys of fifteen. It would take three years to get his baccalaureate. Above all, in this period of intense spiritual and intellectual development, his most urgent need was to continue the work that had become the mainstay of his life. For a young man of Mikhaël's caliber, experienced in the mystical life and able to communicate with the subtle realms of the spirit, to return to the routine of school would be a great trial. But it was a trial that Peter

Deunov deemed necessary in order to help him to moderate his spiritual experiments and follow the development of every normal human being of his day.

In fact, it would have been possible for Mikhaël to study at home and apply only for the examinations, but Peter Deunov was adamant: he must attend classes. As always, Mikhaël bowed to the decision of the one whom he had chosen as his spiritual Master and, leaving Ternovo, returned to his family in Varna.

For his mother the return of her eldest son was a great joy: it was a comfort to her to be able to count on his presence again. For the two boys and two little girls, here was their big brother, home again as an adult after a two-year absence, during which he had endured many ordeals and known spiritual experiences more intense than ever. For his friends he was still someone out of the ordinary, still capable of stimulating them, infecting

them with his enthusiasm or exasperating them beyond endurance.

Mikhaël's first weeks at school were uncomfortable. For one thing he was obliged to wear a uniform, and Dolia, knowing how ridiculous it made him feel, found an old greatcoat of his father's to wear over it on his way to school. At the Lycée the boys laughed at this young man who was old enough to shave and yet shared the school bench with them. They were forever pulling his hair and playing all kinds of tricks on him. Fortunately, Mikhaël's sense of humor had not forsaken him. Later, when he recounted some of the amusing incidents of this period, it was obvious that he had not taken the chaffing too seriously. His generous smile and friendly ways soon won over his young classmates, and many of them accompanied him after school, questioning him about all kinds of things. He readily adapted himself to their level and, calling on his imagination and his gifts as a story-teller, used the

opportunity to open their minds to realities they had never before envisaged. His friend Alexander who witnessed all this sometimes pitied him, but Mikhaël only replied thoughtfully: 'It's a trial I have to endure.'

All in all, these years at school in Varna seem to have been profitable for Mikhaël, who took the opportunity to ponder and arrive at a more profound understanding of all that Peter Deunov's teaching had awakened within him. Also, his close relationship with Jesus led him to delve deeper into the Gospels in an attempt to grasp their hidden meaning, for he had never found a commentary that really satisfied him. Seated in the lotus position in his little room overlooking the nearby roofs, he meditated for hours, until one day a revelation came to him: the only way to understand the true meaning of Jesus' words was to enter his mind. He set to work immediately, concentrating his mental powers on banishing all consciousness of himself and the world he

lived in. In his mind he was in Palestine in the time of Jesus, walking on the shores of the Jordan and Lake Gennesaret, entering the cities of Capernaum and Jerusalem. Repeating aloud the very words that Jesus had said to his disciples, he concentrated on penetrating his consciousness, on seeing and thinking as though he were one with him.

Gradually, this work became more and more important to him. Whenever he had a moment he returned to it, and little by little the true meaning of Jesus' words was revealed to him. Naturally, his efforts were not always successful. There were days when he was disappointed with the meager results, but he persevered, refusing to be discouraged. At other times his labors were richly rewarded: a dazzling light flooded his being and everything became crystal clear. Transcending all earthly contingencies, a true communication between two spirits was gradually taking shape, thanks to which Mikhaël was able later to give such authentic and

inspired commentaries on the Gospels. Those he would give in Paris in 1938 cast a dazzling new light on the Parables which was deeply moving.

In later years he often spoke of having been profoundly influenced not only by Jesus, but also by the Buddha, the two great luminaries of his youth. He must have striven to enter the mind of the Buddha as he had with Jesus, since he would say later that he had succeeded in communicating with him at the age of twenty-two or -three.

In the solitude of his little room, eager to draw upon every source that spoke of God and the perfection of the created universe, he studied a wide range of spiritual philosophies. He was already familiar with the Cabbalah, whose definition of the structure of the subtle worlds satisfied him deeply. He found great inspiration in The Tree of Life, with its depiction of the different levels of creation, and in the six-pointed Seal of Solomon with its sym-

bolic representation of Good and Evil. This impressive symbol, composed of two interlaced triangles, contains a representation of the glorious countenance of God in the higher part of the upright triangle. In the inverted triangle below is a representation of the devil, a distorted reflection of the divine countenance. At the intersection of the two triangles, a horizontal line separates the air above from the waters below, and across this line, God's hands have a firm grasp on the hands of the Devil. In Mikhaël's eyes, this representation of good and evil was an excellent and unequivocal expression of all creation as a reflection of God, who makes use of both positive and negative forces.

For one in whom the spirit of mysticism is highly developed, every philosophical discovery seems to lead directly to a spiritual experience; it is an 'event' that triggers an inner change, however minute. One day, reading the Zohar, the principal book of the Cabbalah, Mikhaël was

extraordinarily moved by the text, ‘Seven lights are there in the highest, and therein dwells the Ancient of Ancients, the Most Hidden of the Hidden, the Mystery of Mysteries, Ain Soph.’

When I recited these words everything within me started to vibrate and quiver. Those seven lights are the seven colors, and each one corresponds to a particular virtue or quality: purple corresponds to sacrifice, blue to truth, green to hope, yellow to wisdom, orange to sanctity and red to love.³

Conscious of the influence of colors on a human being, Mikhaël continued to work with them—and his strange experiments continued to astonish those around him. His friend Alexander who had always admired his spirituality and his intellectual gifts often visited him in his room. One day he was amazed to see that Mikhaël had covered the walls with red paper. ‘Have you gone mad?’ he exclaimed.

Mikhaël laughed and explained that it was Tuesday, the day of the planet Mars and therefore of red, the color of love, vitality, and energy. For some time he had been working in this way, surrounding himself with the color that, according to the books he had been reading, corresponded to the day of the week. At the age of fifteen, when he first started experimenting with colors, he had noticed that one extreme triggers its opposite. Thus, if he switched his gaze to a white surface after staring at something red, he saw the same form in green. The phenomenon, which is well known to painters, had opened interesting avenues of spiritual exploration for him.

The symbolism of the planets began to be of practical importance: thus the red planet Mars, symbol of strength and war, calls forth green Venus, the symbol of love, and vice versa. Mikhaël worked with the characteristic of each color and made use of their complementary nature: the dynamic vitality of fire symbolized by red;

the peaceful life of nature symbolized by green; the spirituality of violet, and the wisdom and science of yellow.

Every spare moment was used to consolidate the discoveries of his adolescence and to reflect, among other things, on the meaning of nutrition. In order to be consciously in union with the hidden forces of food, he ate frugally and preferably alone. Very often, after his meditation, he took a mouthful of food and let it dissolve in his mouth until it had completely disappeared. This sufficed for the whole day.

* * *

Thanks to Mikhaël's dynamic, creative temperament, many everyday objects or circumstances served to stimulate his spiritual centers or chakras. This was the case with roses. It is well known that Bulgarian roses are unique. They are cultivated for their precious aromatic oil in the Valley of Roses, a vast expanse bor-

dered by mountains to the south of Ternovo. In summer, when the flowers are in full bloom, the fields stretch for miles like an immense, glowing carpet of color.

One day, Mikhaël picked up a rose and breathed in its scent, and his reflections, stimulated by the perfume and emanations of the flower, became as light as air. Imperceptibly, his meditation became contemplation, a profound spiritual experience with its own special complexion, different from any he had known before, and one that he often repeated in the years that followed. He had long since learned to use earthly objects as channels of communication with spiritual realities, and he sensed that a rose enabled him to draw upon the most spiritual form of love. 'This exercise can even lead to ecstasy,' he was to say later.

To the casual observer, one flower is much the same as any other, and yet, like human beings, each has its own countenance and is inhabited by its own specific

energies. Mikhaël knew this, and when he went to the flower market to buy a rose, he chose one for its color, perfume, form, and freshness. Back in his room, he began simply by looking at it with great love, treating it as a living being, as ‘an exquisite young maiden from heaven, who has sacrificed herself to show us the path that leads to the virtues that are hers’. Each time he repeated this exercise, he experienced an indescribable state of consciousness and his mind floated far above earthly realities. ‘It is even possible,’ he said one day, ‘to reach a state of ecstasy with this exercise.’

In the meantime however, every morning meant a return to school, to the tiresome uniform and boring lessons, and yet, all things considered, the effort and discipline was as good as any yoga or other exercise to develop his willpower. Besides, difficulties were not the only ‘blessings’ he received during these months in Varna. One day, toward the end of his studies, someone who knew

his dream of playing the violin gave him an instrument. His delight knew no bounds, and he enrolled at the Musical Academy, where he gave himself with passion to the study of music, determined to become a true virtuoso capable of awakening the most noble sentiments in his audience:

When I thought of God or of something beautiful, I could only envisage a perfect, harmonious music, and this thought awakened certain spiritual centers within me. Sometimes it left me in tears.⁴

In the years that followed he was never without his violin. He took it everywhere, even to the mountains, where he delighted in playing in the open air with his friends. Music was as necessary to him as the air he breathed, and song in particular had a magical power; it was a potent weapon which he used to dissipate negative feelings, attain certain spiritual states, or express gratitude. In the fraternity he was always happy to sing with his

brothers and sisters, and when Peter Deunov composed the sacred song *Fir fur fen*, he was transported by the power of its vibrations. In his mind's eye he saw 'processions of angels advancing, driving the darkness before them'.

In the years to come he would say:

*The human voice is superior to the violin or any other instrument. The most beautiful voices are created by love. Let yourself be filled with love and splendid ideas, and very soon the vibrations of your voice will be gentler, warmer, more tender.*⁵

On warm summer evenings in Varna, his need for music often drew him to the *Morskata Gradina*, where a good orchestra gave concerts or played waltzes for public dancing. Without lingering in the Garden, he went down the long flight of steps to the beach and sat on the sand. Over his head, the myriad diamonds of the Milky Way formed a great river in the night sky. He often stayed for hours, lis-

tening to the music and contemplating the stars.

During this period of his life, however, Mikhaël experienced some difficult moments. He confessed later that as a disciple he had known 'moments of real pessimism'. Whether this pessimism was triggered by Peter Deunov's apparent rejection or by the ostracism he suffered in the brotherhood is difficult to say. From adolescence he had had to learn to pursue his own course without worrying about what others thought of him. At twenty, after the public rebuff at the hands of Peter Deunov, he had had to armor himself further against the malicious lies that continued to distress him. Seeking to protect himself without closing his heart to others, he strove to master his sensitivity and transform his difficulties into 'precious stones' for the soul, using pain as a springboard. In order to vault upwards toward the joy of the spirit, he first sank to the depths of despondency, sometimes deliberately feigning

extreme sadness in order to spark the opposite reaction. He realized, however, that to remain in a state of sadness for a long time could be dangerous unless one's consciousness was fully awake and in control.

He applied the same principle to his spiritual life. Having experienced 'periods of exaggerated ecstasy' followed by periods of drought, he came to the conclusion that moderation was indispensable in facing the storms of life. This practice of moderation, which helped him to rise above difficulties and trials, would serve him all his life.

At one point he began to make a rigorous annual review of his life. For three days he called to mind and analyzed everything he did, examining the interwoven threads of his existence, judging and evaluating each one in order to discern 'those that were from God and those that were not'.

As for his relationship with Peter Deunov, he did everything in his power to restore it to its former cordiality, but this was not easy. 'My will was strained to the utmost, my heart was on fire, and he saw nothing!' he would say later, adding that Peter Deunov's attitude was certainly intended to test his ability to persevere and rise above his difficulties. He knew that the only thing that really mattered was to 'remain in contact with his soul', and he continued to work mentally for his Master and to speak of him with the innate reverence he had for all great beings.

On the other hand, as he said himself, his secret was to continue his work in silence. If he felt unhappy, as sometimes happened, he noticed that there was someone within him who looked on and laughed, who even enjoyed the situation. He recognized this being as the one known in India as 'the Silent One'.

One day, however, in the most unex-

pected way, Peter Deunov took Mikhaël's side in full view of many of his disciples. It happened at Rila. A young man who had formerly been a good friend, but who now held a grudge against Mikhaël following a misunderstanding, had taken to insulting him and trying to belittle him at every opportunity. Unable to change the situation, Mikhaël remained patient and unruffled. But one evening, faced with his ceaseless insults, he said to himself: 'Humility, restraint, and non-violence will not cure him; he will go on being abusive', and he made up his mind to respond.

Before he knew it, he was fending off his adversary's blows and very quickly, although not as tall or as strong as the other, he managed to get the better of him. Thinking that that would be the end of it, Mikhaël relaxed his hold, whereupon the other flung himself at him a second time. Once again, without knowing how, Mikhaël got the advantage and he was still holding his assailant down when

Peter Deunov appeared. At once, the two brothers sprang to their feet. To Mikhaël's amazement, the Master told him:

‘Stand aside. Leave him to me!’

Then he began to chastise the young man severely until, after a moment, the latter managed to slip away. He did not dare to show his face again that evening. Mikhaël could not get over his astonishment. ‘How could the Master know who was in the wrong?’ he wondered. ‘It was the other who was on the ground and needed help, and yet he sided with me!’ The next day the attitude of his persecutor was completely transformed, and Mikhaël thought to himself: ‘Why didn’t I tackle him ages ago?’

Throughout these years Peter Deunov remained extremely reserved toward Mikhaël when others were present, but during the summer camp at Rila in 1922, he did much to dissipate the negative

repercussions of the ordeal he had imposed on him two years earlier. One evening, several hundred people were gathered near the second lake under the pure transparent blue of the evening sky. A huge bonfire, fed by dead branches brought up from the forests below, threw a fantastic light all around. The only sound was the crackling of the flames. After a long silence, Peter Deunov looked at Mikhaël and said in solemn tones:

‘You do not yet know who Mikhaël is.’

All eyes were on the startled Mikhaël who thought to himself: ‘Does this mean another ordeal?’ But while he braced himself for what was to come, Peter Deunov continued:

‘No, you do not yet know Brother Mikhaël. At the moment he is disguised, but one day you will know him. You will see who he truly is.’

Suddenly, all the escapades of his youth surged into Mikhaël’s mind as he waited

in alarm for what would follow. But as the silence lengthened, his first emotion faded, and he realized that this time Peter Deunov's voice conveyed no harshness. Their eyes met. Flooded with an overwhelming sense of gratitude, Mikhaël saw that the Master's face was suffused with love. His remark had implied nothing negative, rather the contrary.

In fact, Peter Deunov had publicly shown his esteem and appreciation of Mikhaël. Most of his disciples understood the message and hastened to apologize for their past attitude, but it did not occur to Mikhaël to take advantage of this public endorsement. He remained in the background and continued his work in silence. Unfortunately, however, the melee between him and the other brother was to become a cause of scandal. Some members of the brotherhood used it to discredit him, for they could not understand Peter Deunov's attitude toward this disciple. Sometimes he put him through terrible ordeals; at other times he

defended him or made mysterious pronouncements about him; most of the time he seemed to ignore him, and yet he continued to receive him for long hours at a time.

* * *

Mikhaël's relief was great when he finally received his baccalaureate. He thought he would once again be free to devote all his time to his spiritual work, but when he went to see Peter Deunov in Sofia, the first thing the Master said was:

'You must go on with your studies at the university.'

Mikhaël knew that this meant renewed sacrifices, but his faith in Peter Deunov's wisdom never faltered. After taking leave of his mother in Varna, he returned to Sofia, where he registered at the faculty of Physics and Mathematics. Upon his arrival in the capital, some friends offered him the use of a room in their home. He still had to find work to pay for tuition

and food, however, and whenever his money ran out he took a temporary job on a building site as bricklayer, carpenter, painter, or odd job man. The wages were meager, and for years he lived in extreme poverty. His room was scantily furnished with a bed and some blankets received from his family, a bookcase from Peter Deunov, and a small table on which he kept his violin. He wrote on his knees, sitting cross-legged on the floor. His clothes were threadbare; a scarf concealed the absence of a tie, and for a long time his only footwear was a single pair of sandals that served in summer and winter alike. As he remarked with a smile in later years, although he had many friends in Sofia, they did not invite him to their elegant receptions, but rather to informal meals in the intimacy of the family.

I have always been indifferent to external forms. It's not so bad now, but for the first forty years of my life I was dressed like a poor man: my shoes were 'ventilated'. I had no tie, and safety-pins served

*as buttons. I spent all my time in the mountains. I despised 'forms', and that was a mistake, for form is something divine. Beautiful content should be contained in a beautiful form, and that means that I was not living in perfection! Form is really important... For me the inner reality was all that mattered, and people did not invite me because I was not 'presentable'. Actually, I did get invitations... but always alone. Everyone liked me... but not in front of others. Their affection was hidden. It was this that taught me how strange people are: however stupid you may be, if you respect the forms you will always be welcome. No one will mind about your brain. They will say, 'What does his brain matter as long as he's well dressed?'*⁶

At the beginning of the 20th century, the University of Sofia consisted of six or seven faculties housed in several old buildings. Another institution, the Bulgarian Academy, offered additional faculties, and it was here that Mikhaël regis-

tered for courses in mathematics, a discipline which gave him great satisfaction as it corresponded so well to his sense of order and perfection. He also studied astronomy, drawn by its close relationship with mathematics, and spent hours striving to decipher the correspondences between the two disciplines. But his memory for figures was not good, and he too easily forgot the formulae he needed. Less than a year later, realizing that he had little hope of passing his exams, he abandoned mathematics and transferred to a different faculty.

This time he chose the faculty of Historical and Comparative Linguistics, where he took courses in philosophy, education, and psychology. His thirst for knowledge was as lively as ever. He read a great deal and studied sufficiently to pass his exams, but in fact he spent little time at the university. In his eyes, the true university was 'that of Peter Deunov, for it was there that one learned the essential truths valid for all eternity'. All his spare time was

devoted to meditation and contemplation. 'For me', he would say later, 'it was a question of life or death.' But he kept all this inner work to himself. He never even talked to Peter Deunov about it.

Throughout his years of higher studies, it was the great philosophical tenets of initiatic science that guided him. The sun was his guarantor of life, light was his shield and only weapon, for in his eyes light was a living spirit.

At the same time, the mountains continued to attract him irresistibly. He could never ignore the siren-song of the summits, and when the call became too insistent, he threw books, food, and a few warm clothes into a satchel and left the town. Free as air, he would spend a few days on Mount Vitosha or even a few weeks at Rila. His love of trees had never diminished, and the long climb through the forests gave him profound joy.

Mikhaël's unusual behavior irritated his

professors who censured him severely. One of them, hostile to Peter Deunov's disciples on principle, excluded him from his lectures and barred him from the examinations. Fortunately, he soon repented this decision—which would have prevented Mikhaël from completing his studies—and authorized him to appear before the examiners.

Mikhaël, well aware of the importance of a degree, passed his exams and chose for the subject of his thesis the aspirations of the young. His research led him to interview a great many students who readily confided in him their hopes and plans for the future. Listening with interest to what they told him, he noticed that very few 'wanted to serve God or work for the good of humanity'.

After receiving diplomas in philosophy, psychology, and education Mikhaël continued to frequent the university. Stimulated by curiosity, he moved freely from one faculty to another, exploring the dif-

ferent disciplines, following courses in medicine, chemistry, and physics. He spent so many years at the university that his friends nicknamed him 'the eternal student'.

* * *

During those student years, as always, the events that assumed the greatest importance in Mikhaël's eyes concerned his life as a disciple. One such event stood out among others. Soon after his return to Sofia, Peter Deunov gave him a special test that he reserved for the boldest of his disciples: the ascent of Mount Musala alone on a moonless night, without a lantern.

'The experience will help you to understand many things,' said the Master.

Mikhaël waited for a night without a moon before setting out. The dense darkness and the quality of silence created an atmosphere of dread as he groped his way through the forest, hoping not to lose his

way. Aware of the danger from wild boars, bears, and wolves, he was also constantly mindful of the steep ravine that bordered the trail. One false step and he would fall. Suddenly he sensed that he had strayed from the path. Poignantly conscious of his vulnerability and his isolation, he paused and began to pray.

Believe me, in such moments our prayers become very fervent. I felt that I had never prayed like that before. A few seconds later, I saw a light which lit up the path for about two yards in front of me. From that moment I walked on in the light, singing and full of joy. I felt something moving within me as though a new current was flowing through me.⁷

After climbing for several hours, he came to a sudden halt as he heard the deep bay-ing of dogs. How could he defend himself with only a stick against enraged dogs? To retreat would only incite them to attack. Standing perfectly still, he listened to them coming nearer and fixed his mind

on thoughts of light and the powers of the invisible world. Never one to remain long in a state of indecision or fear, he told himself, 'What must happen will happen!' and advanced resolutely toward the increasingly ferocious barking. What happened next was over in seconds. Suddenly he saw two mastiffs the size of small donkeys bounding toward him. Summoning every ounce of strength and will-power, he thrust his right hand forward with extraordinary energy, the two first fingers pointing straight at them. At the same moment he felt an electrical current surge from his whole being, and sensed the presence of invisible entities all around. The dogs gave one agonized howl as they were picked up and thrown to the ground by a terrifying force and left cowering where they fell, their eyes fixed on the ground.

Once he had regained his breath, Mikhaël spoke soothingly to the dogs, and when he felt sure that they would no longer try to attack him, he relaxed with

renewed gratitude and joy. But suddenly, he felt terribly tired, as though all his strength had drained away through his hand. Laboriously, he started to walk again, only to stop moments later, unable to continue. He sat down on a rock to pray and thank out loud the invisible entities whose presence he sensed and who had accompanied and protected him. After a short rest he slowly set off again, emerged at last from the forest, climbed the stony slopes and reached the summit just as the sun was rising. There, on the highest spot in the country, with the innumerable peaks all around, he thanked God with his whole soul.

That experience taught me that a great many of the trials and tribulations of life are sent by the invisible world with the purpose of teaching us to rely on our inner spiritual strength.⁸

This ordeal was not the only one Peter Deunov imposed on Mikhaël in those years. He gave him all kinds of harsh

tasks. On several occasions he sent him to work in remote hamlets that could only be reached on foot. More than once, as Mikhaël approached a village, he was attacked by fierce dogs. The peasants, often so uncouth and ignorant that they did not even know how to make bread, would let him sleep in a hut or in a corner of a barn. His mission was to live with them for a time, to talk to them and teach them things that would help them to evolve. Little by little he became their friend, their brother. Sometimes the relationships became so close that people who had seemed incapable of emotion were moved to tears as they confided in him.

In spite of the great distances, Mikhaël continued to attend Peter Deunov's talks in Sofia. Even in winter, braving rain or snow, with only sandals on his feet, he trudged miles through forests infested with wolves and wild boars.

One day, Peter Deunov manifested his

satisfaction with him, saying: 'You have changed your skin.' Although he ignored Mikhaël in public, Peter Deunov continued to give him an occasional precious indication, an expression of approval or support. Each time he made one of his laconic remarks, Mikhaël had to ponder it at length to discern the hidden meaning. On this occasion the allusion was to an inner transformation, a purification that expressed itself in a visible radiance. Despite the undemonstrative nature of their relationship, the mysterious and precious bond that had existed from their first encounter was still there. Mikhaël was extremely sensitive to Peter Deunov's reactions, and it seems that this was fully reciprocated. Imperceptible though it was, the Master was never indifferent to Mikhaël; nothing he said or did went unnoticed.

Notes

1. 'The Law of Affinity: Peace', in *Cosmic Moral Law*.
2. 'Rise Above the Clouds', in *The Splendour of Tiphareth*.
3. 'Working with Light', in *Light is a Living Spirit*.
4. November 1, 1966.
5. April 25, 1943.
6. May 15, 1947.
7. See his own account of this incident: 'The Master Peter Deunov', in *The Second Birth: Love, Wisdom, Truth*.
8. Ibid.

7



The Seven Lakes of Rila

Although the summer camps in the Rila mountains were called ‘holiday camps’, the activities had little in common with the ordinary idea of a holiday. It is true that the participants were there for a refreshing break from the work and wor-

ries of everyday life, but their primary motive was to continue their apprenticeship with their spiritual Master in the ideal conditions offered by the mountains. As the years passed, the duration of these camps was extended from a few days to a number of weeks. After a month or two in the mountains, the campers returned home renewed and purified.

In later years, Mikhaël evoked with enthusiasm the special ambience that reigned in these camps. Gathering in the village of Samokov at the foot of the mountains, the campers strapped on their knapsacks and began the long ascent to the Seven Lakes, while a train of mules transported tents and kitchen equipment. Seven or eight hours of hiking and climbing through forests of evergreens and up steep slopes strewn with boulders, brought them to the first lake at an altitude of 7,500 feet. A little higher, near the second lake, they pitched their tents among the clumps of dwarf pines

called *kleks*, the only shrubs to survive at this height.

For the contemplation of the sunrise, Peter Deunov had chosen a craggy spur of rock above the camp which he named the Summit of Prayer. Under a translucent dawn sky it seemed to thrust out its mass like the prow of some great ship silhouetted in space. Every morning at day-break, awoken by the music of a violin, the campers arose in silence, washed and dressed in the icy air of their tents or by the lake. As the sky grew lighter, they climbed up among the enormous boulders to the Summit where they settled down to meditate and wait for the sunrise. At first glimpse of the rising sun, they sang very softly one of Peter Deunov's songs in praise of light. The Master then talked quietly to them as the sun climbed slowly into the sky. Years later Mikhaël declared:

If you were to ask me when the best moment of my life had been, the moment

when I had experienced the most wonderful sensations, I would say that it was at sunrise in the mountains at Rila.¹

These days in the mountains were very full. The campers did a great deal of arduous walking, climbing endlessly up and down the steep slopes among the boulders and the twisted branches of the dwarf conifers. They thought nothing of hiking for an hour every day to reach the level ground near one of the higher lakes, where they practiced the movements of a symbolic dance called the 'Paneurythmy'.

The Paneurythmy, created by Peter Deunov, is a round. As the dancers turn slowly to the sound of music, it evokes the great round of the universe in which is manifested the ebb and flow of life. The simple, graceful movements are designed to unite the dancers alternately with heavenly and terrestrial energies. Peter Deunov defined the dance as 'a conscious exchange between man and the forces of nature'. Every morning, accompanied by

a small group of musicians, he positioned himself in the center of an immense circle formed by the hundreds of dancers. Here and there voices could be heard singing with the orchestra in spontaneous harmonizations that rose and fell in rhythm with the dance.

After the Paneurythmy, everyone went back to the camp for a communal meal, serving themselves from the enormous cauldrons steaming in the shelter of the makeshift kitchen. During the rest of the day, every spare moment was taken up with physical work, much of it very strenuous: meals had to be prepared for the whole camp, food supplies fetched from the village below, newcomers met halfway and guided to the camp. Among other things, the men built a stone shelter roofed with slate and piled up slabs of stone to serve as tables or as benches overlooking the lake that Peter Deunov had named the Lake of Contemplation. Evening found the campers exhausted, but the mountains had a mysterious hold

on them and filled their hearts with such profound joy that fatigue and discomfort were forgotten. They had eyes only for the beauty of the light that transfigured the summits.

Peter Deunov often led the campers on excursion to one of the surrounding peaks, and at least once each summer to the summit of Mount Musala. Before leaving, he explained how to walk all day without tiring, then, at the head of the group, he set out at such a pace that those behind were hard put to it to keep up.

In this notoriously unstable mountain climate, menacing clouds often began to gather just as the hikers were ready to leave, and although those who were fearful of being soaked to the skin sometimes protested, Peter Deunov rarely heeded their complaints. In rain, snow, or squalls, after only a few hours' sleep, they set off for the summits. There were days when the lightning fell all around, the rain streamed over their bodies and the elec-

tricity in the air became almost unbearable, but their guide strode on without faltering. His disciples, accepting it as a trial of endurance, followed him stoically. And as most of these excursions lasted from ten to fourteen hours, they were constantly called on to surpass their own limits. Once back in camp, exhausted but happy, they gratefully quenched their thirst with hot water that had been prepared in the great cauldrons and samovars. In the mountains, hot water was of great importance, a panacea for colds, fevers, and every kind of malaise.

The task of making tea was entrusted to a brother called Tseko. Every now and then, the campers were startled by the sudden whistling of a samovar, and turning saw this brother climbing the hillside, the lighted samovar on his back. Tseko had the face of a brute and a heart of gold. Although he was almost illiterate, he dreamed of being a poet, and sometimes recited his compositions before the entire camp. His verses were often so ridiculous

that they were greeted with laughter, but one could not help loving this man so full of gentle goodness. Surprisingly, after several years of persevering efforts to compose poems about the sun, the birds, the spring, he became a true poet. Mikhaël, who loved and understood him, told how, at the end of an evening around the fire, Tseko once stood up, and much to the amusement of the campers, sang one of his compositions.

Everybody laughed, but it was so beautiful that the next day the mountains resounded to the sound of that song [...] The example of Tseko should make you reflect. You all have talents and qualities but fear prevents you from manifesting them.... Put them to the test. ... Everything is worth doing: life demands that your talents be brought to fruition.²

Judging from what Mikhaël would say later about these mountain camps, it is obvious that they were the scene of some unforgettable moments in his life. For

him, mountains represented a link between heaven and earth. Everything he did in this setting—walking, climbing, immersing himself in a lake—had repercussions in his inner life and created a bond between himself and the beings of subtler planes.

We have not forgotten his childhood passion for springs. To contemplate the water of a spring bubbling from the ground still gave him great happiness, and he was overjoyed to find that Peter Deunov shared his enthusiasm. The Master often asked some of the men to clear away the dead leaves and grass blocking the mountain springs so that the music of the crystal-clear water could be heard flowing freely. He also asked them to build stone bridges over the many small streams. Few understood why they were asked to do this kind of work, and were often surprised at the sense of satisfaction it gave them. 'In reality,' Mikhaël explained later, 'the Master was clearing debris from his disciples as well as from

the springs, and building bridges between the brothers.'

One of these springs was the main source of water for the camp. A constant stream of campers drank from it or filled their buckets and saucepans. In one of those significant gestures he occasionally made toward Mikhaël, Peter Deunov asked him to design a symbol to be carved and put in place as a channel for the water. The resulting sculpture is a symbol of Aquarius: a white stone channel representing two hands, from which, to this day, flows the pure spring water.

Fire, like water, had a vital role to play in life in the mountains. Each evening, the campers gathered around a paved area where the camp fire blazed. Warmed by the fire, their faces lit by the leaping flames, they sang, told of their personal experiences, recited poems, or gave little concerts.

Later, we would fall asleep beneath the

*starlit sky until it was time to get up, very early in the morning, to communicate with another fire, the fire of the sun. We went to sleep by the fire, we woke to fire, the whole day was a feast of fire, and our lives were illuminated.*³

In the evenings around the fire—as during meals or while out on an excursion—Peter Deunov often closed his eyes and meditated for a long time, sometimes for an hour or more, to accustom his disciples to do the same. Before withdrawing into his own meditation, Mikhaël often looked at the Master and asked himself: ‘Where is he? What is he thinking about?’ Realizing that Peter Deunov never put the whole of his knowledge into words, Mikhaël tried to capture the thoughts that illuminated his glance, to see people and things from his point of view. Using the exercises he had developed earlier to penetrate the minds of Jesus, Buddha, and Hermes Trismegistus, he now attempted to penetrate the mind of Peter Deunov. When in his presence

he listened attentively to what he was saying, and afterwards, when he was alone, continued to imagine that he was 'in Peter Deunov's head'. Little by little he sensed that 'things were becoming clearer' and he was beginning to discover his thought processes.

When he wanted to be alone to meditate, he would climb above the camp where he had found a particularly beautiful spot. For someone so sensitive to cold, it must have required great will-power and endurance to continue his spiritual exercises in all weathers, at an altitude of more than 8,000 feet. He often spent the night up there under the stars, sometimes alone, sometimes with a friend. As darkness fell, he settled down between the dwarf trees on a makeshift bed of pine needles, and warmly wrapped in his blankets stretched out to contemplate the stars until a deep peace filled his whole being. The memory of his grandmother often came back to him: she had helped so many sick people to regain their

health, not only by treating them with herbal infusions, but also by exposing them to the light of the stars.

What was the effect of starlight on the human body? At this altitude, the countless points of light shining in the dark velvet sky were indescribably pure. Contemplating them, Mikhaël sought answers from them. Intoxicated by their beauty, he linked himself to the cosmic forces and entities whose presence he felt so strongly.

I experienced such immense, such ecstatic sensations that I was far, far from the earth. I was carried off to regions in which I felt and understood that there is one thing in life which surpasses all others, and that is to be united to the cosmic Spirit which is everywhere.⁴

Recalling these moments in later years, he often spoke in the name of his companions as well as his own, perhaps because of the intense communion that united

them. 'There were nights,' he once said, 'when we were out of our minds with ecstasy and wonder!' At the same time, he added, their great joy had made them almost sad because they could not share it with the whole world.

Mikhaël's whole being was inhabited by one essential idea, that of helping his human brothers and sisters to achieve peace in their own hearts so that it might be realized in human society. Often, seeing the extraordinary peace that reigned at night, he was seized by a feeling of astonishment at the thought of all the antipathy and resentment between individuals, all the wars and acts of revenge. Seen from the mountain heights, the conflicts between individuals and nations seemed extraordinarily puerile. The memory of the cosmic music he had heard at the age of seventeen was always alive within him, and he reflected that if human beings so often treat each other as enemies, it is because they do not know each other. They do not know that they

are all members of one family, of one symphony orchestra.

One night he kept thinking of his friend Pasal, a young actor who often appeared in Shakespeare's plays in a theater in Sofia. A few months previously, while he was playing the part of a hero, one of the actors thrust a dagger into his heart, and Mikhaël who had been watching closely, had felt an intense pain as though his friend were really and truly dying. That night Mikhaël could not sleep. He kept thinking about his friend, convinced that he was going to die very soon. He was sure that the pain he had felt had been a presentiment. Shortly after that Pasal told him about a dream:

'I was in the next world, among a great throng of people all dressed in white. Some of them started to question me: they wanted to know about the place I had come from, about the world and the beautiful things that happened there, and whether I had many friends. "Yes, I have

friends,” I told them, “but there are also many people I don’t like—people I hate, in fact.” Then they looked at me in astonishment and said: “You mean to say that hatred still exists there? But have you learned nothing yet?”

Pasal had an anxious expression as he asked:

‘Mikhaël, do you think that dream means that I’m going to die?’

But Mikhaël, who had never felt able to tell Pasal about the presentiment he had had that night at the theater, simply said: ‘It was only a dream.’ A few months later Pasal had fallen ill and was soon dead. With all his gifts he was now no more than a sad memory.

That evening, as Mikhaël thought of the peace he longed for in the world, he kept remembering what the people in Pasal’s dream had said: ‘But have you learned nothing yet?’ Human beings have to *learn* peace. We all have to transform violence,

hatred, and ill-will and make room in ourselves for harmony. Stretched out on his back with the stars glittering above him, Mikhaël worked mentally for peace in the world.

One night, enraptured by all that splendor, an idea occurred to him: he imagined that the stars had declared war on each other, a magnificent, glorious war in which they were spraying each other with bullets of light. This notion suggested a new spiritual exercise, and he spent hours mentally pouring light into the world, until he fell into the untroubled sleep of a child. At times he was caught up in ecstasy and experienced divine sensations that bore him far from the earth. Often, after a night on the mountain side, he awakened at dawn to find himself covered with snow. Chilled but happy, he jumped up, collected his blankets and hurried down to the camp in time for the sunrise.

One day he decided to attempt an

extremely difficult climb on a seemingly inaccessible summit: he wanted to see whether, in the course of an arduous exercise of this kind, he would find within himself something that would warn him not to continue, the something that we call intuition. For this experiment he chose a particularly beautiful peak formed of a multitude of smooth, vertical ridges. No footholds were visible, and yet, inching his way from one knife-edge to the next, he always managed to find some slight crack or irregularity to hold on to. As he clung to the rock face, he prayed, linked himself to God, and listened to his intuition. Slowly and laboriously he climbed, searching the surface for every tiny asperity, and moving foot or hand forward only when he heard the inner voice telling him to advance. Thus, at last, he reached the top.

The temerity that was such a notable part of Mikhaël's temperament was always suggesting new experiments, always urging him to devise new and more difficult

tests designed to lead to self-knowledge and self-mastery.

There is a way out of every situation, and we have to look for it. It is a magnificent thing to venture out, to throw oneself into action. Spiritual people are often hesitant and indecisive. They keep asking themselves: 'Is this right? Is this the way?' They spend years hesitating, not daring to enjoy the splendors of the new life. Did you know that in ancient times initiation was given not to those whose hearts were full of goodness, but to the audacious? Those who were not daring were told that they were not ready for initiation.⁵

Mikhaël's constant excursions to the mountain summits were symbolic of his aspirations to attain the heights of the spiritual life. In the twenty years of his discipleship he climbed Mount Musala nineteen times, often in difficult circumstances and always with the specific idea of doing a spiritual work on the highest

peak of the Balkans. It was here as nowhere else that his contemplative soul could open out and expand, that he was conscious of the presence of powerful invisible entities which stimulated and sustained him. It was here on the mountain heights that he found a deep sense of peace. Here he understood that the only truly important thing in life was to be one with the cosmic Spirit.

His years of spiritual work were often rewarded with gifts straight from heaven: stones became animated and luminous; a fruit was transformed into a receptacle for divine forces. This was the case one summer morning on Mount Musala. It was a glorious day in August, and Mikhaël and his friend Dimitri—the one-time anarchist who had become a peace-loving brother—had decided to climb Mount Musala before joining the camp at Rila. Striding along energetically, they felt young, vigorous, and full of joy. After walking for several hours in heat that was becoming increasingly intense, they

paused to rest and refresh themselves. Taking a pear each from their knapsacks, they sat down and began to eat slowly, savoring it as long as possible. Ordinary though it was, the action triggered in Mikhaël's soul an ecstatic communion with nature. Later, speaking for both his companion and himself, he said, 'It was an ocean of sweetness that swept over us, as though God himself had been in that fruit.' And he added that thanks to that fruit they had been 'transported to paradise and the experience opened immense horizons.' His consciousness, he said, was awakened, and he was 'filled with all the light of the cosmos'.

Often, throughout his life, Mikhaël spoke of an awakening of his consciousness as though it had been sleeping until then. The fact is that when he examined his state of consciousness he was never satisfied. For him, true love, peace, and initiation were all states of consciousness, and he was insatiable, always thirsting for God to pervade and possess his

whole being. He worked tirelessly to replace in himself all that was old and worn, and to become one with the divine beings whom he called on ceaselessly.

Notes

1. March 29, 1951.
2. July 2, 1950.
3. 'Evening Vigils Round the Fire II', in *The Fruits of the Tree of Life*.
4. October 26, 1946.
5. May 9, 1944.

8



*The
Wondrous
Powers of
Thought
and
Word*

It must have been in the winter of 1926 that Mikhaël found work as a mason to pay for his tuition and help his family. His crew was assigned to the site of a new building which was still open and exposed to bitter winter winds. Wearing only a thin wind-breaker and trousers with a large tear at the knee, Mikhaël felt his leg gradually becoming numb under the bite of the icy wind. By the end of the day, one knee was so swollen that he could no longer walk and had to be helped home.

Finding himself obliged to stay in bed, he decided to take advantage of his forced immobility to turn to his favorite occupations. The days slipped by unnoticed, gradually becoming weeks, as he immersed himself in the study of astrology. Once he felt that he had sufficient knowledge, he drew up his own chart, and it was here that a painful surprise awaited him: his horoscope depicted a crude, mediocre human being whose character had nothing in common with

his own. Whereas the quest for God had characterized him from childhood, his chart showed no hint of spiritual aspirations, no trace of the ecstasies or spiritual revelations he had already known. The fact is that he had forgotten something he had known as a child: when he and his mother had arrived in Varna in 1907, he had been registered as one year older than his true age, so that he would be accepted at the school. This made it impossible to calculate his true horoscope.

Not before he was fifty years old did his mother remind him that he was a year younger than he had thought. Even then, the details were indefinite, for his mother was not sure of the exact time of his birth. She remembered only that it had been some time after midnight on January 31, 1900. The circumstances of Mikhaël's birth, in fact, have always been somewhat obscure, due to the conditions in the country, the mentality of its inhabitants and the burning of his village, during

which all official documents were destroyed. Also, at the beginning of the 20th century in the mountain villages of Macedonia, years and days were reckoned according to the weather or the seasons. Marriages, births, and deaths were dated by natural events rather than by the calendar. It is as though Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov was not destined to be circumscribed by time or defined by astrological analysis.

At the age of twenty-six, however, the negative implications of this false horoscope constituted a new challenge for him. Much as he was drawn to this science, to its view of the universe and the web of relations linking individual creatures and creation as a whole, he could not help but doubt its reliability when he attempted to draw up his own birth-chart. For a serious astrologer—especially one who studies spiritual or holistic astrology—a birth-chart is a basic tool, a composite frame of reference through which to view one's life and gain spiritual

understanding. Mikhaël eventually found some consolation in the idea that he had perhaps managed to neutralize the negative aspects of his birth-chart by his intense spiritual work. In any event, he continued to study astrology and to meditate on the great laws on which it is based until, ten years later, he was considered the foremost specialist in the country and was consulted by several prominent persons.

In the meantime, his knee was not getting better. One day, some friends who often came to visit him decided to chivvy him into playing a more active role in his recovery.

‘Why don’t you try to heal yourself?’ they asked.

‘How can I?’ Mikhaël responded.

‘By the power of thought! You are perfectly capable.’

‘I would have to concentrate for a very

long time,' replied Mikhaël, 'and I am too busy.'

The fact was that his knee was painful only when he tried to walk, and, deeply absorbed in his study of astrology, he was quite happy to stay in his room and work. Also, in what he thought to be his birth-chart he found an indication of a health problem that would prevent him from walking, and this motivated him to devote hours to prayer and meditation in a desire to purify himself. But after a month of being confined to his room, he decided he had had enough. His knee was still purple and badly swollen, and he resolved to try to heal it 'by the power of thought, by love, by the spirit'.

Summoning all his mental resources, he created a beam of brilliant light and focused it on the swollen knee. After concentrating for a long time, he gradually began to feel a gentle warmth followed by the burning sensation of light penetrating his knee. He continued in

this way until at last he sensed a movement, a tremendous influx of force in his very bones. Within a few minutes he fell asleep and awoke next morning to find his leg completely healed. Surprisingly, he himself was astonished by his success, even though this was not the first time he had experienced something of the kind; he had often achieved spectacular results through the powers of thought. But, as some of his friends remarked, for Mikhaël everything was always new. He never became blasé, or considered himself an expert.

All the evidence indicates that this period of his life was one of immense, dynamic energy. His whole being was expanding and he was continually discovering new possibilities within himself. At one point he discovered that he had the same gift of healing as his mother and grandmother. And when he read a biography of François Schlater, an Alsatian who had healed people by touching their hands, he was so moved that he almost

aspired to imitate him. But in fact, the means he already used with great conviction was thought. For him, thought was the most powerful of all instruments.

When a friend told him about a young man who had hurt his leg and whose wound was so badly ulcerated that nothing seemed to do any good, Mikhaël made up his mind to try and help him. Filling a bottle with water from a spring, he concentrated on imbuing it with the healing elements he knew to be present in nature. He then gave the young man a small glass of it and told him to drink some every day until the bottle was empty. The following day the ulcerated leg was completely healed, without so much as a scar.

Each time Mikhaël discovered new gifts or powers in himself he was faced with the same choice: whether to use those powers for his own purposes or to dedicate them unconditionally to the service of God. Peter Deunov, who was well aware of this, probably intended to give

him one more occasion to make that choice when he showed him a place where treasure was hidden. It was during a brotherhood camp on Mount Vitosha, and after leading Mikhaël quite a distance from the camp Peter Deunov told him that a great treasure was buried just beneath their feet. Then, without another word, he turned and went back to his tent, leaving Mikhaël to make what he would of it.

Peter Deunov was known to be exceptionally clairvoyant and Mikhaël must have been very impressed, not only by this unexpected revelation but also by this proof of his Master's faith in him. Did he have any doubts about the existence of the treasure? Probably not, for it was perfectly plausible: it was common knowledge that highway robbers had buried gold in various regions of Bulgaria. In fact, treasure hunters were numerous in the vicinity of the ancient routes linking the north and south of the country. Mikhaël stood for a few minutes

and watched the figure of Peter Deunov as he returned rapidly to the camp; then, without a backward look, he followed him. Speaking of the incident years later, he said: 'The other brothers could not understand my behavior. They never forgave me for not showing them where that treasure was hidden.'

On another occasion Peter Deunov showed Mikhaël how to make a dowsing instrument equipped with a small copper rod with which to find gold in the ground. Mikhaël used it once, when he was dining in the home of some wealthy friends. His host hid some gold coins in different places throughout the house, and to the amazement of the family and their guests, he found them all.

The discovery of such a possibility was enough to turn many heads, but Mikhaël never used it again. What purpose could it serve except to exploit and dominate his fellow human beings? Had he not already renounced such use of his psy-

chic powers at the age of eighteen, when he had refused the offer of the retired consul? His exceptional gifts could easily have assured him a brilliant career as healer, clairvoyant, or astrologer, but he knew that his role in life lay in a different direction. As soon as he sensed that a particular discipline would not enable him to help others to free themselves and overcome their difficulties, he abandoned it. He could easily imagine the depth of slavery to which he would be reduced if he sought to exploit those glittering powers.

Although for many years already, Mikhaël had abandoned any desire to use his exceptional powers for his own ends, he had not tried to stifle them, and he did not fear them. If he saw that his powers of concentration and what he called the power of thought could be used constructively, he had no hesitation in doing so.

One day, on an excursion with Dimitri,

they reached a village late at night. It was completely dark and not a light could be seen anywhere. The two young men made their way as best they could through the village and the vineyard beyond, hoping to find somewhere to sleep. Groping their way forward, they realized that deep ravines and clumps of thorn bushes made it a dangerous place. Mikhaël gripped his friend's arm, saying: 'I know it's very dark and we have no-one to show us the way, but we're going to find the best spot, the cleanest and most sheltered...'

In the darkness he could barely see Dimitri's eyes.

'And how are we going to do that?' asked his friend.

Mikhaël's only reply was to turn slowly around, sending out mental waves of harmony.

Many years later he spoke of the impor-

tance of understanding how waves function:

When we emit thought waves they reach out and then return to us. They are like bats: if you let bats fly loose in a room with wires stretched across it in all directions, they will never hit the wires. Bats have highly developed antennae which, thanks to the airwaves produced by their flight, warn them of the presence of obstacles. [...] If you understand these laws—which also govern the waves you emit—you too can sense the obstacles in your way. Before going forward, you must send out waves in all directions so as to explore the ground. If you perceive disorder, chaos in one direction, do not go that way; but if you sense waves of harmony you can go forward safely: it means that the way is clear. So on that day I turned my hand in all directions until I found the best way. Of course, you cannot do this unless you have trained yourself. You will not succeed at your first attempt. But I was already trained... So I

told my friend, 'Let's stay here.' The next morning we found that we were, indeed, in the best place. That brother has had immense faith ever since!'

Mikhaël's choices were deeply sincere and his desire to use his gifts for spiritual ends was so intense that he was always trying to infect his friends with his own convictions. It was with sadness that he observed one of his fellow-workers, an exceptional young man who had discovered a natural gift for healing through iridology and used it to become rich and seduce girls and young women who came to him for treatment. For Mikhaël, it was not one's gifts and talents that mattered—however spectacular and lucrative—but the way one lived. The only way to help and enlighten others was to be kind, loving, and generous. When he saw that a friend needed help, he often suggested simple but effective methods.

It was in this spirit that he suggested that several of them might do well to take a

new name, in order to trigger an inner transformation. He had long been interested in the meaning of proper names and in the influence of their vibrations, which, it seemed to him, could be as powerful as the vibrations of colors. A few years later he was struck by the results. One of his friends in particular, a violent person whose original name had a very negative meaning, was gradually transformed after adopting a new one.

Eventually, however, Mikhaël began to realize that by taking the responsibility of giving someone a new name he was perhaps linking himself too closely to their destiny and making some of their problems his own, and he abandoned the practice. It was only many years later, when he had his own followers, that he occasionally gave one of them a new name, and it was always for a specific reason. Similarly, he decided to do no more Tarot readings for anybody but himself, for, as he was to say later, such methods were too easy. They might be helpful for a

time but it was not possible to transform people by those means. 'On the contrary,' he explained, 'it is only their own efforts that can help them to advance and perfect themselves.'

* * *

In Varna, Mikhaël's mother had always been the confidant and source of consolation for her neighbors, the person they instinctively turned to for help in their troubles. Many of those who were destitute or bed-ridden were cheered by a visit from Dolia, who arrived with a gift of bread or a cake hidden under her apron. One day she did something that was the talk of the neighborhood for a long time after. One of her neighbors, a married man with a growing family, needed to add on a room to his house but was unable to pay for the building permit. The room was almost finished when the police got wind of the affair, and news went around that they were on their way to demolish it.

Filled with compassion for the unfortunate family, Dolia quickly decided to champion their cause. Collecting all the children she could find, she gathered them around her in the room, hung a photograph of King Boris on the wall, and waited. When the police burst in, they found themselves confronted by this little woman surrounded by a crowd of laughing children. 'Madam,' they said; 'we have a warrant.'

'We're not moving from here,' replied Dolia calmly. 'Do you have the courage to pull the room down around us?'

Disconcerted, the men looked at each other and after a moment the officer motioned for them to leave. Once outside they did their best to conceal their discomfiture from the crowd that had gathered in the street. After this defeat the matter was dropped, for the police, knowing Dolia's devotion to her neighbors and the affection and respect they had for her,

had no desire to stir up unrest in the Turkish quarter.

Mikhaël's occasional visits were a great comfort to his mother, for she missed him very much. She did not really understand why he continued to be Peter Deunov's disciple, but to her family and friends she continued to say: 'That's where he belongs. He's happy there.'

For his part, when he arrived in Varna and saw her tired and preoccupied by so many difficulties, he often scolded her gently and told her not to take everybody's problems so much to heart.

The friends of Mikhaël's sisters were always much impressed by this serious young man of twenty-six who turned up from time to time with his violin tucked under his arm. He knew so many fascinating things about physiognomy music and the influence of nature on human beings. Seventy years later, one of them confided:

I was fifteen when I saw Mikhaël for the

first time. He was so sunburned that I thought he looked like a Hindu. He had a beautiful, mellow voice. I was studying a theorem about a triangle, and for something to say, I talked to him about it, whereupon he explained the symbolic meaning of the triangles he saw on my face, full-face and profile. That day I learned a good deal about myself and my character!

Mikhaël also played the violin with great feeling, and although his family admitted that he was not a virtuoso, they used to say that there was so much love in the way he played that several people were healed when he played something specially for them. The fact is that although music was always a source of joy to him, it was also a tool. In Sofia, he still lived with the friends who had given him a room when he first arrived. As before in Varna, this gave him the occasion to integrate music into his spiritual work. One of the family who was a professional pianist would spend hours at the piano, and as

before in Varna, Mikhaël would sit quietly in a corner of the room to listen. He had long thought of music as a great wind capable of bearing him to higher planes, and here was a golden opportunity to learn to use it more intensively than ever. As he listened, his eyes closed, he tried to discern the specific force emanating from each piece:

When we listen to a piece of music, we must first of all know whether it is a force for good or for ill; what it represents and what comparison it suggests. Is it like the wind or like thunder? Is it like a cataract or a waterfall tumbling down the mountainside? Is it like electricity? Or heat? Whatever the energy it emits you must learn to use it. If it suggests the wind, you can imagine that you are on a ship in full sail. If it suggests electricity, you can use it to set in motion your spiritual 'appliances', and so on.²

He often joined other friends who were musicians and spent hours listening to

them. The friendships of his youth were without doubt extremely important to him. Speaking in later years of some of these profound and sincere relationships, he would not hesitate to say, 'We had great love for each other.' His friend Ivan was an exceptionally gifted musician and his improvisations on the guitar were often a source of inspiration to Mikhaël. Thanks to the subtle affinity, the mysterious emanations that flow between two beings, Ivan's music had the power to propel Mikhaël to the world of the spirit. For this he was always grateful, and for the rest of his life he had a special affection for the guitar because of the mystical experiences it had inspired in his youth.

The two young men, both disciples of Peter Deunov, certainly had a great deal in common. Their spiritual aspirations and the similarity of their tastes were a bond between them, and in addition to making music together they often experimented with telepathic communication. Unfortunately their friendship lasted

only a few years, for Ivan died young, and his premature death was one of the great griefs of Mikhaël's youth. Fifty years later he could still say: 'He is still with me.'

Mikhaël continued his lessons at the Conservatory of Music for several years. If truth be told, he was both happy and unhappy about his studies, for he was well aware of the flaws in his playing and knew that his fingers would never acquire the necessary agility. If only he had been able to learn as a child! Would he ever be a really good violinist? After a few years, recognizing that he would never be a virtuoso, he regretfully gave up his music lessons. He kept his violin and continued to play, but never in the same way.

His role in life was not that of a musician. Indeed, he had known for a long time that the higher beings who guided him 'put one obstacle after another in his way on the physical plane' in order to help him to 'grow on other planes'. Just as they had barred the route to a specialization in

mathematics, so they now made it clear that the world of musicians was not for him. In his mind he heard them murmuring: 'You cannot lead people to the ultimate goal by means of music. We will show you another realm, a realm in which there will also be music; a realm in which you can act effectively.' As soon as he acquiesced he felt a powerful urge to turn to inner realities; he was learning to recognize the music that is hidden in all things, animate and inanimate; everything became music.

The music of the spheres reverberated still in every fiber of his being, reminding him constantly that just as the stars, the trees, and the stones of the earth possess their own special note, human beings too are part of the great cosmic choir, of the great orchestra whose conductor is the Creator himself. Above all, he understood that he must learn to play as perfectly as possible on the instrument of his own being. One day, this resolve received an unexpected stimulus.

I was still a student in Sofia, and I was sitting reading in my room one evening, when I heard a violin being played in the street. It was so extraordinary that I went out to see who was playing like that. And what did I see? A gypsy, an old man dressed in rags and playing a violin... but what a strange kind of violin! It was a roughly made wooden box, with some strings stretched across it, and from those strings he drew sounds... sounds such as I had never heard in even the best concerts. I was amazed. And all the neighbors had come out on their balconies to listen. When he stopped playing I went up to him and asked 'Where does your violin come from?' 'I made it myself,' he replied. So then I asked him if I could have a closer look at it. It was simply a piece of wood that had been hollowed out, all crooked, and with a few strings on it. 'Would you sell it?' I asked. 'Oh, no, I'll never sell it!'

I kept thinking about this encounter: I could not understand how the gypsy

could produce such pure sounds from so crude an instrument. How astonished Stradivarius would have been, I thought. But then I realized that it is not necessarily the perfection of an instrument that counts. It's something else. It all depends on the person who plays it. I thought about this for a long time, and I concluded that I too could make music with an instrument as crude as mine—that is, myself.

The important thing is to have the will to triumph. We always complain that we don't have the right conditions, but that is just an excuse for doing nothing. If you knew how difficult the conditions of my life had been when I was young... You can have no idea! But I did not count on external conditions to bring me success—and that old gypsy only made me more convinced. I told myself, 'I must produce good things from my difficulties.' And what was it that I really wanted? To be useful. This is the overriding desire of my life: to be useful to others, to be

*able to help, console and comfort them. Night and day this desire is with me. It is this desire that inspires me to play my violin.*³

* * *

In the life and in the mission of Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov, thought was an instrument capable of tremendous realizations; silence was both a need and a means of communication; a look was a mysteriously potent means of exchange. But it was perhaps his use of speech, the power of words, that was the most important.

*The only thing I am concerned about is the wind... the Word. And the Word can achieve wonders. I have never cultivated a talent, I have used only words.*⁴

When he gave advice he spoke with great frankness, and that advice cut straight to the heart of a problem. We see an example of this in the way he helped a wealthy young friend who always looked

unhappy. Meeting him in the street one day, Mikhaël greeted him warmly, whereupon his friend exclaimed: 'You're looking very joyful. What has happened?'

'Oh, nothing much,' replied Mikhaël. 'I have just bought some joy. And it cost very little.'

Puzzled, his friend looked at him in silence. He knew that Mikhaël had almost nothing in the world, and yet he always seemed to be in a state of supernatural joy. It was incomprehensible. On the other hand, he knew him well enough to know that he was not teasing. With a sigh, the young man complained that he had spent a lot of money in his life without receiving any joy in return. Wordlessly, Mikhaël beckoned to him to come with him, and pausing some distance from a poor man selling buttons, shoelaces, and string, he murmured:

'Look! There's someone who sells joy. He stands there for hours in the cold, the

wind, and the rain, waiting for customers. Go up to him and buy something, shoe-laces for instance. Ask him how much they are, and if he says they are ten leva, give him fifty and tell him to keep the change. When he hears that he will think: 'Ah, there are still good people in the world.' His faith will be strengthened, and his joy will be yours too. It will reverberate within you all day long, and it will have cost you only a few cents.'

Thoughtfully, the young man looked at the peddler and suddenly a smile lit up his face. Mikhaël added: 'You can also pay a visit to someone who is ill. Take him some little gift. Tell him that all will be well; that God is merciful. If you comfort others and give them joy, you yourself will become joyful. But when you want to give joy to someone you must choose carefully, for not everybody is ready to accept it.'⁵

Mikhaël always spoke simply with words that went straight to people's hearts. His

methods were those of all white magicians who, having mastered and refined their own faculties and feelings, are capable of using the power of words to great effect. For him, words were powerful instruments capable of eliciting vivifying reactions.

One summer, before joining the brotherhood camp, he spent a few days with a friend in the little town of Dupnitsa to the west of Rila. One day, as he was on his way to join his friend for a picnic in the hills outside the town, he heard that two murderers were thought to have taken refuge there. Deciding that he ought to go and warn his friend, he walked on, never dreaming that the shirt he was wearing was similar to those of the assassins and would give rise to a serious misunderstanding. Hardly had he reached the hill when he found himself surrounded by a crowd of armed civilians and policemen who pointed their guns at him and ordered him to stop. He guessed from the expression on their faces that

they had taken him for one of the fugitives. Standing still, he waited for them to come closer before saying anything. And what he said was surprising: 'You have arms, but I have one that is better.'

The police, taken aback, looked at him suspiciously, and Mikhaël, taking advantage of their hesitation took out the New Testament he had slipped into his pocket that morning, saying: 'There you are. This is my weapon, and it is more powerful than yours.'

At once, it was as though a tableau, frozen in time, came back to life as the tension went out of all those threatening countenances. The police asked what he was doing on the hill and ordered him to accompany them to the station. As he walked along quietly, an inner voice kept repeating: 'Don't worry! Everything is going to be all right.' An hour later, his friend, who had also been arrested and then released, came to fetch him and stopped in the doorway in amazement to

see Mikhaël sitting in the middle of a group of policemen. He had brought out his New Testament again and was explaining a passage of the Gospels.

As they left the police station together, the two young men were greeted by the crowd that was waiting for news of the arrests. Learning that the 'assassin' was a visitor in the home of an honest citizen, they burst into applause. Mikhaël's popularity was assured, and in the days that followed there occurred a phenomenon that was often repeated in his life: his radiance and spontaneous kindness drew people to him, and suddenly everybody wanted to confide in him and ask his advice. For several days, his friend's house was besieged by people who seemed never to tire of listening to this young man whose eyes expressed such light and goodness, and who gave such clear and practical answers to their questions.

When he left Dupnitz to join the camp

at Rila, some of these new friends went to find him there to continue their questions and talk about their problems. Every year after that, whenever Mikhaël was at the camp near the Seven Lakes, his friends from Dupnitsa hiked up to see him.⁶

No one who had anything to do with Mikhaël ever suffered from boredom. In his eagerness to stimulate the flow of life within them, he was not afraid to irritate them or even, when necessary, to arouse their anger. Some of them never forgave him.

One day he had just reached the top of Mount Musala, when a Protestant pastor arrived and sat down beside him. Almost numb with cold, the man still managed to pull a Bible from his pocket saying: 'Do you know the Bible? Do you read it?' Without more ado he started to preach. For him, nothing was more important than the written word. The spirit seemed to have been forgotten, and he did his

best to convert Mikhaël to his own narrow views. After listening to him for a few minutes, Mikhaël lost patience and decided to shake him up a little and try to get him to reflect beyond the rigid limits of his militant theories. At one point, insisting that human beings were more important than books, even one inspired by God, he said:

Books can be destroyed, but they can always be written again, because the knowledge in them will always exist. I could throw this magnificent book into the ravine, but I would never throw you there. You are more important.

The pastor could not help but see his point. How often in history men had killed each other in the name of religion, in the name of a holy book! Fanaticism has always led to destruction. More and more, Mikhaël talked about the importance of turning to the universal principle that is the source of all religions, and to his mind it was the sun that was the vis-

ible representation of this vital principle. The language of light is universal; all human beings can understand it. It is the language of life.

Notes

1. June 3, 1946.
2. 'Art and Music II', in *Know Thyself : Jnana Yoga II*.
3. 'Préparer l'avenir de la jeunesse', in *La Pédagogie initiatique I*.
4. March 12, 1980.
5. See his own account: 'Love is Hidden in the Mouth', in *The Second Birth*.
6. See his own account : 'Gentleness and Humility', in *Spiritual Alchemy*.

9



*I Will
Give You
a
Precious
Stone*

The estate known as *Izgrev*—Rising Sun—was an extensive property recently

acquired by the fraternity of Peter Deunov. It lay on the outskirts of Sofia near Boris Gardens, one of the largest parks of the city. Close to the entrance they had built a white house with a lecture hall and a private room for the Master. Over the years, as more and more disciples wished to live together in a fraternal setting, several smaller houses had been built on the grounds. Each had a small flower garden, and the absence of fences or hedges preserved the overall impression of one large park. As the years passed the fraternity at Izgrev expanded, and more and more visitors came, sometimes from afar, to see this experiment in collective living and meet the Master whose influence was so great.

When Mikhaël approached Izgrev after a forty-five minute tram ride through the city, he could always tell whether Peter Deunov was there or not. When he was there, the very air seemed to vibrate, the enthusiasm that animated the community was palpable. When he was absent

it was as though the sun had disappeared from the sky. Mikhaël, struck by these observations, concluded that the presence of a Master kindles a more intense life in the hearts of his disciples.

Mikhaël had a room in the city and spent a good deal of his time in the mountains. He sensed that Peter Deunov wished him to remain at a distance from the brotherhood, and although he did not understand why, he was convinced that it was for the best. As he explained later, this distance helped him to pursue his spiritual exercises in a spirit of detachment. When he was younger had he not been a little too possessive in his first enthusiasm at having found the Master he had sought for so long? He admitted frankly that he had gone to see him very often to ask for advice, and in his passionate desire to advance as quickly as possible, to correct his defects and endure ordeals of purification, he had often stayed too long and taken up too much of the Master's time. He never tired of pleading with

him: 'Make me someone who will be of use to the whole world'. It was only later that he realized that the distance Peter Deunov had asked of him had been necessary so that his Master might 'write on him as on a living book, just as the sun writes with its rays on the earth'.

Each time he returned to Izgrev, his joy in the Master's presence was renewed. In their private conversations Mikhaël always had many questions for him, and as they talked he rejoiced in the power and love emanating from the Master. After so many years he understood the true nature of Peter Deunov's feelings towards him. Mikhaël was now thirty, and he continued to listen to every word his Master uttered with the loving attention he had shown at seventeen. His only desire was to deepen his understanding of the great truths of initiatic science. The Master had already imposed many ordeals on him, each more arduous than the last, but he had also let him see that he was satisfied with his work. Not many

years later it was Mikhaël he would choose from among thousands to carry his teaching to France.

At about this time, in his usual enigmatic way, Peter Deunov gratified Mikhaël with another public expression of approval. Interrupting himself in the middle of a lecture, he said: 'Brother Guirev is tuned to long waves, while brother Mikhaël operates on short waves.'

Brother Guirev was an intellectual, a veritable encyclopedia, who liked to show off his learning. In referring to the longer wavelength of red, the color of materialistic science, in contrast to the short waves of violet, which represent the spiritual world, Peter Deunov had described the most prominent and the most self-effacing members of the fraternity. The message was addressed to both, and having uttered it, he went on with his talk.

Violet light, that with the shortest wavelength and the highest frequency in the

solar spectrum, was a constant source of inspiration for Mikhaël. But two of the most important means he used to open his soul and spirit to the spiritual world were fasting and silence. More than once, while still a young man in Bulgaria, he followed a practice much recommended by Hindu Masters and spent thirty days in silent retreat.

In India, where such methods are used by those seeking inner revelations, the practice of silence requires great self-control. How much more so in a country where few understand the meaning of such a thing! Mikhaël had to muster all his inner strength and discipline. People questioned him, trying to get him to talk; children laughed and teased him. But the rewards of his silence must have been very precious, for he repeated the experience more than once during his twenty years with Peter Deunov.

* * *

Mikhaël continued to work, to refine and purify himself so as to be ready for what was to come. Some of his companions who had seen the ardor he had brought to his spiritual exercises for so many years wondered what he was preparing himself for. He himself had no clear notion of what it was, but with a determination which seemed almost sacred, he worked 'to become an instrument ever more flexible, ever more adept in the service of God'. As always, his over-riding desire was to become useful, not only to the few he lived and worked with, but to the whole of humanity.

Knowing that this time of preparation was essential and indispensable—it was also of absorbing interest—he spent twenty years with Peter Deunov. He was thirty years old but he still did not feel sufficiently prepared. Convinced that he still needed to purify his motives, to strengthen his will, to be more detached, he prayed ceaselessly to the invisible entities whose presence he sensed all around

him to give him 'the strength to work for the establishment of God's kingdom on earth'.

Friends, recognizing his wisdom and his experience in the spiritual life, often sought his advice. But to be Mikhaël's friend was never a bed of roses. He asked a great deal of himself, and although he was devoted to his friends and very sympathetic, he asked a great deal of them also. He tried to stimulate them and give them something vivifying. In his desire to help all those he met he was always genuinely interested in them.

Some people found his lofty ideals and his personal integrity uncomfortable and even exasperating. Some became angry. Others were envious of the apparently effortless influence he had on his companions. But most people sensed that he understood them and shared in their personal interests. His spontaneity and sincerity attracted friendship, and although his outspokenness sometimes brought

him enmity instead, he knew that he had to deal with that as we all have to deal with light and darkness; both are necessary to life. He would say later that he had tried to help and encourage those who called on him, but that he always directed them to Peter Deunov, always reminded them of the aspects of the teaching most likely to enlighten and encourage them.

He made no attempt to assume the role of teacher—he probably mistrusted himself in this respect—and recognizing that humility was essential to evolution, he preferred to remain in the background. When he went to Izgrev he did so discreetly. In spite of his profound understanding of Peter Deunov's teaching, he avoided the dinners and receptions to which many of his fellow disciples were invited to give talks.

The truth is that his whole life was oriented toward something very special and unusual. Since adolescence, his quest for God had led him to decide not to give

physical expression to his sexual energies but to transform them and make use of them for his spiritual development. Since then he had sought inspiration in beauty, in the subtler dimensions of life. His attitude toward the opposite sex was unequivocal, and his companions knew he had chosen to live in chastity. During much of his youth, however, he had had to endure the purifying fire of criticism and derision. His close friends knew how he spent his time. They respected and admired him. But others, unable to understand how anyone could sacrifice the things to which most people aspire, openly sneered at his options which seemed to them too radical.

Like all the great beings who had traveled this path before him, Mikhaël certainly had his own inner struggles, but never in his long life would he deny the reality of the human body created by God or its innate impulses, which are good or evil *depending only on the use we make of them*. He would say later that in his youth he

had been filled with a great effervescence which had sometimes frightened him, but that when he had discovered its profound meaning he could only thank heaven for all he had received. Several years earlier, Peter Deunov, who was well aware of this, had told him: 'For you, Mikhaël, a look is enough.'

He had not explained his remark, and Mikhaël had reflected at length on the meaning.

The Master had seen the roots, the structure, of my deepest nature and had summed it up in a single phrase: I need only a glance, a look. Later on, I often used a glance and I discovered some important laws or, to be more accurate, I discovered how to look in such a way as to sanctify oneself, how to be filled with wonder, to feel elated and fulfilled with only a single glance.¹

For his part, Peter Deunov was well aware of Mikhaël's detachment, of the stability

of his conduct, and in particular of his frank and unambiguous attitude toward women. A few years earlier in the garden at Ternovo he had witnessed a minor but revealing incident: Mikhaël, perched on top of a ladder that was leaning against the branch of a tree, was lost in the contemplation of nature, when a girl approached and climbed half-way up the ladder to talk to him. Peter Deunov knew that the two young people were very fond of each other, and although he could not hear what they were saying, he could see that they were both enjoying their conversation. Finally the girl climbed down, beckoning to Mikhaël to follow. Peter Deunov had noted with interest that Mikhaël remained on the ladder and went back to his meditation. The incident was so significant in his eyes that he mentioned it to Mikhaël several years later.

To Mikhaël's way of thinking, true purity was God himself, and in a human being it was one of the most important virtues.

When his friends talked to him of their problems, of their sexual desires or obsessions, he was not afraid to assert that they should face them squarely, and use them as a starting point for a more profound understanding of beauty. One day, a friend told him of a recent experience which had disturbed him deeply. With an expression of despair, he said:

‘I don’t know where to turn. I’m so miserable I have even considered killing myself. I’m incapable of working. I must get the picture of that girl out of my mind.’

‘That’s the wrong way to go about it,’ replied Mikhaël. ‘On the contrary, look at her mentally, and little by little the picture will fade away. You should see this image as a blessing, a starting point for a reflection about beauty.’

Later, he would often say: ‘True purity is not what people think. Purity is God himself. It is the divine world. It is the

way we use things that make them good or bad.' Ever since he had gazed at the spring in the village of his childhood, he had constantly striven for purity. But never would he reject the sexual energies created by God. Never would he approve the renunciations of certain narrow-minded spiritualists. On the contrary, in later years he explained how one could use those energies to fuel one's ascent to the divine regions for which all human beings are destined. At the time of his youth, however, it had not always been easy for him to make his contemporaries understand his position. More than once he had been obliged to make his position clear to young girls or women in the fraternity who had fallen in love with him.

One of the women who attended the Brotherhood meetings in Sofia pursued him with her attentions. She was a university professor and a brilliant and highly cultivated poet and philosopher. Nothing escaped her critical observation and no one was able to best her in an

argument. She even argued with Peter Deunov who was always very patient with her. From the first moment she saw Mikhaël she had been mesmerized by his beauty and the extraordinary magnetism of his eyes. Poetry came easily to her and she began to write extravagant poems in his honor. She became so possessive that she began to station herself beneath Peter Deunov's window whenever Mikhaël was with him in order to overhear their conversation, and although Mikhaël did his best to avoid her and insisted that she leave him alone, she persisted in following him home.

She beseeched him: 'Brother Mikhaël, this is the first time I have ever loved someone.'

'You should be singing with joy because of your love alone. Tell me, why has it not changed you? You should be nicer to your brothers and sisters, for instance.'

But she was not interested in being nicer,

all she wanted was to be allowed to kiss him. But Mikhaël continued patiently to tell her:

‘It is not allowed. In any case, if you did you would be very unhappy.’

Refusing to be put off, she continued to send him poems and love letters in all the languages she knew. She was forever knocking at his door, sometimes in tears, and Mikhaël, with equal perseverance, continued to resist her until one day, seeing that she was always bothering Peter Deunov when he himself was with him, he told her:

‘You really do love me, don’t you? You still want to kiss me? Very well. I will kiss you later, on condition that you never disturb the Master again and that you stop criticizing and contradicting him.’

Commenting this episode later, he said:

It was very difficult for her. She thought about it, tried to calculate whether she

had the strength to do as I asked, and finished by promising that she would try, because she wanted the promised reward. But she was unable to keep her promise. So I was released from my side of the bargain also, and I managed to avoid giving her what she wanted. From then on she changed. She no longer shouted and insisted on having her own way. She was unrecognizable. So you see, if someone loves you it is possible to use that love to help him and get him to see himself as he really is. If his love is not genuine you cannot help him. He must have faith in you; above all he must love and have faith in God.²

Far from being indifferent to feminine beauty, Mikhaël always looked on it with admiration and delight. He never attempted to ignore it. With astonishing strength of mind, he succeeded in working exclusively with the eyes, and his efforts were sometimes rewarded by unexpected gifts from subtler regions. During the night, he was often awakened

by the presence of unreal creatures of extraordinary beauty.

They were all round me, looking at me in such a way that I felt myself melting in indescribable love. They did not touch me, just stayed there, looking at me, and all their power was in their eyes. I have never yet seen such an expression in the eyes of a human being. It seemed to come from a great distance and a great height. The experience lasted for hours. I learned later that these creatures were devas, and I understood that they had visited me in order to show me that there existed in nature a beauty beyond anything one could imagine.³

Through their absolute purity, light and radiance, these creatures opened up a new world in Mikhaël's soul. He received from them 'revelations about true love, the love that needs no physical manifestation'.

* * *

By 1930 or 1931, Mikhaël was no longer attending lectures at the university. He remarked later that much of what he had studied had been a waste of time, that it had 'drawn a veil between reality and his life', and was best forgotten.

In Bulgaria, before qualifying for a teaching position in Sofia or any major city, three years of experience in a village school were required. For his first school term, Mikhaël was employed in a high school not far from the capital. It is probably here that he lived in the bungalow that he once described as 'so small that two people could not be in it at the same time'. In the classroom, applying educational methods that owed little to prevailing customs, he soon obtained results that surpassed his most optimistic expectations.

Mikhaël had noticed that delinquency had been on the rise in the country following a popular series of plays about the bandit Zigomar. This confirmed his con-

viction that the power of suggestion exerted by theater and cinema has a stronger influence on people's minds and behavior than church, school, or even family. With this in mind, he organized and produced several short plays with his pupils. One of them in particular, the adaptation of a Tolstoy legend about a grain of wheat, was a great favorite with the parents. Seeking to awaken his pupils' minds and hearts to new ideas, he explained the lines they recited and helped them to discover the beauty in them. At home the children talked about this new teacher who was so unlike those they had known before, and their grateful parents began to pay him frequent visits.

Three or four years later, Mikhaël was appointed director of a college, and during the few months of this charge he was busier than ever. His methods, based on a pedagogical principle of love and patience, created once again a sincere and dynamic relationship between himself and the students. Their parents, not

knowing how else to thank him, brought him cheese, nuts, and fruit. His office was often fragrant with the scent of their gifts. At the same time, however, he attracted the envy and resentment of some of the other teachers, who, unwilling to change their attitude toward their students, opposed him in different ways.

Jealousy always came as a surprise to Mikhaël. He found it difficult to realize just how powerful and tenacious it could be. But in spite of his new responsibilities and endless problems of this kind, he was always full of energy and undertook to give a series of spiritual talks for the peasant population of the region, who attended in great numbers. They loved this new director who used such colorful imagery and expressive gestures, and who spoke with such humor, peppering his talks with anecdotes to illustrate his meaning.

The time was drawing near when Mikhaël would be called on to leave his

country forever. Peter Deunov had kept him in the background for years, and most of the members of the brotherhood had forgotten the mysterious remark he had made one day by the shores of the second lake of Rila: 'You do not yet know brother Mikhaël; at the moment he is disguised, but one day you will know him.'

In the 1930s, Peter Deunov had begun to reveal certain things to Mikhaël in order to prepare him more directly for his future task. One of these revelations was in the form of an allegory:

'I have in my possession a precious stone. It is as big as an egg and valuable beyond words. I intend to give it to someone to take to another country, but as he will have to travel through a dense forest teeming with bandits and savage beasts, I will coat it with mud. Later, when it is washed, it will shine in all its splendor.'

It was a prediction that was to be fulfilled ten years later, but at the time Mikhaël

was not able to decipher the hermetic language in which his future was described. He was to be the bearer of the teaching, symbolized by the precious stone, and he was to be soiled in the same way as the gem. Since Peter Deunov had prophesied in 1917 that the forces of darkness would oppose him, Mikhaël had known that he was destined to endure great ordeals, but the meaning of this allegory of the gem that had to be soiled in order to be protected became clear to him only when those ordeals were imminent. Even if Peter Deunov knew the nature of the tribulations that awaited Mikhaël, to have revealed them would only have made things more difficult for him. Thus this veiled allusion to the mission he would entrust to him a few years hence and which had to be concealed.

He also told him:

‘When you have passed through the *narrow gate* you will be so transformed that you will not recognize yourself. You will

shine like the sun, and the whole world will be drawn to you.'

On another occasion he made an astonishing statement:

'You must realize that in the world above you were free. Before incarnating you signed a contract in front of an assembly of all the greatest spirits. You agreed to accomplish a certain task here below, and you must now fulfill your promise.'

Peter Deunov sometimes told his disciples that before their present incarnation they had had to agree to carry out a specific task on earth. To Mikhaël he spoke of the signature of a free being, of one who did not need to reincarnate in order to achieve perfection and who could be entrusted with a special mission by the great assembly of spirits only if he consented. He did not elaborate, knowing no doubt that Mikhaël would one day understand all the implications. Human beings are not permitted to know their

future; even high initiates and great Masters are subject to this rule. Their mission is revealed to them only progressively in the course of their life.

Peter Deunov had also said: 'You came to bear witness to truth', and Mikhaël often pondered those words. To bear witness to truth, he reflected, every fiber of one's being would have to vibrate in unison with truth; one would have to have the flawless purity of a diamond that bears witness to the transparency of all diamonds. One day, it occurred to him to ask the Master:

'When were you best pleased with me as a disciple?'

Mikhaël was then thirty-four. In the seventeen years Peter Deunov had known him, he had tried and tested him in different ways and followed his progress closely. He knew that Mikhaël was an exceptional being who never drew attention to himself. Destined to enlighten

and console, he was a being of integrity, courage, and steadfastness beyond question. Over and over he had proved capable of sacrificing his own tranquility to support and defend his brothers and sisters. All this Peter Deunov recognized, and yet he chose to speak of the apparently insignificant incident in the garden at Ternovo, many years before:

‘You were in deep meditation when that girl, who had great affection for you—and you for her—came looking for you. But when she climbed down the ladder and asked you to do the same, you stayed up there and continued your meditation. That was the moment when I was best pleased with you.’

‘But, Master,’ exclaimed Mikhaël in astonishment, ‘does that mean that it was the symbolic and perhaps prophetic aspect of what you saw that pleased you? It seems to me it was nothing much.’

Peter Deunov smiled and said nothing.

He had been pleased to see that Mikhaël remained faithful to the divine world, to his ideal, to the mission of those who renounce marriage and procreation in order to devote themselves totally to the realization of the kingdom of God on earth. But he certainly knew also that Mikhaël's unconditional choices, his frankness and honesty sometimes caused resentment. Even that young girl in the garden at Ternovo who had loved him would, in the future, become one of his worst enemies under the influence of an unscrupulous man with whom Mikhaël would refuse to associate.

* * *

It was during these years that Peter Deunov made several important revelations to Mikhaël about his future, predictions he had deciphered in the *Akasha Chronica*. While he spoke of these things his expression took on extraordinary intensity, his features were transformed and radiant. Mikhaël would never forget

those moments, the beauty that suffused the Master's face and the accent of truth in his words. Progressively, in the three years that followed, Peter Deunov revealed to Mikhaël many things about himself, in particular that books he had written in a past incarnation in India had been a source of instruction for the whole world. He told him that he had been especially destined for a work of spiritual assistance to women, and that he would one day converse with the great archangels, rulers of the planets. These revelations and promises came as a confirmation and consecration of all that Mikhaël had already accomplished.

During this period Peter Deunov was especially close to Mikhaël, who had worked so humbly by his side for twenty years and who was already, without doubt, an exceptional spiritual guide. The Master could now allow himself to show his love for him. Mysteriously, he sometimes called him *lacchoi*. The name was unfamiliar to Mikhaël, and he was

puzzled by the Master's use of it. It was only many years later that he would come across it in a book about the Dionysian Mysteries. There he learned that for the alchemists, the name *Iacchus* was synonymous with the sun. It also referred to Dionysus, Apollo, and Osiris. In the Mysteries, the plural form, *Iacchoi*, was the name given to androgynies, those perfect beings who possess both the masculine and feminine principles within themselves. The Master's use of this name was once more an enigmatic reference that gave Mikhaël matter for deep reflection and meditation.

I think now that by giving me this name he was giving me an inkling of what he thought of me. He wanted to tell me that I was nothing, but that he saw me as one who could become perfect.⁴

In these years Peter Deunov was very much alive to the threat that the rise of Communism posed for the fraternity. In 1937, he invited Mikhaël to his house one

last time and entrusted him with the mission to make his teaching known in France. To prepare the way for him, he gave him three letters that he had dictated to his secretary, Boyan Boëv. The first stated that Mikhaël was leaving on a specific mission to which his whole life was dedicated. The second was addressed to a Polish woman who was in a position to introduce him to interesting people in Paris. The third, dated June 12 and signed by brother Boëv, was addressed to a Bulgarian brother, Anastassi, who also lived in the French capital. It said:

One of our brothers, Mikhaël Ivanov, is leaving for Paris. He is being sent by the Master. As you know, he is one of the very advanced disciples. He is deeply knowledgeable and totally dedicated, living and working only for God's work.

The official reason for Mikhaël's departure for France was to visit the Paris World Fair: Peter Deunov never disclosed to his other disciples that he had

entrusted him with a mission. Knowing that his choice would inevitably arouse envious reactions on the part of those who thought themselves better equipped for such a task, he chose to say nothing.

On July 18, 1937, after bidding farewell to his family, Mikhaël boarded the train that was to take him to Paris. A small crowd of friends and many of his pupils and their parents were at the station to see him off. Many wept when he left, sensing perhaps that they would never see him again. Mikhaël could only look at them, his heart torn. For years he thought often of those children he had loved and of the brothers and sisters who had come to wish him Godspeed.

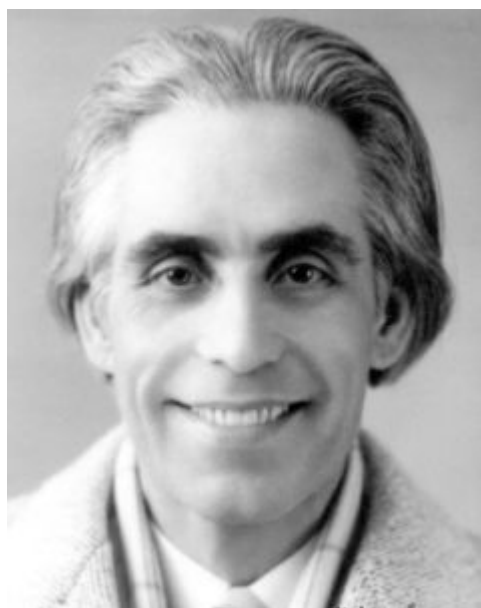
He was thirty-seven and was giving up everything, family, friends, and the country in which he had been born, for the sake of this new mission. Symbolically, he was selling all he possessed in order to carry the precious stone to a distant land.

Notes

1. 'The Masculine and Feminine Principles: Exchanges and Relationships', in *Love and Sexuality I*.
2. May 17, 1941.
3. 'The Masculine and Feminine Principles: Exchanges and Relationships', in *Love and Sexuality I*.
4. January 1, 1961.

PART III

*BROTHER
MICHAEL*



10



God Gives Freely

The train from Sofia, crowded with passengers bound for the 1937 World's Fair, made a two-day stopover in Venice and reached Paris on July 22. On his arrival, Mikhaël was taken in by brother Anastassi, but when he tried to contact the

Polish woman who was to introduce him to various spiritual movements in Paris, she was away from home and her neighbors had no idea when she would return.

While waiting for her to appear, Mikhaël set out to discover Paris. For days he explored the different *quartiers*, visiting churches, museums, the famous gardens, and the second-hand book stalls on the banks of the Seine. Gazing down the majestic sweep of the Champs-Élysées for the first time, he remembered with amusement the naive idea he had had of it at the age of seventeen, when the name evoked for him the mythical 'Elysian Fields, the marvelous abode of the great spirits of the past'. In dusty old bookshops in the Latin Quarter, he browsed through rare texts on alchemy. He also spent many fascinating hours at the *Palais des Découvertes*, where visitors can observe demonstrations of scientific experiments.

He also used this time to improve his

rudimentary French by frequenting the cinema, the theater and the opera. During the performances he continued as in the past to note the effect of the instruments and voices on himself and others, attempting to 'understand how the different sounds activated the spiritual energy centers within'.

Back in his friend's apartment in the evening, Mikhaël retired to his room. There, listening to the children at play, their cries echoing in the narrow street below, he pondered his situation. His visitor's visa would soon expire, and if he failed to get in touch with the person Peter Deunov had written to, he would have to return to Bulgaria. The days sped by, and on the eve of his departure he tried one last time to reach her. Miraculously, the telephone rang as she opened the door of her apartment, having just returned from Warsaw. Without hesitation she invited him to come and see her and began at once to take steps to prolong his visa. After interminable telephone

conversations with the immigration authorities, she was finally successful. Toward the end of the day Mikhaël was still with her when the doorbell rang, and his hostess introduced him to Stella Bellemin, a woman in her fifties who was to be one of the most faithful disciples of the new teaching he had brought to France.

Stella had also just returned from a vacation. She had been to Bulgaria and spent a few days at the Seven Lakes of Rila where she had met Peter Deunov. After about ten days with the Bulgarian brotherhood, she had asked Peter Deunov, in the presence of his secretary, Brother Boëv, how she could help to make his teaching known in France. His reply was:

‘When you meet the person you are destined to work with, you will recognize him immediately.’

Many years later when the validity of Mikhaël’s work was being contested,

Stella remembered that although Peter Deunov had not named Mikhaël explicitly, there was no doubt that he had been referring to him, and that his secretary, who had been present at the time, understood this perfectly. She would also recall that, during those ten days in Bulgaria, nobody had so much as mentioned a brother who had recently left for France.

That evening in her friend's apartment, Peter Deunov's prediction was fulfilled: as soon as she saw the visitor in the sitting room, she knew without a shadow of doubt that he was the one Peter Deunov had spoken of. And when she learned that he had come to France to make known the teaching she herself had recently discovered, her decision was immediate: she would collaborate in his work by putting all her resources at his disposal. Without hesitation—and with a total disregard for convention—she offered Mikhaël a room in her apartment and promised him all the help he needed. Mikhaël did not accept immediately: he

needed time to consider the question in private, but the next day he accepted her offer and moved to her apartment in the rue des Princes, where she had set aside a small room with an easterly view for him from which he could see the sunrise.

Stella was an astronomer, attached to the *Bibliothèque Nationale* of Paris. Every morning she left for the office and returned home only in the evening. Before long many of her friends heard that one of Peter Deunov's disciples was staying in her apartment and came to make his acquaintance. With attention and the utmost patience, 'Brother Mikhaël', as he began to be called, listened to his visitors and responded to their questions. And as they came in increasing numbers, seeking advice, instruction and consolation, there were days when the apartment hummed like a beehive. On weekends when Stella was free, he devoted many hours to instructing her in the teaching Peter Deunov had entrusted to him.

Toward the end of 1937 the social and political situation in France was deeply troubled. The threat of war hung over Europe and dominated every conversation. That autumn the French government passed a law severely restricting the right of foreign visitors to the World's Fair to remain in the country, and Mikhaël, who had left Bulgaria with only a temporary permit to visit the Fair, was now faced with the necessity of renewing it every week. But neither the long hours of waiting nor the harassment, suspicion and arrogance with which he was treated exhausted his patience. With tireless regularity, he renewed the legal formalities, and was so often obliged to be photographed that a great number of photographs from that period still exist.

For her part, Stella observed her guest closely and could not help but be deeply affected by his extraordinary radiance. Drawn to the spiritual life since childhood, she was also an intellectual who had gained considerable authority in her

field. She was not easily impressed, but in later years she would often speak of the deep impression Brother Mikhaël had made on her. Time and again she saw people who were harassed and irritable thawed by a look and a smile from him. He instilled such rare kindness into a few simple words that their attitude was often completely transformed.

One day, an official warned Stella that Mikhaël was a spy in the pay of the Soviet Union. She defended him vigorously, but each week, because of misunderstandings of this kind, he had to find additional people of influence to back his request for an extension of his permit. It was two years before he obtained a visa which had to be renewed only every three months, and it was many more years before the restrictions on him were further relaxed. But he was never to have citizenship in any one country. He would always be a citizen of the world.

In the meantime he remained serene,

counting as always on the unfailing support of his friends in the invisible world. It seemed that his prayers were always answered. More than once, at the last minute and under unusual circumstances, he met someone who was in a position to get his papers renewed. Sometimes it was the Bulgarian legation that put obstacles in his way; sometimes it was the French authorities. One day, just two hours before his visa expired, the French police demanded that his application be countersigned by ten French male citizens with substantial financial means. Half an hour later, ten 'solid citizens' arrived almost simultaneously at the apartment. All were among his regular visitors and all, without a word to the others, had decided to leave work earlier than usual and go to see Brother Mikhaël. Together they accompanied him to police headquarters.

His friends were constantly astonished by the unusual events they witnessed, and even the most skeptical were impressed.

They could not help but recognize that he was surrounded by invisible beings who assisted him so that his work could go forward. Their support even extended to seemingly insignificant details: he received an unexpected gift of money that exactly matched the price of a small radio he needed; he found at his door a Japanese tea service that he had admired in a shop window, thinking he could use it to offer his guests a cup of tea. Incidents of this kind were frequent, but in spite of his faith, Mikhaël never seemed to take them for granted. Each time he was as astonished and delighted as a child.

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As Brother Mikhaël's popularity increased, the visitors to Stella's apartment in the rue des Princes became more and more numerous. Once a week a score of people gathered for an evening meeting, but before long the apartment became too small, and meetings were

held in the more spacious home of her Polish friend near the rue du Bac.

Peter Deunov was not unknown in the French capital at the time; in fact, several of his disciples in Paris claimed to be there at his behest, but Mikhaël made no such claim. He was simply a Bulgarian living in France, one among a number of Peter Deunov's disciples. Without professing to represent Peter Deunov or to possess any special expertise, he talked quite simply about the major themes of this teaching which constituted the warp and woof of his life.

Although his knowledge of French was improving rapidly, it was far from perfect. His audience, however, found little to complain about, for his lively humor and vivid imagery more than compensated for any shortcomings. But there were occasions when his imperfect knowledge of the language was a handicap: some of those who came to hear him were writers, astrologers and alchemists, and occasion-

ally, mistaking his limited means of expression for a lack of knowledge, one of them would presume to give him advice.

Many considered themselves to be initiates, a cut above ordinary mortals, and they sometimes held forth at such length that Mikhaël could hardly utter a word. Without attempting to correct their perception of him, he simply listened patiently as they described how they had passed the 'second or third degree of initiation'. For his part, he was completely indifferent to these so-called degrees and had no intention of establishing them in the brotherhood. More than once he said that he had never known what degree of initiation he had reached, that the brotherhood was not interested in titles and there were no 'pundits' among the members. In his view, each time someone experienced an expansion of consciousness it meant that they had reached a higher degree of initiation.

One day Stella invited a friend, who was

an engineer as well as a seasoned astrologer, to meet Brother Mikhaël. They had hardly been introduced when the visitor, full of his own importance, began to question Mikhaël as though he were one of his students: 'Do you have some notion of astrology?'

'Yes, a little,' replied Mikhaël, who had been known in his own country as one of the foremost experts on the subject.

The engineer then mentioned the titles of several books and advised him to study this fascinating science which would open undreamed of avenues for him. Not in the least perturbed, Mikhaël thanked him for the information and made a note of the books he had recommended. One evening a few months later, intrigued by talk of Brother Mikhaël's brilliant interpretations of the major astrological themes, the engineer returned to hear him talk and was astounded by the extent of his knowledge and the natural authority with which he spoke. From that

moment on, his attitude changed completely. In a long letter of apology he expressed shame at the arrogance of his behavior and signed it, 'Your worthless disciple'.

With his profound understanding of spiritual astrology, Mikhaël was able to speak of the great laws that sustain the universe in ways that enhanced his audience's understanding of the world around them. Several well-known astrologers attended his talks regularly, drawing from them a wealth of new and vivifying ideas. In general, however, astrology was not a frequent topic of his talks; he referred to it only occasionally in order to illustrate or emphasize a point of the teaching.

During all this time, Stella, who never tired of listening to him and observing his reactions, did her best to fathom the secret of his behavior. Many years later, she wrote that his actions had often

amazed her; his code of conduct seemed so different from that of most people:

He was always natural, humble, unpretentious and sometimes seemingly ignorant, and this astonished me very much. I still could not understand why he so consistently concealed every hint of his exceptional nature and true worth, of which I had received such a clear indication from the very first moment we had met. [...] On first meeting him, the thing that struck one above all else was the intense light that radiated from him, a light that was imbued with tenderness and pure, impersonal love.¹

In her desire to understand the well-springs of his action, she observed every detail: the harmony of his gestures, so different from the abruptness of most people; the kindness that often cloaked his exceptional inner strength; and the way he looked at each person with an affection that made no demands on them.

Stella could find no discrepancy between his teaching and his life.

* * *

Five months after Mikhaël's arrival in France, his students asked him to address a wider public, assuring him that his French was perfectly adequate for the purpose. He finally agreed, and on the evening of January 29, 1938, gave his first public talk in the Luxembourg Hall, Place de la Sorbonne.

On the morning of the talk, Stella's apartment was without water. Unable to get water from the washbasin in his room, Mikhaël tried the kitchen tap but forgot to turn it off before going out. When Stella returned from work that evening, she was horrified to find her guest in the kitchen, mopping up the flood. At the sight of her expression, Mikhaël could not help laughing. For him, the significance of the incident was perfectly clear: the water, symbol of fertility, abundance,

and life, was a message from the invisible world. With enthusiasm he explained:

‘Don’t you see what a wonderful sign it is? It is an outpouring, a torrent of love! My talk this evening will be a success. The audience will be fully satisfied.’

In fact, the reality surpassed the portent. His talk, entitled ‘*The Second Birth*’, turned out to be the first in a series of more than five thousand. That evening, he surprised his listeners with the unexpected precision and aptness of his French, and the eloquence of his gestures contributed in no small part to his success. From time to time, at a loss for a specific word, he delighted them by asking them to supply it. Very often, after hearing their suggestions, he found the elusive word for himself, and the audience was charmed by his informality.

This first talk was rich in themes central to his philosophy: the symbolism of fire and water, the subtler forms of nourish-

ment; the relationship between the twelve signs of the zodiac and the four elements; the spiritual significance of a triangular prism; the symbolism of colors and their influence on human beings; and the need to be born again.

To be born for the second time, he said, is to become a living fountain of pure water which gives birth to a new and thriving civilization. The religion of such a one is the true religion of divine love and wisdom. For him, the only true temple of God is the universe, the sun is High Priest in this temple and the stars are its votive lights. To be born a second time is to open one's secret, innermost channels so that they may be filled with love and wisdom. It is to be a perfect prism, radiating the seven beneficial forces throughout one's own being and projecting them out for the benefit of all around him.²

Throughout his life, Mikhaël spoke of light as the 'celestial water' that flows from the world above. His great desire

was to foster the upsurge of life by ensuring the constant flow of this 'water.' His first public talk, then, was the initial outpouring of the fountainhead from which his mission flowed. At the same time, it inaugurated a ten-year period during which he would lay the foundations in France of Peter Deunov's teaching and prepare to bring it to fruition.

After the success of this first experience, he continued to give weekly talks in a rented hall. Before long, his audience grew in numbers until they overflowed onto the podium, and a more spacious meeting place had to be found. The new assembly room quickly became inadequate as well, and people were often had to stand outside and listen as best they could.

The style Mikhaël adopted for his talks was similar to that of Peter Deunov and corresponded well with his own temperament. Rather than composing a discourse in advance, he prepared himself by

spending some time in meditation. On entering the hall, he greeted his audience, his right hand raised in the salutation that had become customary in the Bulgarian brotherhood. The gesture had real significance for him. He saw it as an instrument, a means by which to communicate energy, colors, and life-giving vibrations. He often said: 'When you salute each other, the gesture should be a true communion; it should be powerful, harmonious, and alive.'

After the salutation, he remained in silence for a few moments, sensing the state of mind of his audience. And when he spoke, whatever his theme, he always seemed to address the problems of each one and to offer the lucid, practical solutions they needed. A period of meditation invariably followed his talk, but the pattern of the gatherings never became routine; they were full of life, exuberance and surprise, for Brother Mikhaël maintained that routine 'leads to sluggishness and death'.

To relax his audience or stimulate their attention, he frequently interspersed his talks with jokes and anecdotes, and his laughter was contagious. Like the legendary story-tellers of the Orient, he peppered his discourse with tales that were both amusing and instructive. Particularly fond of Turkish folk-tales about Mullah Nashrudin learned in childhood, he was equally at home with the stories of Alexander Dumas, the *Fables* of La Fontaine, or the *Tales of a Thousand and One Nights*. These stories were often a way of summing up an aspect of his teaching, but they also served to ease tensions he himself had created in his audience. He liked to say that laughter keeps the brain flexible, and that the brotherhood was a school for laughter. His own laugh was so infectious that when he started it was impossible not to join in.

Mikhaël found constant inspiration in the everyday events of life. For him, they were a reflection of invisible realities, and he used them as examples to illustrate a

point of his teaching. One day, some friends took him to Luna Park, in which one of the attractions was the Rotor, or 'butter dish'. This was a large circular platform, and as it spun faster and faster, those standing near the outside edge lost their balance and were thrown to the ground, while those who stood close to the central axis remained unaffected. This carnival ride fascinated Mikhaël, and he often referred to the 'butter dish' when speaking of the need to maintain a close bond with God, the center of all things: 'If we do not want to be defeated and thrown off balance by life's difficulties, we must stay close to God, in spite of epidemics, suffering and wars.'

His ability to recognize vivifying symbols in nature, in music or sports, in the inventions of human beings or in their professions gave Mikhaël a very practical and concrete point of view in regard to the exigencies of the spirit. On one occasion he treated his audience to a special talk after André Jahan had taken him for a

ride on his motorcycle. Jahan—whom Mikhaël called 'Brother Jean'—had been a champion automobile racer. He had placed himself and his professional skills at Mikhaël's service ever since his first public lecture and was always ready to drive him wherever he needed to go. That day his motorcycle had refused to start, and when Jean diagnosed a dirty spark-plug, Mikhaël immediately offered to clean it, but when it was put back in place, the engine still failed to start. After Jean had inspected it again he said, with a hint of reproach: 'Brother Mikhaël, in your zeal you have cleaned it too thoroughly. The gap between the electrodes is too great. The current cannot pass.'

To Jean's surprise, Mikhaël exclaimed delightedly: 'Oh, that's wonderful!'

With the vivacity to which his audience was accustomed, Mikhaël recounted the incident and explained why he had been so delighted:

It gave me such a good example that I could use to explain things to you. You must always remember that if the electrodes of a spark plug are too far apart or if they are dirty, it will not work. It only takes a tiny detail to prevent an instrument from functioning. The same is true in the life of a disciple. We too have electrodes within us, and if they are too far apart they will not work. [...] Every thought, every feeling, everything we eat, every breath we take, every one of our organs must be in contact with our life as a whole. When this is the case our life will become magnificent, because all our instruments will function properly and enable us to manifest as we are meant to.³

In contrast to so many fashionable speakers, Mikhaël always spoke simply, using ordinary, everyday expressions, illuminating the meaning of life in a unique way, and suggesting practical methods of self-transformation that anyone might use. His unpretentious imagery evoked

an immediate response in many of his listeners, but the very ordinariness of the language he used in speaking about elevated subjects often disconcerted those who were more intellectually sophisticated. A few were offended when he remarked that 'even a baby could understand' what he was saying, but if they persevered they gradually discovered the depth and complexity of the ideas that lay behind his words.

Once his talk was over, so many people crowded around him that it was sometimes an hour before he could reach the car waiting to take him home. But even after a long and tiring evening, he never tried to avoid them: on the contrary, he answered all their questions patiently.

From the beginning, many of the Bulgarian disciples of Peter Deunov who were living in Paris attended these evening gatherings regularly. Most of them, however, remained reserved in their attitude toward Mikhaël. In his homeland, he had

never been in the public eye or lectured on the teaching like so many others. When the news reached Bulgaria that he was giving public talks in Paris, it was the signal for a period of great difficulty, not only for him, but also for the Bulgarian brotherhood, for many members believed that he had gone to France and proclaimed himself Peter Deunov's representative on his own initiative. Even when a number of Bulgarians returned from Paris and spoke of his work with admiration, the skepticism remained.

During this contentious period, Peter Deunov's main concern seems to have been to keep the peace among his disciples. In 1937 he had given Mikhaël a letter which clearly stated his mission in Paris. Later, in private conversations with other disciples, he spoke approvingly of the spiritual work Mikhaël was doing in France. Never once, however, did he announce publicly that it was he who had commissioned that work. It was hardly surprising, therefore, that some of his dis-

ciples concluded that their Master disapproved of Mikhaël's activity and that it was only out of charity that he remained silent. In lieu of any public endorsement, however, Peter Deunov did take the precaution of writing to Mikhaël personally to reiterate his approval: 'Work as God directs you. I am pleased with what you are doing. Do as you think best.' And in October 1938, his secretary, Brother Boëv, wrote:

You can be sure that what you are doing has the Master's complete approval. Pay no attention to those who are being negative. All those I talk to here hold you in great affection.

Mikhaël was well aware of the criticisms aimed at him. One day he assured his audience that he was simply passing on what he had received in Bulgaria from Peter Deunov and that he always communed mentally with him before speaking. Moreover, he regularly began his talks by quoting a text by Peter Deunov,

which he then elaborated upon at length. His deep love for Peter Deunov was evident, and for years he hoped to bring him to Paris to instruct the French brotherhood himself.

Meanwhile, presenting himself as 'a disciple of no importance', he continued to strive for the virtue of humility. Humility, he used to say, is a point of view, a way of looking at things: if we compare ourselves with an ant, we are bound to think that we are very big and grand, but if we compare ourselves with a star, an archangel, or a divinity, we become conscious of our smallness. Humility, in his view, is the one attitude that can stimulate us to achieve greater heights, for, 'if we think we have reached the top, we have no incentive to climb higher. There is nowhere to go but down'.

As always, Mikhaël was not afraid of appearing ignorant, and frequently this led people to underestimate his knowledge or intelligence. The long-term con-

sequence of this habitual self-depreciation was that, when the time came for him to broaden the scope of Peter Deunov's teaching, many members of the brotherhood reproached him for it. Even in those early days, however, it was evident to many that he possessed a vast store of knowledge drawn from the *Akasha Chronica*, as well as an exceptional gift for communicating that knowledge. He could not behave as though the light that flooded his being did not exist, and yet for years he continued to extol the reputation of Peter Deunov and to minimize his own. He accepted criticism as an inevitable part of his mission and never allowed it to hinder his work.

His conviction that a Master is a model to be imitated made him try to think and feel as the Master he admired so greatly. His own ideas were too original, however, and his own perceptions too keen to allow him to model himself indefinitely on the spirit of any one individual, even a Master. His intelligence was too vast to

be contained, limited and subject to concepts which belonged partially to one particular period and which inevitably bore the mark of one particular mind. Instinctively, through meditation and contemplation, he drew upon the true source of all knowledge.

* * *

In the spring following his first public talk, Mikhaël encouraged his students to attend the sunrise as often as possible in order to draw strength and inspiration from the light, as was the custom among the disciples of Pythagoras and other high initiates of Antiquity. When some complained that they were too tired to get up early, he replied that the apparent fatigue caused by getting up early would counteract their chronic state of exhaustion:

When you are present as the sun rises, its rays dissolve the harmful fluidic layers that surround you, and the seeds that

*God has planted in your soul begin to
germinate.*⁴

Several of his followers soon vouched for the fact that the regular practice of attending the sunrise left them feeling stronger and more energetic; their complexion cleared, and they became more emotionally stable. Mikhaël often assured them that the day would come when everyone attended the sunrise and lived longer and healthier lives as a result.

On Sundays, he liked to leave the city with those who formed the core of the French brotherhood and spend the day in the forest, where he continued to instruct them in initiatic science and introduced them to the spiritual and physical exercises practiced in the Bulgarian brotherhood. In the peaceful setting of a natural clearing among the great trees, Mikhaël was in his element. In May 1939, inviting his regular students to accompany him to the forest of St-Nom-la-Bretèche for further practice in the gymnastic exercises

taught by Peter Deunov, he told them that these exercises could greatly benefit their physical and psychic health as well as their will, their thoughts, and their feelings. The rhythm with which they were carried out was fundamental: 'It is important to be attuned to the rhythm of cosmic forces and to carry out each movement slowly and with concentration.'

On the appointed day more than a hundred people turned up. Once they were assembled in the clearing, he explained how these seven daily exercises could nourish, reinforce and harmonize certain centers of the nervous system. Then, while talking about their symbolism, he demonstrated each movement. While the participants were doing their best to follow his gestures, dark storm clouds gathered overhead, but Mikhaël, seeing their disappointment, reassured them with a smile:

'Don't worry. The clouds will disappear as soon as we begin to sing.'

And indeed, as the first notes of their song rang out, the sky began to clear dramatically, as though a great wind had suddenly risen high above their heads.

After a picnic lunch, Mikhaël spoke about the beauty of the forest and explained how to tap the forces of nature and draw energy from the big trees or from running water. For him the link between the two worlds of spirit and matter was an ever-present reality and a potent means of realization in the physical world. The universe is an immense living organism whose elements, from the smallest atom through the angelic hierarchies to the supernal God, are linked. The cycles of nature were a means of strengthening his ties with the divine world. He used the phases of the moon or the energies of fire, wind, streams and waterfalls as a means of self-transformation. He used to say, for instance, 'As this water washes and purifies all in its path, so may I be made pure.'

While he was speaking that day, his gaze followed the movements of a salamander as it crossed the space between himself and the circle of participants and came straight to where he was sitting. When he stretched out his hand, it remained perfectly still as though waiting for him to pick it up, and then sat in his palm, watching him with its beady little eyes. Mikhaël looked at it pensively but without comment. The incident was an eloquent illustration of what he had just explained about the harmony and trust that is possible between the different species.

In addition to the gymnastic exercises, Mikhaël introduced his students to the Paneurythmy, the symbolic circle dance created by Peter Deunov. He also taught basic breathing exercises, recommending that they be practiced regularly every morning after the sunrise.

Saying that the ‘essence of air’—that which Hindus call *prana*—is life itself, he

explained that deep, conscious breathing improves the circulation thus causing the organs of the body to function better: the brain can think more clearly and the heart and stomach can work more efficiently. After explaining the traditional pattern of rhythmic breathing—inhaling to the count of four, holding one's breath to the count of sixteen, and exhaling to the count of eight—he insisted that beginners should be very careful about trying to adopt a slower rhythm. They should do so only very gradually.

By breathing you can extract and distil an essence from the air—call it prana, or life, or whatever you please. When you inhale consciously through your nostrils the various 'factories' in your body work more efficiently to extract that essence from the air. If you breathe unconsciously they can extract no more than a thousandth part of that essence, and that is not enough for either your physical or your psychic life. It is by conscious breathing that you can get your brain to

*think more clearly, your heart to beat
and to feel correctly, and your stomach to
digest properly.*⁵

While insisting on the beneficial effects of these exercises, however, he was always careful to warn against certain dangerous methods reputed to promote rapid psychic development. In the years that followed, he often explained that the simplest breathing exercises were the most effective, for they involved no risk and were beneficial to both physical and psychic health.

* * *

The brotherhood began to attract more members throughout France following a talk Brother Mikhaël gave in Lyon in June, 1938. The subject of that talk was 'spiritual galvanoplasty', an original concept to which he attached great importance.

Using the example of the technique of electroplating, by which an object is

coated with gold or other precious metal, he explained how a pregnant woman had the power to influence the child in her womb:

If a woman knows the laws of gold-plating and decides to apply them in bringing her child into the world, then, when a seed is implanted in her womb (cathode), she will put a sheet of gold into her mind (anode), the gold of pure, lofty thoughts. The current is switched on and the blood flowing through her body conveys the precious metal to the seed. The child grows, clothed in gold and turns out to be robust, healthy and beautiful both in physique and in character, and capable of overcoming all difficulties and diseases, all evil influences. Mothers have the potential ability to work miracles for the world: it is they who possess the key to the forces of creation. Within fifty years women could transform the whole of humanity if they applied the methods of spiritual galvanoplasty.⁶

Throughout his life, Mikhaël often spoke of a dream he cherished. This was an unusual scheme which would enable pregnant women to benefit from ideal conditions during the period of gestation. The only problem was, as he said, that this scheme required a government with the wisdom to provide accommodation for expectant mothers in beautifully landscaped estates, with spacious parks, trees, flowers and fountains. There, the mothers-to-be would live surrounded by music and color, and be taught how to bring exceptional children into the world.

Peter Deunov had once told Mikhaël that he was 'especially destined to give spiritual assistance to women', and this was one of his principal concerns, but he did not restrict the notion of galvanoplasty to the realm of physical gestation alone. Transposing it onto the spiritual plane, he explained how all human beings can put golden thoughts in their minds and a divine image in their hearts and be con-

stantly connected to the great central powerhouse from which the current of life flows. 'Every human being,' he insisted, 'possesses extraordinary innate powers of self-perfection, and meditation is one of the most effective means of achieving self-mastery and inner harmony.'

Within a year after the talk in Lyons, the name of Brother Mikhaël was becoming well known in Paris. His ideas were discussed wherever there was an interest in spirituality, and people were eager to meet him and hear him, for his words spoke to the highest aspirations of the human soul. One of those who had often been present expressed the feelings of many:

As we listened to him, we discovered a new life. We felt the desire to change our whole outlook on life by consciously entertaining thoughts of love and kindness, and at the same time to improve our health and even to transform our fea-

tures. We began to realize that we had the power to acquire all the beauty, all the wealth of the spiritual life.

In France at this time, it was fashionable to take an interest in the occult sciences, hypnotism and extra-sensory phenomena. Spiritual groups of every variety abounded in Paris, and desiring to understand better the milieu in which he was called to work, Mikhaël attended some of their meetings. He saw that many of the speakers, whether astrologers, cabbalists or alchemists, were content to dazzle their audience with a show of sublime ideas but failed to speak about how to put them into practice. Scanning their faces, he looked in vain for a subtle emanation of light, for some hint of radiance, but in spite of their vast erudition, he found no light; some, indeed, seemed to emanate darkness.

As for his own audience, he was well aware that they were as heterogeneous a group as any in Paris. There was a small

nucleus of those who considered themselves members of the budding fraternity and who called each other 'brother' and 'sister'. But a much greater number drifted from one spiritual group to another in search of knowledge, with no intention of committing themselves to anything. At one point, more than forty spiritual movements were represented among the audience at Brother Mikhaël's talks. Many who were interested only in the occult arts or in a particular discipline such as hypnotism and who were not ready to alter their way of life soon stopped attending the meetings when they realized that his teaching required certain hard choices, certain sacrifices. Finally, among his audience were several women for whom the attraction was not so much the spirituality of Mikhaël as his radiant personality.

Stella, who was in a position to observe all this, saw that Brother Mikhaël gave the same love and consideration to all, without regard for age, intelligence or

social rank. But she could not know that within this group lay the seeds of danger for him.

As his reputation grew, he was besieged by invitations to talk, and in the hope of spreading the teaching he often accepted. In this way he found himself in contact with an ever more varied public, but although he attended their receptions he was not taken in by their modes and manners. More than once, when his hosts tried to use him to impress their friends, he managed to thwart their plans in such a way as to open their minds to a higher view of life. His audience did not always understand his message, but it never occurred to him to protect his personal reputation. If the truth had to be spoken, he was not deterred by the possibility that it might offend someone. He knew in advance that he would be criticized, even hated, and more than once he suffered the consequences of his words.

One evening in a gathering of occultists

and writers, a well-known author buttonholed him and, almost incoherent with fury, began to abuse him. A hush fell on the gathering, and Mikhaël, listening in stunned silence, wondered what he could possibly have said or done to merit such venom. All of a sudden he understood: the man had attended one of his talks accompanied by his mistress. The subject that evening had been death and immortality, and he had spoken of the true nature of love, the love that vivifies rather than exploiting the loved one. After his talk the young woman had asked several questions about love, and having understood the wrong her lover was doing her by obliging her to practice sexual magic with him, she had decided to leave him. Faced with the wrath of his adversary, Mikhaël responded with humor:

‘Believe me, sir, I had no idea that that young lady belonged to you and that you had such rights over her. If I unintentionally freed her from your designs, how can you blame me? The sun has the right to

shine, and those who have no hats are in danger of sunstroke. You should have worn a hat!’

At this, everyone laughed and the incident was closed, but for years the writer bore a grudge against Brother Mikhaël. And then one day he went to see him and told him that life had taught him a lesson, and that in spite of himself he had come to regret the harm he had done to several women.⁷

From time to time, people approached Mikhaël and offered to help him in various ways. A young American diplomat, for instance, who had been struck by his spiritual influence, told him that if he agreed to live in the United States she would put her immense wealth at his disposal and do all she could to make his teaching known in her country. Although Mikhaël sensed that to accept her proposal would be to put himself under an obligation to her, the prospect seemed to offer such advantages that he

felt he could not decide without first consulting Peter Deunov. The negative reply he received confirmed his own feeling and he went quietly on with the work he had already begun, devoting himself to instructing those who gathered to hear him speak.

At about this time, he began to be confronted with difficulties similar to those experienced by Peter Deunov in Bulgaria when the religious authorities opposed his work and exiled him from Sofia. With the intention of destroying Brother Mikhaël's reputation, some Church leaders in France launched a campaign of slander against him. It seems that they feared that their own authority would be undermined and were distrustful of any spiritual activity not within their jurisdiction. Also, these free public meetings at which a foreigner talked about such things as reincarnation or man's subtle bodies must certainly be considered suspect...

It was true that Brother Mikhaël had come to France for reasons that were entirely altruistic: everything he did was done without payment. Within the first year, after he had been giving his weekly talks for eight months, he took an unequivocal stand in this respect: speaking to a group of regular listeners, he declared that he would always work without payment, as Peter Deunov had always done. 'Above all,' he added, 'God gives freely and we should do the same.'

His attitude in this regard was always firm and unambiguous. Throughout his life he never accepted payment for his talks. There were people around him, of course, who contributed voluntarily and anonymously to his expenses, but Mikhaël was always content with very little. Later, when he received offers of property—houses or land—he invariably refused, for his conduct was dictated by his knowledge of what he termed 'natural law'. He knew that by accepting a gift from someone he would be binding him-

self to that person in the future, and this he could not do; he owed it to himself and to his mission to remain free of all such ties. It was only forty years later that his circumstances would be eased somewhat, thanks to royalties received for his published talks.

As the months went by he continued to speak of the glorious future that awaited those who persevered in their striving for perfection. He often used to tell them that the highest ideal of every human being was to resemble God, even though that seemed utterly impossible. 'That is what is so wonderful!' he exclaimed, and he gave them a prayer which he had received from Peter Deunov and which he called the formula of the high ideal:

To have a heart as pure as crystal, a mind as luminous as the sun, a soul as vast as the universe, a spirit as powerful as God and one with God.

He knew, of course, that most people

needed time before they could assimilate the truths he put before them. Sometimes, he realized, they were frightened when he talked of purity and the beauty of a life given to the pursuit of perfection. As in his youth, he thought that it would be enough to show them where truth and splendor lay, but he was soon disillusioned: some of those whom he had encouraged and instructed found that he asked too much of them.

Mikhaël never tried to pressure people or use his clairvoyance or other psychic gifts to attract or impress. When asked if he was clairvoyant, he denied it, saying that at best he could 'sometimes feel things a little'. He maintained with complete sincerity that he did not possess the gift of seeing prosaic, everyday things. In his view, the only kind of clairvoyance worth having was that which came as an expansion of consciousness, an awareness 'of things that one has never before noticed, things that one has been too fast asleep or too blind to see'. And the best way to

obtain this discernment was to follow the path of purity and love of God.

He never encouraged people to consult clairvoyants, for the good reason that to do so was not the best way to transform themselves. He often cautioned against experimenting with the occult, for he had seen too many people who had become psychologically unbalanced by such experimentation. 'As far as I am concerned,' he sometimes said, 'I would like to be clairvoyant, but only so that I might see angels.' Involuntarily, however, he often gave proof of his capacity for seeing things on a very elevated plane. Over the years it became clear that he knew the past or the future of those close to him as well as the future prospects of society and the world.

His frequent out-of-body experiences had taught him that Plato's 'world of ideas' was a reality, a realm that contained all truth, all the best, purest, and most noble thoughts. He asserted that it was

possible for all these ideas, each in its own way and according to its own nature, to materialize on the physical plane as color, form, movement, scent, or sound. Many clairvoyants who consulted him realized that he could speak of these materializations because he could see them and hear their music. They themselves often had to ask him to explain the meaning of phenomena they saw but did not understand.

On the other hand, people often thanked him for having helped them: 'I was in great difficulty, and you helped me to extricate myself.' Or, 'I was very ill and you healed me.' When this happened, Mikhaël simply smiled and said that he had had nothing to do with it; that he had many friends in the invisible world who sometimes assumed his form and features and did things in his name: 'These spirits,' he added, 'do many good deeds on earth, and they are always glad to let someone else take the credit for them. It is they who should be thanked.'

Physical illness, as he well knew, is often caused by obstructions on a subtler plane, and it was to those planes that he directed his mental work. One day he went to see a man who was paralyzed and who had already consulted the most eminent specialists without success. After sitting by his bed for a long time, listening to him and observing his reactions, Mikhaël told him that he could be cured if he wanted it enough. 'If you believe with all your might, you will be walking in a month or two.'

When he prescribed certain breathing exercises, meditations and prayers, the sick man's family listened with skepticism, but the invalid followed Brother Mikhaël's unusual instructions to the letter. Gradually the paralysis was defeated and he was able to walk again. One day, referring to the case of this man—who was known to all present—Mikhaël insisted on the importance of guarding against the accumulation of poisons in one's system, of immersing oneself in the

torrent of heavenly life through prayer, meditation and purification.

There are certain extremely poisonous substances which coat the walls of the body's canals with a fluid that prevents them from functioning correctly. These poisons are worry, anxiety, discontent, jealousy and resentment. [...] Also, it is essential that our nerve fluids circulate freely, and for that we need light... The first thing to do is to improve and cleanse the canalizations of our body so that all our cells may be washed and nourished both by our thoughts and by our nerve fluids. You must shine light, therefore, into all the dark places.⁸

When Mikhaël defined thought, he knew what he was talking about. For him thought—which is so tremendously potent when it is concentrated—was a natural instrument that he had always used in the service of good. One day he had occasion to use it like a flash of lightning to prevent a cyclist from crashing

into a child. Quite unaware of danger, the young boy was riding his scooter directly in the path of the man speeding down the hill toward him. Mikhaël described the incident the next day:

I stopped and watched over the child, concentrating my mind to stop him moving to one side just as the cyclist went by, and for no apparent reason he suddenly stopped still. The cyclist was furious. He realized that he too had been in danger. I decided to talk to the boy who was about seven: 'Listen to me. You have just been saved from great danger. You were about to cross the road just when that cyclist was coming straight at you. You didn't even look to see if it was safe to do so. You must look, otherwise you will be killed.' He listened gravely, and I added: 'Can you say thank you to God for protecting you? Go, now, and be careful.' As I walked on I could see him standing there thinking. I think he had understood me, for I had spoken gently but very seriously. I wish that you would

*all learn to pause in life and look round,
to left and right, in front and behind.'*⁹

Notes

1. Svezda, Vie et enseignement du Maître Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov en France, Éditions Prosveta, p. 35f.
2. 'The Second Birth', in *The Second Birth: Love, Wisdom, Truth*.
3. April 3, 1943.
4. April 24, 1945.
5. May 15, 1941.
6. 'Spiritual Galvanoplasty', in *Spiritual Alchemy*.
7. See his account of this incident: 'The sun is the source of love', in *Love and Sexuality II*.
8. May 17, 1941.
9. April 14, 1945.

11



*An
Attempt
at a
Fraternal
Community*

Brother Mikhaël talked with such infectious love about Master Peter Deunov,

about life in the Bulgarian brotherhood and the marvelous ambience of their camps by the Seven Lakes of Rila, that several of his students planned a visit to Bulgaria in the summer of 1939. He was tempted to accompany them, for the obligation to renew his residential permit every week was a severe constraint, and he thought he might more easily obtain a visa from his own country. But Peter Deunov, consulted by letter, advised him not to leave France, warning that he might never be allowed to go back, and twenty-five people left for Bulgaria without him.

Jean, his wife Raymonde, and Stella did not accompany them. Instead they invited Brother Mikhaël to join them on a trip to Italy. The invitation was tempting and certainly less risky than a return to Bulgaria, but even a brief absence from France involved complications, for Mikhaël needed the authorization of several different departments in order to be sure he would be allowed back into the

country. After several attempts, however, the necessary permissions were granted and he set out with his three companions.

They visited the length and breadth of Italy, camping out each evening wherever they found themselves. Long before they had originally planned to go home, however, Mikhaël announced that they would have to cut short their vacation and return to France as quickly as possible, for hostilities would soon break out. Although his companions had seen no sign of imminent danger, they knew better than to discount his warning. Driving as fast as possible, they crossed into France just before the frontier closed on September 3, the very day France and England declared war on Germany. Those who had spent three weeks in the mountains of Bulgaria had returned only three days before.

World War II had begun. From then on, life was very different for the people of France, and when the German army

occupied Paris a few months later, many members of the brotherhood moved to the country.

During the year 1940, Mikhaël gave only a few talks; he could do little more than keep in touch with the many small groups of his regular listeners who met to meditate together. It was only in the second year of the Occupation that a few fraternal activities began again as discreetly as possible. Strict precautions were necessary, for public gatherings were forbidden and meetings had to be held in the members' private homes.

Mikhaël's situation was particularly precarious, for most foreigners were being sent back to their homelands. To avoid being expelled from the country, he had to be careful to renew his papers well in advance.

In 1942, the constraints of the Occupation became more and more burdensome. Food supplies were running low and

meals were reduced to the barest essentials. Severe regulations restricted the movements of French citizens, and it became dangerous to gather even in small groups. In view of this, some of the members of the brotherhood agreed to rent a house of their own in which they could live together without drawing undue attention to themselves.

A suitable villa was found in Sèvres, and several people moved in with Brother Mikhaël. A loft with large windows was converted into a meeting room in which they could meditate at sunrise without being disturbed. Mikhaël chose a small room for himself, in which he arranged his few belongings with his customary attention to detail. He continued to take care of his own needs and, as Stella Bellemin wrote later:

He never allowed himself to be served in any way, even though the group could well have relieved him of certain chores. He made his own bed and tidied and

cleaned his room. He also took great care of his own clothes.¹

His visitors were often surprised to find, instead of the ascetic cell they had expected, a bright room decorated in beautiful colors and enlivened by several crystals that caught the light of the sun. As they were often tired when they arrived after the journey on the crowded Métro, Brother Mikhaël urged them to sit and relax for a few minutes in silence. Some were ill at ease to rest in his presence, but afterwards they were grateful to him for his exquisite sense of hospitality, more concerned with their deep needs than with conventional etiquette. The personal attention he gave to each guest and the frankness and sensitivity with which he responded to them soon established an authentic spiritual exchange. At the time, one of the brothers wrote:

Within a few minutes of meeting him, I was weighed up, illuminated, encouraged and invigorated to the depths of my

*being. I was completely transparent to him... and when, in a few words and with the utmost tact, he sketched a portrait of my character, he gave me exactly the nourishment and the medicine I needed.*²

From that year on, Mikhaël gave a short talk for the residents almost every day after the sunrise, in addition to his regular weekly talks in the evening. One of his favorite themes was that of brotherhood. He used to paint a glowing picture of a life of sharing and harmony in which all would open themselves to love. A fraternal center, he said, should be a veritable focal point of light.

When he talked of brotherhood, he was not referring principally to a gathering of human beings on earth, but rather to the great family of those of all eras who seek the light, who have embraced a philosophy of love and justice, and who belong, consciously or not, to one great universal family. As time went on he often talked

about the great Brotherhood of white light that exists on a higher plane:

The power of the Great White Brotherhood extends throughout the entire planetary system, and even beyond. It must not be confused with the Brotherhood on earth which consists of a handful of men and women who are for the most part neither wise nor enlightened. The true Universal White Brotherhood is made up of all the most evolved beings in existence. The Brotherhood on earth is a reflection, a 'branch office' if you will, whose purpose is to carry out the plans of the Brothers above while benefiting from their light and their help. It must become, more and more, a faithful reflection of the one above.³

In Mikhaël's eyes, the name of his brotherhood—Universal White Brotherhood—was a marvelous reminder of a higher reality that could be actualized by human beings on earth. The name—in which the word 'white' had no racial con-

notation—inspired him because it evoked the energy of the white light that illuminates the whole of creation.

His enthusiastic temperament led him to make all kinds of plans for the future. Not all of them materialized, but he was an indefatigable sower of ideas and impossible dreams which stimulated and invigorated others. Already during his second year in France, he talked of his dream of finding a piece of land where all those who wanted to live together in a fraternal spirit could have a small house of their own.

His idea of a true brotherhood respected the differences between people; he did not encourage them to live permanently together in one house. The community he envisaged was more in the nature of a village in which all the members would have their own house or apartment: a collective ideal in which all would enjoy the beauty of music, the arts, and science. There would be a place for dancing the

Paneurythmy, a library and an educational institute; there would be concerts, dancing, films, and studios for artists and craftsmen. There would be a university in which comparative astrological research would be carried on in relation to different aspects of human life such as the phenomenon of precocious talent, health, healing, chemistry, crystals and their influence, plants and their relationship with celestial bodies, childbirth and so on. The role of spiritual galvanoplasty, the means by which a mother can form her child during gestation, was also one of his most frequent themes.

He sometimes spoke of a special plan for a village laid out in concentric circles, with streets forming the radii linking the circles, and between the houses and the street, footpaths lined with trees and shrubs to safeguard the privacy of the residents. With infectious enthusiasm he talked of the beauty of a spiritual family in which the members came together at certain times of the day, but in which the

individuals were free to go about their own business, to stay or leave as they wished.

Never, either then or later, did he ask them to pool their financial resources; never did he attempt to control their private lives. He used to say, rather, that in the ideal family no one lays down the law, because where love reigns all is harmony. Over the years he often affirmed his faith in the coming of the kingdom of God on earth, which would be a world of love, joy and song, 'a world in which all human beings loved and respected each other, in which none would need to molest others in order to satisfy their own cravings'.

During the war, he had an inspiring experience which suggested an image of a truly fraternal world. Returning home late one evening, he missed the last train. The ticket offices were closed; everyone was at home behind closed and bolted shutters, and it was growing colder. Not

knowing what else to do, he sat down on a bench and began to pray.

After a few minutes he heard the rhythmic tread of a German patrol, and hoping that he would not be arrested for being out after curfew, he stood up, walked briskly toward them and explained his predicament. To his surprise, they escorted him very courteously to a mansion in which there were a number of officers, and gave him a bed for the night. Lying in the dark, unable to sleep, he could hardly believe the strange adventure that had led him to be offered hospitality by the enemy. The next morning he was invited to breakfast with them. No one asked him what he was doing there, and when he was ready to leave, one of the officers walked with him to the station.

Speaking of this incident years later, he said:

Just think. If all men and women lived

*in brotherhood and love, you could move freely about the world and be welcomed with open arms in every country as members of the same family.'*⁴

During this time of war he continued to say: 'Peace means universal brotherhood. Peace will never be born of violence.' In his view, the age of Aquarius would be an era in which fraternal communities thrived in the world, for Aquarius is synonymous with universality. But in order to adapt themselves and respond to the high frequency vibrations of Aquarius, human beings will have to perfect and refine their intuition, become more spiritual, be truly fraternal and make room in their hearts for the love of others.

He often spoke of the mountains, of the wealth to be found in them, of the pure, luminous spirits that dwell at their summits and with whom it is possible to communicate. And in his desire to share with the members of the brotherhood in France the joys he had known at Rila, he

spoke of spending several months in the mountains with the whole group. He also spoke of his wish to have a center for the Brotherhood near Paris.

At the same time, he was well aware that most people were not ready to live in a spirit of true sharing. Even the few who lived together in the villa, who had chosen an ideal of brotherhood and were fully supportive of Brother Mikhaël's ideas, found it difficult to adapt to each other without conflict. In April 1942, he told them frankly that they were not ready to put his ideas into practice. He added:

Many communities have sprung up in the West, but many have been unsuccessful because they were founded on self-interest or commercial and financial gain, instead of being founded on love and wisdom. They did not live in a spirit of humility.

It would be another five years before the

members of the brotherhood finally achieved something more substantial, for Mikhaël's enthusiasm for a fraternal community was accompanied by a strong sense of reality: they needed to prepare themselves for a long time in advance. In the meantime, they continued to rent this first villa until 1947 and did their best to live as a family, taking all their meals in common.

Mikhaël had always continued to practice the yoga of nutrition which he called *Hani-yoga*, from the Bulgarian word meaning 'to eat'. For him, food was 'a love letter from God'. It is capable, he explained, of preserving life and restoring energies, for, in addition to its physical properties, food contains precious etheric properties, and it is important to be aware of this when eating, as the mouth is a marvelous 'laboratory' which can assimilate even the subtlest elements. For this reason he asked the residents to take their meals in silence in order to facilitate this conscious work, adding that

noise, discussion and arguments during meals are harmful to health.

He was asking them, in fact, to practice a discipline, a form of yoga: learning to avoid any noise while eating is an extraordinarily effective way of acquiring true self-mastery. Explaining that the control of small things is conducive to inner harmony and a first step toward the control of larger things, he asked them to refrain from even the slightest sound with the dishes or the cutlery. Such attentiveness was so different from their habitual behavior that he had great difficulty in obtaining it. He had to keep insisting on the need for care and respect, reminding them repeatedly that true silence is both uplifting and nourishing: 'You must learn to remain completely silent, without moving or even rustling a piece of paper.'

As he explained, silence is harmony, and it is only when we establish true silence within ourselves that we can really hear music. All his life, Mikhaël stressed the

importance of musical vibrations and their subtle influence. He often said that it was not so much the intellectual understanding of music that was important but the sensations it generated: 'Do we understand the song of birds, or waterfalls, or the wind in the branches? No, but we are captivated and enchanted by them.'

Music accompanied all the activities of the brotherhood, and Peter Deunov's songs had a special place of honor. Brother Mikhaël insisted on the value of four-part choral singing, because of the equilibrium created by a mixed choir, but more importantly, because everything in nature sings with its own voice, and the four voices represent the four elements.

Years later, speaking of those early days, one of the musicians in the group said:

It was impossible to associate with him without feeling called upon to outdo oneself, to give the best of oneself. Things

that had been ordinary and routine became a challenge, an occasion for reflection and self-transformation. Under his guidance, professional musicians were urged to put aside all their erudition, all the conventions they had learned. If they allowed themselves to be guided by him, it was not long before they realized that they had begun to attain levels of perception previously undreamed of.

During the brotherhood meetings, the more sensitive among them often perceived colors, perfume or music, and sensed the presence of the angelic beings attracted by the spiritual work. Such moments gave them a deeply beneficial sense of joy and tranquility, a keener awareness of the reality of their spiritual family.

* * *

Despite the war, Mikhaël did not talk about politics more than before. It was

not his role to do so. He spoke rather about the purity that is indispensable for all great achievements, about the sun and the beneficial influence of its rays, about the spiritual intuition of the human heart, about music and about the birth of a new humanity. In this period of daily atrocities, he spoke about the love that alone is capable of resolving all conflicts and explained how to transform one's own nature so as to contribute to the transformation of the world.

In his view, if war was ravaging Europe, it was because war existed in the minds of men and women. People were killing each other because they did not realize that they were all members of the same divine family. He spoke also of prayer, by which we are united with the great current that rises ceaselessly from the hearts of all believers. For him, true prayer was vibrant and alive, free from routine:

If you always recite the same prayer you will put yourself to sleep and your prayer

*will be without effect. A formula can be helpful to someone who really does not know how to pray, but I much prefer a prayer that is unrehearsed, one that flows spontaneously. When you ask a favor of a friend, you speak simply and naturally, without affectation. This is how you should pray. [...] Picture in your mind a dazzling light in which everything pulsates and vibrates. Suns, angels, archangels, all is bathed in the softest, most subtle light. It is this, this light, that is the formless image of God.'*⁵

Sensing the anguish that gripped most of members of the brotherhood during the air raids, he gave them methods to help them to control their emotions. On several occasions he spoke about fear from the initiatic point of view, saying that it was the greatest enemy of every human being. When, after one of his talks, a woman told him that she was always paralyzed by terror during the air raids, he told her what she could do to overcome her instinctive reactions: 'Breathe deeply

and unite yourself to God; in this way you will be in command of your cells.'

He himself had always seen silence and immobility as a means to self-mastery in moments of difficulty. Speaking to the residents of the villa after the sunrise on April 19, 1944, he related that he had often been walking home from the railway station when the anti-aircraft guns began firing. In spite of the danger, he always continued calmly walking. Then one day when the thunder of the guns seemed louder than usual, he suddenly felt impelled to hurry and began to run, hoping to avoid the shrapnel falling all around him. The faster he ran, the more frightened he felt, until thoroughly annoyed with himself, he stopped and with great effort managed to compose himself. In conclusion, he noted:

That experience taught me that by running I had triggered the fear that lies dormant in every human being. You must not think that those whom we call brave

do not feel fear. In the course of their evolution, all human beings have to experience fear, it is a 'spirit' which must be defeated. The only solution is to grow in love of God and work with the will and with purity and justice; in this way fear will disappear. The first thing to do is establish this link with God. This has a calming effect. One's inner light and self-control grow stronger, and all within becomes marvelously luminous. ⁶

Mikhaël did not hesitate to tell adolescents as well as adults to face up to fear. On one occasion he was awoken by the telephone at three o'clock in the morning and heard the voice of a friend who sometimes sheltered people wanted by the German police:

'Brother Mikhaël,' she whispered; 'the Gestapo hammered on my door a few minutes ago and woke me up. When I opened the door they demanded that I give up a young Jewish boy who is hiding here. His whole family has been arrested.'

I managed to persuade them to wait outside, and I have told the boy not to try to flee. I promised that you would get him out of this predicament. Can you do something?’

Mikhaël, deciding to call on the cooperation of the boy himself, sent him this message:

‘Don’t hide. Keep calm and speak politely to the officers and you will come to no harm.’

To everyone’s amazement, the boy had the courage to obey these terrifying instructions and was not arrested. The Gestapo questioned him and then told him to go back to bed. One of the people who witnessed this scene said that it was as though they had suddenly forgotten the purpose of their visit—or perhaps the boy’s confident attitude reassured them. Mikhaël, for his part, offered no explanation. If people were astonished by his methods, it was because they did not real-

ize that he was aware of certain factors that were imperceptible to others. Without regard for his own safety, he continued to devote a great deal of time and energy to giving spiritual help to all those who appealed to him and who were often in great danger.

From time to time during these years he would accept the invitation of friends to spend a week or two at their country estate. Here, far from Paris he was free to meditate in solitude and take the time to rebuild his depleted strength. His hostess was an energetic woman who had assumed the task of preparing the meals for her forty employees. Conditions were extremely hard; money was scarce and she was beset by constant problems. One day Mikhaël, who could see that she was wearing herself out, told her:

‘You’re burning the candle at both ends. You must rest. I suggest that once the meal is ready you go and rest for a quarter of an hour. Then, when the workers

arrive, you can come back and serve them.'

'How can I do that? It's impossible!'

The next day he came to the kitchen a quarter of an hour before mealtime, saying:

'You should go and rest now.'

'But the meal isn't ready...'

'If you don't do it, you'll have a very difficult old age.'

Mikhaël said no more at the time. And later, when she brought the subject up again, sometimes justifying herself, sometimes blaming herself for her indecisiveness, he responded only with a smile. Eventually she found a rhythm which enabled her to get all her work done without exhausting herself. 'Brother Mikhaël taught me to respect myself,' she later confided to Stella.

It was at this time that Brother Mikhaël said:

It is important to know yourself and not do violence to your physical system. You can avoid serious damage if you submit to the rhythm of nature. At one time I did not know this and I squandered enormous sums of energy trying to swim against the current of life. No. You have to learn to wait. There are times when the tide carries all before it and we have to stand back and wait until the tide turns and allows us to move ahead safely. We want to compete with the ocean, get the better of it: we want to be the stronger. But it is impossible. For my part I am highly influenced by these alternations. In the last few days of the waning moon I am in an almost permanent state of disassociation. I feel that I am no longer on earth, that I am far away from you all. My physical body is lying down, asleep, but on the invisible plane I move about and am active. My friends tell me that at those times they

*feel me near to them. In periods like this you should rest so that your cells may be purified and revived.*⁷

* * *

The summer of 1944 saw the last months of the war in France. In Paris it was common knowledge that Hitler had ordered the commanding officer to destroy the city. Large areas could be blown up at any moment, for it had been systematically mined, and immense quantities of explosives were stored in the tunnels of the Métro. While gun battles erupted in the streets, snipers fired from the rooftops, and the few pedestrians hurried about their business as fast as they could. In August, during the chaotic week before Paris was liberated, Mikhaël left Sèvres without explanation and went into the city, where he stayed for several days. At one point he found himself on Lafayette Street, as bullets ricocheted off buildings. Several people were gunned down before

his eyes, and he himself was struck by flying fragments of stone.

In spite of the danger, he remained in Paris, continuing the special work that had brought him there, and about which he never gave any explanation. In Sèvres, the members of the brotherhood could not help wondering what his strange behavior signified. Experience had taught them that he never did anything of consequence without 'an indication from above'. They knew also that he continually united himself mentally with all those who worked with the forces of light, joining his prayer to theirs to create a spiritual force of great potency. When Paris was liberated a few days later, they understood that Brother Mikhaël had thought it necessary to be at the center of the city for this spiritual work. His prayer, in union with that of all believers throughout the world, had certainly contributed to bringing about the end of hostilities. Often in the course of his life he did such things which seemed mysterious

to those around him, but which were quite natural to him. In his single-minded desire to bring the kingdom of God to earth, he worked untiringly with light, acting, as it were, 'as a prism which receives the light of the sun and refracts it in life-giving rays of color'.

Once the war was over, the rhythm of life gradually returned to normal and in the brotherhood, as in society as a whole, people began to breathe freely again. Toward the end of 1945 the French brotherhood was officially informed that Peter Deunov had died on December 27, 1944. The news had not reached them earlier, owing to the difficult circumstances that had interrupted postal services between certain countries toward the end of hostilities. When he received the news, Mikhaël thought back to the previous December, remembering his premonitory dreams about Peter Deunov's death, which at the time he had not wanted to believe. Perhaps he had been unable to recognize the truth of these messages

because Peter Deunov was too dear to him, for in spite of them, he had continued to make plans to bring him to France. This separation was a great personal distress for Mikhaël. It also marked the beginning of the anticipated period of tribulation.

Notes

1. Svezda, op cit., p. 55.
2. A. Laumonier, preface to, 'Michaël Ivanoff' in *Les sept lacs de Rila*. Ed Izgrev, 1946. (Our translation)
3. 'On Participating in the Work of the Universal White Brotherhood' in *On the Art of Teaching*.
4. 'The Idea of a Pan-World' in *A New Dawn: Society and Politics in the Light of Initiatic Science*.
5. June 7, 1942.
6. April 19, 1944.

7. June 7, 1942.

12



The Conspiracy

Peter Deunov had not misread the signs when, in 1918, he had told Mikhaël that the powers of darkness would put obstacles in his path ‘in the twenty-sixth year’. The prophecy came true toward the end of the war, when dark forces began to conspire against Mikhaël in an effort to destroy him and annihilate his work. In

June 1944, recognizing the imminent danger, he urged the members of the brotherhood to be attentive to what was going on around them, not to be swayed by the tactics of those who served the powers of darkness, and to ally themselves constantly with all those who worked with 'white forces', the forces of light. For Mikhaël, the four-year period from 1944 to 1948 was fraught with attacks, temptations and ordeals calculated to bring down even the greatest spiritual master, saint or prophet.

One such attack occurred in his native land after the death of Peter Deunov. In an attempt to counteract any influence he might still have, some members of the Bulgarian brotherhood held public meetings in various towns and villages in a deliberate attempt to discredit him. Even Boyan Boëv, Peter Deunov's secretary, weakened by poor health, was drawn into this campaign and denied having written to Mikhaël about his mission at the dictation of the Master. A little later, however,

he regretted this injustice, and admitted that he had lied.

In spite of the slander, no one could erase the deep impression Mikhaël had left on his friends, on the members of the brotherhood, on his pupils and their parents. In 1945 and 1946, he received many letters from compatriots, assuring him of their esteem. One of these touched him very deeply: it was from his friend Alexander, from whom he had not heard for a long time. Alexander wrote that he had been arrested by the Gestapo and had spent several months in prison. During those months he had undergone a profound transformation:

In that solitude, shut up between four walls, I was born again... I experienced greater spiritual growth than in all the rest of my life, and it was your words which were the primary cause of this great and definitive transformation. Those words heard in the past still lingered like ghosts in my consciousness,

and while I was in prison these ghosts became more spiritual. They came back to me as living figures which represented my destiny and my future. My dear, dear Brother Mikhaël, if this single transformation were your only achievement in life, it would be enough.

But the letters which affected Mikhaël most profoundly were from those who had been with Peter Deunov shortly before his death. The Master had talked to them about 'the great white brotherhood on high' which must be materialized on earth, and had added: 'It is Mikhaël who will realize it on earth.' He had also said: 'Mikhaël will experience great ordeals, but afterwards he will go further than I.'

Even in the French brotherhood Mikhaël came under attack: a few of those who had stayed with the Bulgarian brothers and sisters at Rila in 1939 reproached him for giving his own interpretation of the teaching. They did not know—or did not

want to admit—that Peter Deunov himself had written to him to endorse the work he was doing in France.

But the most perfidious attacks came from some of the secret societies in Paris, which attempted to bribe him and gain control of his brotherhood, for it was now a factor to be reckoned with. Brother Mikhaël's stature and spiritual influence were such that more than one of the occult organizations in Paris sought to use him in order to enhance their own power. Their leaders' tactics were shrewd: they praised him publicly, declared that he was uniquely capable of assuming great responsibilities in the world, and offered him wealth and renown if he agreed to fuse his brotherhood with their own association.

Mikhaël declined. Speaking about one of these groups later, he said that although they had retained certain aspects of ancient Egyptian initiation, their goal today was domination, and that when he

had 'had the misfortune to refuse to join them' he had brought terrible reprisals upon himself.

In addition to these powerful adversaries, there were those who, seeing him in the light of their own narrow interests, offered him expensive gifts or money to use magic for their personal benefit. At this period he also had to contend with frequent difficulties caused by women who fell in love with him. One of them, confident of success, announced that she was going to marry him. When she saw that this was not to be, she became one of his most implacable enemies, and even went to the immigration authorities to persuade them not to issue the identity card he was due to receive. Another admirer offered him her estates and her immense fortune in return for marriage.

Mikhaël brushed aside all these offers as unrealistic fantasies. He knew very well that any benefits he might gain from such associations with the rich of this world

would cost him his freedom. As might have been expected, however, many of those whose offers were rejected turned against him and bore him a lasting grudge. Some of them were to play a key role in the ordeal that was being prepared for him.

As though all this were not enough, he was once again being harassed by police inspectors, who questioned him about his reasons for staying in France. Fortunately, the officers of the local precinct knew perfectly well what kind of work he was doing, for they had interrogated him regularly during the past nine years—each time he had applied for a renewal of his residential permit—and had great respect for him. During the war, however, the alliance between King Boris of Bulgaria and Hitler had often led to Bulgarian nationals in France being suspected of espionage. Most of them had been expelled from France immediately after the war, but Mikhaël, having refused to return to his homeland, had

acquired official status as a stateless person and could not legally be expelled. For a time he was under close surveillance by secret service agents who managed to infiltrate the brotherhood meetings. This surveillance ceased when they failed to find the slightest evidence to justify their suspicions.

The year 1946 saw an influx of new members into the brotherhood from the secret societies that had failed to win over Brother Mikhaël. Their goal was to infiltrate and undermine the group from within. In particular, they hoped to detect something in his behavior toward women that could be used against him. Their efforts were in vain, for his conduct was so transparent and impartial that they could find no hint of impropriety. For want of anything more substantial, they spread increasingly insidious and corrosive rumors impugning his moral integrity. The climate of suspicion and conflict in the fraternity created by all

this made it increasingly difficult to see exactly what was going on.

Mikhaël knew that he could not avoid the ordeals that were coming closer and recalled one in particular that had been foretold by Peter Deunov: 'Mikhaël will know great misfortunes, particularly through women.' He was not blind to the prevailing rumors and deceitful maneuvers, but he did not allow them to distract him. He welcomed all who came and did his best to enlighten them, for he always hoped 'to leave in their souls some trace of beauty and harmony'. In fact, throughout this trying period, he continued his teaching, excluding no one and taking little heed of any possible repercussions. At the same time, although his tendency was to 'invite the whole world to dine at the table of the brotherhood', he had always warned his regular participants not to invite people who had no notion of spirituality or who were looking for miracles or ready-made solutions to their prob-

lems. One of the brothers remembers those days:

He was fully aware of the motivations of some of those who came to his talks, but he remained present to each person and as attentive as ever to their needs. During those difficult days he seemed to be suffused with light and inspiration as never before.

Hoping to kindle enthusiasm in the heart of each member of his audience, he spoke of the energy of the sun, of sacred fire, of the music that awakens the chakras, of true and universal brotherhood. In April 1946, however, seeing that the mood in the group was unchanged, he took a very serious decision. Speaking in a tone that revealed deep sadness, he began by reminding them that it was in response to their own insistence and in the desire to be useful to them that he had attempted to be their instructor. And he added:

My failure to convince you to put this

teaching into practice shows me that it was very presumptuous of me to undertake the task. Henceforth I abandon my role as your guide.¹

He said no more, and the members of the brotherhood were aghast. They had recognized long ago that Brother Mikhaël was a true spiritual Master and they had no desire to lose him. A ripple went through the group, as one after the other stood up and assured him that they sincerely wanted to live in harmony. Several asked him explicitly in the name of the group to be their spiritual Master. Even those who later betrayed him and bore false witness against him joined in the general consensus. Stella, who knew who they were, heard them asserting:

‘Brother Mikhaël, you are truly a Master! We shall always be faithful to you whatever comes.’

At that moment, there was a keen awareness in the group of the gravity of a spir-

itual commitment and the demands it made on them. But Mikhaël, although deeply moved, refused to take advantage of the general emotion. Yes, he would remain their teacher, but on condition that he continued to be simply their 'Brother Mikhaël'. In spite of his insistence, from that day on those whom he called his brothers and sisters considered him as a Master. As one of those who had been present at this meeting told us:

The evidence of our own eyes was not to be denied: his purity and magnanimity, the integrity and fortitude with which he faced his ordeals, and the clarity with which he transmitted Peter Deunov's teaching only served to confirm what we had felt from the moment we first met him.

Stella in particular defended him faithfully and continued to believe in him in the face of all opposition. She could never forget that he had been for her 'the occasion of a prodigious expansion of

consciousness'. Several years later she would write that he had guided her 'as a sighted person guides one who is blind, to help her to awaken her higher sense of sight'.

That incident marked an important phase in the life of the brotherhood. Something powerful had taken shape: a subtle force, a collective entity now surrounded and protected the members, but this entity needed to be nurtured and reinforced. Mikhaël's attitude did not change; he continued to speak to them with the same simplicity. Despite the agitation surrounding his person and the sadness he sometimes felt, his visitors always found him serene. He continued to insist that they should always verify what he put before them. On April 25, he told them:

Do not bother your heads about whether I am an initiate or not; try simply to check the authenticity of what I give you.

Before eating, make sure that this 'food' is pure, unadulterated and true.

In the weeks that followed several people wrote to him to express their admiration and respect. But he, as always, kept his sights fixed on a higher world so as not to forget his own lowliness and succumb to the temptation of pride. Referring to these letters one day in June, he made it quite clear that he had no desire to be praised, that he was content to be an insignificant servant. He added: 'Focus all your attention on the teaching, for it is the teaching that possesses every virtue.'

* * *

The year 1947, Mikhaël's tenth year in France, was to be one of the most difficult in the history of the brotherhood. It would see both the realization of their dream of a fraternal community and the tornado that would sweep Mikhaël toward one of the most painful ordeals of his life. For his part, although he sensed

the approaching storm, he did nothing to forestall its fury. In his New Year message to the brotherhood, he wrote:

Nineteen forty-seven is poised before us, as mysterious, dark and impenetrable as the sphinx of ancient Egypt which waited to be conquered by the response of wise and enlightened disciples before opening its treasure-house and dispensing its blessings.

That year, he faced two opposing tendencies in the way he was perceived by others; the one glorified him, the other did everything possible to defile him. The first manifested itself when a film producer, wishing to make a documentary about the brotherhood, was given permission to film everyday life at the villa. The shooting took place in an atmosphere of great cordiality. Some time later, the film was shown in the cinemas of Paris following the newsreels, and Mikhaël went with a few friends to watch it. The photography was superb and the

editing was done with great subtlety. The film ended on a powerful note: it showed Brother Mikhaël as an immense figure rising with the sun above the terrestrial globe. Paradoxically, just before being publicly debased and humiliated, he was being glorified in the most extraordinary way. This film led to a radio interview during which he spoke about Peter Deunov, Bulgaria, and the fraternal camps at Rila.

The contrary tendency was expressed in a savage attack published in a major newspaper. Some journalists who had been allowed to visit the villa wrote an article which attempted to discredit him and ridicule the brotherhood. On April 24, 1947, aware of the distress and indignation of the members, Mikhaël told them that instead of being angry, they should be joyful about all they had received; above all, that they must be prepared for the difficulties to come. He added: 'Public opinion will be divided about us.'

During the following months he took advantage of several occasions to instill greater energy and ardor into his followers. On May 1, he spoke to them about the approaching feast of Wesak. He explained that each year on the day of the full moon of May, great numbers of initiates gather in the Himalayas, some physically, others in their astral bodies, to commemorate the birth of the Buddha and work together with the forces of white light.

In the course of this ceremony, which falls on Monday, May 5, these 'white brothers', uniting themselves by means of potent invocations to the celestial hierarchies, will work to bring cosmic forces to earth and send waves and vibrations of the highest spirituality throughout space for the benefit of humanity.

He urged them to forgive their enemies and to take special care during these days of preparation to avoid all negative thoughts. Knowing that many of them

were afraid of the intrigues going on in the background, he added:

If you do not light your lamps no one will be able to see you. We are all afloat on the ocean of life, and our ship is often in danger of sinking in the terrible storms that threaten it. If we want to be saved we must be capable of sending luminous signals heavenward. Then someone will come and rescue us.

All those who were able to do so prepared themselves by meditation for the celebration of Wesak. Four days later, Mikhaël spoke to them about inner peace and described how a dove had come to him while he was meditating, settling on his left hand. 'It is because of that dove,' he added, 'that I tell you now not to grovel, but to become like birds.'

In the spring of 1947, in the midst of all the difficulties the brotherhood was experiencing, the members realized a cherished dream. After much searching, they

at last found a house on the outskirts of Paris which seemed to suit their needs, and they decided to buy it. The new house was at the top of the rue du Belvédère de la Ronce above Sèvres, on a hectare of land bordering the forest. Around it was the countryside dotted with occasional houses and clusters of trees. In the distance, the dim forms of the Paris skyline could just be seen.

The brotherhood took possession of the new property that spring, but a tremendous effort of co-operation was needed to make it habitable. The house had not been lived in for eighteen years and was in a state of extreme disrepair. Several weeks of back-breaking labor were needed to bring order out of chaos, but this great family worked together in a spirit of joy which often expressed itself in outbursts of song. Mikhaël, in grey overalls and a beret, was everywhere at once, helping with all the different tasks. He had lost none of his practical common sense and had not forgotten the lessons

learned in Bulgaria when he had worked as carpenter, brick-layer and house-painter. One of those who worked with him remembers:

When he took a paintbrush or trowel from someone's hand to demonstrate a better way to use it, it was because he knew not only how each tool should be handled, but also its hidden symbolism.

One day, as he went to check on the progress in the meeting hall, he found a young woman on her knees scrubbing the floor with all the ardor of youth. Her smile as she looked up at him soon gave way to an expression of dismay as he told her that she was going about it the wrong way: 'When we do the ceiling the floor will be dirty all over again.'

That evening he talked about how to work and about the symbolism of ceiling, doors and windows. He explained how important it was for our spiritual, psychic and physical life to begin by tidying and

cleansing the upper levels before descending gradually to the lower levels, and that this means that we must think and use our minds before moving on to the level of feelings and acts.

When you begin a job you must always bear in mind certain rules. For instance, things have to be done in a certain order, also you must clean your tools after use. If you only knew the profound science hidden in the gestures we make when we work... Even if this work seems to be not even remotely spiritual, the whole universe is reflected in our gestures.²

By June, the greater part of the work was done: the grounds had been cleared and leveled and the house was ready for occupation. The ground floor was arranged as one large meeting room. In one corner of the top floor under the mansard roof, Mikhaël chose a tiny bedroom with a window looking out to the east, and a sitting-room next to it. On one wall of this room he hung a magnificent portrait

of Peter Deunov, and it was here that he received his visitors.

At last, the dream of a good number of people who had longed to share a home in which they could live together in harmony was to be realized, and their mood was euphoric. In spite of the numerous difficulties, they were full of hope. The shared work of renovation had given them the feeling that they were building a better future together. Even the threatened storm seemed to be receding.

Once the work was completed, Mikhaël consecrated the property and gave it the name that Peter Deunov had chosen for the brotherhood center in Bulgaria: Izgrev. All the members were invited to come for the sunrise whenever they were free, and on Sundays they gathered to hear Brother Mikhaël speak, perform the gymnastic exercises and dance the Paneurythmy to the accompaniment of flute and violin.

This harmonious interlude was short-lived, for Mikhaël's enemies, who had tried in vain to find something blameworthy in his attitude toward women, multiplied the rumors and innuendoes. Those who considered themselves his disciples felt as though they were being torn apart by the conflicts and slanderous rumors; they could not help but be influenced by the climate of anxiety. In June, Mikhaël told them:

I am not asking you to believe me or to follow me blindly. No. Open your eyes and you will see the difference between us and the others. Trust your intuition. Set it free; allow it to function; release it from impurities and from its old habits.³

More and more his talks revealed this constant desire to liberate his fellow human beings. His knowledge of human nature told him that an ideal of perfection could never be imposed on anybody.

Witnesses tell us that he had never attempted to attract the masses; on the contrary, he excelled at screening his audience. In his talks, he sometimes began by discussing a seemingly random variety of subjects, knowing that those who were only superficially interested would not have the patience to stay to the end. Then, once they had left the room, he gathered up the threads of these different subjects and wove them into a coherent whole, a complete and well-balanced picture.

One day, noting the arrogant attitude of four individuals who had just come into the room, he introduced one subject after another, skimming superficially over each one, until at last the four men stood up and went out, remarking audibly on the insignificance of the speaker. They had discovered that Brother Mikhaël was 'not dangerous.' As soon as they had left, however, bringing together all the apparently irrelevant elements, he drew a masterly conclusion.

In July, most of his regular students left Paris and went their separate ways for the vacations. There would be no more talks from Mikhaël for three months, and when the brotherhood gathered again at the end of September, the climate would be very different. Mikhaël, who spent part of his nights in prayer, defending himself against the various attacks aimed at him—which even included black magic—decided to go away for a rest. He left for the Alps with one of the brothers.

In the mountains one day, he stretched out on the ground to rest and in a half-sleep had the first of four visions that would come to him within the year, symbolic visions of trial by the four elements. He saw himself standing on a mountain that was crumbling beneath his feet. Although the ground was disappearing at dizzying speed, he sensed that he would not fall, and began to leap lightly from rock to rock. Afterwards, he understood that the time of his great tests had begun;

this vision heralded the ordeal of earth, designed to test steadfastness of will.

In the meantime, having readied themselves for the attack, his enemies set out to break him. The man who served as catalyst for the alliance of destructive forces ranged against him was a mysterious individual who had been living in Paris for some time, but who professed to hail from Tibet. The names he claimed as his own were those of the most prestigious of high initiates: Sherenzi Lind, Kut Humi, and many more. His followers called him King of the World. It was learned later that he was an international spy who had come from Cuba, but for a long time he succeeded in hoodwinking many people by means of his considerable occult powers. As far as is known, neither his true nationality nor his name were ever divulged.

This unscrupulous individual was a formidable hypnotist who used his powers to influence many people and force them

to do his will. His aim—which came to light only later—was to gain ascendancy over the different spiritual movements and use them as a cover for his clandestine activities. Determined to take over the brotherhood, he used every means in his power to subjugate Brother Mikhaël and make him serve him. His first step was to attempt to win the trust of the members of the brotherhood by speaking of their spiritual guide in highly flattering terms.

As long as he had not met the man, Mikhaël avoided speaking about him. As soon as he met him in the flesh, he recognized him for what he was and realized that he had acquired a dangerous enemy. But even then, faithful to his method of leaving people to verify a situation for themselves before forming an opinion, he spoke of him several times in terms which left his listeners free to make up their own minds.

Those who sensed the falsity of the

Cuban's claims found this magnanimous attitude unwise. For a long time, some even believed that he had managed to deceive Brother Mikhaël. One day however, Mikhaël took three members of the brotherhood into his confidence and disclosed his true perception of the self-styled 'King of the World'. Did he do this deliberately, acting on the intuition that his destiny would be accomplished through this man? However that may be, one of the three betrayed his confidence.

When the Cuban learned that he had been unmasked, he launched his attack—although he still endeavored to remain in Brother Mikhaël's good graces. His first step was to win over a Bulgarian who nursed a long-standing grievance against Mikhaël, and to invite to his home some of the women who had a grudge against him. Fascinated by his flamboyant personality and rough-hewn, dominating visage, most of those who accepted his invitations were easily persuaded to let him hypnotize them, and

several of them became docile instruments, ready to do whatever he asked.

* * *

In September the storm clouds broke. Witnesses in the pay of his enemies officially accused Brother Mikhaël of raping forty women. The major newspapers published these allegations in front-page headlines, depicting him as the most debauched satyr of all times and accusing him of conducting orgies in the forest with his disciples. No words were too abusive to be applied to him. Immediately, Izgrev was besieged by journalists, many of whom, armed with cameras, climbed the trees outside the walls, trying to spy on Brother Mikhaël's every movement. He received threats and insults from complete strangers.

On September 28 1947, Mikhaël spoke to a hushed gathering. His usual audience was there in force, a heterogeneous group which included members of the brother-

hood, occasional visitors, members of other movements who were still drawn by his radiance, and the enemies who had already secretly betrayed him. After a brief meditation he spoke of the attacks a man in his position can be subject to: the poisoned arrows, the destructive vibrations, the tornadoes that could eventually bring him down:

I'm obliged to strive like a tightrope-walker to keep my balance. Who can help me in this task? Only very few help me.

And he added that he knew the identity of those who had joined the brotherhood with the intention of causing his downfall. After alluding to the implausible accusations made against him, he added that he was willing to continue his work:

If you want me to go on talking to you, to go on encouraging you and giving you joys of a higher kind, I will stay with you. But you may be sure of one thing: wher-

ever I may be, in prison or elsewhere, I shall always be ready to praise God.

Then, reminding them that it was Peter Deunov who had sent him to France, he invited those whom he knew to be his enemies to speak out openly in front of the group. Seeing that they were too ill at ease to speak, he said:

You say nothing. You accept that I should remain with you... I ask you then to help me by praying for me tonight. You need the support of others to evolve. So do I.

At this, trying not to draw attention to themselves, those who had betrayed him slipped from the room. By then, however, everyone knew who they were, and they would come back only when they were sure of reaching their objective. After a brief pause, Mikhaël concluded the meeting by saying that they were all free to leave him, but that it was in the teaching that they would find all spiritual riches.

At Izgrev and in the other groups, most of the members passed the night in prayer. Knowing Brother Mikhaël's purity and integrity, they realized that the accusations leveled against him must cause him the greatest possible moral torture.

During the months that followed Mikhaël gave few talks. He was often overwhelmed by great sadness, not so much because of what he was going through as because, 'so few human beings are capable of committing themselves to a high ideal'. This sadness was palpable in the two or three talks he gave in October. At the same time, seeking to prepare his brothers and sisters for what was to come, he repeated that their ordeals would serve to winnow out some of their number, and urged them to cultivate discernment and work with diligence to purify themselves.

That autumn was a waking nightmare for the brotherhood. The 'Tibetan' continued his work in concert with Mikhaël's other enemies who had assembled the

fabricated 'proofs' they needed to have him arrested. Since Brother Mikhaël had proved to be incorruptible, it did not really matter what pretext was invoked; what mattered was to get rid of him and take over his movement. From several women, who had been transformed through repeated hypnosis into their docile tools, they obtained signed declarations charging that Brother Mikhaël had seduced them. Some of these women seem to have been infected by a current of hysteria and sincerely believed that their mysterious hypnotizer was truly the Master of the world. Others had never forgiven Brother Mikhaël for resisting their charms. Still others, who had succumbed to an offer of money or had been set up in business, signed because they were in no position to refuse. Certain witnesses of these events maintain, however, that a large majority of the women in the brotherhood took no part in these stratagems.

One day, Mikhaël was given a warning

which he realized was extremely significant. While meditating in his room he had the second symbolic vision of ordeal by the four elements. He saw himself suspended over a pool of dark water swarming with crocodiles which were trying to seize and devour him. The waters rose, the earth disappeared under terrible floods, and he saw many of his brothers and sisters drowning.

After this vision he understood that the dark water symbolized hatred and evil, and he knew that his enemies were determined to crush him. As he would say later, it is when one is subjected to ordeal by water that one finds out 'if one is capable of resisting the temptation of hatred.' He himself did not feel hatred—or if he did, he refused to give in to it. He continued to work mentally to help his enemies, constantly picturing them bathed in light. His 'dearest wish', as he confided to a small group of his disciples, was to win the heart of his most bitter enemies so that he could help them, even at the

risk of incurring the condemnation of the world. He raised no objection, therefore, when the so-called Tibetan, seeking to benefit from Mikhaël's reputation, spoke of him as one of his closest associates.

Later that autumn he agreed to participate in a three-day convention to which all the major spiritual movements were invited. He prepared for the event by fasting. At the convention, the 'Tibetan', in a long saffron robe, spoke at length. When his turn came, Brother Mikhaël, in a light grey suit, walked up the steps and seated himself in the lotus position at the front of the stage, as close as possible to the audience. A member of that audience remembers the moment:

His face expressed great serenity, his gaze was direct and full of warmth, and with his first words the atmosphere in the auditorium was transformed. Using simple, everyday terms, in strong contrast to the solemn orations of the other speakers, he spoke to the people in front of him

as to friends. That evening, he revealed himself in public as never before.

The convention was followed by a lull before the opening of a new round of hostilities. Although Mikhaël gave no more talks until the New Year, he remained readily accessible to those around him. They could sense that he wanted them to make their own choices in complete freedom and without undue influence from him, and was ready to put himself at risk to help them to develop their discernment. It was with this in mind that he invited the 'Tibetan' to Izgrev to address the members of the brotherhood, their friends, and families.

For most of those present, the occasion was a turning point. The regular students, accustomed to the clear language and highly spiritual ideas of Brother Mikhaël, soon realized that the guest speaker possessed disturbing powers of fascination which he used with great skill. A witness recounted the scene:

On the wall behind the rostrum was a photo of Peter Deunov, and beneath it the armchair which was always reserved for him. Brother Mikhaël sat to one side with his three guests on his left. We sang. I could sense that part of the circle centered on Brother Mikhaël began imperceptibly to move and to be centered on the 'Tibetan'. But not everyone was taken in. After the meeting several people could be heard to say: 'The man's an impostor. Why did Brother Mikhaël invite him?'

Those who had looked forward to this meeting in trepidation were deeply impressed by the outcome, for it gave them a glimpse—not for the first time—of the extraordinary inner liberty which allowed Brother Mikhaël to take such unprecedented action. In spite of what he knew of the influence and power of his enemy, he had given the members of his group the opportunity to make their own choice.

Nineteen forty-seven drew to a close. The journalists had not abandoned their quarry, and scurrilous and libelous articles continued to appear in the press. In spite of this, Mikhaël declared in his New Year message that the year just ending had been one of the best in the life of the brotherhood. It was an astonishing declaration. Speaking of the ordeals they had experienced, he said that each member had been tried and tempted in every dimension of his being: heart, intelligence, and will. Then, referring to his enemies, he wrote: 'My only concern is to assist them spiritually.'

The magnanimity with which he treated his enemies was not always understood, but his explanation was invariable: he was working to help each of them by surrounding them mentally with light, and he hoped to win their hearts through love. He admitted one day that on several occasions he had been offered the opportunity to use his personal powers to

avenge himself on them, but that he had never done so.

The prediction with which he closed that New Year message was remembered in the brotherhood for a long time: the coming year, he wrote, would be a year of tribulation, marked by the separation of the sheep from the goats. 'The children of light will seek each other out. They will join forces and gain strength from each other.'

During the month of January Mikhaël took no part in public activities. At home one night, he had a phone call from a brother who had learned what his enemies were planning and urged him to escape, saying: 'You must leave the country. They are plotting to have you put in prison.'

But Mikhaël had no intention of running away, and refused to abandon his brotherhood and his work. He had consented long since to the suffering and trials that

would be part of the life he had chosen, and that night, more conscious than ever of the ferocity of his enemies, he agreed to go through fire. The moment was, perhaps, a turning point in his mission: on one side of the balance were the terrible ordeals that threatened to undermine his work; on the other, was the possibility of escape and a new beginning elsewhere. In one sense he was free to refuse the bitter cup offered to him, but he knew that if he wanted to emerge into the light, he would first have to descend into the most terrible darkness. Not long before this, speaking about the trials that he and his disciples were undergoing, he had said that there came a point when all human beings had to go through hell:

Jesus descended into hell because the path to heaven goes that way. Everyone has to pass through hell to reach paradise. In other words, when you begin to work at overcoming your faults, a kind of hell opens up before you, and for a time you have to make your way through

*that hell. When you emerge victorious, another external struggle awaits you, and if you are once more victorious, all will fall silent, no voice will ever be raised against you again. But until that last moment you have to be heroic.*⁴

* * *

On Wednesday, January 21, 1948, Mikhaël was arrested without warning and booked on a trumped-up charge at the local police station. Later, on the strength of false testimony sworn to by several women, he was transferred to a cell in the Santé prison in Paris. Jean, who had been with him when the police arrived, was also taken into custody but was released the next day.

The members of the brotherhood, paralyzed by shock, were completely at a loss. They did not believe Brother Mikhaël to be guilty, but some were intimidated by the climate of hostility, or embarrassed to acknowledge that they belonged to his

spiritual family. Only a small nucleus remained absolutely loyal, and these, with heavy hearts and in constant anguish, tried to decide how to defend him. Articles continued to appear in the press, and the brotherhood was surrounded by an ambience of threats, hostility and derision.

A few days after the arrest, Jean was at Izgrev with his wife Raymonde and a brother called Maurice. It had rained relentlessly for several days and the three friends were deeply unhappy. Their spiritual Master was in prison and the brotherhood was divided in itself. Breaking the silence that had settled in, Raymonde began to talk of a dream she had had four years earlier:

‘Peter Deunov had just died, and in my dream he arrived at the villa carrying two large suitcases. “Where is my son?” he asked. Someone answered, “He’s very busy.” Peter Deunov replied, “Oh, he’s busy is he...” then, going straight through

the wall into Brother Mikhaël's room, he put the suitcases down and said: "There, my son; they are yours."

When Raymonde stopped speaking the atmosphere seemed lighter. Jean and Maurice both knew that she had surprising mediumistic gifts and often received strong premonitions. They could not help but be struck by the dream which symbolized the inheritance that Mikhaël had received from Peter Deunov: responsibility for the teaching he had brought to France.

'We just have to go on,' said Jean, standing up. 'Brother Mikhaël has shown us the way. He has talked about the future and I believe in that future. I am sure that all that he has foreseen will come true.'

In the meantime, Stella had thrown herself into the task of preserving the existence of the brotherhood against all odds and devoted herself heart and soul to this cause. With the help of the president of

the association—also called Jean—she did her best to keep everyone calm and bolster their courage.

Only the deeply troubled climate of post-war society can explain certain aspects of Mikhaël's arrest and long detention before being brought to trial, or the trial itself which contravened several specific requirements of the justice system. Twenty years later Stella was to write that the ambience of those times had allowed what would have been impossible later: five months after his arrest he was still detained at the Santé prison without having been brought to trial.

Mikhaël would speak little about those long months of detention in the harrowing conditions of prison and the terrible treatment to which he was subjected. Years later, however, referring briefly to his state of mind at the time, he spoke of the inner voices that attempt to lead human beings to despair:

When I was falsely accused, I, too, heard the voices that cause one to doubt. No one is beyond their reach. In 1948 and 1949 they tempted me, tried to make me doubt myself and my ability to accomplish my mission. But I clung to the memory of the luminous experiences I had had, and my doubts vanished.⁵

His teaching makes it clear that good and evil are both necessary to life. Just as fire can be used to warm or to destroy, just as poisonous plants can be used to kill or to heal, good and evil both have a twofold task. What is important is to know how to use evil and transform it into good. As a mountaineer uses the irregularities on a rock-face as toe-holds on his climb to the summit, or as nature transforms garbage into nourishment for trees and flowers, so can we use trials, illness and suffering as a means of rising to higher things. In this sense, what appears as evil to those who suffer is often a hidden form of good.

Many years later, he would say:

All that had happened to me—to have the press present me before the world as a satyr, a monster—was it not the worst that could happen? I tell you frankly, all those unfounded accusations, all that derision, were very hard to bear. There are times when one would rather die than be so deeply dishonored. Many people have committed suicide for one hundredth of what I endured. Calumny works in one like a deadly poison. But initiatic science was there to show me that it was perhaps the greatest good that could have happened to me, for it obliged me to tread an unknown path, to find undreamed-of weapons and resources, untapped inner energies that I would never have found otherwise.⁶

During the five months following Mikhaël's arrest, Stella and several others devoted days and nights to the preparation of his defense. They had engaged a team of lawyers, but to their despair the most competent of them died just before the trial, which had been set for June 26,

1948. They were obliged to fall back on others who were unknown to them, and the results were decidedly inferior.

On Saturday, June 26, a dozen faithful followers were present at the Palais de Justice when Mikhaël was brought into the courtroom, but there was to be no trial that day: he had been brought to court only to be told that the hearing had been postponed. As he was led out, his followers were allowed to shake his hand.

In spite of this delay, his defense team was feeling quite hopeful, for that day one of his accusers had signed an official retraction. It turned out to be the first of a series. Also, an unexpected ally had just come forward: a woman who had been the pseudo-Tibetan's representative in France had realized, not long before, that she had been taken in by him. On entering his office unexpectedly one day, she had surprised him in the act of dictating a letter to a woman who was one of Mikhaël's most virulent adversaries, in

which she was accusing him of rape. Realizing what was going on, this witness had written to the judge to describe what she had seen. She concluded her letter by asserting that 'Mister Ivanov was innocent of all the crimes of which he was accused'.

The following Saturday, Mikhaël was again taken to the courthouse, only to learn that his trial would take place two weeks later, on July 17. But this time no one was allowed to approach him before he was hurried off to prison again.

It was at this point that a voice was raised in the media in his defense. Acting on information that would come to the ears of the competent authorities only several months later, a reputable journalist published an article in *Le Populaire*, in which he revealed that the stranger who had come to Paris claiming to be a Tibetan initiate was in fact a spy in the pay of the Soviet Union.

Mikhaël's trial began at one o'clock in the afternoon of July 17 and was over the same day. Those who were present as witnesses for the defense described it as a travesty of justice. The hearings were supposed to be closed to the public. Several legal stipulations were, however, flagrantly ignored, and a number of reporters and photographers were admitted. Also, an influential member of the government, the *Garde des Sceaux*, was present throughout the trial. This was a gross breach of the law, but it became known later that he was determined to see the accused convicted and deported from France. The witnesses for the defense, in an atmosphere of hostility that was almost palpable, sensed their powerlessness. When called on to speak, they could barely be heard above the shouts and jeers.

Brother Mikhaël was sentenced to four years in prison.

At seven o'clock the next morning, Sun-

day, a small group of his followers gathered at Izgrev to pray together. Their hearts were heavy, their minds in turmoil, and their courage at a low ebb. Two hours later, some of those who had plotted the destruction of Brother Mikhaël's reputation arrived in a body. Claiming recognition as 'members in good standing' of the brotherhood, they had come to carry out the second phase of their plan: to shut down the center preliminary to taking it over for themselves. Mustering all their powers of persuasion, they did their utmost to demoralize those present and split their ranks. But all their arguments met with immovable resistance, and they were forced to withdraw in defeat.

Mikhaël's lawyers appealed against the verdict. In the days that followed, the women who had falsely accused Mikhaël began, one by one, to sign official retractions. Fear, blackmail, hypnotism or bribery had been used to obtain their testimony, and on the day of the trial several of them had been close to panic when

they began to understand the consequences of what they had done, and found themselves obliged to go through with it and perjure themselves in court. It was only when they could look back on events with some objectivity that most of them realized clearly what had happened to them. Even then there were some who, for the sake of their families who had received large sums of money, or in an attempt to protect their own reputations, never publicly acknowledged that they had lied.

The trial, as might be expected, was the occasion of a further winnowing among the members of Mikhaël's little spiritual family. As one of them recalled later:

We were revolted by the injustice of the proceedings we had witnessed. We felt like grains of sand being sifted through a series of filters of increasingly fine mesh. Like steel that is being tempered, we passed from heat to cold, from profound discouragement to extravagant hope. As

we reflected on what Brother Mikhaël had said about the divisions and sorting that was to come, we tried to understand the meaning of all the suffering he had foreseen for the brotherhood. But we could never allow ourselves to despair, for these were the trials for which he had so unerringly prepared us.

Nevertheless, their courage and faith were sorely tried: sometimes they were faced with offensive articles published in the press, at other times they received letters from people who spoke of their admiration for Mikhaël's work and declared him to be a saint and a Master.

On July 22, Mikhaël was transferred from the Santé prison to the huge prison camp at La Celle St-Cloud known as the Châtaigneraie, where conditions were slightly more humane and the rules less stringent. Stella and Jean, the only ones to be granted a thirty-minute visit, found him serene, his face radiating a subtle inner light. He inquired affectionately after

each member of the brotherhood before giving his visitors encouraging advice and assuring them of his faith in the victory of light and truth. In prison, he added, he felt truly free.

Notes

1. Quoted by Svezda, op. cit, p. 107.
2. 'What Can We Learn From a House', in *Harmony*.
3. June 26, 1947.
4. October 12, 1947.
5. July 14, 1956.
6. 'Une nouvelle attitude devant le mal', in *La Pédagogie initiatique*. (Our translation).

13



Prison

At the Châtaigneraie the prisoners lived in huge barracks. Well aware of the accusation against the new arrival, the other prisoners were free with their jeers and insults, calling him derisively ‘the Magus’, a title that many of the newspapers had used. To test him they played all sorts of tricks on him and charged their tobacco or other items from the prison shop to his account. But none of his fellow prisoners was completely indifferent to his pres-

ence. Some, too deeply disillusioned or discouraged to trust another human being, simply observed their strange comrade in silence.

One of these men—a prisoner by the name of Lemery—later wrote that it was the serene kindness that shone from Mikhaël's eyes that disarmed even the most relentless. In his desire to be one voice to speak out on his behalf, Lemery wrote that he used to watch him as he meditated for hours, seated in the lotus position on his bunk, always clean and neat in spite of the difficult conditions, his abundant silver hair carefully combed beneath his Basque beret. After a vivid description of the violent disputes of the card-players at one end of the shed, the deafening noise, the constant coming and going of the various cliques: the swindlers, the pimps, the vagrants with criminal records, felons of every kind, rotted by vice, Lemery concluded:

And there, far above and detached from

all this slime, lives, ponders, works, and meditates our living example, one who radiates peace and whose presence alone, like a ray of sunlight, illuminates and purifies the oppressive atmosphere of that accursed shed—one of the best, apparently, in this enormous camp of the Châtaigneraie. [...] To be frank, I have to admit that I hung back for a long time. I wanted to study the man and get to know him before I could consider him not just as a comrade, but as a friend and confidant. It was the sight of the way he lived, of his attitude toward everyone that imperceptibly won me over. I was gradually drawn to him, attracted by what he had to say. His love of nature made me understand that a man who was capable of standing for long periods of time behind the bars admiring the dawn at sunrise, as nature awoke to the song of the nightingale, was not, could not be, the man described by some of the newspapers. [...] One only had to live with him and observe him to be convinced of his innocence.¹

From the beginning, Mikhaël took careful stock of the milieu in which he would have to live for an undetermined length of time. Exerting every ounce of his mental strength, he surrounded himself with light to ward off the noxious emanations that he sensed all around him, on both the physical and the subtler planes. Later, he would say that he had worked to reinforce his aura to prevent all that from entering and undermining him.

For if that had happened, it would have gone on growing and might even have driven me to live as they lived, weakened my faith and love, and prevented me from following my path. Even at night I worked to strengthen my defenses... For two years I had to struggle constantly, not only against that, but also against the general lack of understanding on the part of others.²

The two winters he spent in prison were particularly cold. For reasons of hygiene and to dissipate the nauseating stench in

the shed, prison regulations required that the windows be kept open day and night. With so many prisoners crowded into one place, the air was thick with the smoke of their cigarettes, and the open windows at least assured that there was a minimum supply of oxygen. Stiff with cold, the men paced up and down the shed for hours on end, stamping their feet in an effort to keep warm, but Mikhaël, sensitive though he was to the cold, spent long hours meditating on his bed under the open window.

Most of his fellow-prisoners suffered from nightmares, and his nights were often disturbed by their cries and groans. Every morning he awoke to the four walls that shut out the sun. Every meal brought the same moldy bread, rancid oil, and rotten, unpeeled potatoes floating in water.

Far from condemning the conduct of the prisoners, many of whom behaved with the frenzy of rampaging beasts, Mikhaël could not help 'seeing them as children,

full of a wild, unbridled energy, who had never learned how to behave'. But he also said that he had never envied hermits so much as during his imprisonment. He prayed ceaselessly, asking always for light and more light, because 'light always goes hand in hand with gratitude, not with a spirit of revenge'.

One young boy, member of a gang that had committed some crimes during the Occupation, observed him from a distance. On the brink of despair, he was only waiting for the right moment to carry out the suicide pact he had made with his comrades. The wretchedness of his life in prison and the thought of what awaited him afterwards was more than he could bear. But he could not help being touched by this prisoner who was so different from the others, whose attitude was that of a free man, who talked courteously to each one, and who gave to the least privileged the gifts he received from his visitors. Finally, he decided to confide in him about his plans for suicide. To his

astonishment, Mikhaël rebuked him energetically and talked to him about the meaning of life and its difficulties, before explaining with great kindness and compassion how he could transform his own existence if he had the will to do so. Every day after that, the boy returned with more questions, reflected on what Mikhaël told him, and gradually achieved a certain serenity. His desire to end his life faded and was replaced by the will to transform it.

Imperceptibly, other prisoners were surprised to find that they too were beginning to trust the newcomer. Something strange was going on in this shed: here was a spiritual Master who was a prisoner and yet manifestly free, who listened to them, who counseled and instructed them. Capable of abstracting himself from the filth, the coarse language, the cruel and amoral behavior, he was gradually restoring the hope and courage of those who were willing to listen to him.

After a time, Mikhaël noticed that at the end of their compulsory outdoor exercise the prisoners were always exhausted. Their environment was unhealthy: they were not getting enough food, and they took no exercise other than the daily walk round the prison yard—which resembled nothing so much as a funeral cortege. One day, disregarding the suspicious frowns of the guards, he detached himself from the procession and began to step briskly round the yard with another man, explaining to him how to walk without becoming tired.

Encouraged by his example, someone else took the initiative of forming a group of runners. But when the runners returned to the shed they were more exhausted than ever. Little by little, Mikhaël's group of walkers became more numerous and more receptive to his ideas, and he began to instruct them in the value of their movements, the rhythm most beneficial to the human organism, and the impor-

tance of synchronizing their breathing with this rhythm.

He also took advantage of these occasions to respond to some of the inmates who questioned him about the eternal problem of evil in the world. Why did God allow evil to exist? Why was there so much injustice? In a desire to help them he talked about the innate ability they all possessed to transform their lives, and he was not afraid to offend by talking openly of their present situation and the reasons that had brought them to it.

He spoke as their friend, meeting them on their own ground in order to help them to rise above the conditions they had resigned themselves to. Listening to their conversations, he realized that money was the god through which they proposed to avenge themselves on society. One day he undertook to persuade them that another God existed, and began a discussion with a small group. It was not long before others joined in,

many of them insisting that they had no intention of allowing themselves to be convinced.

‘What is God?’ asked Mikhaël. ‘What is the deity? In a moment you too will be able to prove that God exists. Listen: do you believe that there are any just people on earth?’

A chorus of denial greeted this, but when Mikhaël insisted: ‘Not even you?’ several admitted that they considered themselves just. It was society that was at fault for failing to understand or help them.

‘And are there intelligent people on earth? Are there people who are beautiful?’

All agreed that intelligence existed and that beauty existed, particularly in women and children.

‘In other words,’ said Mikhaël, ‘you admit that intelligence, justice, and beauty

exist. What about strength? Do you know anyone who is strong?’

Yes, they all agreed, and Mikhaël continued:

‘So you agree that there is such a thing as strength. And surely you must admit that there are other virtues as well? Now, imagine that all the qualities and virtues whose existence you acknowledge are multiplied, amplified and intensified to an infinite degree. The deity is precisely that: the sum of all virtues and qualities carried to an infinite, unlimited dimension. We cannot deny this reality, because we all possess some fragments of it. If the deity does not exist, where do the particles of virtue we possess come from? What is their source? It is very difficult to deny this truth. You can certainly refuse the notion of God as an old man with a beard and a notebook and pencil who spends his time recording the sins of human beings, but the virtues, these you cannot deny or ignore.’

His audience stared at him in silence, and he went on:

‘I can even prove to you that although you don’t realize it, you are all seeking God.’

‘Oh no! Impossible!’ exclaimed one of the men.

‘Yes. You are always thinking of God, always looking for him,’ insisted Mikhaël.

Turning to one of the men, he asked why he was in prison.

‘Because of a woman’, replied the man.

‘That means that you are drawn to beauty, that you look for it. Why?’

‘Because it makes me happy.’

‘Well, this simply means that you are looking for God, but in a limited form.’

Turning to the men around him, one after the other, he continued:

‘And you, who fight because you like strength, can’t you see that strength, even wrongly understood, is God in another form? And you, you steal from shops because you love wealth; but wealth is God. Wealth belongs to God and comes from God, and from now on you must look for it elsewhere and in other ways. There are those who desire knowledge or power, and these too are attributes of God. And aren’t those who are looking for tenderness looking for God? Yes, we are all looking for God; we are all in pursuit of the deity in one form or another. It is the means and methods we use to reach and lay hold of our goal that are ineffectual, false, twisted, inappropriate and base. But in reality we are all drawn to great things, to the one thing that is great, limitless, infinite.’³

The relationship between Mikhaël and many of his companions in misfortune was established only progressively, and the same was true of his relationship with the personnel. For the first few months,

they made life extremely difficult for him. The Governor and supervisors even forbade visits from his lawyers. The guards on duty in his barracks were changed frequently and ordered not to talk to him. They were warned, on the strength of some newspaper reports, that this prisoner was capable of hypnotizing them in order to escape. At one point, Mikhaël discovered that one of the new inmates in the shed was in reality a detective inspector who hoped to trick him into incriminating himself.

One day, a guard approached him and without a word struck the Bible he was holding, knocking it to the other end of the room. When Mikhaël protested and reproached him for his brutality, the man had the pretext he needed to accuse him of insolence. Surrounded by a detachment of guards, he was taken before the prison tribunal. His companions, watching him go, were convinced that he would be condemned to that terrible, dark cell

from which he would return, like so many others, a sick man.

But the outcome of his appearance before the tribunal was not what they had expected. When he explained what had happened, the judges simply smiled and sentenced him to be deprived for three months of the meager ration of cigarettes and wine that prisoners were entitled to. Mikhaël, who had never smoked in his life and who did not drink wine, was greatly amused. 'But the other prisoners were disappointed to be deprived of the rations I used to distribute to them', he said later.

Gradually the guards became less suspicious of him. The harshness of their attitude gave way to a certain curiosity and, finally, to friendliness, for they could not help but notice that most of the inmates trusted him and talked to him about their problems. It was obvious that Mikhaël was a pacifying influence in the shed. Eventually, the guards themselves began

to seek him out and ask his advice. Pre-texting that an officer wanted to see him, one of the supervisors sometimes came and took him discreetly to an office where they could talk without being disturbed. Even the prison Governor, who had developed a feeling of genuine friendship and respect for this unusual prisoner, had long conversations with him.

Mikhaël's inner freedom was such that he could say many years later:

I found that in the midst of the greatest difficulties there was always someone singing within me. In each one of us is this being who watches and sees everything, who sings and laughs at what goes on.⁴

During his days in prison Mikhaël continued to listen to his companions, to console and instruct them, but it was at night that he felt truly free. In spirit he could slip through the bars, send his thoughts out to the world, and work

mentally with light. He lived as much in his soul and spirit as in his physical body.

In his New Year message for 1949, Brother Mikhaël wrote to his 'dear brothers and sisters', begging them not to panic, not to see enemies lurking in every corner, but to remain united and understand that 'God, who dwells in every visible form, manifests through even the most terrifying events'. He encouraged them to treat everyone with love, above all those who criticized or slandered them.

This is what I have always done, even with my worst enemies. They may have caused my downfall, but who knows: I may yet touch the depths of their hearts and souls.

While still in prison he had two visions symbolizing trials by air and fire. In the first, he found himself surrounded by the wild shrieking of a tornado. Sinister faces peered at him, while objects hurled by the wind were falling all around. Taking shel-

ter behind a large rock, he could only wait for the storm to abate. The vision of the trial by fire came a little later. He saw fires ravaging the earth and found himself in the middle of a blazing furnace with thick clouds of smoke swirling overhead. Again, he succeeded in passing through the ordeal and emerging unscathed from the fire.

In his first talk after his release from prison, he described the four visions he had been given before and during his incarceration and explained their meaning. The trial by earth is necessary to test one's strength of will, one's steadfastness. The trial by water is designed to test the reactions of the heart, of the emotions. The trial by air reveals the equilibrium of the intellect, and the last and most painful, the trial by fire, is necessary to burn away all the wastes that prevent the soul from uniting with the forces of the cosmos. These are, in fact, the same four indispensable ordeals imposed on initi-

ates in the temples of ancient Egypt and India.

Endeavoring to understand the full import of the ordeal he was undergoing in prison, Mikhaël methodically reviewed his life up to that moment, and it was then that Peter Deunov's words came back to him: '*A time will come when the forces of darkness will put obstacles in your way and try to prevent you from advancing.*' At the age of seventeen, he had not known exactly what those 'forces of darkness' represented. Also, although Peter Deunov had foretold great trials, he had not been at liberty to speak of the prison, and it was only when Mikhaël was deprived of his physical freedom that he remembered the allegory of the young man who was entrusted with a precious stone that had to be carried through a forest.

He understood then what he had not understood fifteen years earlier: the precious stone, symbol of the teaching he

had brought to France, had been horribly defiled and trampled underfoot. And he too, the bearer of this stone, had been vilely dishonored and slandered, dragged through filth by those who wanted to destroy him. Just as Peter Deunov had foretold, he was making his way through a forest infested with bandits and wild beasts.

When he had recounted this parable, Peter Deunov had said that after his ordeal, the bearer of the precious stone would be cleansed of all the impurities cast upon him; that he would be given all he needed, and that the gem would shine in all its splendor. Mikhaël was to say later that there had been a moment in prison when he had sensed the presence of Peter Deunov. He had seen an indication of this presence in the changed attitude of the Governor and guards who, having once treated him with brutality, began to protect him.

* * *

Two years were to pass, however, before he was released. Certain charges against him had fallen under the weight of their own absurdity, and others had been withdrawn. On March 24 1950, the appeal court reduced his prison sentence to 30 months, which meant that he was free immediately. Several prominent people who had been taken in by the 'Tibetan' and had used their influence to get Mikhaël condemned now did everything in their power to make amends. Years later the Garde des Sceaux who had been present illegally at his trial was to write and ask his forgiveness for having influenced the judge. He explained that at the time he had been convinced of Mikhaël's guilt; only later had he found out that the whole affair had been a conspiracy.

At Mikhaël's request, the date of his liberation was kept secret from all but Stella and Jean, who went without a word to anyone to meet him at the gates of the Châtaigneraie.

In view of the complex web of influences involved in the conspiracy against him, he was released with the proviso that he would not live in Paris for the next five years. It was only in the spring of 1955 that he was authorized to live at Izgrev. In the meantime he stayed with friends in the south of France.

The brotherhood in France had grown and become stronger in the midst of adversity and was ready for the reunion with its spiritual Master. As soon as he was free, Mikhaël visited Izgrev briefly and gave a talk to a small group. His face was emaciated and deeply marked by suffering, but a flame burned in his eyes and his expression radiated serenity.

He began this first meeting, as always, by reading a text by Peter Deunov. Afterwards, with the utmost simplicity, he spoke of his time in prison and his relationship with his fellow-prisoners. He touched lightly on his feelings when he had been slandered and vilified. 'The

hardest thing of all', he said, 'is to be dishonored.' But knowing how much his brothers and sisters had suffered all this time, and in order to help them to forget past hardships and concentrate on their spiritual work, he added:

Perhaps you think I should have endured these trials alone. Yes, but if I had, the victory would have been mine alone. You had to win with me. [...] May all the dark clouds, all thoughts and feelings of hatred disappear, may the springs of love flow freely again, and may we truly feel ourselves to be children of God.⁵

The majority of those present wept for joy. Throughout his life Mikhaël had accepted the trials that are the lot of all human beings. He had 'worked', as he put it, on different kinds of problems, on different kinds of suffering and limitations, in order to open a new path. It was this constancy that was the measure of his love, of his capacity for sacrifice. Some years later, a brother asked him why the

life of initiates was always marked by tragedy; his answer undoubtedly applies to himself:

You will remember that Greek mythology speaks of Prometheus who was punished for giving heavenly fire to mankind. Every savior of humanity shares the fate of Prometheus. Tradition reveals that through original sin the first beings created monstrous entities that peopled the earth. More than once since then, the phenomenon has been repeated because of the transgressions of humanity, and it is this propagation of monsters that is the cause of all our misfortunes. In sacrificing their lives, the saints, prophets, and martyrs wiped out a great part of the debt owed by humanity. In other words they opened up part of the path that humanity must travel. The blood of Jesus Christ cleansed a great part of this road. The sacrifices of highly evolved beings are very precious, because they cancel out the darkness that, on the astral plane, still weighs on humanity.⁶

After that first brief visit to Paris in 1950, Mikhaël returned to Pau. There, living in a house surrounded by trees, he followed a rhythm of life that helped him gradually to rebuild his strength, devoting the mornings to his spiritual life, in communion with the generous sun of these southern climes, and his afternoons to 'giving what he had received'.

Resting on a bench one day after a long walk in one of the city parks, he noticed that a woman sitting nearby was glancing at him. He realized that she must have recognized him, for his photograph had appeared in all the French papers two years earlier. Turning to her, he asked quietly: 'Do you believe what they said about me?'

At that, she dared to look him in the face, and her answer was spontaneous: 'No, I don't believe it. It's impossible. You have the face of a prophet.'

After a moment's hesitation, she added:
'What you went through was terrible.'

'You know,' he said gently, 'the surest way of losing all strength and courage is to consider evil as an enemy. If you see it as something that can help you to evolve, you transform it into good. We must not forget that it is our trials that allow us to find unknown resources within ourselves. This is why evil is often a blessing in disguise.'

His new acquaintance was profoundly receptive to what he was saying, and not long after this first encounter she was one of a number of people who visited him regularly.⁷

Beginning in June 1950, Mikhaël made the round trip from Pau to Sèvres almost every Sunday. As before, he gave much of his time to those who asked to talk to him privately. On these occasions, many people told him that they had seen him physically before them while he was still in

prison and thanked him for what he had done for them. But although he never hesitated to help those in need, he always refused to be seen as a miracle-worker with powers of bilocation. When someone claimed to have seen him in a dream or to have been helped by his intervention, he alluded to the many spirits who supported him in his work, saying: 'I do not know which one of them helped you to find your peace of mind or to solve your problem.'

His talks that year were often very long, and his close friends spent many hours at a time with him. They were regaining strength and drinking their fill of light after the long months of darkness. They sang, shared a meal, and listened to Brother Mikhaël as he talked about forgiveness and inner light, about prayer and meditation, about purity and man's subtle bodies, and about the role of music in achieving harmony. One of those present at these gatherings told us:

He was so inspired that we never tired of listening to him. The atmosphere at these meetings was unique: the very air seemed to be suffused with joy. Now and then a spontaneous burst of laughter or song arose; the musicians played selections of classical music, and it was with reluctance that we went our separate ways at the end of the day.

In spite of the negative effects of the trial and all that had followed, Brother Mikhaël's radiance attracted people from every level of society. This was a period of intense activity, and he was constantly called on to talk in many different places. Judging from the themes of his talks, this was also a period of intense mystical experiences. It is clear that since his ecstasy at the age of fifteen, he had experienced many others, but a talk he gave on January 28 1951, is so vibrant that it seems to be the echo of a recent experience. Before speaking that day he had opened a small book of meditations by Peter Deunov, asking the invisible world

to show him what he should talk about. His gaze had fallen upon a text about ecstasy, which he proceeded to comment on with particular intensity:

Ecstasy is a marvelous, indescribable state. One has to experience it to understand. One's whole being is pervaded by sentiments of self-abnegation, altruism, and nobility. One loves with a love that embraces all creatures and renounces all trivial, material pleasures. The heart is filled with impersonal, selfless, generous feelings. This gives you some slight idea of ecstasy. It is something that can be experienced only when one has admired, adored and contemplated the deity for a very long time.

In spite of their joy at having their spiritual guide with them once again, things were still not easy for the members of the brotherhood in those years. The troubled atmosphere of the past was not wholly dissipated. Hostile articles began to appear in the press again, and Mikhaël

knew that his enemies had not laid down their arms. In March, he told those who assembled at Izgrev that he was the happiest of men and was determined not to follow the advice of many people who said he should speak out in his own defense. He had no wish to threaten anyone or to appeal to the courts. In his own words: 'Either there is nothing to defend, or what exists is good, and in this case, nothing can destroy it.' A few months later, after the sunrise on April 9, 1951, he spoke of the darkness in which seeds must lie before they can germinate, and in doing so threw a ray of light on a profound initiatic truth:

For two years I was drowned in darkness, and it was with joy that I amassed that darkness. It was very, very dark, completely black. This darkness is a mystery. Things are formed in darkness. White is manifestation; black is formation. A child is formed in darkness. Darkness is a twofold symbol: for ordinary human beings, it is equated with evil, egoism and

hell. For an initiate, it is a mystery that has not yet been illuminated or explained.

In the autumn of the following year, he at last felt free to make an excursion into the mountains, as in the days of his youth in Bulgaria. Early one bright Sunday morning in October, he and several brothers set out for the Midi d'Ossau, a peak that rises to more than 9,000 feet in the Pyrenees. Once they had reached the heights, Mikhaël went off alone for a long meditation before giving a brief talk to his companions. As they were about to start on the return journey, the whole area was suddenly wrapped in fog and they could see barely a yard before them. It was then that an unusual phenomenon occurred: in front of them, reflected on the thick white mist, they saw their individual silhouettes, each surrounded by concentric circles of rainbow-hued light. Compared to theirs, Brother Mikhaël's aura was immense.

'It was a marvelous, overwhelming, unforgettable experience,' wrote one of those present that day.⁸

Turning to his companions, Mikhaël said that the invisible world had allowed them to see their auras reflected in the mist as in a mirror, so that they might be more conscious of the subtle dimensions of life. Then he set off ahead of them, almost running down the mountain side, and the brothers watched in astonishment as, with sweeping gestures, he cut a path through the mist which folded away on either side. He seemed to be blazing a path of light.

A full ten years passed after his release from prison before Brother Mikhaël's reputation was finally cleared of all stain. Towards the end of September 1960, he was in the South of France for the summer convention of the brotherhood where many of his brothers and sisters

had joined him for the feast of St Michael Archangel, when he received a summons to the Appeals Court in Aix-en-Provence for the 28th. That morning, as on many other occasions in his life, his winged friends were present: as he left his cottage, hundreds of swallows suddenly appeared, flying low over his car and accompanying it a great part of the way.

When he returned home later that afternoon, he was able to announce the news that the Court had at last pronounced his judicial rehabilitation.

Notes

1. Reported in Svezda, *op. cit.*, p.93.
2. February 11, 1951.
3. Dialogue reported in talk of October 29, 1950.
4. June 4, 1958.
5. March 19, 1950.

6. August 13, 1956.
7. We had this information from one of her friends.
8. See *Qui est le Maître Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov* ?, Éditions Prosveta.

14



*The
Beauty
we Create
Around
us*

In the hinterland of the French Riviera, near the town of Fréjus, Jean owned a piece of land known as the Bonfin. It consisted of a few acres of barren, slatey ground on which grew one ancient evergreen oak, a few meager pines and fig trees, and some old vines. In the center, surrounded by thorn and scrub, stood the ruins of an old farmhouse. Jean hoped that one day his land would be a home for the brotherhood, and while Brother Mikhaël was absent, he had recruited a few friends to help him prepare it for occupation. When Mikhaël visited it in 1947, he had been particularly attracted by a steep hill to the east of the land with a splendid view of the rising sun, which came to be known as 'the Rock of Prayer'.

Three years later, ownership of the Bonfin was transferred to the fraternity, and Mikhaël approved its use as a convention center. From then on, a great deal of landscaping and construction work went on, but for years the land remained barren. Tremendous efforts with pick and shovel

were needed to build even the most rudimentary structures on the unforgiving ground. In this country regularly swept by the *mistral*, tents and temporary shelters had to be firmly anchored to the land, and even then they were sometimes carried off with all their contents by violent gusts of wind.

Mikhaël occupied a minuscule caravan which Jean had built for him out of used materials he had collected over the years. When the mistral blew, this precarious dwelling rocked and swayed and threatened to fly away.

Most of the sleeping and living quarters were makeshift constructions of *canisses*, the tall reeds which grew in abundance in the surrounding countryside and served to make fences, as well as walls and roofs for kitchens, dormitories and washrooms. The campers labored long hours under a broiling sun, clearing the scrub, digging up dead vines, laying out paths. When they needed to cool off they tied

a wet handkerchief on their head. There were two wells on the property, but they gave very little water and frequently had to be cleaned and disinfected. Jean was in charge of providing the camp with drinking water: every evening, accompanied by one or two brothers, he rode down to the river Reyran on his motor cycle and filled barrels of water to take back to the Bonfin in his side-car.

In the summer of 1953, the minimum equipment was in place for the first summer convention. It was during this convention that Brother Mikhaël sent all his 'friends near and far' a vibrant message of hope and of faith in the advent of a new age for humanity in which he asserted that the Golden Age of the poets was no fable. His desire to see all conscious beings sharing in 'the great work of our noble elder brothers' had never abandoned him and was as fervent as ever:

*There is nothing more glorious than to
strive with all your strength, all your*

thoughts and feelings for the realization of this dazzling plan: the kingdom of God on earth.

And he concluded his message with these words:

The sun is luminous and it is already rising over the world. The air is pure; space is infinite; the spirit is immortal; God is eternal. His beauty is beyond description; his goodness is limitless; his wisdom is unfathomable, and his love all-powerful.

Gradually over the years, the summer conventions would be extended from two weeks to three months. Members of the brotherhood arrived from every corner of France and Switzerland for stays of various lengths, and the coming and going was constant. They gathered at the Bonfin, eager to live together and share these new and difficult conditions in a spirit of brotherhood.

For most of them the change of scenery

was radical. In the still untamed nature of the Mediterranean hinterland, they felt as though they were living in biblical times. They could walk for hours without meeting another human being, with only the immensity of the blue sky overhead, the twisted pine trees and parched scrub all around, the little black pebbles rolling underfoot. In the distance rose the mountain which had been nick-named *le Gisant*—its silhouette resembled the recumbent statue of a knight on a mediæval tomb. When the campers wanted a bath, it meant a half-hour walk to the Reyran: after bathing and washing their clothes, they donned their wet clothes and let the sun dry them as they walked back to the Bonfin.

As always, Mikhaël was content with very little. For several years, he occupied the small caravan built by Jean, before moving into a tiny cabin which measured six feet by nine. It was only several years later that the brothers could afford to provide him with one of three rudimen-

tary wooden cottages built with cheap materials from a demolition site. When he talked of the spiritual work one could do in a restricted living space, he was speaking from experience. Since his youth he had had years of training in this, and, as he had said several years earlier:

Even when you are ill, isolated, in prison, or in exile, you can work within yourself. Difficult external conditions often make it easier to improve one's inner state. It is then that one is stronger, because no help can be had from outside. When there are obstacles and difficulties on all sides, one direction is always wide open: the upward direction. Thus, when you find yourself in the worst possible external conditions, when you can move neither forwards, nor backwards, nor downwards, you must not hesitate: move upwards. Rise to a higher plane. When we are overwhelmed by every kind of difficulty, we can always enter the world of the spirit and turn to God. In that

direction, nobody can put barriers in our way.¹

The work of developing and improving the Bonfin continued for several years. Great quantities of top-soil had to be imported before it was possible to plant a few vines and grow the minimal crops of vegetables required to feed the campers. Mikhaël made regular rounds of the teams at work, lending a hand wherever it was needed. Nothing escaped his vigilance, no task was beneath him. But the evenings were a time of relaxation when he strolled among the tents and talked to the campers. And always, in spite of the arduous nature of the work, he asked each one to be mindful of the beauty of the environment: 'The beauty we create around us,' he said, 'is reflected in our soul.'

In general, however, although he noticed the smallest details and could wield a mason's trowel or a paintbrush to good effect, he left all responsibility for the

physical plane to the campers. His role, he explained, was to *keep water flowing* in abundance—water being the symbol of life and love—for, ‘as long as there is water, things organize themselves’. The life he breathed into his brotherhood was almost tangible in its intensity, and from time to time visitors or workers remarked on it. One summer an Italian carpenter called Carrodano and his sons were hired to build several cabins with timber retrieved from a huge barn which had been hauled to the Bonfin. One morning as Brother Mikhaël came down from the Rock followed by a crowd of people, Carrodano was perched on the roof of one of the cabins. Putting down his hammer, he watched as they came closer. ²

‘Mister Ivanoff,’ he called, ‘I understand now. Today I understand.’

‘Ah, what do you understand, Mister Carrodano?’ asked Mikhaël.

‘I understand what you’re doing.’

‘And what is that my friend? What am I doing?’

Then Carrodano, still sitting on the roof embarked on the story of a rich man he had once known in his native Italy who was always unhappy. One day he had invited Carrodano and his work-mates to join him for a drink, in the hope that he would be infected by their good cheer. But he only watched them with a gloomy expression as they drank and sang and laughed, and finally he left them.

‘So what I have understood, Mister Ivanoff, is that you are giving the meaning of life to your brothers and sisters.’

‘Bravo, Mister Carrodano,’ exclaimed Mikhaël. ‘But how did you see that?’

‘It’s visible on their faces... It was when I saw you all coming down the hill after the sunrise that I finally understood what you were giving them.’

Mikhaël’s mission with regard to his dis-

ciples lay on different levels: he spoke to their intelligence, their heart and their will; he appealed to their desire for perfection, but also to their generosity or their sense of beauty. He was not blind to the difficulties of a lifestyle based on collaboration, to the problems that arose between people of different temperaments, to the demands of a truly brotherly spirit. As he often said, however, all this constituted a school, a learning process. A spontaneous sympathy or antipathy between individuals, for example, was often rooted in a distant past, in a previous incarnation, and one must learn to put these manifestations of the *personality* at the service of the *individuality*.

To explain the respective roles of these two natures in human beings, he used the example of a tree. The personality, like the roots of a tree, can draw on great reserves of 'subterranean' riches, the raw materials that are the instincts, passions and desires. The personality is very powerful, but it has one defect: it tends to

use everything for the benefit of the ego or inferior self. The individuality, on the other hand, has received the most beautiful and most radiant attributes: the power to produce flowers and fruit. 'All that is truly spiritual is inspired by the individuality,' he used to say.

Using this example of the tree, he explained that the personality is as ever-present and as necessary to a human being as are the roots, trunk and branches to a tree. Whereas the individuality, like the fruit and flowers of a tree, is not always present, and it is important that we learn to recognize where our impulses are coming from: the personality or the individuality. The personality is capable of becoming the best of servants, and we must not be like some ascetics of the past and try to uproot it. If we give our individuality first place and allow it to govern and dominate the personality, then our physical body can become a basis for the manifestation of God.

The Bonfin was a school; his school. He asked those who came there to behave as exceptional human beings, to be pure in thought, word and deed. He gave them methods they could use to harmonize themselves with the cosmos, to live in union with the source of all life, the universal soul, God himself. 'It is in this communion with universal life that you will find the meaning of life,' he told them.

A stay at the Bonfin was an apprenticeship in what he called '*our real work*', the work that harmonizes and unifies all other activities. 'Never neglect the practice of concentration and meditation,' he used to say. And as he often referred to progress in the spiritual life as 'a work' to be accomplished, he was asked more than once to explain what he meant.

It is a work which goes on where you would least suspect it. It is possible to remain completely motionless and silent and yet take an active part in God's

*work. How? By rising to the level of the universal soul. Once there, you unite yourself to it and participate in its work. Nobody knows what you are doing; not even you. You can be in several different places in the universe at the same time.*³

The implication is clear: perseverance is an essential ingredient of the spiritual quest, and it was in this sense that he liked to use the popular expression, 'Bonne continuation!'—Keep up the good work!—thereby stimulating in his disciples the forces necessary for the continuation and completion of the work undertaken. He knew that the greatest strength of human beings lay in perseverance in the face of all that might conspire to hinder their work of self-transformation. In fact, the transformation he refers to is an alchemical process, which he likens to the change in color of a litmus die when the last crucial drop of acid or alkali is added. 'One more drop! Just one more! Keep up the good work, until the red turns to blue.' What matters is to con-

tinue, to continue one's efforts until the ultimate transmutation is achieved.

* * *

As the years passed, the Bonfin was transformed. Flowers, shrubs and trees were planted, oleander, mimosa and eucalyptus, and a level area was laid out next to the old oak tree for the morning exercises. The scene that unfolded every day at dawn must have reminded Mikhaël of his days at Rila: the stars were still bright in the sky when the first campers emerged from their tents. After summary ablutions because of the scarcity of water, they dressed warmly, took up a blanket as a protection against the chilly morning air, and set off in silence for the Rock of Prayer. A brief climb up some steep boulders led to a slope of sandy soil scattered with pine trees which brought them to the summit where they settled down for their meditation.

The site is beautiful. Against the gradu-

ally lightening sky to the east, the outlines of distant mountains stand out in a graceful succession of dark blue curves, and in clear weather the Mediterranean can be glimpsed through a cleft in the hills to the south. An hour or so after the sun had risen, Brother Mikhaël turned to the group for a short talk. Then came the descent to the camp, the exercises, and breakfast which was set out on three tables under an awning of reeds.

At noon the talks sometimes took place in a room in the old farmhouse, but usually the campers remained sitting around the tables out of doors. And when the mistral blew and a fine layer of dust settled on the soup, everyone was too happy to care.

But the time had come for renewed efforts. During the first convention in 1953, Mikhaël encouraged the participants to spend a little more time in front of the sun in the morning, simply to contemplate it, like children. Five years later, he

suggested longer meditations and emphasized the importance of the conditions conducive to real concentration.

Brother Mikhaël's love of the sun was contagious. As one who had been close to him since 1939 said:

As we listened to him we were filled with the desire to be as radiant as he was. He who had contemplated the sun since his childhood. He who had accepted the most terrible ordeals without losing his inner light. We knew of Peter Deunov's warning of the 'narrow gate' through which he would have to pass, and we could see that he had, indeed, emerged 'as luminous as a sun'.

In 1958, during the convention, he declared that an immense work was going on in the subtler dimensions of earth and of the cosmos, and that entirely new elements were beginning to appear in the world. He prophesied the impending dawn of a new era that would endure for

many centuries, during which humanity would be free from war, disease and crime. He often said that this new era would dawn first in the souls of a handful of men and women toward the end of the 20th century, and that a Golden Age would manifest as love in the hearts of human beings.

All his labors to bring about the kingdom of God on earth bore the mark of his close relationship with the angels of the four elements. He did everything he could to create an elevated spiritual ambience for his disciples, to help them to be more aware of certain aspects of nature and their own links with her. On August 6, 1958, when running water was at last installed at the Bonfin, he made it an occasion to thank the Angel of Water for this gift, and to explain:

Water represents the fluidic dimension of nature. It is the earth's blood... and this water is transformed into blood in human beings. This is the true blood that

nourishes all the creatures of nature. You should meditate on water, for it is a very profound symbol. When you drink it with love, respect, and gratitude it is transformed into life, for it is the bearer of life. No chemical process can exist without water; even precious stones cannot exist without some particles of water, crystals cannot form without water. It is thanks to a minute quantity of water that a precious stone is hard and transparent and capable of reflecting the sun's rays... Ask water to communicate its transparency to you.

Sometimes at sunrise he asked those present to join in his spiritual work by praying with him to the Angel of Air or the Angel of the Sun; and in the evenings around the fire, he spoke of the importance of burning all that is old and obsolete within oneself in order to enhance life. He often spoke of fire and water, the two elements that are indispensable to life. It was his understanding of these two principles that led him, on August 29,

1958, to speak of the respective roles of man and woman:

Man possesses immense energies, but if it were not for woman, those energies would simply return to the great cosmic reservoir. Woman has the tremendously important role of capturing the spirit, the energies of the spirit, and creating forms that allow the spirit to act. It is thanks to the union of these two principles that the earth and the forms that people it exist. The spirit is so subtle that without woman it could not survive on earth.

Toward the middle of September he announced that he would leave shortly for a visit to India. The summer convention of that year had been the last in a particular phase of his own life as well as that of his brotherhood. He would remain in India for a year, and when he returned a new phase would begin. On September 29, he talked at length about the meaning of the feast of the Archangel Mikhaël

which falls in the autumn, at the beginning of a season of apparent death.

It is a cycle of disengagement and liberation; the advent of something new. It is the moment when the fruit is released from its shell, when seeds are gathered to be eaten or put in storage for the future. The feast of the Archangel Mikhaël began a week ago, and the whole of nature takes part in the festivities on that day. The Angels and the Archangels, all the forces of nature, even the divine Mother are invited to the celebration. On September 22 an extraordinary banquet takes place. But human beings know nothing of what goes on in nature, and very few are invited to take part in the festivities.

During the three months before his departure for India, several events made a great impression on the brotherhood. One day, on developing a photograph taken during the meditation after lunch, a form could be distinguished over

Brother Mikhaël's head: it was the cabalistic symbol of the Shin, whose vertical and horizontal lines represent the masculine and feminine principles respectively. The same form appeared on a photograph on three different occasions. The phenomenon, which could have been attributed to unusual reflections of light, was remarkable because the sacred symbol was so perfectly formed. In the brotherhood it was seen as an expression of the equilibrium that reigns in a human being who has developed the two principles within himself.

On January 1, 1959, Brother Mikhaël told those gathered at Izgrev that his absence would benefit them; that it would perhaps allow them to find their true strength within themselves. He had been with them for twenty-one years, and it was now time for him to go in search of certain sacred things that had been conserved in an oriental country deeply imbued with the mysticism of the great spiritual Masters.

He told them:

You are under the protection of a being who is all-powerful. It is he, this great being from on high, who told me: 'I have taken them under my protection.' All powers are his. For a long time now he has taken care of me. Several times in the past forty years I have sensed his presence, but I have never been able to speak to him. Now, by the grace of heaven, he has spoken directly to me. I believe what he says. I know he will take good care of you. I have been instructed to undertake this voyage. I am simply obeying heaven's orders.

Brother Mikhaël was entering his sixtieth year. This allusion to a mysterious being who had been by his side for forty years seems to relate to the 'extraordinary event' that had occurred in 1920 and which he had mentioned briefly a few years earlier. All indications are that he was speaking of the beginning of his rela-

tionship, at the age of twenty, with the one he called his 'true Master.'

The date of his departure for India was set for February 11, 1959. He traveled alone, but more than two hundred people were at Orly to bid him goodbye. As they watched his plane fading into the distance, several of them feared that the months of his absence would seem very long without the intense life which dwelt in him and which he breathed into each one of them. 'Hold on to the principles of love, wisdom, and truth,' he had said in one of his last talks. What a program for the coming months!

Notes

1. December 3, 1950.
2. See his own account: 'A Disciple Must Develop His Spiritual Senses', in *Harmony*.
3. January 4, 1959.

PART IV

THE MASTER





*The Land
of the
Devas*

On his return from a year in the East, Mikhaël told the brotherhood: 'My new name is Omraam Mikhaël.' It was while he was in India that he had received this new name which seems to have always

been destined for him. On March 6 he explained:

The two principles of science, solve and coagula, are concealed in this name. 'Om' produces the vibrations which dis-integrate all that is bad or negative. It corresponds to the solve of initiatic science which returns things to their source and spiritualizes them by transforming them into light. The vibrations of 'Raam' have the power to condense and coagulate divine realities and make them tangible. This is coagula.

He never revealed the exact circumstances of the event, but in private he sometimes alluded to three Masters whom he met during a two-week retreat in a Himalayan temple. One of these three, by virtue of the supernatural power invested in him, gave him the name of Omraam. In April, he would say: 'It was someone who was greater than Babaji.'

A change of name is not unusual in the

initiatric tradition. On condition that it is well chosen—normally by a person of great wisdom—a new name can awaken new forces in the soul. For this reason, the quality of its vibrations is of first importance. Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov, who was familiar with the symbolism and power of numbers, calculated the numerological value of his new name, and changed the spelling of his surname from Ivanoff to Aïvanhov.¹ He said that he had been inspired by the Indian pronunciation of his name, but far more important, as he explained later, was the fact that this brought the total numerological value of his name to 72, a number that is considered very important in the cabbalistic tradition, as it is the sum of the nine choirs of angels, each of which comprises eight hierarchies.

Little is known of the true import of his stay in India. He himself referred to it with great discretion, but several of his later talks and occasional comments about that period of his life throw an

interesting light on both his personal itinerary and his mission as a spiritual guide. Although those comments, often brief, do not constitute a chronological account of his travels, they indicate that he spent the first few months of his stay in the mountains.

I was in the Himalayas, beyond Almora. The air was very pure and there were few people about. I talked very little and spent my time meditating. I spent several months there and meditated day and night.²

This was in Kashmir, where he spent several weeks. He loved this country sheltered by the Himalayan foothills, its magnificent valleys studded with gentians, primroses, and edelweiss, and its torrents pouring from the glaciers above into the lakes and rivers below. After visiting Srinagar, the ancient lakeside city known as the 'Venice of the East', he went higher, and at Gulmarg he stayed for a long time in a small cottage, in spite of the rudi-

mentary physical conditions. From there he set out one day—as so often in his youth—for a long hike into the mountains and reached a lake at an altitude of 16,000 feet. Lacking mountaineering equipment, he could go no higher.

It was here that he had a rare experience. He knew of the technique that enabled certain initiates of India and Tibet to travel from one place to another in a state of weightlessness, but he also knew that they achieved this only after long years of practice. He was astonished, therefore, to be given the experience without having sought it. Suddenly, while walking in the mountains and contemplating the summit of Nanga Parbat, he had a sensation of weightlessness. He began to run with such lightness that his feet barely touched the ground. Effortlessly he ran, uphill and down, as though flying over the slopes. 'It was an unforgettable experience,' he said later.

On the heights above Almora he met two

exceptional beings, Anagarika Govinda and his wife, and they became fast friends. At last, on June 17, he met Babaji. Omraam Mikhaël had long wished to meet this 'great being', but as he did not know where to find him, he decided to communicate by telepathy.

Neemkaroli Babaji responded immediately by going to meet him in Almora. When he arrived, he asked the disciples who had accompanied him to leave him alone with this Master from another land. They spent some time together and then Babaji arranged for him to meet many interesting people, introducing him as 'the French sadhu, a yogi and great saint'. The people greeted Babaji's friend with respect, bowing low in the traditional way.

But who was Babaji? First of all we must remember that 'Baba' or 'Babaji' are terms of affection meaning 'father' or 'little father' which are given to many spiritual guides in India. Since the publication in

1946 of Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi*, the West has known of the existence of Mahavatar Babaji, a very mysterious being whose role seemed to be that of a guide for prophets and spiritual Masters. It was said of him that he always seemed to be the same age, that he had lived in the Himalayas for two hundred and fifty or three hundred years, and that he appeared and disappeared at will. His disciples were highly evolved beings toward whom he was extremely demanding. He had been known to foretell events and it was said that his predictions always came true, that he could see and hear people at a distance, and that among other powers, he had the ability to be present in several different places at once. Countless people told of being saved from danger or illuminated by the great Babaji, without ever having seen him.

The same things were said of another great Master known as Neemkaroli Babaji. Some maintained that he too was several hundred years old, and although

others said they knew where and when he had been born, he remained a mystery. He had never been known to represent himself as a great lord; on the contrary, he always behaved with the utmost simplicity. After his return from India, Omraam Mikhaël told of an incident involving Neemkaroli Babaji which had occurred in the small town of Nib Karauri.

One day, Babaji was traveling by train along with a number of sadhus who had not bought tickets. The sadhus in India are usually poor and often use public transport without paying. When they are found out they are simply asked to leave. On this particular day, the ticket inspector asked all the sadhus—including Babaji, who was also without a ticket—to leave the train. At the next stop, after Babaji and the sadhus left the train with the passengers who had reached their destination, they stayed on the platform. The whistle blew to announce its departure, but to the surprise of the engineer the train failed to

*move. When a detailed inspection of the engine failed to determine the reason for this failure, the advice of the station-master and other employees was sought and a general discussion followed. They were all very puzzled and had no idea what to do about it. Finally an old man, pointing to Babaji, told the station-master: 'Go and ask him. It is he who is preventing the train from leaving. I saw light coming from his eyes.' The station-Master spoke to Babaji, and when he invited him to get back on the train, he did so, followed by all the sadhus, and without more ado the train went on its way.*³

From then on he was known as Neemkaroli Babaji, meaning the Babaji of Nib Karauri.⁴

In July 1959, the brotherhood in France received a letter signed Mikhaël in which he told them of his meeting with the 'Maharajah Neemkaroli Babaji'. In a few vibrant words he described this excep-

tional being and then went on to speak of the great Babaji mentioned by Yogananada as though he were the same person. Later, he seemed rather to mask these events as if, after that first enthusiastic message, he wished to confuse the trail. He continued to speak of his encounters with 'Babaji' without further indication of his identity, and to describe his legendary powers, particularly his ability to escape from a locked room or to be seen in different places at the same time. In one of his talks, Omraam Mikhaël said that he had met Babaji only twice, in another he spoke of numerous meetings: 'Several times after leaving me he sent someone to fetch me so that we could talk together.' And one day, speaking of Neemkaroli Babaji, he said: 'He has the same powers as the other one.'

A communion existed between the two men that needed no words. Omraam Mikhaël recounted how, one day when they were in a car together, he put his hand on Babaji's knee in a gesture of

respect and affection, whereupon Babaji turned to him with a smile: 'He began to sing in a mysterious language, and we exchanged a look such as I have never exchanged with anyone.'

Before saying goodbye for the last time, Babaji invited Omraam Mikhaël to stay in a temple near Nainital. He himself would not be there; he visited Nainital only occasionally and unexpectedly. The temple was in a magnificent site high in the mountains, and Hanuman Baba, the yogi in charge, welcoming his guest with every sign of respect, showed him in silence to Babaji's room. It was in this setting, looking out on the splendid panorama of the Himalayas, that Omraam Mikhaël spent two weeks in contemplation.

He used the evenings to learn more about Hinduism from Hanuman Baba, who, having taken a vow of silence, replied to his questions by writing on a slate. This yogi's only nourishment was a pint of milk a day; at night he slept only two or

three hours in a hole dug in the ground. Thanks to this centuries-old technique he deprived the five senses of their nourishment, thus achieving a certain numbness in his physical body:

*Once the senses cease their activity, they no longer absorb the psychic energy intended for the subtle force-centers, so these centers can be awakened and the yogi begins to see, hear, smell and touch the fluidic elements of the higher realms of reality.*⁵

In spite of the constraints of communicating by writing, a warm friendship developed between the two men. Hanuman Baba explained to the foreign Master the meaning of certain exercises of *Shabda yoga* prescribed by Babaji. He also translated texts from the *Vedas* and *Upanishads* for him and taught him the special properties of certain plants growing in the garden.

* * *

The period that followed this retreat in Babaji's ashram was very different. Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov visited the length and breadth of the country: the big cities, shrines and places of pilgrimage, sacred caves, palaces and temples. He spent long hours in some of the major libraries and even treated himself to some lessons in Sanskrit.

Throughout his travels on the roads of India he lived as an oriental, partaking of frugal meals which he prepared for himself. In hotels, the personnel respected his wishes and smilingly provided him with what he needed, for they immediately recognized him as a *Brahmashari*, one who is consecrated in celibacy to the service of God.

As the days passed, he met Indians from all walks of life: members of the different religious castes, businessmen, members of the judiciary, and industrialists. To all of them he showed the photograph of Peter Deunov he always carried and was

moved each time to see them take it with respect and touch it to their forehead before returning it. Usually they invited him to a meal, told him of their problems and asked his advice, and to thank him for the honor of his presence, they often took him on a tour of their town or region.

When he was invited to speak to a group of scientists, doctors, and physicists at Gulmarg, he expressed himself with the frankness which always characterized his relations with other people, and his intervention provoked a lively discussion about the way to improve conditions in the country.

In the temples he visited he could not fail to notice the many sculptures of popular religious symbols, chief among them the *lingam*, a symbol of procreation, which consists of a concave horizontal form surmounted by a vertical column. In the courtyard of a temple one day, he saw a group of women laying flowers at the foot

of one such sculpture. Curious to learn what they knew about the symbolism and having noticed that many women in the towns knew English, he decided to talk to them. Approaching, he asked them what the sculpture represented. One of the women replied that it symbolized the two principles, masculine and feminine.

‘Why are they shown together,’ he asked, ‘rather than separately?’

In the silence that followed his question, he explained:

The Rishis have joined the two principles in this symbol, but in human beings they are still separate. In the temples they are united, but not in yourselves. You are either a woman, and in that case you continually seek the other principle, man; or you are a man, continually in search of the other principle, woman. The two principles are separated. If they were not, you would not always be looking for the one that is missing. You are not whole

and complete in your own person, this is why you look for a partner to make you whole. Great sages, the Rishis and sadhus, possess the two principles within themselves: they are both man and woman. This is why they do not need to marry. They possess the qualities of both principles: the love of the feminine principle, and the strength of the masculine principle. They are the perfect lingam.⁶

By this time he was surrounded by a large group of people who had gathered to listen. In India, there is nothing unusual in such a scene: people recognize a Master who is dispensing knowledge and wisdom; they draw near and stay to listen. He went on to talk about the chakras:

There is something more. You must develop the Ajnâ chakra, which will give you the ability to see everything, but as you develop this feminine, horizontal chakra, you must also awaken the masculine chakra, Sahasrara, which is vertical. Only then will you be a living lingam.⁷

Although he sometimes talked publicly in this way, he was more often content to observe and listen. He spent long periods in isolated villages, observing how the people lived and learning about their interests and their problems. In spite of the wretched conditions, he remained with the poorest of the poor for a long time and adapted to their way of life.

Traveling the roads, he sometimes met sadhus who, renouncing all glory, dressed and behaved like ignorant beggars in order to carry on their spiritual work in peace. His practiced eye was not deceived by their appearance, however, and he sometimes stopped to talk to them. They were always willing to converse with him, and some even addressed him as *Mahatma*, the title reserved for spiritual leaders, ascetics and sages. He denied that he had a right to the title, but when they insisted, he smiled and said no more.

After the traditional gesture of farewell, he watched them fading into the distance

on the dusty road and reflected on the exceptional conditions in this country for the development of the spiritual life: it was always warm, and in many regions the abundance of fruit in the forests made it possible to live without money. All this made life easier for the sadhus and allowed them to concentrate on developing their spiritual faculties.

From his first days in India, he had noticed that the people still had faith in the power of a blessing. In the streets, buses and hotels, even in the homes of the rich, people sometimes knelt before him and asked him to bless them and accept them as disciples. At first, this surprised and embarrassed him, but after a time he willingly blessed those who asked.

* * *

Omraam Mikhaël visited many ashrams, from the humblest to the most renowned, and even attended a religious ceremony

in an ashram for women which was run by a young woman who was acquainted with Neemkaroli Babaji. From the first, he was surprised to learn that Babaji had spread word of his presence in India. In all the principal ashrams they knew who he was and were expecting him. At Calcutta he met Ananda Moyi Ma, of whom he said: 'She is a woman who has achieved something very great. There can be no doubt that the Spirit is upon her.'

He spent several days at the Ramakrishna Center. He also visited Shivananda in his immense ashram at Rishikesh, equipped with a hospital, a pharmacy, and a printing press. As soon as Shivananda saw him he exclaimed in delight, jumped up and placed a welcoming garland of flowers around his neck. At the end of the day, after a long conversation, he invited the foreign Master to join him in a walk along the shores of the Ganga.

At Tiruvanamalai he was able at last to enjoy a few days of tranquility and silence

in the ashram of Ramana Maharshi who had died nine years earlier. The atmosphere here was particularly cordial, luminous, and peaceful. The whole ashram was permeated by a truly spiritual ambience. Ramana Maharshi's disciples received him with the deference due to a great spiritual Master and showed him every mark of confidence. He was taken to the room that had been Ramana Maharshi's and invited to stay and meditate as long as he wished. Speaking later of his experience in that room, he said that he had been in communion in the light with the soul of Ramana Maharshi. He had always had a special affection for this mystic who had refused to be considered a personage of importance, and who had always possessed a lively humor and great common sense.

His visits to ashrams in the four corners of the country taught him a great deal about India. In a civilization in which psychic powers have been highly developed over the course of centuries, there

inevitably exists a wide variety of charismatic leaders, from simple fakirs to true spiritual Masters. 'Oh the powers, the powers...' exclaimed Omraam Mikhaël one day; 'Keep your powers, but keep them hidden. Show only love.'

Several of the sadhus he met were well known and had thousands of disciples, but he also encountered many who had assumed the role of guru, medium or clairvoyant without real knowledge, and who exploited the credulity of their disciples. On the faces of those who lived in such ashrams he failed to find the signs of spirituality he looked for. One day, watching a disciple who was reputed to be often in a state of ecstasy, he realized that in fact he was ill.

After an ecstasy, you should be strengthened. Your health and your inner light and intelligence should all be enhanced. If you are depressed or exhausted, the experience was not ecstasy but a pathological condition.⁸

One day he met a sadhu for whom he developed a particular affection. He was a hundred and fifty years old and remained almost constantly motionless in a state of *samadhi*. The disciples in his ashram considered their guru to be a transmitter, a kind of icon, behind whose unresponsive physical exterior was an entity with whom they could communicate:

When I saw this sadhu—a hundred and fifty years old... Oh, he was adorable. Truly, I love that man. He is already pure, already liberated, and he remains on earth in order to help others. And to see how his disciples took care of him... it was magnificent. We just looked at each other. No-one said anything, and then he began to speak. He took off his necklace of flowers and put it round my neck. And what he said... it was so poetic. He had read the Bible, the Gospels. He was inspired. He told me things, but in Hindi, and there were interpreters as he did not know English. What he told me was more marvelous, more sublime, more

*extraordinary than anything I had ever heard. I asked his disciples: 'Has your sadhu ever been wrong?' 'Never!' He is already in communication with God.*⁹

At Ganeshpuri, Omraam Mikhaël broke his journey in order to meet Nityananda Maharaj, reputed to be a great sage and an infallible clairvoyant. Arriving in his ashram near Bombay, he found himself before a simple, unassuming man, dressed in nothing but a *dhoti*, who greeted him silently and invited him with a courteous gesture to sit opposite him. Without a word, Nityananda gazed at his visitor for a long time, then closed his eyes. The time passed. Sitting face to face, neither of them stirred, and for the disciples present it was obvious that their spiritual guide was in a trance. When Nityananda finally opened his eyes, he seemed to return from a great distance. In perfect English, he said:

‘His heart is pure. Peace is in his soul. All powers have been given to him.’

He added that his visitor had lived in India in the distant past, and mentioned an important personage whose name is still known today. Others before him—among them Peter Deunov—had spoken to Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov of the role he had played in India in the past. In fact, only a few days before, a sadhu gifted with clairvoyance had told him:

This is not the first time you have been here. You have already been a Hindu. You have lived here in the past, and you will return.

Before leaving India, Omraam Mikhaël again visited Ananda Moyi Ma and several of the greater clairvoyants of the time, all of whom spontaneously repeated Nityananda's revelation. Finally, returning to Nainital to see Hanuman Baba, he told him the name that Nityananda had revealed. Hanuman Baba, still silent, took out an ancient book about the great spiritual Masters of India and showed him a picture of one of

them, seated in the lotus posture. Over his head was the figure of the seven-headed cobra, symbolizing the possession of all spiritual and psychic powers.

Notes

1. Pythagoras taught that the universe was based on numbers. Numerology stems from the notion that each number has both a symbolic significance and a particular vibration, and that each letter of the alphabet corresponds to a number.
2. December 30, 1975.
3. February 12, 1960.
4. The differences in spelling are due to the transliteration.
5. 'A Disciple Must Develop his Spiritual Senses', in *Harmony*.
6. February 14, 1960.
7. Ibid.

8. 'A Disciple Must Develop his Spiritual Senses', in *Harmony*.
9. July 29, 1960.

16



A

Spiritual
Master

On February 9, 1960, after a year's absence, Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov returned to Paris. The happy crowd gathered at Orly airport were impatient to see him again, for his dynamic presence and his spiritual talks had been greatly

missed. But when he appeared at the gates they were taken by surprise. A new power seemed to emanate from this white-bearded patriarchal figure whom they barely recognized. So strongly did he resemble Peter Deunov that some of those who had known the Bulgarian Master wept openly.

Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov was sixty years old. In reality he had been teaching, enlightening, and guiding his disciples with the wisdom of a true spiritual Master for many years, but that day at Orly he seemed both the same and yet transformed. His whole being expressed the stability that had always characterized him, while at the same time radiating a new aura of authority.

The next day and for the following several days, in spite of the fatigue of his long journey, he received countless visitors at Izgrev and gave several talks in a hall filled to capacity. But he did not delay long in Paris and soon left for the Bon-

fin. Toward the end of his stay in India he had heard of the disaster that had struck Fréjus two months earlier when the rupture of the Malpasset Dam on the Reyran had released flood waters that had devastated the town and left hundreds dead. The Bonfin, a few kilometers away, had been spared.

The spectacle of destruction that met his eyes was overwhelming. For miles around, everything was in ruins, and the whole region was impregnated with the terror and suffering of the victims. Powerful, negative vibrations assailed him on all sides, and he could sense the souls of the dead still clinging to the ruins of their homes. For days, he did everything in his power to communicate with them mentally and help them to free themselves from the horror of the sudden, violent death which kept them tied to where they had lived. By communicating with their spirit, he tried to help them to move toward the light.

After two weeks of this intense spiritual work, he returned to Izgrev, and then, at the spring equinox, he spent a few days in the mountains. After living as an oriental for months in India, he was finding it difficult to adapt to the rhythm of life in Paris and had even lost all desire to speak. For many years, he had dreamed of communicating wordlessly with his brothers and sisters, and throughout his life he was to have a sense of regret that this was not possible:

The things I say to you during these meditations cannot all be put into words. One day you will sense and receive within yourselves what I give you in these moments of silence. In fact, some of you are already capable of this. I could lead you to extraordinary regions, but you are not aware of this and are not synchronized with my vibrations.¹

It is true that the members of the brotherhood were not yet capable of following his lead in this, but neither was he called

to live the life of a contemplative. It was impossible for him to be silent. For a long time now, his days had been dedicated to action and a large part of his nights to communion with God. From on high he received the strength that enabled him to live in both worlds.

No sooner had he returned from the mountains than he resumed his task as teacher. The members of the brotherhood were overjoyed. At last their guide was with them again, he who had shown them the way to spiritual summits while helping them to assume full responsibility for their earthly tasks. To begin with they had been a little uneasy, afraid that the warm, simple relationship of the past might have changed. They could not fail to notice something new and indefinable in him that they had never sensed before. The months he had spent with the yogis and sadhus of India, the privileged relation he had enjoyed with the great Babaji, and the new name that had been given

to him in mysterious circumstances—all this was somewhat intimidating.

It was not long, however, before they realized that his attitude had not changed. He was as accessible, cordial and informal as ever, and no more inclined than before to let them put him on a pedestal. ‘Stop singing my praises,’ he said, ‘and start working without paying attention to me. Try rather to understand my ideas and put them into practice.’ Over the years he repeated that he never told them anything without having experienced and verified it beforehand, and they too, he said, should verify everything for themselves. His constant theme was the light dispensed by the sun to all creatures on earth. He urged his disciples to immerse themselves mentally in light as in an ocean, and to radiate out to the world all the colors it contains.

Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov’s place is unquestionably at the heart of the Mikhaëlic era foretold by Rudolf Steiner.

He belongs to the spiritual family of that great luminous spirit, Mikhaël, archangel of Light, whose mission is to illuminate and liberate human beings. Far from using his ascendancy to influence or coerce the members of his brotherhood, he always pointed out the different possibilities open to them. If he saw that some were leaning toward another genuinely spiritual group, he did not try to hold them back. 'We are all members of the same family,' he told them. One could follow him as one follows a mountain guide, without renouncing a particle of one's freedom.

His stay in India had been a pilgrimage to spiritual heights; an immersion in a unique civilization: the discovery of a human society both rich and poor, of yogis, brahmins, government ministers, middle class citizens and beggars. In that country he had come face to face with the most difficult conditions on earth—poverty and ignorance—but he had also discovered the spiritual values of

a people in search of the absolute and the suppression of earthly appetites, a people impregnated by the striving for detachment of hundreds of generations before them. He had begun and ended his visit with months spent in contemplation in the solitude of the Himalayas. Once again he had scaled the spiritual summits. Once again he had come back to his human family.

Omraam Mikhaël was one of those rare beings whose love of God is so ardent that they are capable of concentrating all their energies toward the attainment of spiritual summits. He first scaled those mysterious heights that give access to the divine world at the age of fifteen. He scaled them and he nearly died of joy, but he came down into the valley again, and if he came down it was because he knew in his heart that he had a task to perform, and even the most sublime joy could not turn him from it. That was what he had said about his experience at the age of seventeen when he had heard the music

of the spheres: 'It was fear that brought me back. Not the fear of death but *the fear of being incapable of returning to work on earth*. If you have a task to accomplish in this world, you must work at it. I could not give that up.'

To the members of the brotherhood, he was now 'the Master'. Not because he had learned to dominate others, but on the contrary, because they had recognized that he had attained that degree of self-mastery that is only possible after many years of intensive work. He had begun this work of self-perfection to which we are all called while still very young; he had experienced a great many of the difficulties known to human beings, and had used them as tools in his work of self-transformation.

After his time in India he sometimes spoke of the great Masters who, once they had attained self-mastery, chose to live in solitude rather than with their fellow human beings. For his part, his fellow

human beings were his family; his first concern was for them. His thoughts were all for his brothers and sisters, all those men, women, and children: he longed to take them by the hand as their brother, lead them to the summits of their own being and help them to understand their role in the society—the family—of which they were members. This is why he continually talked to them about true brotherhood, the only thing that could bring about a Golden Age for humankind. For if he wanted to help them to grow toward perfection, to find inner peace and joy, his ultimate goal was even more far-reaching: he sought to lead them well beyond their individual efforts. His goal was the creation of a fraternal civilization of human solidarity that would be both spiritual and material, centered on the highest values for the greater good of all.

* * *

In 1960, there was a large gathering of people at the Bonfin for the summer con-

vention. When the Master left his chalet at dawn and saw the long lines of shadowy figures walking up to the Rock, he could not help but be moved. 'Dear Lord', he thought, 'how beautiful they are, all these brothers and sisters coming to pay homage to your splendor!' One morning, after his talk on the Rock, he confessed that he had been unable to restrain his tears as they sang. Beautiful music often brought him to a state bordering on ecstasy, plucking at the secret chords of his being that linked him to the world of perfection. And as he had said two years earlier:

I use music in order to bring the most beautiful and beneficial things down onto the physical plane for you. [...] Very few people realize the importance of what they are hearing. So, without your knowing it, I continue my work, using the music we are listening to. Some of you sense this and work with me... For me the question is clear: my whole life has been accompanied by music; I owe to music

*many of the benefits I enjoy today. Yes, thanks to music I have experienced some unforgettable moments. It was never the only factor, of course, but it has been an important one.*²

After his long absence, it did his heart good to hear the songs of the fraternity again and join his voice to those of his disciples, to measure once again the power of this music to stir the most sensitive fibers of the human heart by linking it to sublime entities. In India he had noticed that many ascetics did not sing and even considered music a distraction from things of greater importance. That conception of the spiritual life was utterly foreign to him: in his view, music was an essential part of life.

*If you knew the effect music can have on your different bodies—etheric, astral, and mental—you would sing all day long... Music is the most powerful means we have of renewing and restoring the equilibrium of social life.*³

He was convinced that harmonious music would soon play a predominant role in the life of people throughout the world. Classical music—and above all, sacred music—was what he loved, for it vibrates in harmony with the higher realms and facilitates meditation. His appreciation was not one-sided, however: when he chose music to accompany certain physical activities, it was not to the classics that he turned, but rather to songs full of energy and gaiety. He said that we should always choose the kind of music that had a positive effect on everyone. A pianist with whom he had spent a long day in the countryside during a visit to Greece told of his own experience:

I wasn't feeling very well but the Master was in very good form. All kinds of difficult things had happened during the day. When we got home that evening, I felt much better, the other brother was his usual self, but the Master seemed rather somber. When I suggested some music he agreed and told me to choose, so, as

I wanted to respect his mood, I thought he would be pleased when I put on a record of Byzantine religious music with the Bulgarian singer Boris Christov. After a little while the Master looked at me and said: 'You're not a good psychologist. You could see that I was in a serious mood, a little sad, and yet you chose music that is very solemn. I'll show you what you should have done.' He stood up and went to my record library and put on some tunes from French comic opera. Another time it was a rainy evening during the dark of the moon, the atmosphere was a little oppressive, we were all feeling serious and pensive, and he played some yodeling songs from the Tyrol.

Even those with little sensitivity to music soon grew to love it in this spiritual family where it had such importance and marked the rhythm of the day's activities. When Omraam Mikhaël explained that music was the respiration of the soul, or that a beautiful song had a beneficial effect on the singer, even the indifferent

responded. The music that resounded in the halls of Izgrev and the Bonfin was of a truly magical beauty. Every day after meals, they listened to the sacred works of one of the composers he loved, those he called 'the great musical giants': Beethoven, Haydn, Mozart, Handel, and Bach. But he loved the works of other composers too: Vivaldi, Schubert, Dvorák and Berlioz.

Hearing him speak of the deeper meaning of some of these works, one could not help but discover their spiritual beauty. He used to say, for instance, that Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* could help one to work for greater detachment; that Haydn's *Stabat Mater* was conducive to a continual and tranquil elevation of the spirit; that the Trio for flute and harp from Berlioz's *Enfance du Christ* attracted beings from the invisible world who, unseen and unknown, came to dance. All this was so natural to him that one day he asked the musicians to play the Trio three times running, 'so that those invis-

ble entities can continue to dance for the glory of God'.

To sing with him often became a mystical experience for his disciples, and when they succeeded in silencing the clamorous voice of their own preoccupations and uniting their thoughts to his, they freed him for the spiritual work that was the framework of his life. Gathered around the fire one evening in August 1960, the campers were so stimulated by his words that they sang one of the most beautiful four-part songs in their repertory with exceptional sensitivity. Omraam Mikhaël did not sing with them. The next day he told them that the power of that song had affected him in an extraordinary way, that he had been close to fainting as his soul had taken flight. After leaving them he had thought about the power of their love and, gazing at the stars, had taken a few deep breaths to help him to assimilate what had just happened. 'I know what I do for you,' he said,

‘but I want to thank you for what you do for me.’

The year following his return from India saw the beginning of a fraternity center in Switzerland. On his first visit to the country, his disciples invited him to visit a site they had found at Les Monts-de-Corsier. A long walk through forests and up and down rocky slopes brought them to a broad clearing with a magnificent view. Below stretched the deep blues and greens of the Lake of Geneva, and beyond it the jagged spires of the Dents du Midi pierced the sky. On clear days the great dome of Mont Blanc gleamed in the distance.

Once the Swiss fraternity had bought the land, he returned to visit it again. It was winter, and nature, robed all in white, seemed to have been fashioned that very day by the hand of the Creator. The Master walked for a long time in the snow. Later, when the group asked him to give the future center a name, he called it

Videlinata, meaning 'divine light' in Bulgarian. As always when he dedicated a center for the brotherhood, he exhorted them to use it with great respect, to be conscious of what it represented and of the work to be done there.

The brotherhood is an experiment, an attempt at the social actualization of a spiritual family whose members all support and help each other in a spirit of love. Each one contributes something beautiful from his or her own soul. The perfume that emanates from a brotherhood—as from a flower as it opens—nourishes the souls and spirits of all its members.⁴

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At this period, Master Omraam Mikhaël asked those who followed his teaching to redouble their efforts, to be more attentive, to work with greater spiritual intensity. He spoke of the exigencies of certain Hindu and Tibetan Masters of the past

and described the initiatic ordeals to which they subjected their disciples in order to link them ever more closely to the divine source. For his own disciples he had great ambitions, and although he always showed them great love, he could also be severe, even inflexible. The demands he made on himself, however, were a hundred times greater. Wishing to be capable not only of instructing them but of giving them an entirely new vision of life, he constantly sought to perfect himself and increase his own knowledge. He was never satisfied that what he gave them adequately answered their needs.

The references he made at this time to the exigencies of oriental Masters were important. In his view, true universal brotherhood could only come about through a blending of aspects developed respectively by East and West. The spiritual philosophy, clairvoyance, knowledge and psychic powers of the former allied to the scientific discoveries and material and

social progress of the latter were capable of transforming the world.

In spite of the fascination Eastern mysticism held for many Westerners, however, he did not hesitate to insist that Eastern methods needed to be adapted, for they corresponded to neither the mentality nor the climate nor the way of life of Westerners. In this he agreed with teachers such as Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, neither of whom had encouraged their disciples to practice rigorous physical exercises; on the contrary, they had declared that traditional techniques whose goal was to develop great mental concentration were no longer appropriate. They too had emphasized the value of spiritual work, of meditation and contemplation as the most effective means of achieving liberation.

Without attaching undue importance to external forms, Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov extracted the vital sap from ancient texts, from the maxims of Hermes Tris-

megistus, from the teachings of Jesus and the Buddha, giving them their true cosmic dimension. By placing himself beyond all religions, cults, and philosophies, he could speak of a religion centered on divine light that was capable of preserving the flame of life within changing forms. In his view, only principles are eternal; it is a great mistake to try to perpetuate forms and structures.

At the same time, although he did not approve of the excessively rigid forms established by many religions, he readily acknowledged that pictures or statues could be useful, often serving as a necessary support for prayer. He himself made use of symbols in his spiritual work—the Tree of Life of the Cabbalah, the rose, the prism, the seven colors of the spectrum—but he always warned his disciples that such symbols must be no more than tools to help them rise toward the divine world. In his initiatic school at Izgrev and at the Bonfin he advocated a spiritual work that mobilized mind, heart, and

will. Time and again he talked about the role of these three basic components of every human being. They had an important place in his philosophy, but also in his life:

I have experienced the mystical way: the heart, feelings, sensations, love. I have tasted the spiritual way: study and knowledge. I have also followed the way of concrete realization through work and the exercise of the will. I have tried these three ways one after the other, and in each I have achieved results. And yet I do not want to choose one or the other: I want all three.⁵

If he was to continue to reveal to his followers the truths that would enable them to advance, he needed tranquility and silence. But he saw that an understanding of true silence, the silence that is not merely a conventional attitude but a *state of mind*, was not accessible to all. Although his brothers and sisters were always receptive, he often felt that he was

a voice crying in the wilderness. He told them frankly that their lack of resolve and perseverance saddened him. But his regrets were for them, for those who were not yet aware of the value of 'a silence penetrated by thoughts of such an exalted nature, that it is endowed with all the elements needed to form their subtle bodies, even the body of glory'. Six months after coming back from India he told them:

Once you have had a taste of the gifts this silence brings, you will understand it. Silence is not simply a question of not fidgeting, not moving things about; it is a question of putting a stop to all discontent, to all the vague emotions that drift through one. The first degree of silence is physical. It is necessary to attain that silence before one can go higher and pacify one's astral feelings. The second degree of silence, then, is the pacification of feelings; the third is the pacification of thought. When this silence is achieved, the spirit is free to move about and visit

*regions it has never seen before. In this total peace the spirit can soar aloft and bring back with it joy, health, fortitude and love. It can bring wisdom to our minds, so that our intelligence enables us to understand everything.*⁶

At the Bonfin and Izgrev he continued to insist on the need for real silence during meals, the kind of silence that makes it possible to assimilate one's food consciously and to practice the yoga of nutrition so as to extract its subtlest and most potent elements and thus improve one's physical and psychic health. On January 8 1962, he said:

Help to calm your solar plexus with some consciously harmonious gestures. During meals you often see me quietly moving something on the table for no apparent reason. These small gestures do me good; they harmonize my solar plexus and draw in strength. They benefit you too. Whenever you are in a painful state inwardly, make some harmonious ges-

ture. For example you can draw the form of a circle in the air at the level of your head and upper body.

More than once he resolved to demand more of his brothers and sisters. At times he expressed his displeasure in no uncertain terms when there was too much noise at meals. But each year at the close of the summer convention, gathered with his disciples round the fire in honor of the Archangel Mikhaël, it was the magic of love that triumphed. The ambience created by their spiritual aspirations and desire for perfection was so irresistible that the Master was caught up in the current and all his resolutions of severity were swept away. His love overcame all else.

Over the years, however, he sometimes interrupted his program of talks and left the convention for a few days in order to give the participants a period of personal reflection. At the same time, it was an opportunity for him to renew his own

energy and inspiration. On these occasions, he usually went to the mountains. At other times he stayed at the Bonfin and took part in all the activities, depriving the participants only of the spoken word, so that they might learn 'to desire nothing more than the presence of God.'

This presence of God was the object of his own tireless quest. His mission was very concrete and he was extremely practical and competent on the physical plane, but that did not prevent him from being a true mystic: he would always need to spend long hours in meditation and contemplation. Those close to him knew that when alone he often voluntarily left his physical body or was caught up in ecstasy. They also knew that he slept little and, like all high initiates whose consciousness is always alert and vigilant, was able to carry on his spiritual work while his physical body was resting. He sometimes said that what he could do in the daytime was less than a millionth part of what he could accomplish 'on the

other side' at night. It was then that he could speak to the souls of his disciples most effectively.

* * *

In 1964, accompanied by two brothers, he visited the village of his birth in Macedonia. There, he happily renewed many sixty-year-old memories, and the family members who still lived there gave him a joyous welcome. One of his first visits was to the cousin whose weaving he had ruined at the age of four. On his return to France, he had commented humorously on that visit: 'All these people were still alive and very old, and I gave them something to make up for the distress I had caused them. We must never leave things undone. Sooner or later we have to pay our debts.'

The principal reason for this visit was to meet his mother, and as it was impossible for him to return to Bulgaria, it was she who made the long journey from Varna

to Serbtzi with her son Alexander and one of her grandsons. She was now eighty-eight years old and had not seen her eldest son since 1937.

They both knew that they were seeing each other for the last time. Back in Varna, Dolia told one of her granddaughters: 'I was afraid I would cry when I saw him with his hair quite white, but I managed to hold back my tears. I was very moved, but I wanted the ambience to be beautiful. Above all I did not want to upset him.'

On August 5, 1973, nine years after seeing her eldest son again, her long life drew to a peaceful close.

* * *

At Izgrev, Videlinata and the Bonfin, the members of the brotherhood gathered regularly for Easter, Christmas and Summer conventions, at which the Master Omraam Mikhaël gave daily talks. He received an enormous amount of mail, to

which he always replied personally. In addition, he gave dozens of personal interviews and spent hours listening to and advising people. The task he had assumed absorbed most of his time. As one of those close to him told us: 'Each day he bore the burden of a spiritual Master who is both a father and a mother, ready to accept all the attendant difficulties as well as the joys, the gratitude as well as the resentments.'

At the Bonfin his visitors were invited to join him under the trees of his garden or in his sitting-room. For years he received them in the oriental manner, sitting cross-legged on a cushion. The sparse furnishings in his chalet expressed the extreme simplicity of his tastes. As one witness put it: 'He was so alive, so radiant, and he preferred the simplest, least complicated symbols.' The symbols of his choice, those with which he most often worked, seemed to be teeming with life. He chose them knowing that they would speak to the hearts and minds of his visi-

tors, and the numerous crystals and beautifully colored stones scattered about his chalet bore witness to his special fondness for them.

Each person who came to talk to him was received with great consideration. Almost always he would start by asking:

‘What can I do for you?’

And if, having explained the reason for his visit, the person was open and receptive, Omraam Mikhaël was able to give him whatever it was he most needed. If, on the other hand, the person was too emissive, he was content to listen without trying to force his confidence. With some he was very understanding, affectionate and gentle; with others he was sometimes very severe and exacting. Sometimes, in order to help the person in front of him, he became a mirror in which they could see the reflection of their own defects. Many of his visitors understood only later why he had spoken to them of

things which seemed to have no connection with the subject of the interview.

When he was asked for advice, he did not always answer immediately. He would often say, 'Wait. I'll give you my answer tomorrow.' And when he was consulted about a project that had already been launched he never intervened. If, for instance, two people already had a commitment to each other, if there was already a bond between them, he would say that he could not interfere in their decision or in a relationship which already existed. To all, he would repeat: 'What I am asking you is the most difficult of all: to become messengers of light.'

* * *

He was overburdened with work. In order to renew his inspiration and consolidate his close bond with the spiritual world, he needed to retire from time to time in solitude. In the mid-sixties, he began to make occasional visits to the

Pyrenees to meditate and rest. Finding ideal conditions for his spiritual work, he often spent time there between the brotherhood conventions, alone or with a few people. The place, which he called *Castelrama*, was in a beautiful setting. The view of the mountains was superb, the air pure and invigorating, the silence broken only by the song of birds and the deep voice of the wind.

In his small cottage he consecrated a room for meditation, and he encouraged everyone to do the same at home, adding that the smaller the room the easier it was to concentrate. There were days when he spent many hours in this oratory; at other times he climbed the hill behind the cottage for long meditations, rejoicing in the sunlight and peace of the early morning. Nourished by the natural elements around him, by the currents of energy flowing from the sun, he told his companions that he felt no need to eat. Since his youth he had been accustomed to eat

sparsely twice a day, but at Castelrama he usually had only one meal a day.

At one point he felt the desire to repeat an experience of his youth: to fast completely for ten days. During his fast he read, meditated, wrote, and joined his brothers, working with pickax and spade to prepare the ground for the basic installations they needed. As his fast was not a treatment for illness, he did not need to rest and save his energies to heal himself. On the contrary, he was full of vigor, living on sunshine and the pure air. He was often in a state of ecstasy with the beauty of the sunrise in the mountains. And as his soul had never ceased to vibrate to the call of the mountains, he often went off for long, solitary hikes to the high peaks of the Pyrenees.

Although these periods of retreat were extremely beneficial, he never wished to remain alone for very long. This paradox was a constant in his life: his need to be in permanent communion with the highest

planes of being was always tempered by his rare openness and accessibility to his contemporaries and to the brotherhood in particular. He was never so happy as when surrounded by his spiritual family. Before long, there was a continual coming and going of disciples he invited to stay—ten or more at a time—and Castellrama rapidly became a miniature brotherhood center.

Many surprises awaited his guests: in the Master they discovered a host of unequalled thoughtfulness who personally arranged a vase of flowers in their rooms. He was the *pater familias*, relaxed and warm-hearted, who often invited them to share a meal and at times even prepared a Bulgarian dish for them. He made sure that they all had the opportunity to express themselves, made plans for the future with them, and won their hearts with his informal cordiality.

Omraam Mikhaël recognized the importance of the realities of life in the world

and always tried to remain in touch with the circumstances of his contemporaries in order to understand their problems. In his constant desire to be close to others, to understand their problems, and to see how modern mentalities were evolving, he often read novels and watched films and television. In this way he observed the behavior of his contemporaries and found examples with which to illustrate the major themes of his teaching. The news programs on television were a regular feature of his day, and in the evenings he would sometimes invite his guests to watch a film and then discuss it with them. He particularly enjoyed films in which a hero showed courage and self-sacrifice in the defense of justice.

As he put it, Castelrama was like 'a transmitting station' from which his spiritual work went out to the whole of humanity, always in his heart. Every so often, local people whose acquaintance he wanted to make—the local gendarme or the mountain-rescue teams—were invited to

a meal, and he had the art of putting them all at their ease. The people of the region became truly fond of him and were always happy to know that he was there.

* * *

It was six years since Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov had returned from India, six years since the members of his brotherhood first gave him the respectful title of Master. In spite of this, he continued to refer to himself as 'a living book' on whose pages Peter Deunov had written for twenty years before sending him to France. Although he loved to talk about the great Masters, he never referred to himself as one. He always said that Peter Deunov had chosen him, his most insignificant disciple, only because he cherished a high ideal and worked in secret to perfect himself. His humility was genuine. He knew that people regarded him as a Master, but he did not fear any more than before to diminish himself in the eyes of his brotherhood or

of visitors. Some of them went away perplexed, but he had expressed this very clearly in 1939, soon after his arrival in France:

Humility is like a valley lying between two mountains. It is irrigated by the water that flows from the heights, so that it produces an abundance of fruit and flowers. Pride is like those peaks: isolated, solitary, and barren.⁷

In spite of his unassuming attitude, he was obliged once again to contend with difficulties caused by calumnies, conflicts and misunderstandings that resurfaced in his homeland. There were still some in Bulgaria who bore him a grudge, who even reproached him for his physical resemblance to Peter Deunov. To be sure, there were also many Bulgarians who had visited him at the Bonfin and who spoke of his work with enthusiasm, but they were not taken seriously in their home country, any more than others had been twenty years earlier.

For his part, after a year in India where spiritual guides were accorded unconditional respect, he found himself faced once again with western reticence, with the ever-present tendency to analyze and criticize. Some of the members of the French brotherhood who had known Peter Deunov continually criticized Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov for introducing new elements into the teaching. On July 21, during the 1966 convention at the Bonfin, deciding that it was time to clarify the situation, he declared:

I speak with my own voice. Peter Deunov spoke with his. If he did not talk about certain questions, it was not because he did not know them. Perhaps the time was not ripe to talk about them. Many things have to be revealed before people can understand. There is no need to be afraid. As I have already said, a person can sing only with his own voice. The Master did not speak with the voice of Jesus. And my talks are not copies of Peter Deunov's. The teaching is some-

*thing very vast and true. I had to find my own way.*⁸

Two weeks later he reverted to the same question and begged them to pay less attention to persons and more to the light of the sun, to that which is stable and divine. This time, he spoke with even greater gravity, alluding to his illumination at the age of fifteen:

It is now fifty years since I was overwhelmed by the light. My work is just beginning and one day it will become visible to the whole world. I have been waiting for orders from above, and it is only this year that heaven has sent me a sign of the work expected of me. For the first time I have been instructed to reveal many things to you. A different era is upon us, with a different language and different means. My work is different from that of Peter Deunov. Completely different. But there is no contradiction between us. We are following the same

*path, advancing in the same direction,
always toward the light, toward God.* ⁹

This declaration was enough to clear the air and put new vigor into most of his disciples, enabling them to adhere to his teaching without reserve. As for himself, although criticism never prevented him from doing what he had to do, it was always an occasion to purify his motivations and work to develop humility.

* * *

That summer he gave several talks about purity. In fact, long before this he had frequently spoken about purity. Drawing on examples from everyday life, he spoke first of the necessity in every area of life of separating the pure from the impure to avoid poisoning oneself. Then he insisted on the importance of choosing one's pleasures on every level with great care. His explanation of what he called the divine algebra was particularly striking: 'When the intellect is freed from all

impurities it attracts light and understanding; when the heart is purified it becomes capable of happiness; when the will is freed from apathy it becomes stronger, and when the physical body is freed from the wastes that encumber it, it regains health.'

It was as logical as an equation.

With the skill of a painter, he described the beauty of the river of life, the 'path of wisdom' that flows from the highest realms of the invisible world, pregnant with celestial energies. He explained mental exercises that one could use to slake one's thirst at this river and recapture the purity that dwells at the summit of all that exists. He explained to couples how to live their love for each other without sinking to levels that sterilize the spiritual life. Of paramount importance in his view is to recognize the potency of sexual energy and use it for one's spiritual development.

The sexual organs are a synopsis of creation as a whole. The force that lies hidden in human beings is a sacred, divine force by means of which they can attain all their desires. Let me give you an example: if you live on the fifth floor, the water you need has to be pumped up to you, and this necessitates a certain amount of pressure. If you do away with that pressure, the water will not reach all the floors. But men do their best to lower the pressure within themselves and reduce it to zero. They cannot endure it. And yet, this force must be allowed to rise through all the floors until it reaches the brain. It is the pressure that causes it to rise so that it can be used. But as most people continually get rid of it, the result is that they can never make use of it on the higher planes.¹⁰

It was in this sense that he liked to talk about the beauty of the work achieved by the high initiates, who instead of squandering these energies had learned to use them to create a dazzling light in the

brain, a divine elevation of the soul. He himself had chosen celibacy and continence in order to dedicate his life to helping humanity, but he had never feared this force which, in the words of Hermes Trismegistus, he called 'the strength of all strengths'. Neither his spirituality nor his behavior was ever inspired by a repudiation of the sexual force; on the contrary, in his view, the sexual energies with which cosmic intelligence has endowed human beings contain the seeds of evolution and transcendence.

His attitude toward women was always one of respect and spiritual love. What he looked for was beauty, the joyful triumph of nature. The sight of a woman singing moved him deeply because it made him think of the divine Mother, but what he sought above all in the visible countenance were the emanations of inner beauty. When he spoke about his attitude toward women, he did so in order to help other men. He declared without ambiguity: 'Nothing is more beautiful than the

sexual organs of men and women when considered as organs destined to accomplish the designs of God.'

His teaching about love and sexuality is balanced and vivifying, but it is a teaching for the future. He himself acknowledged that very few human beings today—even, and perhaps especially, within the state of marriage—are ready to work for the self-mastery which, thanks to the potency slumbering in the etheric centers of the chakras, could have truly gigantic results on the spiritual plane.

There is a close affinity in his philosophy between sanctity and sexuality: 'Human beings, he said, are capable of attaining perfection only when they achieve control of these special energies and direct them to the higher spheres. And they can succeed in this endeavor only by adhering to the high ideal of seeking to resemble the heavenly Father and the divine Mother, only by opening their hearts spiritually to all creatures on earth.'

Love is an exchange, and there can be exchange on other planes than the physical. There can be an exchange between two people at a distance, through a look, a thought, a word, without ever embracing or touching. [...] When I speak of love I mean love that is life, light and beauty, an exchange with divine creatures. That is the love I think about night and day, and this love brings me blessings.¹¹

For Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov, to renounce something without putting anything in its place had no meaning. As he often said, he himself had renounced nothing: he had simply transposed his choice of pleasures from the physical to the spiritual plane, thus gaining a profound joy that was nourished by mystical experiences. The beauty of children, of nature at sunrise, of the stars, the oceans, the mountains—all these things spoke to him of the perfection of God.

Notes

1. September 1, 1971.
2. August 13, 1958.
3. April 17, 1957.
4. November 19, 1961.
5. November 19, 1961.
6. August 6, 1960.
7. March 4, 1939.
8. July, 21, 1966.
9. August 6, 1966.
10. August 26, 1958.
11. 'Love and Sex', in *The Mysteries of Yesod*.



The Path of Light

Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov's dominating passion was to set fire to hearts and minds. His aspiration, he sometimes said, was to be a Prometheus: to steal fire from heaven and give it to human beings. His personal path was the path of light, and all his teaching was centered on this element so essential to life. Light, he said,

was the most perfect image human beings can have of God, and he explained how to use it in order to transform oneself and become as radiant as the sun.

A series of talks given during the summer of 1967 constituted a synthesis of his teaching about the sun. For many years he had spoken of the yoga that he called 'Surya yoga'—*Surya* being Sanskrit for sun. This yoga of the sun, he explained, was known to the ancient Greeks, Egyptians, Persians, Aztecs, Mayas and Tibetans, and it was the one he favored above all others, for it included and summed up all other forms of yoga. He used to say: 'I teach many different kinds of yoga, among them the yoga of nutrition. But I have rediscovered the richest, most ancient and most vital of all forms of yoga: *Surya yoga*.'

He liked to talk about the Spirit of the sun. In this respect his philosophy coincided with the age-old philosophies of the Vedas and Puranas, which teach that

the true sun is not the star that is visible in the sky, but the supreme Intelligence that reigns at the summit of the firmament, above the realms of physical creation. He revealed that behind the physical sun existed a subtler, immaterial sun, a sun that is hidden to any but the most highly developed consciousness. Through love, it is possible for human souls to communicate on the level of the super-conscious with all creatures in the light of that sun. 'In our planetary system,' he added, 'the sun is the representative of God, the supreme sun of the universe.'

That year, aware that his ideas were not always easy to grasp, he spelled them out in great detail. In one particularly long talk he explained that by leading people to the light, the yoga of the sun could lead them to God, the unique source of all light. When we contemplate the sun in the morning, at the moment when its emanations are most beneficial, we can rise mentally to the subtlest planes and

there obtain elements that are lacking in our organism. 'It is really very simple,' he used to say. It is not even necessary to know which elements will restore your health; that is not important. It is your soul and spirit that know how to find what you need.'

He realized, of course, that his words were not always properly understood, that most people tended to devise structures and adopt set habits, but he always refused to institute new forms which would inevitably become inflexible. All spiritual Masters must certainly have experienced similar difficulties: they speak of eternal truths, but they see their disciples crystallizing these truths into rigid forms that mask and stifle the life within them.

In Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov's philosophy, the sun was not set up as an idol as in certain ancient solar religions; his 'solar religion' is simply a way of finding God, the true light that shines within each

human being. The sun is no more than a doorway opening on to the deity, the best example we have of selfless love, because it gives without ceasing and asks for nothing in return. It is a dwelling place, an authentic temple for the spirit of truth, the spirit of purity and selfless altruism. And yet, as he declared:

There is nothing wrong in having churches and temples; on the contrary, they are excellent and necessary. I have never suggested that they should be destroyed. Even a house can be a temple. But when men are ready to grasp the truth, they will stop going to man-made temples. They will worship in the great temple built by the hand of God himself, the universe. And then they will understand that man himself is a temple of God, and that he must progressively cleanse, purify and sanctify himself so as to be a perfect sanctuary.¹

From personal experience he had become convinced that forms must constantly be

renewed. As a youth he had been inclined to see them as unimportant before coming to realize that 'a beautiful content should be in a beautiful form, for form is divine'. At the same time he would never stop insisting that to attach more importance to the form than to the spirit led inevitably to rigidity.

He had always felt the need to demolish old forms so that life might flow and the spirit be made manifest. He would say that he used 'little hammers'. 'What I am bringing you is new... new. I am breaking up the old forms.' And he reminded his listeners: 'Peter Deunov told me that I was the demolisher *par excellence*. And what was I demolishing? Archaic ideas. Yes, a demolisher... he did not say destroyer but demolisher. There is a difference. Old ruins are demolished to make room for new constructions. Everything is new in this teaching, nothing is old. The whole earth will be made new.'

And this newness of which he spoke was

a truly fraternal spirit, the desire to help others, to try to understand them and never to confine the spirit in the strait-jacket of tradition: 'The new age will be built on enthusiasm, simplicity and transparency. Today we are too old. The spirit of childhood has vanished.'

In the pure light of the Mediterranean mornings he talked of the subject closest to his heart: light. For him, light was the 'water that flows from the sun, the true source of life in which are contained the seven colors'. Since the age of fourteen when he had discovered the beauty and symbolism of a prism, he had always used one in working with the seven rays. For him, the seven rays represented the seven Spirits imbued with love, wisdom and understanding with which he seems to have had a vital bond. He always carried a stick on which was mounted a large crystal. It was not so much a walking stick as a symbolic wand which he used as an instrument for his work. Knowing the influence of the colors of the spectrum,

he often repeated that one could achieve great results by surrounding oneself with them, by wearing them and working mentally to blend them into one's aura.

* * *

Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov had a close relationship with one particular Being who, he said, was a spiritual sun for our planet, a Being who illuminated the world and protected life on the subtler planes. This Being was Melchizedek, of whom he had already spoken in his first talks in 1938 and whom he called 'the Master of Masters'. His great love for Melchizedek was apparent in his frequent references to him, and the members of his fraternity had come to realize that he lived in uninterrupted communion with him.

The existence of Melchizedek is recognized both in the Judeo-Christian tradition and in certain oriental traditions. In Genesis he appears as the high priest of

God who goes out to meet Abraham with bread and wine, the sacred symbols of the two principles. St Paul says of him that he had 'neither beginning of days nor end of life'. And in Revelations, St John the Evangelist describes him as a 'son of man', clothed in a long robe girded about with a golden belt, with hair as white as snow and a face shining like the sun in full force.

As the representative of God he is the divine flame on earth, and all initiates turn to him to light their candles. Make haste to unite with God, with fire, for it will be your salvation. Melchizedek has dominion over the angelic hierarchies; nothing can withstand him. He manifests where and as he wishes, and all Masters are his disciples. St John saw him, he was with him. It was Melchizedek who revealed the destiny of the world to him and inspired the visions of the Apocalypse.²

In 1969, the Master Omraam Mikhaël

decided to visit Patmos, the island where St John had lived in exile. He had a special affection for this Apostle, but it was perhaps especially his love of Melchizedek that led him to visit the birthplace of the Apocalypse, at the heart of which shines this great being depicted as an old man with eyes of light.

After a few days with the members of the brotherhood in Athens, he boarded a boat bound for Patmos, accompanied by a small group of disciples. The island of Patmos is closer to Turkey than to Greece, and the journey, which lasted thirteen hours in heavy seas, was a real hardship for the passengers. At four o'clock in the morning, the Master, refreshed and full of energy, was knocking on their cabin doors, bringing coffee and rolls for all. Soon they disembarked near a village whose inhabitants were still asleep, and a stalwart porter took charge of their baggage. Every line of his face expressed his admiration for the one he called 'the man of God', and although he

understood no French, he followed closely on his heels, anxious to hear the sound of his voice. Every few minutes he asked, 'What is the man of God saying?'

Once rested and restored, they climbed into the hills to the monastery of Khora. The priest who acted as guide in the museum was at first voluble in his explanations of its sacred treasures, pointedly ignoring the occasional comments of the white-haired visitor about the secret symbolism of a cross or an icon. Gradually, however, his attitude changed, and he became silent until Omraam Mikhaël asked him to tell them about the life of St John. This he did, speaking with greater moderation, after which his face became radiant and he exclaimed:

'I don't know what is happening to me. There is such an extraordinary climate of sympathy between us. I have never felt this with anyone before.'

And he began to weep with joy.

In the afternoon Omraam Mikhaël visited the grotto where St John had lived and in which he had written the Apocalypse. Following him, his companions—who were themselves in a state of mind rarely experienced in this life—saw him descending the thirty steps that led through a garden full of flowers to the grotto: he seemed to be flying. The grotto made a deep impression on him—with the stone bed on which St John slept, the shelf carved out of the rock at which he dictated his Gospel to his disciple, and finally the rock that had been split in three by a bolt of lightning as the Apocalypse was revealed. Toward the end of the visit, asking his companions to leave him, he remained alone in the grotto for a long time.

He stayed on Patmos several days. At the time there were few tourists on the island, and he found the atmosphere very pure and hallowed, still redolent of the presence of St John. He loved being there and was captivated by the beauty of the

country, by the kindness of the people and their sincere, friendly expressions and by the solicitude of the monks who called on him constantly. On his return to France, he commented that the inhabitants of Patmos had the sensitivity of mediums and were capable of prophecy, as though they were still permeated with the ambience of the Apocalypse. For his part, he made a great impression on the villagers, who watched him wherever he went and showed him the deepest respect.

One day, while out for a walk in the country with his companions, a peasant woman approached, stopped in front of him and asked shyly: 'Are you a monk?'

Without waiting for an answer, she made the sign of the cross and kissed his hand, murmuring: 'I wish you good health. Be happy with your monk's crown.'

She stood before him as though before an icon, while he, for his part, gazed at her

with an expression of astonishment and delight. When she left them, he remained lost in thought for a moment. Then he explained that while he meditated in his room before setting out on this walk, he had asked the invisible world a particular question. Only when he was back in France did he explain further: 'When her words were translated for me, I realized that they were the answer to the question I had been asking. Heaven had spoken to me through that old woman. You cannot imagine how happy that made me!'

Leaving Patmos he returned to the Greek mainland where he visited Mount Athos with two of his companions. Here, the numerous monasteries, often situated in almost inaccessible spots, shelter some 3,000 monks and are known for the ancient manuscripts in their care. When a monastery they wanted to visit could not be reached by land, the three visitors were obliged to hire a small motor boat. And to their surprise, at each monastery the scene was the same: without knowing

who he was, the monks manifested the utmost respect for Master Omraam Mikhaël and gave him the room reserved for the Orthodox bishop. In each place he asked the same question:

‘Do you know of the existence of Melchizedek?’

Several years before, while in India, he had asked some of the great sadhus if they knew of a being who dwelt in the Himalayas and who had neither beginning nor end, neither father nor mother. There too they had known of his existence, but their name for him was Markande.

* * *

Since 1960, the universal dimension of Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov’s spiritual work had become increasingly apparent. His published talks were disseminated in many countries, and in the years following his return from India he was asked to speak in a number of European towns

and cities. He was often invited to address groups of professionals, scientists or political leaders, but in many cases, knowing in advance that he would be wasting his time, he refused. His ideas about how humanity could be transformed by means of 'spiritual galvanoplasty', for example, were too advanced for the world in which he was living. When he did address a particular group, however, his manner was the same as when he spoke to the brothers and sisters of his fraternity; it was with the same fire, the same ardor, that he explained the principal themes of initiatic science.

On one occasion, at a meeting of scientists at the French nuclear research center at Saclay, he listened with interest to their scholarly dissertations and discussions, and when his turn came to speak, he led their minds imperceptibly closer to the spiritual dimension, intending in this way to stimulate in them a level of reflection beyond that of pure science. His ideas about light, for instance, were very

different from the scientific notions of the other speakers, but they had the merit of stimulating the participants to make their own discoveries on a subtler plane.

On another occasion, in a discussion with a group of police inspectors in Paris, he talked about light in a way that, almost certainly, they had never heard before:

Do you think you can fight crime by increasing the number of policemen and gendarmes or by improving your methods of surveillance and investigation? Well, you are mistaken. External methods are ineffectual in this area. The only effective means is light.

To the five inspectors listening to him, this seemed a strange solution. 'Light?' one of them asked. 'How?' With his usual colorful images, he talked about criminals and how, when they were preparing their thefts, kidnappings or assassinations they were confident that no one knew about their plans. Then he added:

But suppose people possessed an inner lamp that enabled them to see in advance and from far away the mischief that threatened them: they would take precautions, and the evildoer's plans would come to nothing. So the only way to eliminate crime is by light. This is why human beings must be taught to cultivate their inner light: it will take a very long time, but it is the only sure way.³

The inner light he spoke of was the light of a genuine spirituality capable of transforming every human being. Light, 'the living spirit' which bears within itself love, wisdom and truth. Although well aware that many people are not sufficiently developed spiritually to perceive the subtle reality of light, he still insisted on the necessity of concentrating on it as often as possible, of drawing it into oneself so as to refine one's perceptions and generate new vibrations in the cells.

The private aspirations and inclinations of those he met did not escape him. He

recognized their scale of values and often called it into question without fear of disconcerting them. His first concern was to set people in motion, and to this end he often deliberately shocked or disappointed them. But although he was sometimes severe, his sense of humor and his great kindness were never absent. On occasion, when he was the guest of people who expected to hear him talk about sublime subjects, he limited himself to a few apparently random remarks about their preoccupations: about money which was always on their minds, or about their obsession with sex. This was sometimes the only way to reach them. As for his hosts, they often understood only later why he had talked about things which had seemed so trivial at the time.

After their initial sense of disappointment had faded, they realized that he had stimulated something, that he had opened the floodgates and the 'water of life' was flowing. An English brother who accompanied him on a journey once said:

No human being was insignificant in his eyes; he looked for the divine spark in everyone he met. In hotels he treated the employees with such exquisite courtesy that their expression became animated, their eyes lit up, and they turned to watch him as he passed. In conversation with flight attendants, guides at an exhibition or taxi drivers, he had the gift of creating the ambience he wanted. If he saw that they were tense or shy, he would make them laugh by telling them something funny. He could be so comic, in fact, that even his most serious traveling companions were sometimes shaken out of their solemnity. But his prime purpose was always to stimulate people.

On a visit to the Alhambra in Spain the guide explained that wise men had come from far away to build the palace. Omraam Mikhaël listened closely, and when the man had finished, he approached him and asked how many pillars there were.

‘Thirty-two,’ replied the guide.

‘And why are there thirty-two?’

‘I don’t know, sir’.

Taking him discretely aside, Omraam Mikhaël explained:

‘In the past, wise men placed symbols everywhere to explain the profound aspects of the nature that surrounds us and of our own human nature. Fountains are one example.’

Intrigued, the guide listened closely.

‘The palm trees, the mosaics, the pine cones you see here are all symbols. They express the religious and mystical lore of these men of old. By placing them here in a way that would be understood, they hoped that this knowledge would be admired in the future. These initiates who had studied all the ways of wisdom and knowledge found that there were thirty-two paths of wisdom’.

Seeing the guide's obvious interest, Omraam Mikhaël explained the question of the two principles at the origin of all creation.

‘The fountains are there so that people can admire the potent masculine principle which is the upsurge of life—the people of old had such admiration for this principle that they had large families! And the shells remind us of the other principle, the feminine principle which creates life...’⁴

* * *

His personal needs were modest. At the Bonfin he still lived in his old cottage, and when traveling, the hotels he chose to stay in were always the least luxurious. The only condition he looked for was the possibility of seeing the sunrise from his room. When his traveling companions complained about the rudimentary accommodations they had to put up with, he insisted on the importance of a simple

way of life. Wherever he went, his sole purpose was to become always more useful to humanity. When traveling by car or train, he worked to perfect his knowledge of English, listening to recorded texts on cassettes to improve his accent. 'A new activity triggers a renewal of life in the whole organism,' he commented.

His traveling companions would say of him:

He was like a father, a marvelous educator. Traveling with him was a veritable apprenticeship, for it is impossible to be close to someone of that caliber without constantly calling oneself into question and striving to transform oneself. But his spontaneous expressions of approval for one's efforts were very comforting.

During the last twenty years of his life, he crisscrossed the world as one who explores a fascinating unknown realm. A few countries received several visits from him, to others he went only once. The

purpose of his travels was always to extend his spiritual work to every region of the planet, but it was also to find 'the traces left in every region by humanity's greatest spirits'.

Often, while traveling, he would isolate himself from his companions for several days at a time. Whenever possible he meditated in the midst of nature, the 'true temple of God'. On the other hand, he also liked to pray in the religious sanctuaries of the world—in temples, mosques and basilicas—for he considered that they were all sacred.

In the spring of 1970 he was in Japan and stayed for a week in a Zen temple in the heart of the mountains not far from Tokyo. The twelve monks in residence welcomed him as one of their own and set aside a small temple decorated with numerous Buddhas, in which he was free to pray, read and sleep without being disturbed by the noise of the monastery. As soon as he arrived, they invited him to

take part in their religious rites which were attended by many people from the neighboring town.

Very early in the morning, the participants gathered for a ceremony followed by a two-hour meditation. They sat round the four sides of a room, facing the wall, in the Zazen posture, which includes precise rules for the position of the head and hands. A monk moved quietly about in the center of the room, a long 'warning stick' in his hand, watching the backs of those meditating. When he saw someone becoming drowsy, he tapped him sharply on the shoulder.

Master Omraam Mikhaël knew that the blow was intended to touch a particular nerve, not only to prevent somnolence and remedy a slack posture, but also to induce greater clarity in the brain and rally flagging energies.

Naturally, he wished to experience it for himself. But when he asked the monk to

give him the traditional tap during the meditation next day, the latter was very embarrassed and refused politely, protesting that he did not need it. In the face of the foreign Master's insistence, however, he finally acquiesced, and the following morning, coming up behind him during the meditation, he bowed with great respect before tapping him on the shoulder. In his turn, Omraam Mikhaël bowed his head to signal his thanks. He found the experience instructive, for the blow did indeed trigger in him an interesting reaction of lucidity in the mind. Wishing to continue the experience, he asked the monk to repeat the gesture every morning. The latter reluctantly did as asked.

Relating this incident after his return to France, he made it clear that although the aim of Zazen is to arrest thought and create an inner void, the void must never be a goal in itself. It can even be dangerous if it does not serve to attract plenitude. To create a void without danger one must

have previously worked to purify one's inner self. Before beginning one's meditation it is important to be in a state of calm and emotional peace:

Then, after a few moments, you must be active and dynamic and focus your thoughts and feelings on the subject you have chosen, projecting and intensifying them until you feel yourself expanding, filled with a sense of awe and wonder. Only then is it safe to pause and try to empty yourself, to stop thinking and allow yourself only to feel. If you do this you will be in no danger.⁵

Each time he returned from his travels, he was so happy to be with his spiritual family at Izgrev or the Bonfin once again that he spent the day giving thanks. He often said that we should give thanks a thousand times a day; that the magic of gratitude was extraordinary, more beneficial than all the medicines in the world. For him, the single word 'Thanks' was a

potent mantra, an 'antidote capable of counteracting every kind of poison'.

* * *

For Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov, everything in nature was transparent, everything was luminous and alive. His bonds with the powers of the invisible world were strong, and in this sense the 'marvelous' that accompanies all great spiritual beings was ever present in his life. From the beginning, he had always been conscious of the state of mind of his brothers and sisters. He could see the fluctuations in their inner life in their eyes, and when he saw their light growing fainter, he assured them with great kindness: 'If you think I have no idea of your difficulties, you are mistaken.' He was well aware of their problems, for he himself had not had a sheltered life, but he also told them: 'It is you who have to free yourselves, otherwise you will never evolve.'

Often, after listening to one of his talks, people would thank him for having spoken about their personal problems and given them the specific advice they needed. In fact, this happened so often that he acquired the reputation of being able to tune in to all the questions and problems of a sizeable gathering. In addition, many people told him of inexplicable events such as a cure or an apparition that had occurred when they had called on him. Some had escaped unharmed from an accident after saying his name, while others had seen him before them in his physical body, although in reality he had been elsewhere.

As in the early years in Paris, he listened to them but steadfastly refused to be considered a miracle-worker. 'My mission is not to heal,' he had said in the past, 'but to enlighten.' In order to preserve the integrity of that mission, he almost always denied that he possessed any special powers, even those that had been natural to him since his youth. It was impor-

tant that his relationship with the members of his brotherhood should be free of the aura of fascination that inevitably surrounds clairvoyance, mediumism or the power of healing. Without fail he turned their attention to the light, to the angels, to God.

Shortly after his return from India he had begun to talk about the 'O.M.A. Company'. He explained that he had become a collective entity, that the credit belonged to those who worked with him and whom he himself did not know. Any thanks should be addressed to this collective being: 'Don't blame me,' he used to say; 'it was Omraam who did it!'

One could sense that he had immense respect for all the invisible beings who supported him and whom he sometimes referred to as angels, at other times as devas or simply as entities. While he was confident that he could always call on their assistance, he never forgot that he was addressing free beings who must not

be burdened with self-centered requests. From time to time he asked the Angel of Air to disperse the clouds so that everyone could contemplate the sun, but he recognized that the Angel had the right to refuse. The consciousness of his responsibility toward the invisible beings who helped him in his work gave him a sense of being no more than a single link in the chain of beings working for the good of humanity.

He had the same attitude of respect and humility toward nature as a whole. He did not attempt to go against her laws or change the natural order of things, and this approach had allowed him to forge a mysterious bond with animals, trees and even inanimate objects. This bond had sometimes enabled him to talk to a car that had broken down so that, to the surprise of all present, it inexplicably started up again and functioned just long enough to reach his destination. 'This does not mean that metals are intelligent or that plants have a soul,' he explained,

‘but there is a cosmic intelligence which suffuses all created things and works through them.’

The truth is that he attached little importance to powers of this kind and never encouraged others to try to acquire them. To avoid exerting undue influence on others, he tried to limit any manifestation of his own powers, but some who realized this saw that it was painful to him never to be free to manifest himself naturally.

From time to time his phenomenal psychic energy erupted in a small detail of everyday life. One day he was sitting in his garden with some visitors when he suddenly stood up and asked for a tool with which to prune the branch of a tree. It was hanging dangerously low, and he had decided to cut it off. Only an hour before – although he did not know it — someone had hurt himself on it. The pruning shears handed to him were very small and hopelessly inadequate, but he took them without hesitation and with

one stroke cut off the thick branch. Afterwards he looked at his companions in silence, as though he regretted having shown his power. And those who had witnessed this 'impossible', inexplicable result were quite simply dumbfounded.

When he talked to his brothers and sisters about their desire to transform themselves, he always insisted that they must count only on their own efforts: their personal work should always take precedence over conventional methods or the use of psychic powers. It was in this sense that he reacted during a pilgrimage to Israel, where he went, in part, to meet Cabbalists but primarily to seek traces of the spirit of Jesus.

On the shores of Lake Tiberius several people told him the legend of the miraculous powers of this lake: it was enough to bathe in it to be purified. This sort of thing meant nothing to him. He was indifferent to fables which many people considered highly important and was

always careful to restore things to their true proportions. On his return to France, he spoke of this with a touch of humor, saying that it was not by immersing oneself in water that one could be purified, but by working consciously, inwardly as well as outwardly. The person who had accompanied him on his visit to Israel recounted:

It was after the Six-day War, and we had received permission to visit Jerusalem, which was occupied by Israel. The Master also wanted to visit the synagogue marking the place where Jethro lived, and he spent a long time meditating there. On another occasion we visited the grotto where Shimon Ben Yohai, one of the authors of the Sepher Ha Zohar, had lived. It was the day after a big feast-day. Thousands of people had been there on pilgrimage to the grotto, which is on a wooded hill, and the ground around the sacred shrine was strewn with litter. Seized with a holy fury, the Master appealed to the Angel of Air to clear

it all away. Immediately, torrential rain began to fall and continued for several hours. All the rubbish was swept away. It was such an unusual event that all the newspapers mentioned it the next day. But when the Master was angry, it was never for long. He always regained his serene good humor with staggering speed.

In Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov's view, genuine psychic powers could be obtained, sustained and enhanced only through love. He had always rejected powers that were used to dazzle people in order to dominate them. Those who lived near his cottage, however, could not fail to notice the mastery he exerted over himself and, consequently, over the elements. The fact is that he knew how to influence nature by using the infinite possibilities with which cosmic intelligence has endowed creation.

An instance of this occurred toward the end of one summer in the 1970s. Forest fires, which are frequent in the south of

France, were raging in the region, and the Bonfin was in danger from the flames being blown in that direction. Night was falling. Master Omraam Mikhaël, accompanied by others, climbed up to the Rock of Prayer to call on the Angels of Air and Water. 'Leave me alone to pray,' he told them, and ten minutes later, out of a sky that had been cloudless only a moment earlier, rain poured down and put out the fires. More than once over the years this phenomenon was repeated, and when he spoke of it, it was always to say that he had asked the Angels of Air and Water to put out the fire, adding that one had to conquer a great many things in oneself before obtaining power over the elements.

The meaning is clear: all that exists in nature also exists within each human being. Each of the four elements can be an agent of purification, but it is possible to control the external elements only if one has purified and learned to control the 'elements in oneself'. An effect

obtained in this way is not properly speaking a miracle; it is rather the result of an individual's personal mastery, comparable to the control exercised by a lion tamer over wild animals, or by a snake-charmer who neutralizes the venom from a snake bite by force of will.

Springs, waterfalls, rivers, lakes and oceans represented for him forces that we can all use in our conscious work as members of the human race. Whenever he was on a ship or in a plane, he would communicate with the intelligent beings that inhabit the elements of water or air. 'We should speak to animals, flowers, and spirits, to the naiads and sylphs,' he used to say; 'We should ask them to work to realize the kingdom of God on earth.'

On one of his visits to the United States, the house he stayed in was close to the ocean. Every morning he went to the beach for the sunrise and stayed there for hours engaged in his spiritual work. He never explained what that work was, but

simply said, 'I am sowing seeds.' Later he said that he had been working spiritually with the powers of water:

*Water represents the universal fluid, the blood of the earth, and it has tremendous powers. You must learn to have the right attitude towards it, learn how to talk to it, how to create a bond with it, because it can change certain elements within you by diluting and dissolving them. Water, you see, has power over certain substances that fire is incapable of changing.*⁶

If he was able to work in this way it was because he was familiar with the bonds uniting the different elements of the universe, which is truly a single organism. It was because he lived in complete harmony with that organism that the elements responded to his intervention. One of those who visited Arizona with him in 1979 wrote in a diary:

Birds and animals were not afraid to

approach him. When he was in the country deer gathered to watch him meditating; squirrels came into his room and stayed there, sitting close to him. One morning he came to find us, saying: 'Come quickly!' We followed him out to a small open plateau. Looking around him in surprise, he exclaimed, 'They're not here any more!' Then he called out, and immediately a swallow arrived out of nowhere. 'But you're all alone,' he said; 'Go and fetch the others!' The swallow flew away, and within minutes, a multitude of swallows was flying round us. Another day, when countless swallows were circling round him, a golden eagle came and hovered high overhead. It was an impressive sight, and it happened again several times. These great birds seemed to be more and more interested in him. One day while he was talking to us, an enormous eagle alighted very close to him. It stood there motionless by his side for a long time. We were absolutely astounded. But you should have seen the Master's unaffected

delight, his ingenuous wonder when things like this happened. It was as though animals instinctively sensed in him the harmony and love that could restore humankind to a state of grace, that could recreate an earthly paradise.

Notes

1. 'The Sun is in the Image and Likeness of God', in *The Splendour of Tiphareth*.
2. September 2, 1960.
3. See his own account: 'Light Enables us to See and be Seen' in *Light is a living Spirit*.
4. Dialogue from talk of July 20, 1962.
5. 'Knowledge: Heart and Mind', in *Know Thyself: Jnana Yoga II*.
6. 'Three Kinds of Fire', in *The Splendour of Tiphareth*.



*A New
Springtime
of Love*

At every brotherhood convention for the last twenty-seven years, Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov had been present and had spoken daily to the hundreds of participants. With unfailing regularity he had given thousands of unrehearsed talks

for which he sought inspiration only in the realms of the spirit. His method faced him with a constant challenge. At the age of eighty he was still stimulated by the unexpected, and as he said, 'walking the tightrope' in this way forced him to keep advancing:

I can speak only if the subject is presented to me suddenly, as a suggestion from the divine world. Then, in spite of all the defects, in spite of my mistakes in French and all the unscholarly language, it works.¹

With the passing of the years, the Bonfin became more and more beautiful. In the 1980s the summer conventions lasted three months and included participants from the five continents. At dawn, as usual, they gathered on the Rock of Prayer for meditation. The sun was already high in the sky before the Master turned and saluted them. Then, advancing slowly between the participants crowding both sides of the path leading

down to the Bonfin, he showed his great love for each one with a glance, a word, or a brief recommendation, with a special solicitude for the children who accompanied their parents. Those moments with him on this rocky hill were filled with great sweetness. The ambience was light-hearted and gay because he wished it so. And there was something magical in the scene when the time came to leave the Rock and go down to the Bonfin: all those children clustering around and running to keep up with him. He was like a father with a large brood, the patriarch of myriad spiritual offspring.

As always, he would do the exercises with the participants, and later, as he entered the hall and stood to face his audience, they had the same impression of calm control together with tremendous energy. There were days when he seemed to be inhabited by a mysterious presence: sitting perfectly still, his eyes closed, he talked soberly and succinctly. At other times he expressed himself with great

vigor, like a prophet who had been sent to shake his contemporaries out of their well-worn rut. Usually, however, he spoke to his spiritual family with the simplicity of a father speaking to his children.

His laughter, totally spontaneous and unaffected, expressed a profound zest for life. 'Life is beautiful,' he would say, 'and we can make it more beautiful still if we adopt the philosophy that teaches everything that is most luminous, pure and noble.' Through all the difficulties and trials he had known in life, he had achieved true joy. Speaking of the time he had spent in prison, he could say with all sincerity: 'There was someone within me who was always singing.' Perhaps that was why he could laugh so heartily and infect those who heard him with that joy. He could say, too: 'In spite of all the disgrace heaped on me, no man is happier than I.' Those who knew him knew this, and as one of those who was close to him in those years said:

His was the laughter of someone who is pure, free, happy, fraternal, and hard-working. Happy. Yes; happy to be on earth... and who could laugh when the occasion arose. A man who is solely pre-occupied with his own spiritual progress, who is always looking forward to his next meditation, does not laugh; he is tired of being on earth. But a man who laughs on this earth, a man of the stature of the Master... that says it all. It was extraordinary to see how someone who had worked with such asceticism to advance spiritually and who had endured so much could be so happy. It was because he was interested in others; he was content to be on earth, however hard it might be, because he was always seeking to reveal its beauty to others.

After his talks he could sometimes be seen writing a few words on a scrap of paper. In this he was faithful to a habit acquired in his youth of repeatedly writing or saying, in his mother tongue:

Da bâde blagosloveno i sveto imeto vi vav veka Gospodi.—May your name, O Lord be blessed and glorified throughout the ages.

In the last years he reviewed the different themes of his teaching one by one. One might think that after forty-three years of regular talks he would have exhausted most of his subjects, but on the contrary, with the dynamic energy and humor characteristic of him, he cast new light on them. Rather than attempting a meticulous academic discourse, he would gradually explore his topic, shedding light on it from different angles. His goal was always to inflame hearts and create links between those listening to him and the light of the higher worlds.

Actually, the principal themes of this teaching have always existed, for their source is in the highest spheres of the invisible worlds, and they have been taught by all of mankind's most enlightened spiritual guides. In our times it has

been given to Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov to bring them before us in his own unique way. Every element in his teaching has its practical application. In words so clear and simple that a child could understand, he speaks of the inborn potential possessed by all human beings to become 'perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect' and to transform the world in which they live. He speaks of the quest for sanctity and perfection as the most enthralling work there is.

And if he constantly uses the word 'work', it is because in his eyes every aspect of our existence is meant to be made use of: spiritual work is essential, but equally important is work on the physical plane. He insists that it is by means of the events of our daily lives that we can arrive at perfection, that initiation no longer takes place in temples but in everyday life, and that all our faculties—our senses, emotions and activities—can serve as springboards in this quest for perfection.

The methods he taught were realistic, practical and effective. He explained how to purify oneself in order to receive energies from a higher plane, how to bring good out of evil, and how to bring oneself into harmony with the four elements and learn to use their power creatively.

He astonishes and vivifies us with his unique perspectives on the meaning of love and sexuality; on the great laws of ‘cosmic morality’; on true purity—which is to have a heart as transparent as crystal; on the yoga of the sun and of nutrition; and on the way in which mothers can work to perfect the child in their womb. And all this with a view to preparing the advent of a true Golden Age for humankind.

* * *

One of the most important aspects of Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov’s mission on earth was to lay the foundations of a truly universal human family. His constant

themes were brotherly understanding, peace and sharing. He was always trying to make people understand the essential: that peace can be achieved on earth only when genuine brotherhood reigns among human beings. Peace has to reign in our hearts before it can reign in families, individual countries and in the world as a whole.

Arriving in France on the eve of World War II, he had undertaken the mission entrusted to him by Peter Deunov in the midst of the morass created by a senseless war. He had to begin his teaching just when one of the worst genocides in history was being prepared, just when millions of human beings were about to be sacrificed on the field of battle or exterminated in death camps.

And in the years that followed, when he himself had endured the purifying fire of calumny and injustice, when he had lost his good name and his freedom, he never abandoned that task. Peter Deunov had

predicted: 'When you have passed through the narrow gate, you will be so completely transformed that you will not recognize yourself. You will shine like the sun, and the whole world will be attracted to you.' And now he had become a spiritual guide who spoke not only to one race or nation, but to men and women from the five continents. He was seeking to establish a universal civilization:

My only concern is brotherhood. One family... throughout the world. [...] The Universal White Brotherhood is preparing something very important. It has come to work for something which has never been in the minds of human beings in the past. They were thinking of other things: of how to become clairvoyant; how to obtain psychic powers; how to unite with God. And they forgot about the earth; they completely abandoned the world. So many initiates, gurus and saints were interested in only one thing: how to save their own souls. And the world was left to disorder, to poverty...²

Now, in the Age of Aquarius, the time has come to build a world of beauty, love, and brotherhood for all God's children. 'We are working here for the whole world, so that all may understand that only true brotherhood will bring peace.'

Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov often referred to the image of the two triangles combined in the Seal of Solomon: he said that the teachings of India and Tibet were based on the triangle that points up, and that it was now time to take inspiration from the one that points down, in other words, to bring the kingdom of God down to earth:

Our teaching aims to prepare people who know how to work on earth and organize things, while at the same time, striving for an ideal that must become more and more a reality. In the future, human beings will never lose sight of either aspect of their life. In this way they will become one with their ideal. We must be fused into

one with our ideal—God—without letting go of our sense of the earth.³

His 'sense of the earth' was that it should be a world of beauty, a marvelous garden of Eden. He pictured a peaceful, tolerant society of reconciliation, in which all his human brothers and sisters throughout the world would be spiritually nourished and even materially prosperous; a society which would allow everyone to live in a happiness beyond words and to develop all their inherent potential, from the physical possibilities of their bodies to the most sublime potential of their subtle bodies. And they must work towards this ideal by striving for harmony in themselves and in their relations with others, by an attitude of friendship and fraternal assistance. As heirs to the divine world it is in their power to give concrete reality to all the spiritual treasures which exist for all, which are within reach of all of us.

In a time when so many nations were still at war with each other, when terrorism

ravaged whole countries, he continued to insist that it is by establishing peace in our own hearts, in our family and in society that we can achieve peace in the world, because, as he said, there is peace when the microcosm is in harmony with the macrocosm: 'He who is at peace with himself is at peace with the whole universe.'

He continued to talk about the role of women in the transformation of the human race. He had long asserted that women possessed a reservoir of extraordinary substances capable of realizing Heaven's designs, but that for the most part they were unaware of it:

Once they decide to dedicate themselves to Heaven, so that all that marvelous substance may be used for a divine purpose, we shall see pockets of light bursting out over the whole face of the earth, and everybody will speak the language of the new culture, the language of the new

*life, the language of divine love. What are women waiting for?*⁴

The example of spiritual galvanoplasty, based on the feminine powers of formation and transformation, continued to be one of the themes he most liked to develop. Within the spiritual family of the brotherhood couples tried to live in harmony and mutual respect. They did their best to follow his recommendations for an ideal way of life, particularly during the period of gestation, in order to imbue their children with beauty and peace. But this was all done in the utmost simplicity. His brotherhood was not the preserve of an élite; it was a family of ordinary men and women in which each one was free to learn, to grow, to advance on the path of perfection, to work for the kingdom of God on earth. It was a seed which was destined to grow into a great tree, an endeavor which could become a marvelous, perfectly balanced planetary civilization, modeled on a spiritual, angelic civilization.

The kingdom of God which he so ardently desired to see established on earth is a veritable Golden Age which he called 'the new springtime of love'. It is not so much a physical realization as an inner state that reflects all created beauty; it is the reign of love, joy and peace, and it can become a concrete reality on earth thanks to a truly fraternal spirit. His one preoccupation was to prepare the way for this reality, and to gain the collaboration of his disciples in his work. 'And,' as he explained, 'before the reign of wisdom, justice, and love could be established on earth, those who looked forward to it must realize a "synarchy" within themselves, a way of life founded on the harmonious alliance of heart, mind and will.'

One morning in January 1981, at the Bonfin, he spoke at length about the meaning and beauty of this ideal form of government of self and of the world. He asserted that the era of synarchy had already begun, and that one day the whole world would live together in love and brother-

hood. Immediately after this talk—which he gave by exception at seven o'clock in the morning—a brilliant rainbow appeared above the Bonfin, as though the heavens were confirming his vision of a nobler humanity.

Over the years, Omraam Mikhaël had often spoken about synarchy. In his earliest talks in Paris he had referred to a secret kingdom whose existence was known in a few countries, particularly in India, China and Tibet. Already, in 1938, he had begun to mention the name of Agartha and had spoken of its great libraries and the keys to initiation hidden there. He described it as a world in which the wisdom of the great initiates had been kept alive.

In The Mission of India to the West, Saint-Yves d'Alveydre talks about Agartha, the city of initiates which is 25,000 years old, in which all the sacred scriptures are preserved, in which the inhabitants live a life of perfection.⁵

Today, as he explained, the true power of synarchy lies in kindness, purity, light and love, not in the domination of others. 'The leaders,' he said, 'must be models of integrity and justice. As for you, if you give the priority to the divine principle, if you feel and act according to the precepts of initiatic science, you will be living in synarchy.'

He maintained that the great Masters had always tried to get human beings to understand the meaning of synarchy, and that Jesus himself had taught its principles. For the inhabitants of Agartha, he added, all the great spiritual teachings come from God: Buddhists, Muslims, and Christians are all children of the same family. They are all destined to inherit the kingdom of God. 'As long as human beings oppose each other in the name of faith,' he declared, 'it means that they do not possess true faith.'

At this period of his life he was more interested than ever in the correspon-

dences between objects, thoughts, feelings and actions. Modern technological advances fascinated him and offered him many new analogies with the spiritual life. He often used these analogies to great effect when explaining to his disciples how to exploit their innate powers to achieve self-transformation and exert a beneficial influence on the world.

The year before, and not for the first time, he had given a long talk on the laser, its symbolism, and its spiritual applications. He had explained that if a great many people concentrated at the same time on light, they could produce a powerful beam of light and accomplish a work of peace and love. For him this was one of the most beautiful exercises, one that he loved to do with his brotherhood and which was linked to the music of light, the music of the universe.

From a study of his talks, it is clear that the ecstasy in which he was plunged into the music of the spheres was at the source

of his constant endeavor to create harmony in his own being and to radiate it out to the whole world. The revelation, received at the age of seventeen, of the structure of the universe led him to see God as the great conductor of the cosmic orchestra, as the composer who has given a particular note, a particular voice to each of his creatures. Ever mindful of the perfect harmony of the song of the universe, he had studied its structure on the archetypal level, and all that he taught was based on that prodigious organization:

Well, from now on you know that I draw everything I tell you in my lectures from the region in which I heard the Heavenly Harmony, the Music of the Spheres. In fact it is this Music that explains everything to me, although, if the truth be told there is not really so much that needs to be explained. All one has to do is to achieve this harmony, and in an instant everything becomes clear and one under-

*stands God's wisdom, one understands
peace, one understands love.*⁶

His conception of education had always attributed great importance to the role of music, and he often advised parents to bring up their children surrounded by music. At the Bonfin, he was never happier than when listening to a little open air concert given by the younger children. Each time, he was moved by their fresh voices and the trust in their eyes, and by the enthusiasm with which they played the violin or made a triangle chime. When they gave him their drawings, he exclaimed at the beauty of the broadly smiling suns or the multicolored trees.

By encouraging them to do even better, he sought to stimulate in them a taste for perfection. Small children ran spontaneously to him, and even babies seemed to want to talk to him.

His attitude toward children had always been one of respect for their natural

development. In his view, it was not the role of the brotherhood to educate them: at some point, they would have to make their own decisions about their orientation. At the same time, however, he invited parents to bring their young children to the Bonfin during the holidays so that they might benefit from the climate of beauty and brotherhood: 'This,' he said, 'is the true pedagogy of the future: this attitude, this silence, and the example of their parents.' He himself always encouraged children to do everything well so that their spiritual life, firmly anchored in earthly reality, would vivify their role in society:

'You can be better and more intelligent than anyone. You can do good and be an example of brotherliness for your friends... And you must complete your studies... so as to be useful one day.'

Always attentive to the events of his times, he often talked to young people about how to transform themselves

before attempting to transform society. He had not forgotten the turbulent energies and impassioned searching of his own youth. As Peter Deunov had once told him, he was the demolisher *par excellence* of stale, outworn ideas. At the same time he knew just how important it was to steer the energies of the young toward life and away from violence and death. One day, referring to the protest movements among the young—such as that of the hippies in the United States, whose chosen symbol expressed an ideal of peace and love—he said that they had been confusedly seeking universal brotherhood and were a manifestation of the age of Aquarius.

In spite of his sympathy for the aspirations of the young, however, he did not attempt to make things easy for them. Rather, he taught them how to channel their energies and aspirations and give them concrete expression. Aware of their profound dissatisfaction, he urged them to recognize that they would find true

strength only in themselves, in their ability to govern themselves and behave with nobility and magnanimity. Explaining the immutable laws of cause and effect, he encouraged them to adapt themselves to the demands of society in order to become capable of transforming it from within.

With vivid examples he would explain to them the moral laws of the cosmos: the first of which is the 'law of recordings', by virtue of which everything that happens in the world is recorded in nature's memory. Second, the 'law of agriculture', which determines the results of human endeavor, for we reap only what we have sown. Last, the 'law of resonance', which sends our words back to us: 'I love you', or 'I hate you'. And these laws are effective on the higher planes as well: the negative thoughts we allow to slip into us attract noxious elements which end by poisoning us. Just as everything is recorded in nature, our actions are imprinted in our individual human memory and continue

to torture us or to bring us joy. Hence the importance for human beings to behave in such a way as to create new recordings within themselves, to create new, more positive imprints.

* * *

In June 1981, Omraam Mikhaël saw his homeland again. Forty-four years after leaving Bulgaria, he was invited as an eminent man of letters to attend the festivities marking the twelfth centenary of the foundation of the Bulgarian State. He was received with great courtesy at Sofia and took part in several activities.

Izgrev, the brotherhood estate in Sofia at which he had spent so much time in his youth, no longer existed. Only one small plot had been preserved in the town, and it was here that Peter Deunov was buried. His tomb was surrounded by roses and other flowers, planted each year by members of the Bulgarian brotherhood. Omraam Mikhaël visited the tomb

briefly, went to a few of the places he had loved best in the region of Rila, and then spent a week in Varna with his family.

As he said on his return, those few days in his country were inevitably full of contradictory impressions, for although he was glad to see his family and visit the haunts of his youth, the atmosphere he had known in the past could no longer be found.

The following year he returned to India. During his previous visit a sadhu had told him, 'You have lived here in the past, and you will return', and now, twenty-two years later, that prediction came true. In February 1982, friends welcomed him at New Delhi. Here he met an old guru known as Madrasi Baba through whom he received important revelations. This guru was a learned man who had studied medicine in England and was now recognized by a large number of disciples as an exceptionally gifted clairvoyant. On see-

ing Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov for the first time, he exclaimed:

‘Master, you appeared to me in a vision fifteen years ago. I saw you descending from the sun. You revealed certain truths to me. I saw you exactly as you are now. Five years later you spoke to me again, and I am so astonished to see that you are exactly the same. On your forehead I see the symbol that designates a Brahma Rishi, the highest of all symbols.’

After this first meeting the guru visited him often. At one point Omraam Mikhaël told him of the mysterious statement made by Nityananda in 1959 about the name he had borne in a far-distant incarnation in India. Greatly intrigued by this, Madrasī Baba undertook his own research in some specialized libraries and found texts foretelling the incarnation of a solar Rishi in the era known as ‘Kali Yuga’—the era in which we are living today. The prophecy foretold that he would be born in the eighth month of

gestation, that the initial letter of his first name would be M, and that of his second name A. It also said that during a stay in the 'land of the devas', the name Omraam, after the sixth incarnation of the Hindu Avatar Rama, would be given to him unexpectedly by three sages.

These extraordinary revelations were made in successive stages, for Madrassi Baba, not content with his initial discoveries, extended his research to other libraries. In the meantime, Omraam Mikhaël's hosts invited him to stay in another house they owned in the mountains.

Here, his mornings were spent in solitude. At first, when he joined them for meals, his companions hoped to hear him talk about elevated subjects, but in fact he said almost nothing. Taking a few moments to touch some of the beautiful objects on the table gently and with great love, he commented: 'When the experience one is living through is very com-

elling, it is best to talk about little things.' His radiance was intense. Many people came and knelt at his feet, asking him to bless them and their homes.

The house in which he was staying was in a beautiful spot in the Himalayas at an altitude of more than 8,000 feet. It was spring, the orchards were in flower, and the great forests of conifers and rhododendrons spoke of the power of life. One of his traveling companions remembered those days:

The Master told us every day to express gratitude a thousand times over. He himself never ceased to thank heaven. He told us: 'Listen to the silence... Try to listen to the silence!' He explained that the coming of the kingdom of God was not a question of time but of space. And I must say that when we were watching those magnificent sunrises in the Himalayas, we had the feeling that the kingdom of God was truly close at hand.

Back in France the following summer, he spoke of all he had received in India, saying that if he was at last talking openly about his mission, it was because he had been given the right to do so. At the same time he repeated that he had not yet begun his real work, that all he had done so far had been 'no more than minor preliminaries'. Never, he insisted, had he felt himself to be adequately prepared for his work; he continued night and day to prepare himself. In his eyes, nothing was more important than to work, first and foremost, on himself: 'I say that I have not yet begun my real work because I have found that it helps me to advance.' It was also one way of developing humility. As he said: 'Pride is the lichen that follows a human being even to the top of the mountain,' and it is important continually to practice ways of defending oneself against it.

Paradoxically, it was perhaps his constant work to achieve humility that enabled him to speak of his mission in terms that

left no doubt as to its universality. It was at this period that this characteristic of his mission seemed to come into its own. As he explained one day, it was the invisible world that counseled him to devote less time to his talks so that he could be free to focus on certain specific places on the planet, for, as he said: 'You have to know which button to push to open the door.' It seems to have been important for him to be physically present in certain places for this work.

In the countries where there were brotherhood centers, he always spent time with his brothers and sisters. In the autumn of 1982 he was in England, where he stayed for several months in the home of the couple in charge of the brotherhood. After the New Year he traveled to Egypt with them and spent time in a small port lying between the Red Sea and the desert. In the mornings he walked far out into the sand dunes to contemplate the rising sun, returning wrapped in a supernatural aura of silence and space that his

disciples were careful not to disturb. He loved the stark simplicity of the desert where the sun was absolute monarch. In his eyes it was a privileged region, frequented by benign spirits which made spiritual work easier. Some mornings he preferred the sea, and as the tide drew out, uncovering the great rocks along the shore, he waded out and settled down on one of them to meditate, as though on an island: 'All around there was nothing but water. It was truly extraordinary!'

As always, after these excursions he returned to the Bonfin or Izgrev to join his brothers and sisters who were waiting for him at the different conventions, but he was soon called away again on his pilgrimage through the world. During his absences the brotherhood was always in his mind. He often spoke of it as 'my wife' and worked for it unflaggingly. During these years, although he accepted that he must remain with those who followed his teaching, that he must continue to talk to them and awaken them to life, he said

more than once: 'If the brotherhood were not there, I would abandon everything and settle in the Himalayas or the Andes.'

In April 1984, he gave several talks in the United States. In Los Angeles, disciples had gathered from many directions to hear him speak, bringing their friends with them. The Master entered the room, greeted his guests and then sat down and closed his eyes. The minutes passed in silence. Gradually his audience realized that the talk they had looked forward to was not going to materialize, that Master Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov did not intend to speak, but would only meditate with them. At last he stood up, his gaze rested on each one in turn, and with a final salute he left the room. Many of those present were deeply disappointed, but for some the experience was a veritable revelation: never had they known moments of such intensity in the presence of a spiritual Master.

Mysteriously, he had chosen to do

this—something he had long wished to do—with a group that was unprepared and distinctly heterogeneous. But perhaps he knew that among those present were some who were well able to unite their thoughts to his and collaborate in his work with the light.

On another occasion, having been invited to speak on a television program in Los Angeles, he talked about peace, describing it as neither a thing nor a virtue, but a state of consciousness:

Everyone clamors for peace, but they do not know what it is. They are at war within themselves: their hearts and minds pull in different directions. As long as people have not achieved peace in themselves, they will never achieve it outwardly. It is not possible unless one is capable of harnessing all one's inner powers in the service of an ideal.⁷

After his stay in the United States he went on to visit Canada. He was eighty-

four, and his energy was still astonishing. In June he talked to audiences of a thousand people; in one two-day period he gave seven talks in different places. A French brother who had followed him in his travels commented:

It is very striking to see how the Master's universal mission seemed to attain its true dimensions during these last few years of his life. It is as though he were developing a new and different form of energy during his travels throughout the planet, particularly his repeated visits to North America. On his return home after several weeks or months in Canada or the United States, he seemed in some way renewed, filled with enthusiasm for the new mentality he had discovered there. It is as though he were slightly distancing himself not only from the typically Slavonic mysticism of his early years and from the French intellectualism of the '40s and '50s, but also from the intensely initiatic period which began for him in 1948 when he endured the great-

est trial of his life and culminated in 1959 during his stay in India... Now, without forgetting or repudiating any of that, he seemed to transmute all these different aspects into a practical simplicity more evident than ever... to the point that one could glimpse it even in his photos. In his talks he laid less emphasis on the intellectual aspects of his message, concentrating more on the everyday aspects of life and the sheer joy of living. This aspect was not only astonishing, it was truly captivating and stimulating when seen in the context of universality, in the context of the new 'present' that is just over the horizon.

In May of the following year, he went one last time to Québec, where he consecrated a rural property newly acquired by the brotherhood. He was enchanted by this one-time golfcourse with its grassy slopes, its seven small lakes, and the superb view toward the East where the sun could be seen rising beyond the far distant mountains of the United States.

He named it *Blagoslovénié*, ‘fullness of blessings’. Here, as always, he spent many hours talking to those who asked for a private interview. But he also took the time to commune with nature, to pray for long hours among the trees, calling down heaven’s blessings on the center.

Notes

1. ‘Lire et écrire I’, in *La Pédagogie initiatique II*. (Our translation).
2. December 9, 1968.
3. March 25, 1958.
4. ‘Woman’s Role in the New Culture’, in *Love and Sexuality*.
5. June 7, 1942.
6. ‘Harmony II’, in *Harmony*.
7. From his own account of the incident in his talk of August 11, 1985.

19



*I Am
With You
Even
More
Than
Before*

For some years already, Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov had been preparing for his final departure from this earth. Some of those who were closest to him during this period confided to us that he knew, in his soul, that his present incarnation was drawing to a close. Indeed, it is clear from his messages to the brotherhood during the last year of his life, that he needed a time of quietude in which to prepare himself as well as possible for his passage into the next world and to complete his spiritual mission.

When he returned to France at the end of June 1985, after one last visit to North America, he curtailed many of his activities, gave no more interviews and answered no more personal correspondence. During the summer convention he gave only one weekly talk, on Sundays.

The feast of the Archangel Mikhaël on September 29 was celebrated in an atmosphere of special intensity. As they gathered around the fire in the starlight and

listened to the Master Omraam Mikhaël's talk, none of those present could have known that there would be no more. As always on this special day, he spoke of fire and light: 'Fire is the greatest of all mysteries...' In this, his last talk, as in his first public lecture in 1938, he touched on the principal themes that had always been central to his teaching: fire and water, good and evil, the yoga of nutrition and the yoga of the sun.

Of fire, he said:

Visible fire is the symbol of an invisible reality. By our love, our soul and our consciousness, we try to unite with celestial fire. This is why it is important to contemplate fire. We must ask Agni, the Angel of Fire, to inflame us with the celestial fire of divine love, so that we may burn with that love; so that wherever we go, we may create the new life by radiating and emanating that warmth and that love.

After a few minutes of meditation, he spoke again of the spirit of brotherhood and unity, of the harmony that is so necessary to every organism, whether it be that of an individual or of the universe. His closing words were:

I am always with you, even if I am not physically present. I am with you even more than before.

In October he withdrew completely. His participation in that spiritual feast day had been his last encounter with the brotherhood on the visible plane. During the whole of 1986, although he prepared himself in solitude for his departure for the worlds of light, his thoughts remained in close contact with each of his brothers and sisters. His spiritual presence in the brotherhood was almost tangible.

The messages of encouragement he sent to them during this last year of his life were intended to help them gradually

become accustomed to his physical absence. He asked them to channel their love so as to become examples for others and to direct all their energies towards 'a goal that would benefit the whole human family'. He begged them not to be distressed by his absence but to work to transform themselves, and he made it clear that it was necessary for him to withdraw from the sphere of earth in order to work on other levels, that henceforth his 'true work' lay elsewhere. Again and again he assured his brothers and sisters of his great love for them, asserting forcefully:

I have told you repeatedly, and I continue to say it: if we are to achieve the Golden Age, we must stop living separately and in isolation. Alone, even the most highly evolved being can achieve nothing. Now the time has come for the collectivity to achieve fulfillment. [...] A new day is dawning for the world. The Sun of Love, Wisdom, and Truth will shine as never before.

At this time a member of the brotherhood who had known Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov since he first arrived in France wrote:

Gradually, as he began to travel all over the world, he seemed to distance himself a little from the brotherhood he had founded in France. During those last years he made it clear to us that his mission went far beyond the personal problems of a limited group of individuals; his spiritual work was for the benefit of all beings on this planet. And when he spoke of the extremely difficult times that lay ahead for the world and exhorted us to prepare ourselves for them, it was obvious that he knew that by then he would not be with us by then.

Already, in September 1984, he had begun to make veiled allusions to his departure, saying occasionally: 'I won't always be here...' The following year, to a person who had been working closely with him for a long time, he said: 'What

if we left at Christmas?' When she smiled and replied that Christmas was not a very good moment for travelling, and that it might not be the best time for him, he immediately talked of something else. It was only later that she understood what he had said to her subconscious mind.

All those who were in contact with him during that last year have borne witness to his unflinching love as well as to his total acceptance of the state of a physical vehicle which was nearing the end of its journey. As one of them said: 'He had been carrying an immense burden... He was quite simply worn out.'

Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov departed this world on Christmas day, that great cosmic celebration that brings a spiritual renewal to humanity each year. Since the day of his illumination at the age of fifteen, he had worked with all his might to realize the kingdom of God on earth, but he could be truly effective only by abandoning his physical body and regaining

total freedom of action in the invisible world.

Death, he had always said, is birth on a higher plane:

Death is a change of place, a voyage, a transformation, one energy transformed into another energy. Death does not exist, there is only life. ¹

On December 25, 1986, after a night in which his body had grown gradually weaker, but in full consciousness of his passage into the beyond, Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov left this earth. In accordance with his express wishes, the news was delayed for three days, for he had let it be understood that he had important work to do on the invisible planes during this period, and that his body should be left in peace.

On December 31, a number of people gathered at the Bonfin for a last farewell. The silence was extraordinary, a silence in which each one tried to understand

what his departure meant and to accept the fact of his physical absence. The room in which he lay was suffused with an extraordinary sense of life. Those present were deeply moved to see that he looked so young; it was as though he were peacefully asleep, and a very subtle perfume pervaded the air. They could not help but think of his own words about the death of great spiritual Masters: ‘When they leave their physical body, their body of glory continues to be present and radiant, continues to vivify all who come in contact with it.’

That same day, throughout the world, thousands of members of his brotherhood were united to his spirit in prayer and meditation. In many of the brotherhood centers, they gathered to re-read his last messages and to give thanks – a thousand thanks – as he had so often recommended.

Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov departed for higher realms on Christmas day, this

most significant of days on which Christ, the cosmic Spirit, pursues his work by giving all God's children the Light that can warm them and renew and illuminate their lives.

December 25 marks the day when nature sees the birth of the Christ-principle, the life, light and warmth that is destined to transform everything. Rejoicing is also going on in heaven that day: the angels are singing, and all the saints, the great masters and initiates are gathered together to pray, glorify the Almighty, and celebrate the birthday of Christ who is truly born today in the universe. ²

Notes

1. The Key to the problems of Existence, Chapter 18.
2. 'Au commencement était le Verbe...', Chapter 6.

A Word from the Author

Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov never attempted to tell the story of his whole life, but in his desire to stimulate his listeners to pursue their own spiritual research, he often spoke of his personal experiences.

In the many talks he gave between 1938 and 1985 (more than 5,000) he often spoke of his youth, of the important events of his life, of his own spiritual endeavors, as well as of his most intimate thoughts and feelings.

Far from setting himself up as an example, he often seemed to belittle or laugh at himself, knowing that those who were capable of doing so would grasp the essence of his message. He did not claim to have been a model child or youth. On the contrary, he often called attention to his faults and errors, insisting that we can all improve and evolve, whatever our point of departure. And when he spoke—as he sometimes did—of certain exceptional mystical or psychic experiences, he would add in a tone of gravity: ‘I am telling you the truth. I know that the invisible world is listening to me; I cannot lie to you.’

In writing not only of the events of his life but also of his thoughts and feelings, I have adhered strictly to his own accounts. Even the dialogues are in his own words. The single exception to this rule is his conversation with the lady he met in a park in Pau, which was related to us by a witness.

At times it was difficult to pinpoint the date of the mystical experiences of his childhood and adolescence. His purpose in speaking of them was to instruct and enlighten; he was not unduly concerned about incidental details, and he sometimes indicated a different age for the same experience. Time seems to have had little importance for him. The experiences of the soul are outside of time; they exist in the eternal present. All that matters is the reality of the event, the repercussions it triggers in the soul and the heart, and the bonds it creates with the higher worlds. After contrasting and comparing many different accounts of events, I chose the chronological order he mentioned most often and which seemed the most logical.

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Chronology

1900, January 31	Birth in Serbtzi, Macedonia.
1907, Spring	Destruction of village. Departure for Varna.
1908, October 3	Death of Mikhaël's father.
1909	Reads Proverbs.
1915	Illumination.
1917, Winter	First meeting with Peter Deunov, Varna.
1923	University studies in Sofia.
1930	Teaches in secondary school.
1934 or 1935	College Principal.
1937, July 22	Arrival in France.

1938, January 29	First public talk.
1944, Christmas	Publication of first collection of talks.
1944, December 27	Death of Peter Deunov aged 80.
1948, January 21	Arrested on false charge.
1948, July 17	Sentenced to 4 years in prison.
1950, March	Released from prison.
1950, March 19	Renews contact with brotherhood.
1953, July 8	First summer convention at the Bonfin.
1959, February 11	Departure for India.

1959, June 17	First meeting with Babaji.
1960, February 9	Return from India.
1960, September 28	Rehabilitation by Court of Appeals.
1961, Spring	Visit to England.
1962, May	Visit to Spain.
1964, May	Visit to Italy, Greece, Serbtzi. Meets his mother.
1965, Spring	Visit to Sweden, Holland, Germany.
1965, June	Visit to Spain.
1967, May & June	Visit to United-States & Canada

1968, May & June	Visit to Israel.
1969, May	Visit to Greece & Turkey.
1970, April 25	Visit to Japan, Sri Lanka, Hong Kong.
1971, May 6	Visit to Morocco, Egypt, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Greece, Yugoslavia.
1971, September 18	Fourth Esoteric Convention in Berlin.
1973, August 5	Death of Dolia.
1974, April	Publication of Complete Works Vol. 1
1975	Complete Works sold in bookstores in France.

1976	First translations of Complete Works.
1977, May & June	Inter-religious convention in Paris.
1978, December 17	Visit to United-States, Antilles.
1981, Spring	Visit to Canada, United-States.
1981, June 18	Visit to Bulgaria.
1981, October 12	Visit to United-States. Public talks.
1981, December 10	Visit to Thailand.
1982, February 5	Visit to India.
1982, November	Visit to England, Scotland.

1983, January	Visit to Egypt.
1983, April 28	Visit to Scandinavia.
1984, January 18	Visit to United-States.
1984, May 6	Visit to Canada. Public talks.
1985, January 25	Visit to United-States, Mexico, Canada.
1986, December 25	Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov leaves this world.

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Vol. 7—The Mysteries of Yesod.

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