



Moth & *the* Flame

ADVENTURES WITH THREE
MYSTIC ADEPTS OF OUR TIMES

Memoir of artist, entrepreneur, philanthropist,
organic foods pioneer & spiritual wayfarer

Arran Stephens

O.B.C. D.Sc. D.Ed.

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*Dedicated to the One Creator.
Nameless, Formless & Absolute
manifesting into countless names and forms.*

*To the jewels of humanity
—Saints, messengers and Masters, scientists of the spirit
who have come in every age to bring light and wisdom.*

*To Majestic Sawan and the merciful lion, Kirpal
who appeared to this thirsty seeker sixty years ago,
claiming him through love as Their own.*

*To their successors,
gracious mystic poet, Master Darshan,
nurturer of longing, fulfiller of ancient legacy,
& the living Master, Sant Rajinder Singh Ji Maharaj,
serving, spreading peace, unity & love
—igniting countless lamps across the world.*

*To Ratana, beloved life-companion;
to all who walk the way of love & earth-stewardship
—my humblest gratitude!*

*How can a miniscule moth bring its truth
to life for you, O friend?
Words are too poor a medium to convey the ineffable.*

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Foreword

I write from the perspective of being a longtime student of comparative religion (both East and West) and of spirituality, a teacher of peace studies, and simply as a fellow traveler on life's journey. And what an exciting journey of discovery Arran Stephens has been on, beginning in his teens as he struggled to find life's meaning and purpose.

His early odyssey took him from his native British Columbia to California and New York, as he explored the venues of the artist and the excesses of the times. We relive with him the turbulent era of the sixties and share in auspicious encounters with Allen Ginsberg, Edén Abbez, and others on the leading edge of the counterculture. Then, fueled by an intense inner yearning, Arran embarks on a painstaking search to find a genuine spiritual mentor. After some false starts and promising leads, in 1964, he learns of the great Indian sage and mystic adept, Sant Kirpal Singh Ji Maharaj. That first contact awakens a deep recognition and triggers several profound mystical experiences. As a result, his life undergoes a transformation. Now, sixty years later, Arran remains deeply involved in the study and practice of an age-old, yet surprisingly modern spiritual path—not as a monastic recluse—but as a civic-minded family man, artist and highly successful pioneer in the organic foods movement.

With loving care, Arran weaves the times and teachings of his mentors into the tapestry of his own growth and struggles. The pages overflow with picturesque descriptions of life in India, including details of trips to the pristine Himalayas, to the dusty byways of rural villages, and to shrines and pilgrimage centers. Many of his accounts reveal things which defy explanation by ordinary standards of understanding, including miraculous healings and the sudden appearance of the Masters to individuals many thousands of miles away in times of need.

The reader is provided a rare opportunity to witness the daily activities of living Saints and their interactions with people of all walks of life—from presidents and princesses to simple rural workers. One encounters in action the deep humanity of these servants of humankind, as well as their extraordinary qualities of transvision, protection, and access to inner spiritual dimensions. We are treated to memorable meetings with Raghuvacharya, renowned among the yogis of Haridwar, who late in his lifespan of one hundred thirteen years, became an advanced practitioner of the inner path, and we encounter a wide range of humanity from venerable Tibetan Lamas to two former hardened criminals.

In *Moth & the Flame*, the reader encounters an individual's struggle with the apparent paradoxes of the spiritual life: effort and grace, separation and union, death and life, pain and ecstasy. One glimpses the profoundly transformative personal relationship which lies at the heart of mysticism—that of the competent adept and the sincere wayfarer.

—*Arthur Stein*

*PhD, Professor of Political Science, co-founder of the Center for Nonviolence and Peace Studies, University of Rhode Island, co-author of *Let There Be Light: Experiencing Inner Light Across the World's Sacred Traditions*.*

Author's Preface

Moth and the Flame is the journey of a spiritual seeker whose life was guided by several spontaneous mystical experiences as a struggling teenage artist during the Beat milieu of the 1960s. These experiences led me on an journey to a great spiritual Master—a Master for the ages. My testimony had its genesis in an unquenchable longing that came to life in the '60s and blossomed in India in his presence. That story begins unfolding in Chapter 6, and if you want to skip the drama of my early search, go straight there.

In brief, my journey begins in 1944 on the family farm nestled in a valley in the blue green hills of Vancouver Island; in '57, an abrupt move to Hollywood and the music industry at 13, followed by dissolution of the family at 15, then pursuit of art, life on the streets, addiction, a suicide attempt, followed by monastic refuge. There, encounters with a mysterious inner Light triggers my quest. At 19, follows a major art exhibition in San Francisco, a brief epiphany in the Mendocino hills, then an abyss of despair in New York City. From the ashes of a former life, a new one in the making, my future Preceptor appears within; I apply as his student, although continents separate us, and was initiated into the mysteries of the Beyond at twenty-one.

Two years later, when at last I arrived at Sawan Ashram in India, meeting Sant Kirpal Singh Ji Maharaj in person for the very first time, I bowed before his august presence and blurted out the sins of my tumultuous teens, "I have been a terrible sinner!" He looked deep into my soul with gleaming and forgiving eyes, and said, "*Master is for sinners! Every Saint has a past and every sinner a future.*" My burden was then and there lifted.

I had the inestimable good fortune to spend a total of eighteen months with him over the remaining seven years of his awe-inspiring life. He treated this unworthy one as a father would a prodigal son. How can I begin to express adequate gratitude? Even monarchs would have exchanged a throne for such an opportunity, had they known who he was. I joyously embraced the simple austerity of ashram life.

"Write down what you see and hear, that you may not forget," the Master boldly advised me, soon after arriving. Diary notes of life at the Ashram and on tours accompanying him to cities, towns and dusty villages across northern and central India, evolved into a manuscript under his encouragement. I also took a few photographs and sometimes used a portable tape recorder. Along with chronicling profound experiences, conversations, detailed questions and

answers, my account also records a number of miraculous and historical events. “Miracles are the result of hidden laws of nature with which we are as yet not conversant,” explained the Master. Miracles were never displayed in public, but often were revealed secretly to the devotees in times of trouble. That I am alive till today is also a kind of miracle; in 2011, I was at death’s door. My doctors warned, “You may only live one or two more months.” Daughter Gurdeep also played an essential role, described in Chapter 81, *Divine Interventions*.

Chapter 21, *The Ancient Legacy* offers a brief history of the lineage of *Sant Mat* or the Path of the realized Masters from centuries past to the present.

I was present when a visiting Berkeley professor and his wife turned up at Master Kirpal’s door in Rajpur (Chapter 30) in the Himalayan foothills, to discuss spirituality. After patiently listening to the professor’s questions and the Master’s beautiful and direct responses, the lady asked, “You say that God is everywhere and in all things. Why then do we need to seek the help of an intermediary, a Guru?”

With great authority he answered, “The God in you is asleep. In the Master it is awake! He is competent to awaken others. Light comes from Light, and life comes from life!”

Masters have the power to awaken souls and by directing their supercharged attention on them, are able to effortlessly lift them above the five senses and into radiant realms. I saw that countless times with Kirpal and his Successors. *It still happens, even today.*

Under his guidance, I meditated a minimum of four to six hours daily—often more, attended Satsangs (spiritual discourses) and Darshans (informal, more intimate question and answer sessions). After earning the trust of Ashram secretary, Dalip Singh, I was given the blessing of typing up some of the Master’s voluminous English correspondence with hundreds of seekers across the globe, all the while absorbing as much as humanly possible. Every moment was precious.

Almost seven wonderful months went by, and then, one full-moon night in the Rajpur garden, he asked me if my mother loved me. *Three times!* I said yes. *Three times.* He gently informed me, “tell your mother that her son is coming home soon.” I was thunderstruck as I had hoped this paradise on earth would never end. The next morning as I stood alone out in the garden, I silently wept, feeling like a baby separated from its mother, watching as my tears dropped in slow-motion into the Indian dust at my feet. The all-knowing Master walked out of his bungalow straight to my side, placed his hand on my shoulder and assured with a smile and love coming from his eyes, *“I’m not leaving you!”* He kept His promise.

On the poignant eve of departure, I asked Maharaji, as he was known, if it would be all right to start a wholesome vegetarian restaurant back in Vancouver to serve the community. I sensed a void in the society I was raised plus I needed a meaningful vocation. He gave his blessing, saying, “The Master-Power will be extending all feasible help and protection, both inside and outside.” What more was wanted?!

“Because you now have experience,” he added, “you will not be just repeating what you’ve learned like a parrot.” It’s only what we live and practice that will give power to our words.

Little did I know what was in store and how marvelous, bumpy and strange my journey would be! With his blessings, a hope, a prayer, my remaining seven dollars and a \$1,500 loan, I started Canada’s very first vegetarian restaurant, the Golden Lotus in the fall of 1967. It was the right thing at the right time and place. Despite almost failure a few times, and some

difficult lessons, the restaurant began to thrive and became very popular. The loan was repaid. However, I dearly missed the Master's enlivening presence and within a year, left the Lotus with others and was back in India again, with no idea how long I would stay. At the end of five months at the ashram and traveling with the Master again, in 1969, I was introduced, had an arranged marriage, and fell in love. In that order! That story, *Arranged Marriage* unfolds in Chapter 41. Six weeks later, Ratana, my new bride, bravely accompanied me to Canada where we worked side by side as equals, beginning a foundation upon which our future family and ethos would be built.

The natural food revolution that we helped pioneer, began in the 1960s and '70s as a rebellion against denatured, highly refined, chemical-laced food and the western meat-centric diet. This revolution began in several places simultaneously across North America and Europe by other young idealists; together we founded the first trade association of its kind, Organic Merchants, or OM in Vancouver in 1971, a precursor to bigger things. We were pawns of destiny.

Our enterprise grew like topsy and faced many challenges along the way. Little did I know then, but over the decades that little seed grew and went on to become a global leader in the organic food sector, directly employing over 750, and indirectly, thousands more.

Chapter 76, *Full Circle*, describes some of the challenges faced, which were both harrowing, amusing and miraculous. We were tested time and again, but not meant to fail, as the cause for people and planet was bigger than any individual. The enterprise grew and grew, gaining many plaudits along the way. Despite frequent obstacles, the company, Nature's Path Foods, was consistently ranked North America's top organic breakfast brand for the past 25 years and independently voted as "Canada's 100 Best Companies to Work For," and "100 Greenest Employers." Its modicum of success enabled significant support for endangered species, hospitals, universities, community gardens and food banks across the continent. It's like my dad told me as a boy, *"Always Leave the Soil Better Than You Found It."* It was our duty. Of course, the idea of Soil is synonymous with Mother Earth and our inherent need to protect Her.

The affection received from the Masters, the ethical values learned, and the blessings showered all through our lives, are more valuable than any material wealth or the name and fame of this temporal world. Truly speaking, love is our most precious heritage. Love is the only commodity that increases when shared.

Now, having reached my eighth decade, aware of the inevitable union of soul with the great soul of the universe, the reins have been handed over to son Arjan, daughter Jyoti and other capable leaders. Dues have been paid. What's left is meditation and service, painting, tending the garden and leaving a legacy.

Although my story may, on the surface, seem to be autobiographical, it has a higher message than my life's passage, which, like yours, is a mere blink in the eye of God. Some readers—both old and young—have written how an earlier incarnation of this book helped bring to life for them the spiritual path and a new direction. Not from me, but from God and Guru overhead, within. *What is Guru?* It means Bringer of Divine Light. Nanak said, *"Shabd (Divine Sound and Light) is the Guru, and Surat (attention) is the disciple."*

Behind the waves on the surface of this life, has been the refuge of daily meditation,

wherein I, or anyone, under right guidance, may discover the healing, Ringing Radiance—the all-pervading Music of the Spheres, the Unstruck Sound, known variously as Naam, Logos, Word, Shabd, Tau, Kalma, or Saut-i-Sarmadi by past Masters. What that is and how to experience it, will be explained ahead. Meditation strengthens the positive qualities of the soul, solves problems and helps us to become better human beings. However, meditation's main goal is the attainment of real Self-knowledge—not of the egoic self, but union of the drop to the Ocean of All-consciousness. The next step is God-realization. Uniquely, higher Masters never charge for their teachings or initiation nor call themselves Masters! They are just too humble.

My connection with the great Kirpal was ignited in New York City in 1964, and did not end when He chose to leave the mortal coil on 21st August, 1974. Book I concludes here.

In Book II, Chapter 52—*Divine Darshan*, is a brief chronicle of long separation, from agony to ecstasy. Despite being in leadership roles, unbeknownst to others, I was being hollowed out by longing for the presence of the beloved. Simultaneously, there was divine presence. I cannot explain this mysterious paradox and purifying fire!

Four years after Sant Kirpal Singh's passing in 1974, a misadventure in the Indian desert, all options exhausted, I entered for the first time through the tall open gates of Kirpal Ashram in Old Delhi's Vijay Nagar. I was drawn by a burning desire to know the truth of succession, I discovered to my great delight, a haven of peace, but more importantly, the Master again in his renewed form of Sant Darshan Singh Ji Maharaj, the acclaimed poet-saint. He was there all along, but I hadn't yet the eyes to see. My extraordinary times and experiences with him over the next eleven years of his remarkable life, you will find ahead.

After Sant Darshan Singh merged with the Eternal Flame in 1989, there was renewal again. One light bulb fused and another took its place. One Light, many lamps. The Present Master, Sant Rajinder Singh Ji Maharaj, grandson of Sant Kirpal Singh, is deeply steeped in the eternal mystic tradition. His additional background in engineering, IT and technology, enabled him to communicate and spread the science of spirituality to the modern world on an unprecedented scale. His every action has been flavored by care and love for others, seeing as he does, the God in all, saint and sinner alike. My travels, experiences and interviews with these two Masters fill the second-half of *Moth & the Flame*. All three—Kirpal, Darshan and Rajinder, have each been outwardly very different, yet each diffused the same universal light, love and competency to one and all. By competency, I'm referring to the ability to awaken souls and transmit firsthand inner experience of inner Light and Sound to their students at initiation.

Shortly before his physical demise in 1989, Sant Darshan Singh personally exhorted me to publish my manuscript into book form as soon as possible. In early 1999, when I left the finally completed thick manuscript with the Living Master, Sant Rajinder Singh, I really didn't think he would read it due to the demands on his time from seekers across the globe, but felt that even if he held and put his attention on it for just a few minutes, that would be more than sufficient. Four days later, to my astonishment, he called me into his office and said, "Arran, when I began reading your manuscript, I couldn't put it down. I read continuously for the next thirteen hours!" He even made a few minor corrections. Imagine having a Master edit your work!

Journey to the Luminous—Encounters With Mystic Adepts of our Century was printed and published in English in 1999, and soon sold out, with all proceeds donated to charity. A Spanish edition, *Viaje a lo Luminoso* is now on its third printing. *Moth & the Flame* is the updated and expanded black and white version of *Journey to the Luminous* along with many new color images.

Work on the Hindi version began in 2017 by my young friend Akshay Bishnoi, a gifted architect and devotee who felt there was great value in it for India. In 2020, the Covid-19 global pandemic struck and snatched away millions over the next 2-3 years. Unfortunately Akshay was one of them in 2021. He called me the day before he died from the Jaipur hospital which had just run out of oxygen. Akshay knew he was going to the eternal realms with his beloved Master, something he had presciently written about two years earlier. Despite the huge personal tragedy, Akshay's young widow Akanksha, while completing her PhD, continued work on the book but by the end of July 2022, around 80% was still left untranslated. I wondered how or if a Hindi version would ever manifest in my lifetime.

Fortunately, the universe conspired to make it happen when my dear Chotabhai (“younger brother”) and well-known Indian film director, Ajay Kanchan, in whom I saw both empathy and command of languages, heard the inner call to make this chronicle available in India, and although not formally initiated, Ajay committed himself to this daunting seva. When he realized the magnitude of the task ahead, how much work and time it would take (Ajay happens to run a successful marketing firm in Delhi), he felt hopeless and despondent. On September 24, 2022, first, Sant Rajinder appeared to his inner vision, and then Master Kirpal, specifically telling Ajay in no uncertain terms that he was on the right path and would have to complete the translation within four months! Normally this would have taken two years. It was an urgent work that, as Sant Kirpal told Ajay, Hazur (Baba Sawan Singh) wanted done and shared in India where it all originated. Ajay got it completed and proudly presented two handsomely printed and bound copies on January 26, 2023 as promised!

Similarly, French, Hungarian and Spanish versions have all been done in record time. I am grateful to the translators for their loving and dedicated service—to Agnes Reythey in Budapest, Amina Bamana in Paris, Robert Charbonneau in Montreal, Luis Infante and Maria Consuelo in Bogota and last but not least, Ajay Kanchan in New Delhi. I'm also indebted to all those who helped with assisting in this labor of love—typing, editing, proof-reading, advising, designing, formatting and publishing—notably Lucas Bleackley Petter in Vancouver, and Shafique Ul Hasan of Skyline Book Publishers in Delhi. Much earlier, editorial assistance was given by Joan Morgan and Eliot Rosen. Thanks.

And last of all, I dedicate this lifetime work to you, O seeker, that it might shed a little light on your path in your own search for truth, clarity and unity.

*If any wayfarers discover some resonance,
a little glow, some fragrance in the pages ahead,
then my job is done, with gratitude.
The imperfect “pipe” takes no credit
and begs a thousand pardons
wherever his “rust” has tinted the pure elixir.*