

Chapter 1 Shattered peace

I was surrounded by silence. My whole being was focused on the sound of barely audible, rhythmic breathing. Inhaling.. and.. exhaling. Inhaling.. and.. exhaling. Forty yoga students sat together in silence. Time had stopped. This was our preparation for the guru's arrival. We sat cross-legged on the soft, carpeted floor, the smell of incense hanging in the air.

Presently, a tall, slim figure, a Hindu and Brahmin, strode into the room. His movements were limber and loose, his countenance conveyed authority and aloofness, his penetrating eyes unsettling, his smile reassuring. He took his place of privilege on the slightly elevated platform, just large enough for the traditional lotus pose of a yogi. Hanging onto every word that fell from his lips, our minds were caught up to otherworldly places, as we followed intently the wisdom flowing from the bearded holy man. Entranced by his spiritual revelations, comforted by waves of radiating kindness, he was the object of our adoration. This was our weekly men's class, and as usual, a special time for all.

Without warning, raised voices were heard, a commotion outside the classroom. The door to our "sanctuary" opened. All faces turned to see the perpetrator of this intrusion. To my amazement, the figure in the doorway was a fellow student, somebody we immediately recognized. The fair-haired young man was brandishing a revolver, angry and upset. The mesmeric calm of the guru's teaching was shattered. "Put it away David!" Jeevah said firmly, as though speaking to a person guilty of a mild misdemeanor. "I'll be out in a moment and we'll talk about the issue then." The agitated student retreated, his hostility inexplicably melting away. With a wave of his hand, Jeevah commanded into action those whose job it was to deal with such matters. "Just go and see what he wants. I'll deal with the matter later," said the guru calmly. As sudden as the threat came, it subsided. I was left puzzled. Throughout the episode, Jeevah had not budged from his lotus pose. He was in control, his authority was intact, he was not perturbed one iota.

The place was a yoga school, a two-storey, century-old mansion with lofty ceilings, a grand house in the style typical of the Queen Victoria era. The location was a leafy inner suburb of Melbourne, Australia. The year was 1970 as I recall. The man, the object of our undivided attention, our guru, was Shri Jeevah Raj. Indian by birth, he was the second son of the esteemed yogi and founder of the Madras Ashram for Yoga Research. Jeevah had moved to Melbourne, Australia in the early sixties, to establish The Yoga Advancement Intitute. A man of immense talent, of noble bearing, he came to the West with impeccable credentials.

Yet what I had just witnessed was so utterly inconsistent with the high esteem in which we held Jeevah: an angry young man (a student of all people!), threatening our guru with a gun? It was incomprehensible. How could this be? How could a place of spiritual peace coexist with menacing

violence? These were the thoughts that came to mind in a flash. How could this event be explained, be reconciled? However, nothing more was said of the incident; it just seemed to have not happened. For many years it remained a mystery. Like my fellow students, my admiration of Jeevah grew over the following years into devotion. The incident of the gun and student was soon forgotten. Even the installation of bulletproof, double-glazing to the guru's office raised not even a murmur of disquiet in my spirit.

Should the "alarm bells" have sounded? Had my ability to judge reality been so imperceptibly compromised that I had become blinded to reality? Did I know the real Jeevah, this holy man from a world away, from a culture and religion so alluring yet so foreign? Here was a man who was inviting others to accompany him on a journey of spiritual enlightenment, appealing to those who were idealists, who wanted to improve society through ethical and moral wisdom. He was the dispenser of that wisdom, a man above all men.

I had willingly decided to follow Jeevah, the charismatic holy man from the East, with all my heart, mind and soul, and my purse! Little did I know at that time what dangers and disappointments lay ahead? It was to take more than a decade of service to the guru before I dared to question his actions, or doubt my commitment. As for seeing the ultimate truth of my relationship with Jeevah and his real intentions, another two decades transpired before all was revealed regarding the many strange happenings surrounding the person of Jeevah Raj.

In the meantime an intriguing story of wealth, power, and big business, a story of personal abuse, control and manipulation was to run its course, developing and maturing into an empire. Built by undoubtedly a talented and exceptional man, the empire in the end was to unravel, exposing the man of mystery to the glare of public scrutiny.