

Chapter Four

Awakening

I had not been back at my parents' house for long when the modelling agent called again.

"Sinclair, Sinclair," he said, pouring on the charm. "I have had a good feeling about you, ever since I saw you at the café that day."

I remembered him only vaguely, but listened anyway: I had nothing else to do and nothing to lose.

"I can get you bookings straight away," he continued. "You'll be making big cash in no time! Just one audition so my partners can meet you, and I promise - you'll have the contracts coming in immediately!"

I didn't really know what he was talking about but I was bored, so I made an appointment for 1 o'clock that afternoon. With a few hours to kill, I walked down the street to the café he'd mentioned and ordered the biggest proper German breakfast on the menu. Not once in Tunisia had I had a warm meal. Now I feasted my eyes on a plate of fried eggs, ham, sausages, bacon, hash browns and a hot roll, unsure of where to begin. Half-way through everything, I was stuffed, and placing my knife and fork together, leaned back in the chair. Just in time to finish my cappuccino and catch up on the day's news.

Nothing had changed. The same dilemmas, the same format, the same reports filled the pages! I hadn't missed anything in my time on the island. Still, I read every page. I liked to keep up to date with what was going on in the world.

My route passed the only bookstore on this street, Esoteric Books. This was usually a favourite hang-out of mine, but today I just glanced in the windows, resisting the seductive atmosphere with its promising scent of revelation, keen to get the audition over.

The main window was plastered with bright red billboard posters. I stopped, curious. A cartoon picture of a samurai in the lotus position stared out at me. *Mantra Yoga – Swami Sityanoda – Monday 7pm* I read. I stared at the poster. Why did I feel excited at the thought of trying this out? I repeated under my breath "Swami Sityanoda... Sityanoda. Mantra Yoga!" I memorised the when and where and hurried on.

I went into the audition like a tiger walking unknowingly into the waves. A team of photographers and agents laughed, joked and chatted briefly, all the while carefully studying me from all angles. Then they offered me a contract! I signed it immediately, mainly because I could understand every word and it didn't tie me down for life.

"You're going to pay me to just hang around and be photographed?" I asked.

I couldn't believe I was going to make money so easily, and yet be free to leave anytime.

"We are not a little agency," the photographer laughed. "We do commercials and promotions and magazine campaigns as well as catwalk shows. Our clients are endless, and you, my friend, are a photogenic goldmine for us."

My new agent just smiled.

I liked the sound of that - a goldmine. I felt 10 feet tall as I walked down the street. Suddenly I was aware that the women were checking me out, even some of the men. I was alight with expectation. Something new was happening in my life!

That night I stood in front of the mirror, and for the first time in my life took serious stock of what I looked like. Never before had I seen what these professionals were seeing. My Mom had always told me that I was attractive, and certainly the girls seemed to like me, but I had never studied my nose and my jaw line, my hair and my hands, my abs and my biceps with a subjective eye. Now I was going to be paid for having these attributes!

Now we're talking, I thought, this is a charming way to make money.

The foyer of the hotel was huge, draped with elegant women and sleek businessmen. The concierge materialised discreetly at my side.

"May I help you, sir?"

"The conference room where Swami Sityanoda is?"

"Of course, sir. Right this way."

"Thank you."

I smiled as I followed him down the lush red-carpeted passage. I still found something exciting about the aura of wealth portrayed by places like these.

The ballroom door stood wide open, spilling the intense sweet smell of Indian incense as I entered.

A short man glided up to me.

"Good evening! I'm Kumar. Please, come right in."

A Caucasian despite the exotic name, with piercing blue eyes above an almost suspicious smile, Kumar bustled across the room full of people, and showed me to a vacant spot.

The seats were large brightly-coloured cushions on the floor, and I subsided rather awkwardly onto mine. Surreptitiously looking around, I re-arranged my legs into a semblance of comfort, and began to absorb the surroundings. The lights were on, but the impression was one of dim candlelight. There was a slight background murmur of soft voices, but no real conversation. The incense wafted across my nostrils as I slowly relaxed, and I felt a sense of calm filter through me as I took on the essence of the room.

Only after a few minutes did I realise that there were only men around me. A middle aisle separated us from the women. It felt strange, but I realised it was of no importance. I settled back to digest all the new impressions.

At precisely 7 o'clock, the room fell suddenly silent and Swami Sityanoda entered. An imposing man, he was dressed in a full burgundy robe. Three white lines were painted horizontally across his forehead and a third eye painted on his temple.

"Good evening!" he said.

I couldn't quite distinguish his accent, although I thought I could detect a mixture of Australian and Hungarian intonation in his voice. And I couldn't quite define his appearance either. Very short dark gray hair, with emerald green eyes and a pale skin, his features were neither Caucasian nor Mongolian.

There was a stillness in the room as he took his place on a small platform at the front of the room. With consummate ease he folded his legs into the double-lotus posture as if it was the most casual thing to do. There was no fuss, no vanity, only an irresistible presence radiated from Swami Sityanoda. To say the least, I was impressed.

The Swami sat silently for a full moment, taking the time to look slowly around the audience. For a flash of time his eyes met mine and I felt I had been recognized. How could that possibly be? I'd never met this Swami before in my life. I'd never met any Swami at all! But for the first time in years, I felt like someone actually saw me.

Then he smiled, and his white grin confirmed a youthful charm.

Swami Sityanoda's voice interrupted my thoughts, and as he spoke it was as if his words dropped directly into my mind. He spoke clearly and confidently, without pause and without referring to notes, pronouncing each word with a resonance that rung around the room as if amplified electronically.

"Mantra Yoga is a union of voice and sound.

"Yoga means to unite with our Origin, and the word *mantra* comes from the Sanskrit word meaning advice or suggestion.

"Mantras are psychically powerful sound syllables capable of exciting emotions and giving suggestions to the mind.

"And they affect both the person who speaks them and the person who hears them."

He paused in his measured speech, and looked right at me.

"In a sense, every word is a mantra.

"And each mantra, or word, is a sound pattern that suggests to the mind the meanings inherent in it.

"And the mind immediately responds."

He looked away, into the distance.

"Through the repetition of a mantra, a higher state of deep concentration can be reached. In this state, the divine form embedded in the mantra becomes manifest."

His voice filled with passion.

"Mantra Yoga has its origin in the Vedic Sciences, and in fact all the verses in the Vedas are called mantras. Any person who can chant or sing the Vedas can achieve the ultimate union with supreme consciousness only by chanting the mantras. This union is the aim of Mantra Yoga.

"Mantra is made up of two syllables, *man* & *tra*, which in Sanskrit is *Mananat Trayate*.

"Just by chanting, one can save oneself in the universe and achieve the ultimate in this material world.

"Mantras are sometimes applied to change circumstances, for example to regain a healthy state. These mantras are specially formulated to carry a certain vibration power."

Swami Sityanoda stood effortlessly and wrote on the board behind him, **OM**.

"But the essence of all the thousands of mantras is the three letter word *AUM*, written and used however as *OM*.

"Our universe is made up of vibration energy. Atoms and electrons are energy concentrations with a certain vibration pattern, and everything that vibrates emanates sound."

"Pure physics!" I recognised, enthralled.

"In the Yoga philosophies, OM is considered to be the original vibration and all other mantras are derived from this one master mantra. This cosmic vibration is the word of God".

Oh lord! I thought. After weeks of waiting on an island for a small word from God, now I get told that there are thousands spread all over the universe just waiting to be picked up! Question after question started to pile up as the Swami continued to talk.

He wrote on the board **OM NAMAH SIVAYA** while a lady sitting at the Indian piano started playing a tune.

"It is important that the proper pronunciation is imparted here. OM can be perceived during meditation, but sounds more like the o-sound in ball without the 'b'. It is a deep roaring sound and much closer to the Tibetan mountain trumpets, which are used to reproduce the OM sound that she is imitating on the piano."

He smiled at the pianist.

"If you are a newcomer this evening, sing the melody first until you are able to sing the words. Move at your own pace."

The room was flooded with a tune that appeared eccentric at first, and the sound was shaky. But as the melody sunk in, the volume rose, and with it the energy. The mantra began.

I started singing the words immediately. I was comfortable with it, as if I had been using this language all my life.

"O-M N-A-M-A-H S-I-V-A-Y-A!!!" I sang, losing myself in the sounds.

The chant swarmed around the room like a tornado. There was a feeling of heat burning inside my mouth, and the energy rang around in spirals, a noise similar to the one my grandfather used to make with the rim of his glass. The noise was electric, and the heat was magnetic: it felt surreal. My eyes and mouth were open, but I couldn't comprehend the sound or the heat or the balance of this new energy.

Mesmerised by the energy created from this mantra, I had no clue what I was actually doing. I had no idea of the consequences and the dimension of this blessing I was receiving, but I continued singing with all the passion and veracity of a gospel choirboy.

Soon the chant slowed down, and at the same time everyone faded out into silence. No one was making a sound, but the energy continued to

ring around us until it too slowly faded, leaving us in a moment of quiet bliss.

I sat with the silence of the room. Even the Swami just sat, reflecting on the vibe. This was my first real awakening. It was nowhere as spectacular as a firework display, but my consciousness was ignited, and sitting in that dim room, I became aware - for the first time, I was aware of being aware.

I started looking at how I had lived. I had always taken everything for granted. One of my biggest weaknesses was cars: I loved driving, but suddenly I realised that I did everything robotically. I'd stop at a red light, but not even see the colours of the traffic light. I would change gear with no regard for the gears. I never thought about driving while I drove, I never thought about anything.

It was the same with eating; I ate for survival and never acknowledged the sensation of delicious food or how many senses a flavour could spark on my tongue.

I had read some books, but the words fell to the ground uselessly once I flipped the page.

I gave no regard for my being. I was aware only of the everyday sensation of being alive.

But now, uninvited, I had been awakened, and the awakening had shown me the being of human being.

The experience encompassed me, and this conscious self-reflection made me feel as if I had been beamed to this planet just a moment ago.

I drove home, for the first time aware of what I was doing. To my instant amusement, I found myself driving at a ridiculously low 100km/h, with no desire to go a single kilometre faster. I drove admiring the calm I could now see in the universe; I saw me seeing the stars high above the city, the dark silhouettes of the trees along the highway, the shadows of the buildings in the far distance. A long-lost happiness filled me. It had been a long time since I had felt fulfilment and happiness of this kind.

"This is it!" I said out loud. "This is the peace and calm I am looking for. No direction with desire pulling me here and there, no false pretences of happiness."

The dormant power in me had awakened. I didn't understand the potential just yet, but I felt it boiling inside me. I longed to go deeper into the study of yoga, and I had already signed up for the weekend seminar.

Little did I know I was setting the foundation for the destiny I had chosen to find.

Joining *Act Models Inc.* turned out to be one of the best decisions I could have made, as my daily life as a model gave me the financial and geographical freedom I needed to explore the new spiritual world I had discovered.

Not only had I started taking part in all the seminars and functions that came about, but I also started studying yoga. I focused on the four main traditions, Hatha yoga, Laya yoga, Raja yoga and Mantra yoga. I devoured all the books I could find, and spent hours in the bookstore. I also began learning Sanskrit, the holy Indian language that most of the mantras use, and started meditating and chanting at home.

In a short time I could sit in the lotus position with ease. In fact, I could perform all the yoga movements. Doing yoga strengthened not only my physique but also my presence, and I became even more desirable at the agency. Now I was being paid for a single shoot what I used to earn in a month!

A month into basic yoga practices and readings, I started to experience things that I couldn't understand. After meditation, I began seeing blue lights emanating from my core. In my morning Sun-Salute yoga, my tongue would roll back into my throat as if pulled by a magnet. Often in meditation my head would fall and hit my back so hard that it made a noise, but there were no after-effects. When my meditation time was finished, I would feel fine.

I had become friends with Rachana, the woman who owned the bookstore. She was young, with greying hair and an exuberant passion for her work. Over coffee in the back of the shop, she would ask me a hundred questions, and then spend hours looking for the answers with me. Walking up and down with a book in her hand, she admitted that she too thought best when she was moving. It must have looked strange, two people reading while prancing up and down the small green room!

"How about coming with me to the meeting in Luxembourg?" I asked her one day.

"Yes, yes!" she squealed, jumping up and down like a child accepting an ice-cream. I was working with such pretentious people at the agency that her response was a breath of fresh air.

The function was basically a lot of yoga people gathered together because they could, including several Swamis dressed in orange robes with burgundy ropes. I looked at the colours of their 'uniform' and it sparked an idea.

When we got back to Munich, I dyed all my clothes: my jeans, my shirts, my shorts, my jackets, my socks and even my belts, a variety of colours from orange to burgundy.

When I walked into the shop in my orange and burgundy outfit, Rachana fell on the floor laughing.

"You're not actually wearing that to work?" she giggled.

I didn't appreciate this and stood with my hands on my hips waiting for her to get over it.

"You're not actually wearing that at work?" I replied sarcastically, although her outfit was fine.

She studied me for a few minutes, head to one side.

"OK, I think you can actually pull it off," she smiled.

"I know!" I joked. "I can pull anything off!"

I strode in to work as if I owned the place, and no one flinched. I sat down at the make-up table, and waited for comments.

Nothing.

"I've dyed all my clothes in a range of unfashionable colours, why has no-one said anything yet?" I asked the make-up artist, somewhat bewildered. She looked me up and down with a weird look on her face and then smiled.

"You look good, that colour suits you, brings out your eyes," she said and then continued with her work.

Obviously I was the only one who wondered.

My dreams started to become vividly real, peopled by actual saints, and I had long conversations with them. I met all the wise men of the core yoga movements, and they enhanced my journey and determined my chosen path. I resonated effortlessly with this movement, and I understood deep down that this was not the first time I'd been on this path, and certainly not the first time I had done yoga.

I was inspired to start an official journal of these new insights, to store all this newly acquired wisdom. I went to see what Rachana thought, and as I walked in she came out from behind the counter with a present.

I unwrapped it carefully, and held it for a minute. It felt precious to touch.

"Thank you Rach!" I said looking at her, "this is exactly what I came in here for."

I opened the silk woven ornamented cover, to see blank gold-framed beige pages. The paper was coarse and the pages finely lined: perfect, because otherwise I would be writing all over the place.

We sat together in the back drinking a cappuccino, and Rachana handed me a thick calligraphy pen. I opened the empty journal, and carefully marked it with its purpose.

MY INNER MILLION

*Dedicated to causing a revolution in consciousness
in order to making love a worldwide reality.*

As I wrote, a tear fell down Rachana's cheek.

I have never been a heavy drinker or smoker, so it was a piece of cake for me to abide by the yogic system of not drinking, and also to quit smoking.

I had no problem with giving up meat, as I wanted to explore the impact on my body and mind by quitting animal protein all together. Soy and vegetables became my main source for food.

I was in the supermarket deciding between the tofu in the can or the tofu in the packet when a nice young couple approached me.

"Definitely the packet, never buy anything out of a can, you never know what poisons you're eating off the tin," he laughed somewhat arrogantly.

"Thanks for the tip" I said and threw in the packet and placed the can back on the shelf.

The couple just stood there looking at me. I smiled at them awkwardly and tried to carry on down the aisle, but they obviously wanted to talk.

"Are you a vegetarian?" she asked me.

"Not exactly, but I'm trying out the vegan thing; I'm cutting out all animal protein."

You would have thought I told them they had won the lottery! Their smiles flashed.

"My name is Stephanie and this is my boyfriend Johan," she said, smiling broadly. "We are part of a group that follow a macrobiotic diet, eating according to Dr. Kushi's nutritional philosophy. We would like to invite you for dinner tonight, will you come?"

She spoke with missionary earnestness, her hand on her chest. He just nodded at everything she said. It freaked me out a little and I just wanted to get out of the store. "Ok," I said.

They gave me their address and left straight away, as if they had achieved what they were there for in the first place.

That evening I was welcomed with a lot of excitement as the new candidate. The table was set, and a group of eleven people were standing around holding non-alcoholic drinks. Stephanie introduced me to everyone, and then gave us all an elaborate lecture on the benefits of this way of eating. Of the twenty or so reasons she listed, I really remembered only one: that to prolong life it was important to eat a perfect balance between the yin and yan of foods. Apparently brown rice is one food that has the perfect balance.

Dinner comprised of an assortment of sample dishes, each one smaller than a nouveau cuisine hors d'oeuvre. We sat around being served tiny tastes of purely macrobiotic food. The name made it sound so scientific, but I didn't know why it wasn't called "the rice diet" because that was all we seemed to eat. After a rice ball, a rice cake, a rice spoon, and several other rice something's, we were finally given a vegetable: steamed and totally devoid of any additional flavour, especially salt. I did not enjoy my meal, although I did learn some fancy ways to serve stuff.

The mouthful servings of food came at 10 minute intervals, and in between servings the conversation at the table was enough to drive me crazy.

It was as if each one was competing to speak as much as possible, hardly pausing for breath, and fighting anyone else's input. I am by nature more of a listener than a talker, and as soon as people find that I don't take up any space for myself to talk, they all too happily use the opportunity to speak themselves. So I sat silently amongst a chattering of people saying exactly what came to their lips while totally ignoring each other. Why did nobody there ask themselves if anyone else was actually interested in hearing what they were saying? It was as if they had fallen unconscious while they spoke.

What they were telling me was of no interest to me at all. I listened to everyone speaking, and came to the conclusion that they had nothing to say. I could try and recount the exact words of the conversation, but I would be wasting both your time and mine. The endless rambling at this specific table was simply a group of macrobiotic dieters confirming for themselves just how much better they were compared to the masses who eat 'dead things'. They seemed to find comfort and safety in their righteousness, like so many people in so many situations.

I didn't agree nor disagree. I noticed - that's all. My aim was to live in the present moment, and I couldn't grasp why anyone would want to turn to the description of something if the real thing was right in front of them.

Patience, however, has never been a strength of mine, and the point came when I had had enough of this riveting conversation and I found an excuse to leave them to their 'eat right' banter.

I left.

"I would rather spend 3 hours with an unconscious but non-pretentious meat eater at McDonalds than another minute with these vain people," I said to Rachana later.

I found it interesting how these people paid so much attention to what they ate, but that they neglected what really mattered. One can go weeks without food, days without water, minutes without air, but who can go seconds without thought?

What's the point in detoxifying one's body when the mind stays polluted?

I continued with my experiment of not eating any animal protein, however. I felt good, my mind was sharper and I had a lot of energy.

Although my mother was concerned that this diet would not be good for me in the long run.

"Vegetarians are skinny and pale and weak," she worried.

To prove these assumptions were rubbish, I joined a gym and started pumping iron. A few weeks at the gym, and I was proud of the results.

Not so my booker at the agency!

"You better not get any bigger than that, Sinclair!" he said amongst the whistling when I took my shirt off for a shoot.

"Seriously, I forbid it!"

"But I've only been weight lifting for three weeks!" I protested but he didn't care.

"No more weights Sin, I don't want a bodybuilder scaring off my clients!"

"Oh come on," I chuckled. "You know you love me no matter what I look like! And hey, you know it's me who pulls every major national advertising campaign from credit cards to chocolate, from banks to shower gels. Despite my screaming orange outfits and my rice cooker and my packs of smelly algae! I pranced around him jokingly, flexing my muscles.

He looked at me, a frown wrinkling his forehead.

"You want to travel all over the world with all your yoga stuff, going to all these courses and digging deeper and deeper into the mysteries of the unknown called 'Enlightenment, Nirvana, Moksha, Satori'? You love all that hocus-pocus, and guess what - this job pays for it. The money you earn allows you to dictate your own schedule and to move in this world as you want. So stay that size!"

I shut my mouth. I also stopped weight-lifting, and didn't get any bigger.

I focused on living the simple way, meditating and doing yoga. It wasn't long before I realized that it wasn't the attraction to arrive at some distant paradise that was driving me, but the fact that I enjoyed this way of life.

It began to dawn on me that I might have found my true vocation.

I wanted to be a monk.