

## **CHANTING**

**Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,  
there is a field. I'll meet you there.**

**When the soul lies down in that grass,  
The world is too full to talk about.**

**Ideas, language, even the phrase each other  
Doesn't make any sense.**

### **Rumi**

In my life I've had the glorious privilege of experiencing flashes of Oneness in 'small' and 'big' moments. I have usually stumbled into them quite by accident while playing sports or fishing or in the birth of my sons. In these times nothing else is important. There is only the present moment in which the conventional boundaries of life dissolve. For example, with the birth of each of my sons I have had the joy of sitting in a chair with them moments after their birth. In these experiences there is no father, no son, no chair, no worry. There was only infant-father both being born together. These were seemed like rare, unpredictable moments which I thought were unreproducible, impermanent, unpredictable and in many ways unreliable.

Then life changed.

A colleague invited me and several others to a weekend event featuring her spiritual teacher Sia Maa Lakshmi Devi at the Omega Institute in Greenbeek New York in 2004. I expected a weekend of profound teaching, wisdom and meditation which is exactly what I received. It

was clear from the first few moments in the meeting hall that I was in the presence of a being like no other I had ever encountered; Delightful, unique, cosmic and even humorous. At first I thoroughly enjoyed it all primarily with the left side, logical side, of my brain. Then everything changed. We began to chant. Much to my utter surprise these repetitive, circular 'songs' in this ancient language captivated me.

Music has always felt transformative to me. The first time I heard a recording of Bob Dylan singing *Mr. Tambourine Man*, I was transfixed. And when I heard BB King live sing *The Thrill Is Gone* I felt the power of human love and anguish as at no other time. But something in these chants grabbed me as nothing else had ever done. Words did not matter. Concepts dissolved. And as we kept chanting the transformation kept going deeper.

Latin Catholicism has never interested me. But as we started chanting the *Alleluia* I felt something deeper still. It was as though I was standing in the middle of a powerful stream and was being pulled into the flow of the Cosmos. Half an hour later I floated into the Mystery, into God, into Spirit. At one point I stopped chanting and listened. The beauty flowed into both ears and throughout my entire body. I began to dissolve into it. I, a father of four children, a psychologist, a responsible, rational man flowed into a place I thought was only for other people. I entered a place I assumed belonged only to monks, mystics, gurus and Lamas. Two thirds of the way into the dissolution I began thinking I could simply let go and would disappear into the Cosmos, God, Goddess, Gaia, Spirit or whatever one calls it. I felt I could simply, happily dissolve.

In that moment I felt okay to die. Then my ego woke up and grabbed me by the ankles and yanked me back to Earth. Sternly it pronounced, “No, you can’t go there. You are a responsible person with people to take care of. You have to come back. Get grounded now.” So, much to both my disappointment and relief, I came back to my life as a father, professional and friend. AND, I have never been quite the same.

Over the next three years I participated in several events with Sai Ma. My life reeled, rocked and shattered as I worked out the implications of these experiences (and other events in my life). Through all of it I continued to love the chanting. Each time we chanted as a group and especially when the Alleluia came up I moved into tears remembering and more importantly re-experiencing the joy of the time at Omega. I came to realize that this experience continues to be available. It is always present. I came to see that the presence of Spirit is very reliable and dependable. Increasingly the other Sanskrit chants have become important. I do not understand very much about the theory behind it but I do know that something in the vibration of these ancient words resonates in my being. Nothing else does this in the same way. They are sounds that brush aside the ego when it grabs at my ankles to pull me back into my personality with its fear and limitations. With each repetition my heart opens further and wider until it is unlocked and bursts forth with love, joy and gratitude. The more I experience this the more all of these flow from my heart into all of my life. And the more that happens the more I know the constant Presence of Spirit.

I attended an event in 2007 that continued the process. In this event the verbal meditations fell flat with me. The words got in the way. I could not get outside of my intellect. A new process called *Brain*

*Illumination* was introduced and for me it initially fizzled. This time there were tears of frustration and fear of failure. My ego was screaming at me piercing my Soul, "See, you really are a failure at this. Go back to where you belong." But when we began chanting Kali Bolo or the beautiful Om Namaha Shivaya my brain began to glow. There is no failure only a different path around the ego. No thought, no ideas, no familiar words with all their baggage, no intellect just experience. As the heart and Soul keep opening wider and wider they vibrate with praise, joy and gratitude. Separation, polarization, dualism drop away. Chanting for me has become a lullaby for the ego allowing it to take a nap in the arms of the Unknown. In this space Rumi's field is comes alive for me. I am now able to engage in *The Brain Illumination* technique and other traditional meditation forms without encountering so much fear and ego. But primarily the path through those emotions was chanting.

With Sai Ma we go deeper, deeper still, into the never ending well of Oneness. At the intensive event in Vail in 2008 another element emerged. Here there were over 500 voices singing. They were all chanting directly into my ears in mutiphonic stereo with a higher tonal quality than any speaker any corporation (Bose or otherwise) ever dreamed possible. Call and response flowing in an ever deeper river of vibration, each repetition deepening the process until I am again grabbed again by the Cosmic Current and my entire body starts to flow into movement. Every cell merges with God. All of the other voices became the vehicle of Spirit merging the sound with unscripted, unplanned, unpatterned, unexpected movement. I once tried to take dance lessons in another setting and had been utterly unable to move in the required ways. I flee from the patterned 1-2-3 of the waltz or

whatever steps of any other designated style dance. But in these moments my body flows into the unknown vibration of the Sanskrit words which are beyond words, more than words; they become the echoes of the deepest sounds of the Cosmos. These words do not merely rhyme. They resonate and reverberate with my Soul. They pulsate and throb in my body. The movement comes not from script but from cells, the central cell of the body awakened by the now familiar Brain Illumination Meditation. I now hear with my whole body. As we chant, my body, organs, glands, molecules, cells and blood are infused with life force, chi, shakti and illumination.

There is a saying that proclaims “Those who sing pray twice.” My experience is that “Those who chant and dance pray twice *squared*.” It is exponentially deeper. The voice, intention and the body, yes, even the body, the entire body are all experienced as one from the inside out. Tears of joy flow. There is no belief or nonbelief. There is no understanding or not understanding. There is only the chant. There is barely a chanter. I now not only see Rumi’s field but come to experience the place where “*ideas, language and even the phrase each other don’t make sense*.” The chant chants me and moves me. It flows through me and I flow through it. We are woven together like the double helix of the genetic code. We are like two beautiful rivers merging together. Social convention and safety are the only things that keep me from leaping on the chairs and dancing around the room on the rims of their tops.

The intensive continues. Sai Ma has been working with us building to this point. A powerful matrix of energy has been built in which we are

able to see how we are woven into the Cosmos every day. This is what it is like to merge with God, or more accurately, to remember that we are always merged with God. My Soul whispers to me. "Graham, this is why you are alive. This is real every moment of your life."

This time as I dissolve there is no fear. And this time there is no desire to go further. Where I am is wondrous. It is simply not time to leave the Earth. Among other things there is more chanting to be done.