

Anastasia NOYKH



of Shambala  
SENSEI

**Anastasia Novykh**  
**Sensei of Shambala**  
Серия «Sensei of Shambala»

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**Аннотация**

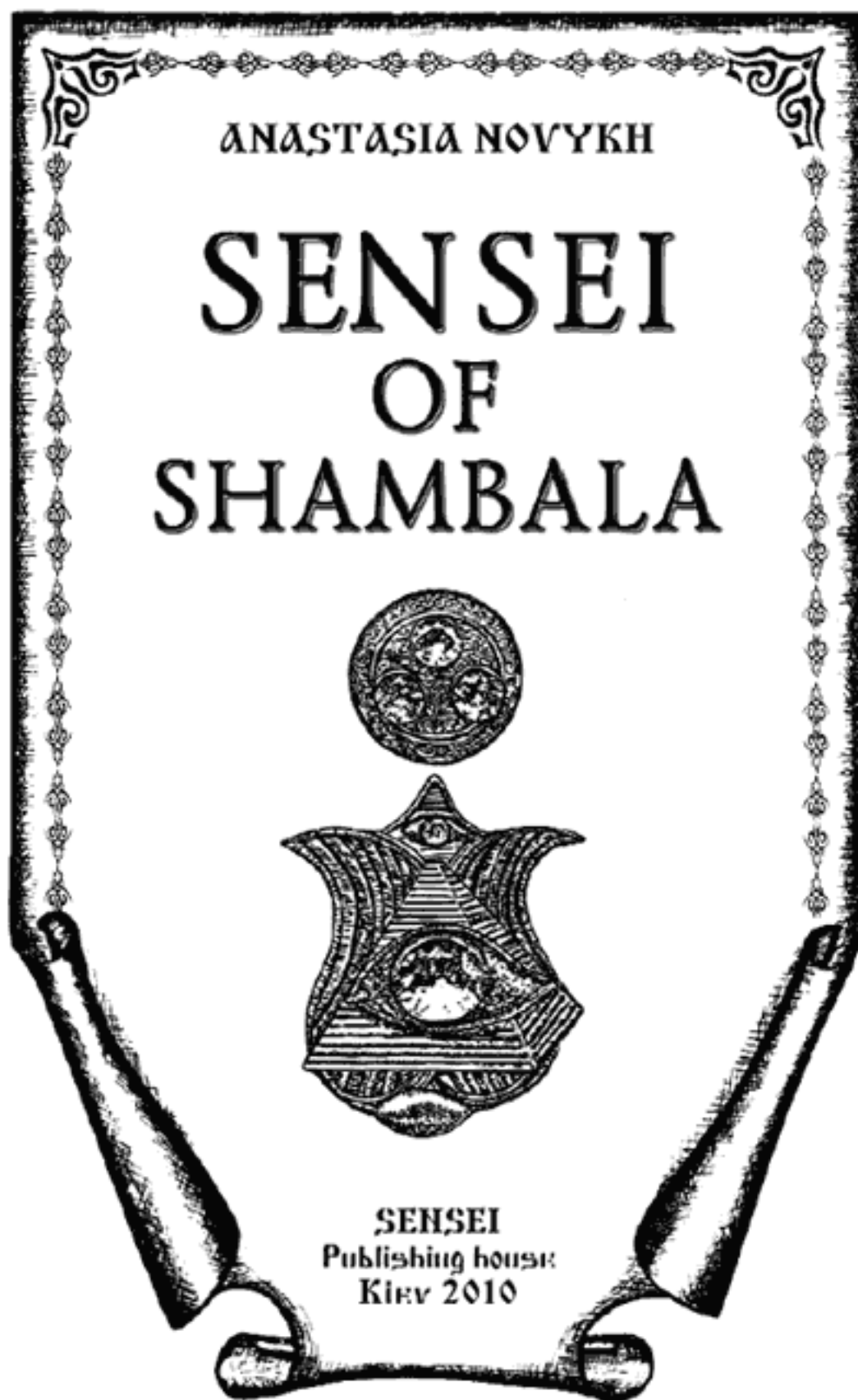
The 'Sensei of Shambala' is a powerful and positive book. After you read it you may feel an unusual inspiration and good spirits. And what is more striking, it is universal and actual for every age in the full sense of the word! Everybody finds his answers for innermost and personal questions. This book reveals a unique world view and contains valuable knowledge. It awakens huge spiritual forces in human souls and helps to resist atrocity and injustice of this world. This book fills a human life with inmost sense and changes the destiny for better.

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# **Anastasia Novykh**

## **Sensei of Shambala**



## ‘Sensei of Shambala’ by Anastasia Novykh, Book I

At first glance, the story of a Youth meeting **Wisdom** seems naive. But this ordinary perception is just an illusionary barrier, a skillful trap set up by our ego on the path to the perfect **Spirit**. The one who will overcome it will **discover** more for himself than **he** would dare to hope for. Hail to the winner because **Knowledge** will be his prize, because **truth** will be unveiled.

This book was written based on the personal diary of a former high school senior girl reflecting events of the years 1990—1991.

The books of Anastasia Novykh are phenomenous for the fact that every person sees as if in the mirror something of his or her own, purely personal. This book discloses the inner world of a sixteen-year-old girl, who suddenly encounters death face to face. This pushes her to reconsideration of her own life and search of answers to the everlasting questions: “What are we living for? What is the sense of life? Who am I really? Why are most of people on earth – believers? For if they believe, they must be hoping for something. What is the path by which the great achieve their inner immortality? What is hidden beyond comprehension of the Human essence?”

Ungovernable energy of inner exploration leads her to meeting with a most erudite man, a martial-arts master and a very enigmatic Person, Sensei. Unordinary soul-staggering world-view of Sensei, his fascinating philosophy and knowledge of the world and of humans, dynamic martial-arts, worldly wisdom, alternative medicine, ancient spiritual practices (including effective techniques for tackling negative thoughts), human abilities phenomena. This and much more does the heroine learn, having touched upon the world of Sensei. But most importantly, she finds answers to her principal inner questions and learns from the personal experience that peoples are granted the most powerful creative force from above – the power of belief and love.

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## Prologue

The silent, warm summer night has long entered its sovereign rights, relieving the bustling day with all its important and troublesome running about. Its deep, dark veil was calming and sweetly lulling all living beings, slowly submerging them into a deep sleep. This charm didn't affect only hearts in love, for whom eternity seemed to pass in one instant. On the sea shore, in an uninhabited place, a lonely fire crackled, casting mysterious shadows. A formless creature sat alone in front of it. Its only witness was an infinite universe, brightly illuminated by starlit worlds, and the moon, inviting eternity with its silvery sparkling path on the water surface. All around was such a stillness that even the sea couldn't dare to disturb it with the soft noise of its waves. Time seemed to have stopped, losing all its meaning. It was the moment of eternity.

The creature started to move, making strange sounds, and slowly divided itself into two stirring parts. Human speech could be heard in the air, "God, how good can it be sometimes in this sinful world."

"Honestly, I don't even want to leave."

"That's what I'm telling you."

The fire was blazing brightly, jealously trying to win back a piece of space from the night. Its luminous glares with variable success were first swollen by the darkness and then fearlessly running far ahead, illuminating nature with its natural tones.

"So, what will your decision be, Rigden?"

"My conclusions are, of course, sad. But I think it is still worthwhile to wait a little for a final decision... I suppose it's worthwhile to remain here for some time."

"It's not all that bad. If you decide to stay, give them another chance and let me..."

Suddenly, from nowhere, a light breeze flew over the sea, breathing life into the moon lit path, which charmingly sparkled with its silver hues, alluring leading into a hazy distance. It was as if nature was teasing the creature, embracing it on the one hand with its eternity and on the other with its natural earthly beauty. Apparently, some innermost mystery, known only to it, was hidden in this delicate gust.

# 1

It's not a secret that destiny guides a man by a complex journey of the finest interrelations, natural phenomena, and intricately bound paths of occurrences and coincidences. At the very end it leads to a concrete event, a final crossroads of the life's path. And here a human dares to hope that he will get a chance to choose. But the same implacable power of destiny, through a net of logically bound circumstances, unnoticeably helps him to make his choice. Because a chain of events, by its plan, inevitably should draw together people who don't know each other yet and who, living in their own small world, don't even realize it at the moment. But this acquaintance will make them work together, mutually seeking the same goal, generating a great number of key events in the lives of other people.

I shared the same fate. I was born in a remote Russian village. My parents were in the military, fulfilling their duty in an honest and fair way. And their command, in the same honest and fair way, was sending us into different parts of our boundless motherland – the Soviet Union. That's how our family got to Ukraine, to "the country of blooming chestnuts," where we settled down in a rose-scented miner's land.

I should say that I'm quite an outgoing person with various interests. It was never a problem for me to find a common language with new people. That's why I quickly joined a group of like-minded people in my new home. Together we had different hobbies, including ballroom dancing and going to the cinema, cafes, and the theater. In general, as they say, my life took its normal course.

Everything was nice... up to a certain moment. Destiny has its own plans. Unexpectedly for my relatives and moreover for me, at the very peak of my youth, it threw me into such an arduous trial that I almost died in it because of complete hopelessness and animalistic fear of death.



## 2

At the beginning of the last school year, I started to have headaches that were strong and chronic. My parents took me for a checkup. Doctors discussed the results mostly alone with them, which disturbed me a lot. It gave rise to shady concerns that one after another started to torment my soul. This complete uncertainty was the worst thing of all.

And all those circumstances were terribly scary up to a certain point, when I overheard by chance my mother's conversation with a doctor:

“...But there should be some way out, shouldn't there be?”

“Of course, a way out can always be found. You see, this small tumor can grow progressively larger over time, and that's very dangerous. It is best to perform an operation now before it's too late... Besides, in Moscow, there is a very good clinic that specializes in these kinds of problems with skilled specialists. The only problem is that it's hard to get there. The waiting list is scheduled for years ahead. But the girl needs it, as you understand, as fast as possible. Otherwise... it's hard to predict the development of this disease, especially if it's a brain tumor. So me times one can live a year, and sometimes even longer... In any case, you shouldn't lose hope. Maybe you have connections that will let you get there...”

I wasn't listening to the rest of the conversation. Only one phrase was pulsating in my head: “One year... and the end!” Emptiness and hopelessness gripped my soul. Noisy hospital fuss was gradually fading out, giving way to a rising whirl of thoughts: “I will die in the prime of my life! But I haven't even started to live... Why me? What have I done to deserve this?!” It was a scream of despair. Tears streamed down my cheeks. It became unbearably stuffy in the hospital crypt, and I ran to the exit. The doctor's voice was ringing in my ears like a threatening echo: “One year! One year... One!”

Fresh air hit me in the face with its dizzy aroma. Little by little I came to my senses and looked around. After the rain, trees stood as if in a fairy tale, with brilliantly sparkling pendants. Purity and renewal was shining all around. Warmth, coming from the ground, was covering the asphalt with a light haze, creating an unreal impression of what was happening. God, how wonderful everything was! This beauty of nature that I had never noticed before now gained some new meaning, a new charm of its own. All small problems that had brought me so many worries every day now seemed to be so trivial and stupid. With bitterness and anguish, I looked at the bright sun, fresh green grass, cheerful bird flitting, and thought: “How foolishly I have spent my life. It's a pity that I didn't have time to do something really worthwhile!” All previous resentments, gossip, vanity – all lost its meaning. Now all those around me were lucky people, and I was a prisoner in a death castle.

For some time I was terribly depressed. I lost interest in school, everyday life, all of my previous hobbies. I was avoiding my parents, locking my bedroom door, and indifferently turning pages of books and magazines. I really wanted to cry to somebody, to tell someone how much I was afraid of dying before I had started to live. My closest friend was, of course, my mother. But how can a mother's heart endure such a soul-screaming confession from her child? One day, sitting at the table, alone with my heavy thoughts, I took up a pen and described all my feelings on a piece of notebook paper. I felt a lot better. Then I started a diary. Later on it became my best “friend” that patiently endured all my thoughts about my non-ordinary destiny.

The only thing that somehow distracted me from my gloomy thoughts was communication with my friends. Of course, I didn't tell them anything about my disease. I just didn't want to see them, like my parents, with mournful eyes and faces full of condolence. That would have killed me once and for all. Their funny chatter amused me, they discussed problems that seemed complete nonsense. Now I looked at everything in the light of some different vision, jealous of any

human who should leave this mysterious, still unknown world in his heyday. Something in me had definitely changed and broken down.

## 3

When friends finally managed to drag me out to the cinema from my voluntary home imprisonment, I was surprised to find that I started to perceive even movies completely differently. It was a time when martial arts just started to come into fashion. In newly opened cafes, they showed the most popular martial arts hits for a ruble or three. The athleticism of the athletes, unusual cases of their self-recovery, their will, and their spirit power intrigued me. I knew that it was all the play of actors. However, I couldn't stop thinking that many scenes were based on real phenomenal facts from the history of mankind. That stimulated me to search for articles, books, and magazines on that issue. My evident interest in these phenomena spread to my friends. With hunting passion, they began to find rare books wherever they could.

Amazed by the extraordinary capabilities of these people and by the depth of their understanding of this world, I felt that it had awakened in me some kind of internal power... hope, vague anticipation that the death of my body **is not my end!** That insight so touched me and inspired something inside of me that I quickly started not only to get out of my depression, but even felt somehow a new impulse for life even though my mind, like before, was aware of inevitable death because few people had ever recovered from cancer. But the new understanding didn't dispirit me and didn't cause fear. Something inside of me simply refused to believe in it. And what's most interesting, it unconsciously started to resist my heavy, dark thoughts.

This new feeling again made me revisit my life and how foolishly I've lived it. I didn't do anything bad in it. But it was absolutely obvious that every day, every hour, I was justifying my own egotism, selfishness, laziness. I wasn't striving to know myself but rather how to gain more points in society through that knowledge. Or, to make a long story short, in all my life, studies, and family life, only one thought was hiding behind it all: "Me, myself and I." And the realization that this small bodily empire of "me" was coming to the big end, that is, to the real death, gave birth in me to all that animal fear, horror, despair, and hopelessness that I had been so intensively experiencing in the last couple of weeks. I realized that death is not as fearsome as its foolish anticipation. Because in reality, it's not the bodily death you are waiting for, but the crash of your egotistic world, which you've been building so hard all your life.

After that realization, I clearly understood that the life I lived and what I've done in it is a sand-castle on the sea shore, where any wave will wash away all my efforts in a second. **And nothing will be left**, only emptiness, the same one that was before me. It seemed to me that most people around me also waste their lives with sandcastles, thoroughly building them, some closer and some further from the coastline. But the result will inevitably be the same for all of them – one day all will be destroyed by the wave of time. But there are people who sit on dry land and impartially observe this human illusion. Or maybe not even observe, but look afar, over it, at something eternal and unchanging. I wonder, what do they think about, what is their internal world like? After all, if they have comprehended this mortality, it means that they have realized something really important, something really worth spending their life on.

These questions began to worry me more than anything else. But I didn't find answers to them. Then I turned to the literature of major world religions. The Great figures, such as Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed, were those who had already been observing from the shore. But how did they get the re? It's written everywhere: by concentration, faith, prayer. But how? Explanations of their followers were so confusing, so odd and veiled, that my brain was falling asleep when my eyes were making efforts to read the same words ten times over. The teachings of those geniuses were interesting, but they only reflected the common truth of all mankind. Perhaps the essential grain of knowledge was hidden in between the lines. But, alas, I was just an ordinary human being, not

the “chosen” one, so I wasn’t able to grasp it with my mind although reading of certain lines did evoke something inside of me.

Then a new question arose. Why are there so many people in this world who believe? If they believe, it means they hope for something in the future. In all world religions, there is life after death. Even after throwing away the legends and myths, then possibly there is really **Something** – but what? How does it express itself? How does it manifest itself?

I’ve tried to get deeper into the paths of religion but just got more confused. The only thing that I understood was that there is one thing that unites all the world religions – and it was the power of faith of the people, their attempts to understand God and themselves. And I discovered that people were searching for the very same thing in their search, and they achieved some results on their way, and in fact many of them didn’t belong to any religion. They just were wise and talented individuals.

Then, what’s the matter? Why is this phenomenon inherent to human nature? What’s behind it? There were plenty of questions, but too few answers. That gave me cause to search further.

Gradually, everyday life was getting back to normal. Moreover, some unusual courage started to arise in me because in my case I had nothing to lose. Therefore I had to quickly realize all my desires. “If I could spend every remaining day effectively, that could substitute for my whole life.” Arming myself with such a motto, I started to look intensively for books on that issue, go in for sports, catch up with school, and attend different hobby groups. All my days were fully filled up, and I didn’t have time to think about the bad. Even though the headaches reminded me about the worst, despite it all, I kept eagerly searching and attempting to understand everything new that I didn’t know or wasn’t able to do.

While my parents were trying to find different loopholes in order to get into the Moscow clinic, my ungovernable strivings brought me to study Kung-fu. Our group didn’t miss any film about our eastern martial arts heroes, and with a sinking heart we watched triple somersaults, overturns, undercuts, and jumps of sportsmen. And when they started to open Wushu schools in our town, where they were actually practicing Kung-fu, our group got extremely excited. We visited one school after another. But in the first school, the teacher was too angry and ignorant; in the second, the teacher considered himself to be almost Bruce Lee, even though he was only teaching ordinary wrestling mixed with boxing; in the third, the guy was simply a cheater and a drunkard. We were looking for a teacher who would be like the heroes we had seen in the eastern martial arts films. And, as they say, the one who’s looking will always find. But what we found was more than unexpected because it surpassed our ideals even in our dreams.

## 4

After a few unsuccessful visits to several schools, we were told to try a school located in the outskirts of our town, near an old mine. We didn't believe that we would see anything better than what we had seen in the town center, but something was definitely drawing us there. After spending half a day questioning a great number of locals, we finally found it.

"Indeed," in a low voice confessed my friend Tatyana, "this place is, of course, quite scary. If we will be practicing here, I will die from fear. I already have goose bumps."

I too felt a light shiver, even though the weather was quite warm. Approaching a dilapidated old building, blooming with moss, even always-silent Slava couldn't keep quiet:

"Well, well! I think we've just wasted our time. Don't tell me that someone is practicing in this out-of-the-way hole. I bet, only mice are practicing here at night."

Andrew, whose face and figure were slightly reminiscent of the Russian Schwarzenegger, concluded significantly, "Generally speaking, the outside form always corresponds to its contents. It's very likely that we'll reinforce that saying."

And having pulled the handle of a worn-out door, he heard crafty words cited by Kostya with regret: "I'll bet the doctor's in your body yet."

With loud laughter, we rushed into the sports hall. But our cheerful mood quickly changed to mute amazement because inside there were around sixty people.

"Oho," Slava whistled, "there you are!"

But I wasn't listening to my friends' puzzled remarks. My eyes were immediately fixed on a fair-haired man. Even though that man didn't differ from the others standing in the crowd, something in him was definitely intriguing me. "God, his face looks so familiar," I thought. His appearance reminded me of someone I knew well. But who? I started to dig intensively in my memory, recalling all my friends from different cities, my numerous relatives and their friends. But all my attempts were in vain. I was awoken from that wild stream of memories by the melodic voice of Sensei (the Teacher) who turned out to be that mysterious young man.

"So, newcomers," he said with a smile, "why do you stand like a girl after her first kiss? Here you either practice or leave. It's your choice."

That voice!... I was so amazed. For sure I'd heard his voice once somewhere. But where and when?

Our small company went together to the locker rooms. And all that time, buzzing thoughts continued to demand satisfaction of their useless curiosity. Getting ready for the training, I tried to ask other people around me about Sensei, to find out where he was from. But it turned out that nobody knew anything clearly. This intrigued me even more.

Unlike slow Tatyana, I quickly put on a white kimono and went to the sports hall hoping to find more answers there. But there I got only more questions. What struck me at first was the fact that there were people of all ages, from fourteen to fifty years old, and that was strange by itself. I'd not seen something like that in any previous school. I thought: "What can unite so many people of different beliefs, ages, and life experiences? If it's only the martial arts, then what kind of master and psychologist do you have to be in order to attract and interest all of them?"

When the training began, the second thing that struck me was the ideal discipline and friendly atmosphere that surrounded us. Nobody here forced anybody to do anything, but no one ever thought of breaking the discipline. Everyone sincerely tried to do his best, and that was astonishing in comparison with our previous unfortunate experiments. Our company tried to show ourselves only from our best side, intensively puffing, groaning, and sweating. But even during that activity (painful, as it seemed, for my badly trained extremities), one thought didn't leave me: "How was it possible to create such a discipline without, as they say, carrot and stick? What have all these

people found here for themselves that they train their bodies with such enthusiasm? And why do they all train in silence?!" My feminine mind finally rebelled. "Why won't anybody say at least one word!" For my curious, talkative nature, this was a complete disaster. But I hoped to gain at least something during the training.

After the warm-up, we heard three strong claps of the sempai (senior disciple). It was a kind of a signal. People started to form a circle by sitting on their knees on the floor. When everybody sat down, the Teacher went out simply and easily to its center. He began to tell the history of the Tiger style as if he were telling it not to the crowd of silly disciples, but to his old friends. For the first time, I learned that the Tiger style is the only style that preserved its original martial spirit without any changes.

It appeared in China. One of the Shaolin masters observed the behavior of tigers and created his own style distinguished from the others by greater aggressiveness and danger. The style has no sportive roots. Its martial spirit was transmitted from Teacher to disciple, changing his consciousness to the level when he begins to feel and to think like a tiger. By its wisdom it's only inferior to a more ancient style called Dragon.

"All right, theory is just a theory; it's time to warm up a little," Sensei said.

He called three fighters – strong, tall, athletic guys – to the tatami and demonstrated a couple of defense and attack techniques from this style. First he showed the moves at high speed, where the real blows were happening. Honestly, I, and probably many others too, didn't even notice when the Teacher struck the blows. All that my eyes could record was the fact that Sensei passed by three fighters and waved his hands for a second. I didn't even realize what had happened before they had time to fall. The same happened during the demonstration of defense techniques. The speed of the blows seemed to be unreal to me. And my brain, unwilling to comprehend that, suggested artfully: "Maybe they fell down on purpose, probably pretending." But it was impossible that the men's faces, distorted by pain, were faked. Sensei came up to them calmly and helped restore their breathing by poking his fingers into some points on their bodies. After that, the boys were able to recover from the pain and shock and continue the training. That entire scene was accompanied by silent contemplation of the amazed crowd.

After that the Teacher started to explain the technique of the Tiger style in detail, slowly showing each movement and the targets for the blows. I thought that these movements were too complicated to be able to be thrown in a split second.

Having split up into pairs, people did their best and repeated diligently what they'd just seen. A plump man of about fifty years old was puffing not far from me, comically ejecting his short hands and legs. His face, with chubby, bulged-out lips, looked like a big dumpling and was neatly shaved. His wise eyes looked through thick glasses. A small bald spot, with errant hairs turning gray, was shining on his head. "And how did he get in here?" I thought. "It's hard to tell by his appearance that he has been practicing martial arts all his life... What is he looking for here? Has he decided to master Kung-fu in his old age?"

My thoughts were interrupted by Sensei's voice correcting the attack technique of a pair of young, strong boys near me.

"Who strikes like that? What are you doing, Valentin Leonidovich? You are a future doctor, aren't you? You should understand why you strike, where you strike, and what is going on during this process. Your goal is to cause a painful shock, not just to flap your hands. A blow should hit the exact location of the nerve or nerve plexus. It should be instantaneous. The faster, the better. Why? To cause a spasm in the muscle tissue. In its turn, the transmitted nerve impulse, through reflex channels of the nervous system, will cause intense irritation of the nerve-knot, which will inevitably lead to inhibition of a certain part in the brain cortex. In other words, the man will fall into a stupor caused by the nerve shock..."

A crowd of curious guys began to gather around him during this conversation. Sensei continued to explain, “But the blow should be delivered taking into consideration that every human being has his own anatomical peculiarities. That’s why not everybody will be affected by an ordinary blow to this anatomical point. So in order to be one hundred percent sure, you should strike not with a straight “tsuki” (blow) but a blow with a twisted fist at the moment of the contact, so that the blow goes deep inside. As a result, a big “damage zone” will appear...

“This strike goes into the point between diaphragm and solar plexus. Why exactly there? Because there passes one of the twelve pairs of cranial nerves, the so-called “nervus vagus” or the vagus nerve. It not only passes that point but also forms the nerve plexus which forms two vagus trunks close to esophageal opening. And what is the vagus nerve? It is, first of all, innervations of respiratory organs, the digestive system, the thyroid and parathyroid glands, adrenal glands, kidneys. It also takes part in innervations of the heart and vessels. Therefore the correctly delivered blow to this point causes an intense irritation of the nervous system, which temporarily distorts functioning of the cerebellum. And the cerebellum, as you know, is responsible for coordination of all movement functions. Man is momentarily disoriented. In other words, it means that you have time to make a certain decision. For example, to deliver a not her blow or to run away.”

The last word caused a lot of selfish smiles on the faces of the surrounding people, including myself. “What? To run away?!” I thought to myself dreamily. “If I’ve just dealt such a powerful blow, I would, I would... wouldn’t chicken out, that’s for sure!”

At this moment, the Teacher looked at the smiling crowd and said seriously, “And why not run away, if that’s the best way out in this situation? In some cases it’s a lot better to get hit ten times in your own nose rather than to kill... to take somebody’s life.”

His words made me shake and turn red, ashamed by my own egotistic thoughts and megalomania. With bitterness, he brought me back to the tough reality of my existence.

“Because human life is invaluable,” Sensei went on, “your objective is to cause only a muscle spasm, a painful shock, in order to prevent the undesirable development of the situation. And in no way should you injure internal organs, break ribs or something else; that is, you should not cause serious after-effects to your opponent. That’s why we spend so much time here, in order to master the right technique of blows. Otherwise, if you deliver a powerful, uncontrollable strike, it is possible to cause great harm to the body or even to bring to death. What for?!... You should respect human life because one day you may happen to be in his place... Or maybe one day he will save your life. Because it is very likely that when you are in trouble it will be this human who will appear to give you a helping hand and save you. **Because life is unpredictable and anything might happen in it, even the most unbelievable, what you can’t imagine.**”

Throughout the rest of the training, I was very impressed by this peculiar, easily understood lecture of profound anatomy and unusual philosophy. It completely captured my thoughts, and from time to time I found myself thinking over what I had heard.

Three claps of the senior sempai meant the end of the training. When everyone traditionally lined up, he commanded:

“Dojo ni rei” (which means a bow to the martial spirit of the sports hall).

“Sensei ni rei.”

The Teacher also politely bowed in response and said, “We’ll meet as usual at the same time. And now whoever needs to, change, and whoever needs to, stay.”

“There you are! And who needs what? Who stays? I want, too...” I thought to myself. But the majority ran in single file to the changing rooms, carrying me along. Running past Sensei, I saw the chubby man in glasses approaching him.

“Igor Mikhailovich,” he said to the Teacher, with respect in his voice. “Concerning our previous conversation. Here, I brought something for you...”

The rest I couldn't hear in the noise of laughter and jokes of guys running close with me. In the women's changing room, a storm of emotions already began to roar, caused by the discussion of the most vivid moments and Sensei's explanations. All this was happening amidst women putting on many layers of clothes on their wet bodies.

A girl with bright curls was changing next to me. Getting acquainted with her, I asked, "Have you been training here for long?"

"No, only for three months."

"And does he often tell and show such things?"

"Well, probably when it's necessary. But, when he is in a good mood, he shows much more... Today it was nothing out of the ordinary."

"Not so bad, nothing out of the ordinary", I thought to myself. "I can't imagine what something special would be then?!"

"What style did he master, the Tiger?"

"Not only. I've heard from the senior guys that have been training here for a long time that he perfectly mastered the Dragon, Snake, Wing-chun, Cat, Mantis, and Monkey styles, and a whole range of other styles that I just can't remember."

I gave her a distrustful gaze, "When did he have time to master all that? He looks like a young man. People sometimes spend their whole life mastering just one style."

"I was also surprised at first," she went on. "But the guys say that, according to the Teacher, **a young body doesn't mean the age of the soul.**" My new acquaintance answered, shrugging her shoulders.

"Who is he, then?!" I started to become nervous, and my old thoughts, together with this new information, once again began tormenting my unsatisfied curiosity.

"An ordinary man," I heard in reply.

Having changed, our company crowded before the exit and contemplated with admiration the unusual technique of a couple of athletically built guys who were training with the others who had stayed. I'd never seen such genuine, naturally beautiful undercuts, overturns, elusively smooth withdrawals, even in movies. But what struck me the most was the speed of their movements. "Is it really possible to move at such speed and still be able to orientate yourself so well in space?" I thought to myself. "Great! And where is Sensei among them?"

Sensei turned out to be sitting quietly aside, looking through a pile of papers and books with bookmarks, presented by Dumpling. Two more men were sitting nearby carefully listening to the explanations of the Teacher. Then Dumpling unfolded a yellowed map, and all four inclined over it as if it were a priceless treasure. Sensei started to mark something there with a pencil, constantly commenting and explaining it. I really wanted to get my curious nose in there, but at that time we were gently pushed by guys trying to get out.

"Hey, guys! Why are you standing here? Don't you know the law of this dojo? You either train here or you stay on the other side of the door. If you want, go back in, and if you are going out, go out, don't disturb the others."

Together we streamed out outside. "It's not fair!" I thought jealously. "They've stayed, why can't we?" But, of course, I didn't say anything aloud.



## 5

We spent almost one whole hour waiting for the only bus in that district, strenuously tamping the earth that was called the bus stop. But the bus didn't come. So we walked to the tramway, which the locals said was fairly close: only some thirty or forty minutes of walking. But since we weren't familiar with the area, we spent an hour and a half getting there. But nobody paid attention to those unpleasant circumstances. Every body passionately shared impressions of the training.

"So," said Kostya smiling, "are we going to the next training?"

Almost simultaneously we all said, "Yes!" "I don't know about you," said Andrew, the biggest fan of martial arts among us, "but I think I found what I wanted, at least for now. Cool training!"

"Yes," Kostya interrupted him, "today I learned a lot more than during all our visits to different schools."

The guys nodded in agreement. Suddenly Slava stopped, tapped himself on the forehead, and said with horror, "Shoot! We forgot to ask how much it costs!"

Andrew placed his hand on Slava's shoulder and reassured him, "Don't worry, old man, I've asked Sensei. He said: 'The more the better. But not more than five rubles. Preference will be given to the pure gold of royal coinage'."

Everybody laughed. Slava even took a deep breath of relief, which was understandable because he was a good guy but from a poor family. He could not afford to pay for the training in the other schools. To get fifteen or twenty rubles a month meant a real fortune for him. Loudly recalling some episodes that happened during the training and the Teacher's funny jokes, we didn't even notice how we got to the tram stop.

## 6

The working week had begun. We got very interested in the vagus nerve story and body innervations in general. For the remaining days of the week, we tried to uncover details from our biology and anatomy teachers. But they didn't give us any concrete answer, saying only that most likely it had to do with advanced anatomy, which was studied in medical universities. This fanned the fire of our interest even more and gave us an impulse to search for these kinds of books through our friends and relatives.

All that time, I was trying hard to search through my memory in order to figure out where I knew Sensei from. I even took time and went through all my family photo albums. But my attempts were in vain. As before, life went on in a continuous search for answers to unknown questions.

We could hardly wait for the next training. So as not to be late, we departed two hours earlier. When our company arrived at the sports hall, we were surprised to discover that we weren't first, even though there was still half an hour before the training. There were thirty people already waiting, like us unwilling to miss something interesting right from the beginning. Our guys, getting acquainted with some of them, jokingly came to the conclusion that we, in comparison to those poor guys, live quite close by. Because they lived in such distant districts, some people had to spend almost half a day on their journey, changing a couple of different types of transport and wearing out their soles walking a great many miles. And only a few lucky ones drove here in their own cars.

"So, guys," Andrew concluded, "you may show off and yell that we are locals!"

Sensei arrived soon, surrounded by a group of guys. People started to smile and act friendly. Separate groups merged into a single crowd greeting the Teacher and entering the open sports hall. We also got caught up in this wave of good feelings. But our joy didn't last long.

At the very beginning of the warm-up, two respectable looking men walked in and, approaching Sensei, began whispering something to him in a familiar way. Having agreed upon something, the Teacher entrusted the senior sempai to continue the training, and having slipped on a jacket right over his kimono, walked out with them. From that point forward, there was endless suffering of our extremities.

The senior sempai, obviously planning to train us the same way he trained his muscular body, carried out a warm-up in a tough tempo, as if we were being prepared for a gold medal. There was such a difference between Sensei, with his graduated exercises, and the senior sempai, who tried to make us Olympic champions with a full set of medals before the Teacher returned. At the end of the warm-up, we heard the command to relax, which for some reason was named by the sempai the "dead body position." People in the sports hall, including me, fell down to the floor with such a loud sound that it really seemed that exhausted dead bodies were lying all around. Later, I found out that the sempai interpreted some commands in an unusual way because he was a policeman.

After that exhausting warm-up, we started to repeat after our chief instructor basic exercises mastering blows, blocks, and stances. I had the impression that I was in the Japanese army, where soldiers executed commands in an exact and simultaneous manner, loudly counting in reply in their native language.

When Sensei walked in, I breathed in with ease. He took his jacket off and continued the training as if nothing had happened. Having noticed a mistake made by a young man standing in the first row, he corrected him courteously: "The correct blow should be delivered with this part," he circled the area on the bones of the forefinger and middle finger. "This way... You shouldn't use these two neighboring fingers (ring finger and pinkie finger) because the incorrect blow can seriously damage your wrist."

And, already addressing the crowd, he added: "It's necessary to work hard and long on yourselves not just to correctly deliver blows, but also not to harm yourselves. A straight fist blow,

as I have already said, is one of the basic martial arts techniques. And without thorough preparation, the fist can be easily hurt. If you train every day, the flexor tendons of the fingers, which are located over here, will part over the sides of the metacarpophalangeal articulations II and III of the fingers in such a way that the bones will become protected and dense. Only then will you be able to easily deliver blows without harming yourselves.”

Someone asked him, “To achieve that, should we start hitting something very hard?”

“No need for such a sacrifice,” objected Igor Mikhailovich. “Start hitting a punching bag. Or, if somebody doesn’t have one, use a sand bag. I think everyone can make one at home. But what’s important is to slowly exercise the blow, gradually increasing speed. And don’t be lazy, really work at full power. Then the result will come.”

The training ended with another demonstration of new techniques from the Tiger style and practice of the previous moves. And again, after the training, puffy Dumpling posed questions to Sensei. There were many people around who wished to talk to Sensei or to listen to him. But Dumpling impudently crawled through the surrounding crowd, including us, and took the Teacher aside, obviously considering his question more important. Not being able to wait for the end of their conversation, we went home.

## 7

A couple of days later, we got a good news: somehow Kostya managed to get the university manual of anatomy through friends of his parents. Our joy was infinite. First, of course, we satisfied our curiosity about the vagus nerve by touching and detecting its routes in our bodies. Kostya wasn't too shy during this experiment and conducted his diagnostics right on Tatyana, making her squeak and us laugh. Then we examined more thoroughly the structure of our hands. And later we started to examine in detail, with evident interest, our bones, muscles, tendons, nerves, organs, and brain. I can't say that I didn't know it before. In general, we studied all of this during anatomy classes. But it was the first time that I looked at it from a different point of view. And it was the first time I was interested in it not because of school, but rather to know it for myself.

I really wanted to examine my muscles and joints in order to understand why and how we move. How do muscles take part in our exercises, and how are they reflected on our internal organs? What happens during the blow? What is pain from the physiological point of view? Why do people suffer at all? And finally, what is going on in my own brain? Perhaps, the last thought was the most important because subconsciously it had been tormenting me.

The guys commented on what we had seen during the training just as passionately, but they were motivated by their own reasons. We agreed unanimously that we didn't know anything in this sphere and that we should fill this gap together. In order to do that, we spontaneously created a special card game. We drew separate cards for bones, muscles, blood and nerve vessels, the lymphatic system, organs, and the brain. Then we made attempts to put that puzzle together, one by one, trying to identify them not just by name, but also by the corresponding functions. At first, of course, it was hard. But all this was accompanied by such jokes, such a passion that, whether you wanted to or not, you'd remember.

Before the next training session, we formulated a couple of questions on biomechanics of the blow and decided to ask Sensei after the training in order to find a reason to stay longer. But that day, life itself gave us an opportunity to do this without our secret conspiracy plan.

At the end of the training, Sensei organized free fights. People sat down on the floor, creating a big circle, and fighters were selected and invited by Sensei two by two into its center. Andrew was chosen, and his opponent was a novice, also brawny and athletically built, chosen by Sensei. Having made a traditional bow to each other, the guys started the fight. For some time, they fought as equals. But Andrew turned out to be faster and nimbler, and that let him win. The approving clap of Sensei meant the end of the fight. Our guy helped his competitor stand up. Bowing to each other and to the Teacher, they took their places.

And when more serious fighters began to walk out to the improvised ring, Andrew couldn't stand watching. Inspired by his recent victory, he volunteered to fight again. He lost almost immediately. This circumstance greatly fanned his dissatisfaction with himself. Infected by his emotional mood, our company screwed up all its courage and asked Sensei to stay for additional training. The Teacher answered smiling, without objections, "You know the law of this dojo: If you want to train, you stay and train."

That day, fortune was on our side because Dump ling was not present at the training to irritate us with his importunity. Access to Sensei was free, and we could ask him about all aspects of the training that interested us.

While the majority of the crowd was leaving, all the rest were perfecting their blows' weak sides. The ones we named "speedy guys" worked on their own level, and the rest of us on our own. But Sensei was closely watching all and correcting the mistakes he noticed. In the already deserted building, he showed us new kata (shadowboxing), which united the speed of undercuts,

blows, overturns, and sharp withdrawals. When I started to practice them, Sensei suddenly came up to me from behind and, putting his hand on my shoulder, said “You’d better not do this.”

I turned to him in surprise: “Why?”

At this moment our eyes met at a close distance. I had such a drilling feeling as if someone were looking through me from head to toes with an X-ray. I’ve never seen such a gaze. It was very unusual, piercing, and strange.

“Because.”

That answer puzzled me a little. I was standing quite confused, not knowing what to say.

Keeping silent for a while, he finally added: “It would be better for you to do these kata.”

Sensei showed me movements that smoothly changed one into another, with deep breathing following them. All that time I was repeating after him almost automatically. And when he went to help others, endless questions started to flash in my head: “What did he mean? Can it be that he knows about my diagnosis? But how?! I didn’t tell any of my friends, and so far I didn’t show it in any way during training.” And during this process of thinking, I made an unbelievable discovery. At school, home, at ballroom dances, I had sometimes a sudden, throbbing, continuous headache, but here, no matter how much I tortured my body, this headache had never appeared. “Why? What is the reason for that?”

Being deep in my thoughts while working on new techniques, I didn’t notice how people crowded around Sensei, having interrupted their exercises. And when I finally realized that, I joined the listeners in order not to miss something important.

“Can you tell us how we can learn a technique of the real blow, just by training our muscles?” Andrew asked.

“No. First of all, by training your mind,” Sensei replied.

“And what does it look like?”

“Well, to be clearer, let’s say it this way... A muscle is like a mechanism that executes its function. It has certain programs coming from the brain in the form of neuron impulses. As a result of the work of such programs, signals arise in the brain that cause contractions of a group of muscles. Thus it results not only in movements of extremities but also in complex moving acts. It means that our training leads to a purposeful perfection of our brain and therefore of our muscles. The better and faster the trained brain works, the faster and better the muscles work.”

“And what about the highest mastery of martial arts fighters?” Kostya asked, joining the discussion. “I’ve read somewhere that masters can deliver a blow before they even think of it. How does it happen and why?”

“Well, guys. You touch upon such a serious subject. But I’ll try to explain in a few words... The whole trick is not just to simply train your muscles but to imagine a concrete situation, or your opponent. And the most important is to know exactly where you hit, into which tissue, and what is happening inside of that body, what’s the power level of the blow, and so forth. If a man strikes thoughtlessly, just to practice, then all his efforts are in vain! A true fighter, while practicing on a maki-vara, first of all works with image. He imagines how the opponent opens up, and at that moment he delivers a blow, being conscious of all possible consequences. In other words, he trains his brain.”

“And what is happening in the brain during that?” one of the senior guys asked.

“The brain evaluates the situation through visual perception, analyzes it and makes a decision. Then it sends that command to the cerebellum or, in other words, to the motion center. And from there, through the nerves, the corresponding signal arrives into the muscles. All that activity is being fixed in the memory. Then, during the fight, this memory unconsciously returns but without a complex chain of analysis and commands in the brain. In other words, when an opponent just opens up, a master has already counteracted automatically. Let’s say it’s a different frame of mind, a different innervation, and different workings of the brain.”

“Does it happen on a subconscious level, from the physiological point of view?” asked Kostya, showing off his erudition.

“You are absolutely right. Complex reflex motion reactions proceed now on the level of unconditional reflex,” said Sensei smiling. He added, “in the school anatomy program such things are described as conditional and unconditional reflexes. The unconditional are genetic by nature. They determine the regulation of the internal medium of the body and preservation of the species. And to the conditional belong the acquired reflexes arising as a result of accumulated experience and new skills. But even they are based on unconditional reflexes. Human beings have a lot of unconditional reflexes, connections, reactions regulating the spinal brain, the after brain, and the middle brain, the subcortical sections of cortexes of the cerebral and cerebellar hemispheres...”

“And is ‘the Highest Art’ what you told us at the beginning?” Andrew asked with excitement.

“No, it’s only a first step to real mastery. In ‘the Highest Art,’ the major work is based on pre-vision. It is the work of epiphysis which is located above the cerebellum in the epithalamus area of the thalamencephalon.”

“And is epiphysis just a section of white matter?” asked Kostya.

“No, it’s the so-called pineal gland that weighs only one carat. However, it plays a huge role in the vital activity of the body. It is one of the most mysterious parts of the human brain and of the human as a whole. Unfortunately, science doesn’t know anything about its true functions.”

“And who does know?” asked curious Kostya.

“Those who need to know,” Sensei answered with a cunning smile and went on. “So, working on pre-vision, a master subconsciously obtains the ability to catch his opponent’s thoughts. It means that, as soon as the opponent thinks about striking somewhere, the master has already simultaneously taken the exact counteraction that is necessary. All that happens unconsciously, in a few split seconds.”

“I wonder if only masters of martial arts face this phenomenon of momentary speed?” Andrew asked thoughtfully.

“Why? Not only. Many people often face these phenomena of mind. Some acquire it after long special training. For example, circus acrobats that catch knives or arrows at great speed. Other people have experienced the influence of unconditional reflexes in their lives. Let’s say you are seriously scared by someone or something, for example, by a dog; you can momentarily execute a series of movements. And only later when the danger has passed you realize how fast you have done it. This ability is implied from the very beginning in human genes. Otherwise, people wouldn’t have survived in ancient times when they had to save themselves by running from mammoths, saber-toothed tigers, or other predators.”

We stood silent, enchanted by Sensei’s words. At that time somebody knocked on the door. It caught me off guard, and everything inside of me contracted. It wasn’t a time when people were out just for an evening walk. Sensei calmly opened the door under the watchful eyes of our company.

“Oh, it’s good that I’ve caught you here,” an unknown man greeted him shaking his hand. “I was just about to look for you at home. You see, there is such a case...”

“All right, wait a second,” replied Sensei. Turning to us, he said, “Guys, you have fifteen more minutes and then we have to go home.”

Half an hour later, we were standing outside, waiting for the others. Igor Mikhailovich closed the sports hall and quickly said goodbye to us, then drove off in a car.

“Well,” I was getting angry with myself, “I wanted to ask Sensei after the training about his mysterious ‘because,’ but it didn’t work out. I should have asked him in the sports hall. But there are too many curious ears over there. That’s the trouble!”

On the way home, everyone thought about his own experiences. And this was not strange, after such trainings there was always something to think about. Some of us thought silently and

some aloud. For almost half of the way, Andrew was trying to convince us or most likely himself that he had lost just by accident.

“It’s a pity that I didn’t have nunchaku with me. Never mind, I will bring them to the next training. And then I’ll show them!”

That spectacle promised to be really thrilling, as we knew how good Andrew was with nunchaku. It was his favourite skill.

## 8

Our company looked forward to this training like no other before. We came early. The sports hall was open. Some guys, having changed, began to warm up. Sensei stood aside and talked with enthusiasm to a gangly old man who was so skinny that his kimono was hanging on him like on a coat-hanger. Not far from them, together with a group of men, stood Dumpling. By the expression on his face, one could see that he didn't hear the funny jokes of his fellow company. It seemed like his ears had turned into a radar that was picking up the slightest sound coming from Sensei and the old man. "Gosh!" I thought with indignation, "He is here again!"

Following us, a couple of guys from our dojo loudly walked in, in an elated mood. They were accompanied by a proudly walking, untidy looking man, about forty years old, with a week's worth of old bristle on his face. The guys greeted Sensei and announced with evident pleasure:

"We have just met a very interesting man, a sensitive... His name is Vitaliy Yakovlevich."

At these words, the disheveled man made a ceremonious bow with his head and again put on his self-satisfied air.

"He possesses extraordinary abilities, and he politely agreed to demonstrate them to our group..."

Sensei made a polite bow in reply and said, "It would be very interesting to see."

"And very edifying," added Vitaliy Yakovlevich meaningfully, raising up his forefinger.

Our huge curious crowd began to gather around him. Meanwhile "the sensitive one," with an air of great expertise, took out of his jacket's torn pocket a dozen of common kitchen spoons wrapped in a piece of dirty rag.

"What do you think," Kostya quietly whispered to Andrew. "Where has this Neanderthal man got these goods of human civilization?"

"I think he has stolen them from somewhere, probably," replied Andrew.

"I wonder, does he even know how to use them?" Kostya asked, smiling.

Meanwhile, Vitaliy Yakovlevich, in an emphatic manner, undressed down to his waist and, having uncovered his wrinkled fat stomach, began to diligently stick the back sides of spoons to his chest. Our guys burst out laughing, and Kostya added:

"Wow! That's why they say that equipment in the hands of a savage is just a pile of metal!"

A slight wave of amazement ran through the crowd. Spoons got really stuck, and "the sensitive one" was now grandly walking with a puffed out chest as if it were covered with medals of honour.

One of the guys asked, "How are you doing this? How can you explain it?"

It seemed like this was the question Vitaliy Yakovlevich was waiting for. With obvious pleasure, he started to talk instructively about bioenergy and informational fields, biological human magnetism, its phenomenal manifestation only through chosen people, and its all-powerful influence. His speech finally reached its culmination. Walking in front of the astonished crowd with his naked torso covered with the hanging spoons and convincingly gesticulating, "the sensitive one" was passionately declaiming, "...this powerful, pulsating emanation born from the Power of the World's Universal Reason embodies the last step to the perfect spirit. It is able to surround the human mind with the power of its aura. And not only to separate itself from the human body but also to exist out of the body together with the soul. I would say, existence beyond the border is quite conscious. Having accumulated the energy of this cosmic emanation, I have discovered a fantastic super power in myself. I got an invaluable gift of magnetism, clairvoyance, and healing. I have the power to heal miraculously all diseases. I cure through an all-penetrating, omnipresent double flow of emanation, which appears to be an initial cause of all energy and informational



fields of the great Universe. With my positive pole I restore power, body, and human aura and also take away the evil eye...”

I noticed that, even though this peculiar lecture was not quite clear to me, my thoughts started to search for the ways of a possible cure in it. “Maybe he will be able to heal me?! Although, of course, it’s very hard to believe, but maybe...” Encouraged by the elusive hope, I started to listen much more diligently to the convincing speech of “the sensitive one,” already not paying any attention to his appearance.

“... My might, as I was perfecting it, became immense... Here, as you can see, this is one of its manifestations,” and he pointed out the stuck spoons.

It looked quite strange. Making circles around the listening crowd, he stuck his stomach out further and further and slightly leaned back, like a penguin. I looked at Sensei. He stood, with hands crossed on his chest and a slightly lowered head, probably already tired of listening. He was smiling ironically.

“... I achieved this perfection due to some mysterious knowledge that is not known to anyone on Earth except the chosen ones. On the basis of that secret information, I developed my own system of spiritual development. But it’s not available to every mortal. Even that one, who due to the hardest work and through the atonement of sins and privations will reach the tenth level of my system of perfection, won’t be able to realize by himself the great mystery of this teaching. Because it reveals itself only to best of the chosen ones. Only people like me who are able to unite the perishable body with the great spirit, the spirit of Universal Reason, possess the all-mighty of God!”

It seemed like those words were the last drop on Sensei’s nerves. Judging by his light wave of movements, it seemed to me that he would lose his temper and punch this man with so much force that even the so-called power of this “alien” wouldn’t be able to save him. But despite my forecast, Sensei, clearly enunciating every word, said:

“Mister, isn’t it too much responsibility to take on yourself? So far, you haven’t demonstrated to us anything that would have proved your words.”

“What do you mean, haven’t demonstrated?!” Vitaliy Yakovlevich demanded angrily. “Don’t you see this?!”

“All this is rubbish,” continued Sensei. “Any body can do it. And there is nothing extraordinary or special in it. You simply need to wash yourself more often.”

The whole crowd rolled with laughter. Kostya, hitting himself on the forehead, said in excitement, “Of course! I remember I’ve read about this trick. He just has a sticky and wet body; that’s why the spoons got stuck.”

The self-proclaimed Ruler of the Universe and the whole Earth became even more furious and shouted across the sports hall towards Sensei, “What? You are too young to make judgements about such great knowledge! What else can you do except flap your legs?”

Sensei gazed at him seriously. Then he came up and easily took one of the spoons that were slipping away. Everybody around them froze. The Teacher stretched out his hand, holding the thin end of the spoon, and started to make a series of breathing exercises, working on deep breathing. In a minute, his face relaxed and his emotions disappeared. His eyes changed, and it seemed to me they became fathomless. He froze for a split second, fixing his eyes on the spoon. His figure seemed to look like a great sculpture. And at that moment the spoon started to bend fast like a soft fading flower, as if it weren’t made from tough metal but from some plastic material. I couldn’t believe my eyes. Impossible, but it’s a fact!

Sensei regained his usual appearance in a few seconds and calmly said to the shocked Vitaliy Yakovlevich as he returned the bent spoon, “When you can demonstrate for us at least this simple trick, then we will listen to you with great pleasure.”

And quickly turning to the crowd Sensei added, “I would like to inform those who haven’t changed yet that the training will start in two minutes. The ones who don’t make it in time will have to do the push-up penalty.”

Having heard these words, we rushed to the changing rooms, outrunning each other, missing the most interesting part: how this newly born God-like bum recovered from his stupor.

“Senior sempai! Why are there strangers in side?!” We heard the voice of Sensei behind us.

During the warm-up I revised my thoughts: “How could I even allow the thought that this bum is able to help me somehow?! Well... But on the other side, in my desperate situation, all I can do is believe in miracles and hope for the best. Here you grasp at any straw just to survive. That’s why these silly thoughts arise, because of an internal, almost panic level of fear. No. I should control my self. Anyway, I will find a saving loophole. I’ll try to survive. I shouldn’t lose hope, and I will fight to the very end!” The most amazing thing was that my firm belief was based on some deep, subconscious feeling, on that something I was looking for so hard. But all this became apparent in vague guesses.

Meanwhile, the warm-up ended up and we started to exercise the bases under the supervision of the senior sempai. Sensei was sitting on a bench discussing something with the gangly old man. “I wish I could hear what they are talking about,” I thought to myself. But evidently those curious thoughts were present not only in my head. During the training, despite the fact he was a man with grey hair, Dumpling was always trying, as if by accident, to take a place closer to the Teacher. And with each try he caused in me an indescribable feeling of envy and jealousy. And judging by the accusing gazes of our guys, I was not the only one who felt it.

During the noisy and monotone basic exercises and loudly announced commands, I again got deep into my thoughts. “How did Sensei manage to bend the spoon? And why did he call that phenomenon simply a trick? If that were a trick, then, in my understanding, it should have been thoroughly prepared. But he just took the spoon and bent it with his gaze alone.”

I could say that I believed and disbelieved it at the same time. I believed because somewhere I’ve read about people who possessed such abilities. I recalled that there were described people-magnets. But any objects, regardless what material they were made of – wood, metal, plastic – would stick to them. I remember that I was amazed most of all by the weight those people could hold up: more than ten kilos!

It was a paradox, but I didn’t believe that I had seen all that with my own eyes, as they say, “live.” Or rather, this disbelief was caused by my reluctance to realize that this fact itself was real. Everything seemed so mysterious. I would have understood if our crowd had been hypnotized, had had it explained to use beforehand what we would see. But Sensei just took it calmly and did it. How?!

Nevertheless, the fact that it was possible was very important for me. It was some kind of, not yet known to me, firm platform formed by Sensei’s knowledge. And my subconscious was intensively grasping it in every way possible, resisting those antagonistic thoughts. I don’t know why, but I started to trust that interesting man. At least, he obviously knew where there is truth and where there is fantasy.

After the basics, finally came the moment long expected by our company. This part of the training we used to call “the free style program” because people, having split up into pairs, were exercising old techniques or some peculiar techniques from the previous trainings. Andrew picked up his nunchaku and being followed by our curious glances came up to the Teacher.

“Is it possible to do something against nunchaku?”

“And do you know how to use them?” Sensei replied with a smile.

“Of course!” bragged Andrew self-satisfied. “I haven’t put them down for four years. One could say, I eat and sleep with them.”

Andrew demonstrated a couple of, in our opinion, complex movements.

“Not bad,” Sensei said.

“And still, is it possible to do something against nunchaku?” Andrew repeated his question, obviously provoking the Teacher.

“Of course... For every Vijai there is a Rajah.”

“What?” Andrew asked again, not understanding the last phrase.

“I mean, for every power there is a counter-power. Nunchaku is not an exception.”

“Can you show me?”

“I can, but then it will not be fair, you with nunchaku against me... Take somebody else with you.”

We looked at each other with astonishment. Nevertheless Andrew went along to look for a partner, and our company to look for the second weapon. To our regret there were no more nunchaku. Instead of that, we found a lot of two-meter-long poles in the sports equipment room.

But although we found weapons fairly easily, finding a partner for Andrew was more difficult. Senior guys flatly refused the proposal to take part in this fight and laughed: “No, thanks, guy. You’d better do it alone.”

Finally, Andrew managed to convince a man among the newcomers. Meanwhile, Sensei was peacefully chattering with that skinny old man in the white kimono.

“Here, I found one!” Andrew happily announced to the Teacher.

“You have found one, great. Let senior sempai second us. At his clap, start to attack with full contact. Is that clear?”

That was all Andrew was waiting for. He nodded with obvious pleasure. Sensei walked out into the middle. Andrew stood facing Sensei, and the man with the pole chose a position from the rear right of Sensei. It came to a thrilling moment. All participants were battle-ready, except Sensei. He was standing relaxed, thinking about something and slightly playing with the tips of his black belt, embroidered with gold hieroglyphs.

At the senior sempai’s clap, Andrew zealously rushed into a frontal attack, spinning his nunchaku with the speed of the blades of a working propeller. Meanwhile, the other man jumped up quickly and started striking with the pole. What happened next happened in an instant. Sensei hadn’t changed his position from the moment the attack was begun but rather kept standing in a deeply thoughtful pose. As soon as his opponents achieved a critical distance with regards to his body, he, without changing his stance, quickly threw his hand forward... if “threw” is the right word because in reality his hand shot out like an attacking snake. The nunchaku folded, spun on it, and flew towards the second fighter. The Teacher accompanied them with a twist of his wrist, slightly changing the trajectory of the flight. The nunchaku made half a turn in the air, aligned, and like the butt-end of a stick, hit the exact middle of the forehead of the man attacking from behind. The second nunchaku’s stick, continuing its flight, hit the pole. And the pole, correspondingly changing its trajectory of movement, hit Andrew right in the head. As a result, two unsuccessful fighters clumsily fell down to the floor, not even realizing what happened. And Sensei continued to stand thoughtfully, as if all the turmoil around had clearly nothing to do with him. And then, having come to himself, he asked his “opponents” with care:

“How are you, guys? Did you get hurt badly?”

“No,” Andrew answered confused, intensively massaging a puffed out bump on his forehead. “It’s all right.”

The other man also nodded.

“I am sorry, I miscalculated a bit,” apologized Sensei. Coming up to his previous interlocutor, he said, as if nothing had happened, “You know, I have a great idea! What if...”

Meanwhile, observing the fight, the crowd buzzed in discussion with noises of laughter and amazement about such a quick fight. And one of the senior guys whom Andrew had asked to help

said with laughter, “Yeah right, Sensei miscalculated, aha! Don’t worry, guys, that’s all right. We went through such ‘miscalculations’ already many times, and all due to our own stupidity.”

When Andrew realized what had happened, he simply tormented Kostya and Slava with the same question: “How can that be? One movement... not even a strike?!” Kostya perplexedly answered, “How can we know? Sensei is over there, ask him.”

But the Teacher was always busy until the end of the training, first demonstrating new techniques, then showing complicated strikes to the senior guys, then answering endless questions, and at the end of the training talking to the old man. However, Andrew made up his mind to clear that up right then, no matter how.

We got that chance only when the supplementary training was over. We quickly changed and waited at the exit, like guards, as we decided to get what we wanted. But it turned out that Igor Mikhailovich and his guys were going towards the same tram stop. On the way, we started our interrogations.

“How did you manage to best two armed opponents with only one movement?” Andrew asked his sore question.

“Well, weapons have nothing to do with it. This is the technique of using the opponent’s force. By the way, it is used in many other styles, for example, Aikido, Jiu-Jitsu, Wing Chun, and others. You need only to catch a moment and use it right away.”

“In general it’s clear, but in this case, what style did you use?”

“Nothing special,” cunningly answered Sensei, shrugging his shoulders, “a little bit of everything.”

“But still?” queried Andrew.

“Well, here all you have to know is the physical law of acceleration, distribution of the gravity center in biomechanics, and a little bit of the Snake style.”

“Oho!” whistled Andrew.

“And what did you think? **All great things are ridiculously simple, but it takes a lot of hard work to master them.**”

While Andrew was thinking over that phrase, Slava quickly asked, “Is it possible to explain that case with the spoon?”

“Of course, it is possible,” Sensei said with a smile. “There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known.”

“So, what was that?”

“Ah, just trifles. There is nothing special in ordinary Qigong, or rather one of its modifications.”

“And what is ‘Qigong’?” Now it was my turn to ask a question.

“I’ve read somewhere that it is just a breathing technique,” Kostya added.

“Yes, many people think so,” replied Igor Mikhailovich. “But in reality, Qigong is a meditative and breathing system that allows a person to master his hidden psycho-physical potential. Though in fact it is one of the simplest types of spiritual practices.”

That phrase roused the interest of our company and something trembled inside of me after these words. But as soon as I opened my mouth to ask about how we could learn it, Kostya squeezed in with his favorite manner of verbiage: “Well, **’If but a friendly hint be thrown / ’Tis easier than to feel one’s way.**”

“Oh, you like Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, do you?” demanded Igor Mikhailovich. “Then, if you’ve read carefully, he also said the following: **’Now of the wise man’s words I learn the sense: / Unlock’d the spirit-world is lying, / Thy sense is shut, thy heart is dead! / Up scholar, lave, with zeal undying, / Thine earthly breast in the morning-red!’**”

At that moment, you should have seen the surprise on Kostya’s face. He was so much impressed by these words that he wasn’t able to immediately find the right answer. That was the

first person in his life (except his parents, of course) who talked to him at his ‘high intellectual’ level. “It serves him right,” I gloated in my thoughts. “He used to pose as the only man of great erudition in this world.”

“I’ve read quite a lot of books,” our ‘Philosopher’ started to defend himself, more trying to uphold his pride rather carrying on the topic of the discussion. “And it was written there that the spiritual world is only a fairy tale for kids.”

“Who knows,” Sensei said indifferently, continuing to quote Goethe, “**Parchment, is that the sacred fount whence roll / Waters, he thirsteth not who once hath quaffed? / Oh, if it gush not from thine inmost soul, / Thou has not won the life-restoring draught.**”

“Hmm! It’s easy to say ‘the life-restoring draught,’” puffed Kostya. Keeping silent for a while, he added, “As Moliere said, **Not all things that are talked of turn to facts; / The road is long, sometimes, from plans to acts.**”

“What do I hear?” Sensei joked, “**If we are too wise, we may be equally to blame. / Good sense avoids all extremes, and requires us to be soberly rational.**”

“It sounds familiar...”

“That is from Poquelin, his expression from ‘The Misanthrope’.”

“Who is that?”

“Well, Jean-Baptiste Moliere. Poquelin is his real surname.”

Even in the dim light of street lamps, we could see how Kostya turned red in the face.

“But... but... Eastern wisdom says that a really wise man foresees the end before starting any doing.”

“Absolutely right. In other words, it means that **a human being possesses mind, and his real power is in his thoughts**. Even in the modern world, to put it in scientific terms, you may find, for example, the confirmation of it in the saying of Tsiolkovsky, ‘A thought precedes an action, a fantasy precedes a precise calculation.’ As you see, in human society nothing has changed throughout the ages. And why? Because, as Valentin Sidorov correctly emphasized, **The nature of your thought is your own nature. / Master your thought and you will know yourself. / And you will be the ruler of your own.**’ The real power is the power of mind.”

“Yes,” uttered Kostya, concluding, “A head without mind is like a flashlight without a light bulb.”

“Wonderful words of Leo Tolstoy,” agreed Igor Mikhailovich to the complete surprise of the ‘Philosopher’. “If you remember, he also has this beautiful saying, ‘Thought is the beginning of all. And you can rule your thoughts. That is why the most important thing in self-perfection is to work with your thoughts.’”

Kostya nodded uncertainly. It seemed to hurt his pride even more. So, for the next twenty minutes we witnessed a grand battle with aphorisms, quotes, sayings of native and foreign writers, poets, philosophers, scientists, and I didn’t even know most of their names. Meanwhile, I was trying hard to join this dialogue with my essential question, and I was impatient to ask it. But Sensei’s polemics with our ‘Philosopher’ flew uninterrupted, gradually reaching its culmination. I have already got completely angry with Kostya that he took such priceless time just to satisfy his mania of brilliant erudition. But he was so possessed by the discussion that it seemed nothing else in the world existed for him.

At the very end, already coming to the tram stop, after probably going through all his memory, he recited his favorite expression. “Well, as Villon said, **I know all, save myself.**”

“So, **You gaze today, while You are You – how then tomorrow, when You shall be You no more?**”

“And who is that?” Kostya almost screamed, completely losing his temper.

“Oh,” drawled Sensei with pleasure, “that was Omar Khayyam, a famous Persian poet and philosopher, and a great scientist who was considerably ahead of his time. His full name is Ghiyath

al-Din Abu'l-Fath Omar ibn Ibrahim Al-Nisaburi Khayyami. He lived in the eleventh century. His wisdom was highly esteemed even by the Seldjuk rulers of Iran, though he was from Khorasan, a small village near Nishapur. He had very interesting philosophical thoughts. According to his views, the Soul is eternal. It came from the Now here into the human body and will return to the Nowhere after death. This world is a strange land for it."

"I wonder," said Tatyana, joining the conversation, "where is the soul located inside of the human body? Just like this philosopher thinks, in the heart, or not?"

"No, he thought that the heart was born on the earth and it is only a part of mortal human flesh, although it's the best and the most 'spiritual' part. Through the heart in particular speaks the soul. But the heart, in his opinion, knows only this world and existence... He has the following interesting lines, when the heart asks the soul about the mysteries of the Nowhere."

Sensei reflected on it for a bit and said, **"I sent my Soul through the Invisible, / Some letter of that After-life to spell: / And by and by my Soul return'd to me, / And answer'd 'I Myself am Heav'n and Hell.'"**

"And what is that 'letter'?"

"It is believed to be 'Aleph' 'a first letter in his native language; it's also the number one. As he thought, it is a symbol of the One Existing, a symbol of the Universal Unity." Having looked at Kostya, Sensei ironically added, "What else can be argued about?!"

Kostya was completely confused, not knowing what more to say. I hastened to use that opportunity and exclaimed in a single breath, "How can we learn that system of techniques to master the hidden psychophysical potential?"

"It's very easy. There is no secret at all. The most important thing is, as they say, to have a great desire, and the chance will come soon."

"So, can we learn it from you?"

"Of course."

"And when can we start?" asked Andrew, apparently thinking the same way as me.

"Well, if you are so interested in it, you are welcome to join. I devote an hour and a half for these exercises, twice a week."

"How much does it cost?" asked Slava.

"Do you think it's possible to evaluate spiritual knowledge with money?" said Sensei, surprised. "You guys pay too much attention to this 'paper'. We train just for ourselves, for our own spiritual development. If you want to train, come and train."

Our company fixed in detail a date and a time of the next meeting.

"Eugene will show you the way," added the Teacher.

Eugene turned out to be a tall, lightly-haired, athletically built guy, one of those 'speedy' guys always with Sensei.

"We certainly will come," Andrew answered for all of us.

At that stage we said goodbye to each other. I was beside myself with joy. Finally I got close to what I had been looking for for so long. It seemed I needed to make just one step and maybe I would be able to cross over this abyss and climb out to the solid surface of Existence. I felt that intuitively, with a sort of sixth sense. Although my mind didn't see any real chance to survive. Despite that, as they say, the Soul was singing.

All the way, the guys passionately discussed today's training and what awaited us the day after tomorrow at the spiritual training. Enthusiasm overfilled everyone but Kostya. He was puffed, like a turkey, with gloomily knitted eyebrows.

"Kostya, will you come?" asked Andrew, clapping him on the back.

"I'm not sure, maybe we shouldn't go," mumbled the dissatisfied 'Philosopher'. "We're not the circus clowns to learn those tricks. We'll just waste our time for nothing there."

“Are you stupid, man?” Andrew retorted ‘politely’. “Where have you seen a circus clown who can bend spoons just by looking at them?”

“And who teaches others to do it for free,” Slava added his strong argument.

“That’s what I’m saying. You must be insane! That distresses me!”

“And yet I understand “most kindly would you be,” our discontented ‘Philosopher’ sarcastically replied.

“All right, guys, don’t quarrel,” said Tatyana. “You should better advise me how to convince my parents to let me go to this training.”

“How?” answered Andrew. “Like in this joke, ‘A daughter came back home late and her father asks her, What would you call that? The girl replies, I don’t know what it’s called, but from now on, it will be my favorite hobby.’”

Everybody laughed. Having agreed upon a new meeting, we went home.

## 9

We waited impatiently for that day. Finally, on Thursday our company arrived in full in a good mood at the destination point. Arriving at the stop, we discerned two men silhouetted in the dark.

“Oh, there is Eugene over there,” said Andrew merrily.

As it turned out, Eugene was with his friend Stas. Having greeted each other, we moved into the unknown, or to be more exact, pitch-dark direction.

“They should’ve at least hung lamps here,” remarked Tatyana, once again stumbling over something.

“Aha,” agreed Kostya, “it’s not a residential area but a real steeplechase zone.”

“Why should they waste the government’s money for electricity?” grinned Eugene. “Besides, we already know everything around here perfectly by touch. Moreover, it’s unlikely that strangers would like to come to this area, especially by their own will.”

“And why is it so?” asked Slava anxiously.

“This place is unusual, remote. Not every beast will run over here, not to mention people. And dogs, do you hear how they howl?”

And really, somewhere close by in the village, a couple of dogs were drawlingly howling.

Tatyana slightly shivered, grabbing my hand.

“And dogs feel danger well,” he continued.

“Come on, stop scaring people with fairy tales!” said Andrew, trying to make a joke.

“They aren’t fairy tales at all. Try to live here for some time, and you’ll find out what sort of devilry is going on here... if you survive, of course.”

After that statement, our good mood quickly disappeared. For some time we walked silently looking around. But no matter how much we tried to peer into the pitch darkness, nothing could be seen. Only dim silhouettes of old houses. And what was strange, there was no light there. Dogs alone with their mournful howls showed at least some signs of life in this Godforsaken place.

“Where are we going?” panicked Kostya.

“Where?” mimicked Eugene. “Right where you’ve ordered... to the black glade.”

“Where?!” we exclaimed, horrified, almost at once.

“Gosh, don’t yell like that” said Eugene, rubbing his ear deafened by our wild outcry. “I told you, we are going to the black glade.”

And stumbling over another pothole, he slightly cursed, “What the hell?! Evil forces try to set a trap everywhere. It’s very likely that they will drag away those who remain behind.”

Tatyana, who was holding my hand just to be safe, grabbed Kostya’s hand with her other hand. I felt how she started to tremble all over. Slava, slightly lagging behind after those words, quickly moved ahead of us. Andrew was walking silently and looked around.

“Where have you seen evil forces and a black glade?” Kostya uttered with fear. “Why should they be here? Absolute nonsense...”

“Where? Over there!” Eugene confidently waved his hand somewhere to the side.

“Why have we come here?” mumbled Tatyana with fear and trembling. “We could have been at home, without caring about anything.”

“But you wanted to learn black magic. And now you say ‘Why have we come?’” Eugene answered, shrugging his shoulders.

“To learn what?” we asked again all together in amazement.

“I can’t believe it!” Eugene made a surprised face. “Didn’t you know that Sensei is the most powerful wizard, so to say, the right hand of Lucifer?”

Now it was our turn to stare wide-eyed.

“Who? What? And who is Lucifer?” An avalanche of questions rushed on Eugene.



“All right,” our guide grandly stopped the torrent of our questions. “I will explain everything to you now. ‘Lucifer’ means an angel of light, the right side of God. For the majority of people, he is known under different names. For example, Satan or Devil, whatever you prefer. He is a ruler of the Earth. Second, I emphasize once again that Sensei is his right hand. And his power doesn’t have boundaries. For him to bend spoons, it’s nothing. He is able to do such things that you can’t imagine even in your most dreadful dream! And third, you are very lucky that you can master what you want. You can get extraordinary abilities almost for nothing. Just for a soul about which you don’t know anything and you don’t even feel. But why am I telling you all this? You will see it now yourselves.”

“There you are! I think we got into trouble,” Tatyana really got scared.

“That’s it!” cried Kostya in a low voice. “And what did I tell you? We shouldn’t have come, but you didn’t listen. I told you something’s fishy here. But I was also stupid, a dummy, I dragged myself with you. What should we do now?”

The panicky fear of Kostya spread to Slava, and he whispered to us, “I think it’s high time to run away from here.”

“Where?” hissed Kostya. “Do you remember how many times we turned, going in different directions?”

“I don’t care!” declared Andrew. “Let’s assume that Sensei is a wizard; that’s his personal problem. What’s important is that he knows much more than me. I won’t miss an opportunity to learn that.”

“Me either,” I responded. I thought to myself, “I shouldn’t care at all because this is my chance to survive. And if not, then I have nothing to lose anyway. But maybe it will help...”

We came out on a curved path along a long, lonely fence. At that moment moonlight shone through the clouds. Suddenly, right before us a big black cat jumped on the fence, his eyes burning like yellow-green lights. Caught by surprise, Tatyana and I screamed and hid behind the guys’ backs. However, our defenders also froze, rooted to the ground. Only our guides alone continued calmly on their way. Eugene, having seen our stupor, mysteriously whispered, “It’s just the beginning.”

The cat, without paying any attention to us, grandly kept walking along the lone fence, and as if on purpose, in the same way they were guiding us.

“Fie, fie, fie,” spit Slava over his left shoulder.

“You should have made the sign of the cross,” Andrew said sarcastically.

“Sounds good,” Tatyana licked over her dry lips. “They say, if a black cat crosses the road, you should hold on to one of your buttons. Then the evil forces won’t even notice you.”

Just to be on the safe side, I touched a button with shaky hands. Our company hurried to catch up with our fellows, continuously looking at the dark shadow of the cat.

The path took us to a small glade. The big full moon was ominously creeping out from the clouds. What we saw completely shocked us. In the middle of the glade, with his back to us, stood a man in a black garment with a hood thrown over his head. His figure phosphoresced with the faintly-cold moonlight. Over it ascended light smoke. All around was a weighty, eerie silence. Looking at this scene, we all lost our ability to speak. In that moment, the big black cat jumped right to our feet, stopping all possible movements of our extremities. The last thing our frightened small group managed to do was to instinctively grab our saving buttons. Jumping off in a cheeky way, that beast rushed to the dark figure and started to rub against his feet, to our unspeakable horror.

Looking at such a sinister picture, everything in my mouth dried up, and a shiver ran along my entire body. In spite of my desire to run away, my body stood still, unable to move. I looked at the guys. Tatyana almost crawled over Kostya and grabbed him with a death grip. Kostya himself looked like a plaster monument. Slava stood with an open mouth and wide-open eyes.

Even Andrew, despite his earlier optimism, was stamping out with his teeth a fine, nervous quiver. His face was covered with sweat.

Eugene, looking back at us, obediently went up to the dark figure. Raising his hands, he solemnly pronounced, "Oh Great magician, wizard and sorcerer, ruler over all the nations, whose power and might over all land, water, air, and fire stretches over the entire Universe. Your loyal disciples have fulfilled their holy duty. Take in your bosom these lost souls, in order to restore your true and fair authority and power on Earth!"

Eugene made a low bow. During his speech, Sensei turned to him in surprise.

"What? What?" he asked. "Which might, which power? What are you talking about?"

Eugene and Stas both rolled with laughter.

"What's the matter? What are you laughing about?" asked Sensei, while smoking a cigarette. "And where are the other guys? Have you met them?"

Drowning in laughter, Eugene waved towards us, "They are still in a stupor over there and can't come out."

"What kind of stupor?" asked Sensei, not understanding and looking into the dark. "What nonsense have you told them?"

But Eugene couldn't stop laughing, hopelessly waving his hand.

"What a clown!"

"Sensei, don't you know Eugene?" replied Stas, dying laughing.

Looking at all that turmoil, Andrew was first to understand what was going on. Shamefully pulling his hand away from the button, he sighed with relief.

"Well, guys," said Andrew, coming out from the darkness to them. "That was great. The joke was good, but who's going to wash my pants now?!"

This comment provoked an even bigger storm of laughter. Sensei said with a smile, "What did this clown make up this time?"

Andrew started to tell in detail how this "guide" led us through the village, changed according to his stories into the Brocken mountain. We also joined him, enriching the story with our impressions. At the very end, our entire big company, together with Sensei, roared with uninterrupted laughter, recalling our recent feelings.

"I just came earlier today," explained Sensei, laughing through tears. "The light in our village was cut off. Probably the cable was damaged somewhere."

"What a story," Tatyana uttered with her clear voice. "I don't want to mention what we suffered from Eugene, but there was also this cat!"

Meanwhile, the small ball of our big fear sat peacefully, frightened by human laughter.

"It's Samurai," Stas waved his hand and explained. "Sensei's cat. He always follows him."

"Stas, you should have clued us in to what was going on," Andrew said with a smile.

"How?" he shrugged his shoulders. "You dashed aside from every shadow, and if I were to start making faces, we would have had to search for you all over the village."

The guys laughed, having imagined this picture.

"I say," Eugene justified, "it was an ordinary joke. Like Ostap Bender said, 'The most important is to bring confusion into the enemy's camp... Because people most of all are afraid of the unknown.'"

"That's right," said Sensei. "**Fear begotten by imagination sees danger even where there is no danger at all.** There is one ancient eastern legend about fear. A wise man met the Plague on his way and asked, 'Where are you going?' It answered, 'To a big city. I have to kill five thousand people there.' In a few days the same wise man again met the Plague. 'You said that you'd kill five thousand people but you've killed fifty thousand,' he accused. 'No,' objected the Plague. 'I've killed five thousand; the others died from fear.'"

Having discussed all the funny details of this journey and having dispersed the myth of our unjustified fears by humor and laughter, we switched to more serious topics. Our group was joined by three other guys: Ruslan, Yura, and Victor (senior sempai). A little later came Nikolai Andreevich (“Dumpling”), who turned out to be a psychotherapist. Meanwhile we were talking about Qigong.

“What does the word ‘Qigong’ mean?” Slava asked Sensei.

“Well, translating this word literally from Chinese, Qigong refers to work with the energy of the air, because ‘Qi’ means ‘wind, gas, breath,’ and the syllable ‘gong’ means ‘work, action, or deed.’”

“And this system was invented by the Chinese?” asked Andrew.

“Not really,” answered the Teacher. “It is the Hindu system of self-regulation, which migrated to China at the beginning of a new era.”

“I’ve read that there exist different types of Qigong.” As always, Kostya put in his remark. “I think there are two different schools.”

“There are a lot more of them,” said Igor Mikhailovich. “In the modern world there are plenty of different schools of Qigong. For example, Confucian, Buddhist, medical, military...”

“Medical?” I shuddered. “What does it heal?”

“Many diseases.”

“So, we need only to breathe the right way?” Andrew interrupted my next question.

“Not only. You also need **to think the right way**. There is a saying that ‘a thought guides Qi, and Qi guides the blood.’ Blood is like the ambulance of the body; it includes all necessary medical supplies. In the very ancient medical treatise Huangdi Neijin, it is said that ‘when a thought rests in stillness it is free.’ It means that you can master Qi. **The human who thinks the right way has good health.**”

“To put it short, a sound mind can only exist in a healthy body,” Kostya made a conclusion for himself.

“Not really. I would say, **with healthy thoughts there will be a sound mind, and with a sound mind will be a healthy body.**”

“Could you please explain to me, you always emphasize the importance to think the right way, both during physical trainings and now,” remarked Andrew. “But for some reason, before I thought that all we need is just to act the right way. Because thoughts can be different during the choice of action: both good and bad.”

“That’s where you waste priceless time on the struggle with your own self. You shouldn’t have to choose between a good and a bad thought because you shouldn’t have any negative thoughts in your mind at all. The goal of the Highest Art, the Art of Lotus, is to learn the proper way of thinking; in other words, ‘to kill a Dragon inside,’ or ‘to conquer a Dragon.’ Have you heard of such an expression?”

“Yes.”

“That is the purpose. **The greatest victory is the victory over yourself. What does that mean? It means to win your own negative thoughts, to control them, and to control your emotions.** I repeat once again, *there shouldn’t be anything ne-ga-tive in your mind. Only positive thoughts! Then you won’t need to spend time fighting with yourself, and your doings will always be positive. Peace should be first of all inside of you. Peace and harmony.*”

“So, it means that human thought is reflected in any action?” asked Andrew, thinking about something known only to him.

“It is not only reflected, it guides all action. Because the thought is material.”

“Material?” It was Nikolai Andreevich’s turn to be surprised.

“Of course. It’s a much finer substance, not studied enough yet. But it does exist, it is real, its movements are traced. There have been many effective experiments on psychics and

psychic phenomena. There were experiments with our own psychics; for example, Nina Kulagina, Julia Vorobieva, and many others. I don't even mention the rich world practice. This research is conducted all over the world, although it is known by different names. For example, in England it is known as mental investigation. In France it is 'metapsychics', in countries of Eastern Europe 'psychotronics', in the U.S. 'parapsychology', in China 'investigations into extraordinary functions of the human body', and so on.

"And if you look deeply into the history of mankind, you will find there is much evidence that it was known from the earliest of times. In all mythical, magical, and religious views and teachings of people, a firm belief exists that it is possible to influence anyone and anything through thoughts, regardless of the distance, time, and space. In other words, generally speaking, this knowledge has always existed."

Nikolai Andreevich joined again in the polemics, "Well, now you have given us examples of local psychics who became known to us just recently. Why weren't there such people earlier in the Soviet Union? I've been practicing psychotherapy for many years. But studying the mind of different people, my colleagues and I have never come across such phenomena. It's true that recently there were people talking nonsense and considering themselves to be sensitives. And they even tried to prove it. But in reality, it was just their sick imagination, while real psychics didn't exist in the Soviet Union."

"Why didn't they exist?" Igor Mikhailovich was surprised. "They existed, and there were a lot of them! From time immemorial in Russia there existed many of such people. But how were they treated? In ancient, unenlightened times, very seldom were they considered saints, but in the majority of cases, those who refused to obey the church were burned in a fire, put on stakes, depending on the whim of the king.

"Only starting from the second half of the eighteenth century, after the opening of the Academy of Science, the phenomena of the psychic life of human beings started to be researched in Russia more seriously, from the medical point of view. And about one hundred years later, research in that sphere was conducted by many prominent scientists; for example, by one of the founders of your own science, Vladimir Mikhailovich Bekhterev. When he was the head of St. Petersburg's imperial military and medical academy, he himself financed the creation of an entire research institute for the study of brain and psychic activities.

"And during Soviet times? Almost from the start of its existence, supreme attention was paid to the study of psychic phenomena of the brain and of one of its main mysteries – thoughts. It can be proved by historical fact that those investigations were held by the order of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin under the personal control of Felix Edmundovich Dzerzhinsky in the special department of the Secret Service that was dealing with secrecy and protection of state secrets. This department even had a special neuro-energetical laboratory. This elite special department used in its work various healers, mediums, shamans, hypnotherapists."

"God, and why did they need all those 'healers'?" Nikolai Andreevich was really surprised.

"Well, all that was for the same reason: the extraordinary abilities of those individuals. They were able to manipulate human beings with hidden forces that significantly surpassed the abilities of any machinery. All these phenomena were very seriously examined! They sent even scientific expeditions searching for this knowledge: from the studies of the mysteries of ancient civilizations to the search for the legendary Shambala."

"Shambala... it sounds familiar... What is it?" Andrew asked impatiently.

"Shambala? Well, it is kind of an abode located high in the mountains. But it is famous because the group of scientists living there have long surpassed mankind in their spiritual, scientific, and technical levels."

“Now I recall,” said Nikolai Andreevich. “Legend says that Shambala is an abode of Wise Men. But what has science to do with that? Do these Wise Men study something in particular: astronomy or mathematics, or just philosophy?”

“In Shambala, they study only the most ancient primordial science, the Art of White Lotus, which includes everything, and exact sciences as well. Moreover, it is a source of all sciences studied by mankind.”

Nikolai Andreevich distrustfully looked at Sensei.

“What do you mean, ‘only the most ancient’? The majority of exact sciences appeared quite recently; well, maybe two or three hundred years ago.”

“You are wrong. All this knowledge was given to people time and again for the development of their civilizations, in ancient times as well. Long before written history there were other human civilizations that achieved a level of development much higher than ours now. Some of them were destroyed, some reached the Absolute. However, remnants of their existence are still being found today. Read about strange archaeological findings and you’ll become certain of that. In the future, people will find even more interesting proof of what has happened a long time ago on the globe. A lot is written in ancient literature about the existence of this knowledge. For example, ancient nuclear explosions, the results of which scientists now find in the most ancient strata, precise maps of the stellar sky, identified planets that weren’t discovered by us, the ‘vimanas’, aircrafts, and so forth. It means that this knowledge was given to people before and it originated from one source: the science of Shambala.”

“And how far ahead is this science compared to modern knowledge?” Nikolai Andreevich asked arrogantly, crossing hands over his chest.

“Considerably far ahead,” replied Sensei simply. “Much farther than you can imagine. But to put that into perspective, I will give this example. At the time when people still piously believed that the Earth stood on three whales and the Sun turned around it, the scientists of Shambala had already conducted scientific experiments and different tests on the Sun. Modern civilization is still very far from that, and it’s not clear whether it will ever reach such a level. Why do you think people at the peak of their power so actively searched for Shambala? For instance, in the span of time known to you, such celebrities as Alexander the Great, Napoleon, Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin and so on, searched for it. Because according to all ancient legends and myths of different cultures, all the knowledge of the Universe and cultural heritage of extinct civilizations is concealed in Shambala.”

“I wonder why was it searched for only by tyrants?”

“Not tyrants, but people striving for absolute power over the world. All people in power possess true information, they knew and know about the existence of this abode, about the existence of this powerful knowledge concealed in it. They perfectly understand that the real power over the world is concentrated in Shambala. That’s why many people searched and still are searching for it. However, Shambala itself never gave anyone the possibility to conquer the whole world. It balanced, in a way, certain forces. And if a man standing at the peak of his power zealously tried to realize his dream of domination over the world, he simply ended his existence. Many people in power contacted with representatives of Shambala and fulfilled their requests. Everybody tried to help, because it’s simply impossible to give up the temptation to know more than mankind knows... Aside from public leaders, many ordinary people were also in search of knowledge of Shambala.”

“Does it mean that nobody has ever found it?” Kostya asked.

“Not exactly. The paradox is that Shambala has never hidden its existence. It doesn’t interfere actively in people’s lives unless it concerns something globally important for all of mankind and in particular for Shambala. But if it’s necessary, its scientific society decides itself whom it is reasonable to contact.”

“Well, let’s assume that. But if this abode of Wise Men doesn’t hide its existence, why couldn’t it be found by people who were at the peak of power? After all, they had everything at their disposal: equipment, finance, and human resources!” Nikolai Andreevich was puzzled.

“Yes, you’ve listed everything but their hard hearts and greedy thoughts. The unalterable rule for contacting Shambala is the high morality and purity of a person’s intentions. Only possessing the first of all these qualities can get someone access to the required knowledge.

“You see, we come back again to our starting point. Why can’t a human develop these phenomenal abilities consciously when it is quite possible? Because there is too much egocentrism, vanity, greed, anger, envy in him. In other words, too many qualities inherent to a beast, to animal nature. And if he comes into contact with this inexplicable psychic phenomenon, his animal nature turns against logic because it fears losing its power over the human mind. That is, animal nature tries to preserve its power over the human by rationalizing the phenomenon or criticizing it, when all that is necessary is simple childish faith.

“In some cases, of course, people spontaneously discover their phenomenal abilities, as a result, for example, of some kind of trauma, intense stress, and so forth. But, if negative qualities prevail in the human mind, it’s the same as if a Neanderthal finds a monkey wrench and, not knowing how to use it, applies it, from his negative point of view, to his friends.”

The guys smiled, and Eugene asked, “Will he hit them on their heads?”

“Even worse, on the big toes. Then his friends will completely forget about their heads.”

“And if at that moment a good, spiritual nature prevails in the human?” I asked with curiosity.

“And if there prevails a spiritual nature in a person, then he will correctly perceive new information on a subconscious level, using his phenomenal abilities for good intentions. Because in this case, **faith gives birth to knowledge, and knowledge strengthens faith. And without faith no miracles are possible in this world.**”

“It’s an interesting thought,” said Nikolai Andreevich, and remaining silent for a while, added, “I wonder, when Stalin came to power in our country, did he stop research into these phenomena?”

“On the contrary, this research became even more intensive and continued even after his death. This interest hasn’t waned, even to the present day. This subject is examined by many scientific institutes.”

“Hmm, but I’ve studied works of many well-known authors of different institutes specialized in my sphere, but I haven’t run into subject.”

“It’s not strange because this subject belongs to the sphere of hidden control over the masses. I think that you understand well enough how secret these works are. I can give you an example of the Leningrad institute named after Vladimir Mikhailovich Bekhterev. By the way, the work of Bekhterev was continued by his granddaughter, Natalya Petrovna Bekhtereva. There they study closely the human brain. And one of the priority directions of that institute is research into people’s psychic phenomena.”

“But the Leningrad institute is one of the leading in...,” Nikolai Andreevich froze, saying half a word, evidently shocked by his guess. Having coped with the excitement, he continued, “Well, but if it has been studied for so long, if the military has shown such an interest in it, and if huge amounts of money were spent, then probably there should have been huge scientific progress in psychic studies.”

“Progress?” grinned Sensei. “What kind of a progress can there be with such motivation? Their institute still can’t explain the phenomenal effects of this biomass that weights a little more than a kilo the cerebrum, just like other world scientists. It has remained, despite all of their efforts, the mystery of mysteries. Space is investigated much more than the human brain.”

“I agree... But you say that the sacred knowledge can be given only to people of high moral standards. Not all the scientists are complete egotists with excessive megalomania. For example, that very Bekhtereva...”

“Absolutely correct. And if you carefully follow the work of academician Bekhtereva as a human and a scientist, you’ll see that after having studied the human brain all her life, she came to the conclusion that she knows very little about it, about its potential. Nevertheless, the deeper she delves into the study of the brain, the more she believes in the idea of its extraterrestrial origin, that is, of its true source of origin, based on the exceptional complexity and superfluity of the brain. I’m pretty sure that soon she will publicly announce it, just as it was announced by the great scientists of the world not just in the sphere of psychic research, but in other natural sciences, for example, by Einstein, Tesla, Vernadsky, Tsiolkovsky, and other great scientists. This list is huge and would take a long time to go through. But all those people came to the conclusion that humans are very unique and mysterious creatures and in no way could have originated on the Earth from some kind of infusorium!”

We stood silent, slightly shocked by what we had heard.

“So, it means that the power of extraordinary, phenomenal people is concealed simply in their thought?” Kostya asked again.

“Absolutely right. **Thought is a real power. A lot greater than humans can imagine.** Thought is able to move planets, to create and destroy entire galaxies, which initially was proved by God Himself.”

Nikolai Andreevich smiled and said ironically, “It’s a very convincing answer, I can’t even argue with it.”

“Really?!” Andrew expressed our general amazement. “Then why don’t we feel the presence of this gigantic power in ourselves?”

“Because you don’t believe in it.”

“Is that so? The beginning was so complicated, but the end is so simple,” stated Kostya.

“What can I do? So is the nature of knowledge,” answered Sensei with a smile.

“Well, how can it be,” Slava was struggling to understand, “if I felt such a power, why wouldn’t I believe in it?”

“The whole trick is that first you should believe, and then you will feel it.”

“And what if I believe but don’t feel it?” Slava couldn’t calm down. “What then?”

“If you really believe in it, then certainly you will feel it,” answered Sensei and added, “All right, we can discuss it for a long time, but it’s time to begin the meditation.”

“And what is a meditation?” asked Tatyana. “I’ve read that it is psychic training during a trance. But what it actually is, I still don’t understand.”

“In a few words, a simple meditation is the training of thought and a deeper spiritual practice is the training of spirit.”

“Does it mean that thought and spirit are the same?” Kostya broke into the conversation again.

“No.”

The cat sitting close by stirred at its place, as if making itself more comfortable.

“Now we will practice the simplest meditation on the concentration of attention, so that you can learn how to control the Qi energy. But before that, I would like to repeat again for those who came late. In addition to the material body, the human also has an energy body. The energy body consists of an aura, chakras, energy channels, meridians, and special reservoirs for energy accumulation. Each of them has its own name. I will tell you later in detail about all of them, depending on the meditation.”

“And what is a chakra?” I asked.

“Chakra is a tiny spot on the human body through which different energies enter and exit. It works...so for you it would be easier to understand... like an iris or diaphragm in a camera. Do you know what that is?”

We nodded assent.

“It is the same way with chakras; they instantly open and instantly close.”

“And does all that energy really come out in that instant?” Slava was surprised.

“Well, it’s not like emptying a bucket of water. After all, a human being is an energy and material creature, where energy and matter exist by their own laws and time, however they are fully interconnected and interdependent. Any other questions?” Everyone was silent. “Then let’s begin. Right now, your objective is to learn to feel inside of yourselves the movement of air, the movement of Qi. You all think that you perfectly understand and feel yourselves. But I’m pretty sure that you can’t see right now, for example, the toes of your feet. Why? Because you don’t have internal vision. Internal vision, just like internal feeling, can be trained with time, in everyday training. That’s why we will start with the simplest and easiest meditation. We’ll try to learn to control thoughts and feelings, to evoke them and to guide them.

“All right, now make yourselves comfortable and relax. Calm your emotions. You may close your eyes, so nothing will distract you. Dissolve all your thoughts and everyday problems in the emptiness.”

As soon as that phrase was spoken, I recalled a pile of tiny household chores. “Gosh! Those impudent thoughts again,” I thought. “You were told to get dissolved.” I tried again not to think about anything.

“Concentrate on the tip of your nose...”

With closed eyes I tried to “see” the tip of the nose, guided more by my internal feelings. I felt my eyes slightly strain.

“Now breathe in deeply, slowly and gradually. First, with the bottom of the stomach, then with the stomach, chest, raising shoulders... Slightly hold your breath... Slowly breathe out... We concentrate our internal vision only on the tip of the nose... You should feel and imagine that the tip of your nose is like a small light bulb or small flame, and it flames up with your every breath out... Breathe in... Breathe out... Breathe in... Breathe out... The flame flares up more and more...”

At first, I felt a slight burning and pricking in my nose. There was such a feeling as if I were filled with something material, like a jug with water. Later it seemed to me that in the area of the nose tip appeared a dark distant contour of a purple tiny spot. At first, I couldn’t clearly focus on it. Finally, when I was able to get it fixed, it started to lighten up from inside. Moreover, when breathing in, the light narrowed, and when breathing out, it widened. When I got used to breathing this way, I heard the words of Sensei.

“Now switch your attention to another part of meditation. Slightly raise your hands a little forward, palms facing the earth. Breathe in as usual: through the bottom of the stomach, then through the stomach and chest. Your breath out should be directed through the shoulders, hands, to the center of your palms, where the chakras of the hands are located, and through them into the earth. Imagine that something is flowing through your hands, Qi energy, or light, or water, and then overflows into the earth. This flow rises from the bottom of the stomach up to your chest, and there it is split up in two streamlets and overflows into the earth through your shoulders, arms, hands. Concentrate all your attention on the feeling of that movement... Breathe in... Breathe out... Breathe in... Breathe out...”

A thought flashed across my mind, “What does it mean to breathe through the hands? How can it be?” I even panicked a little. Sensei, obviously feeling my confusion, came up and placed his palms over mine, without touching the skin. After some time, my palms began to burn, like two stoves, spreading warmth from their center to the periphery. And what astonished me most of all was that I really felt how tiny warm streamlets were pouring through my shoulders. In the region



of my elbows they weakened, but I felt them very well overflowing through my palms. Deep in these new, unusual feelings, I asked myself, “How am I doing this?” While I was thinking it over, I lost the feeling of the steamlets. I had to concentrate again. In general, it worked with variable success. After one of my next attempts, I again heard Sensei’s voice.

“Close the palms of your hands in front of you, firmly grip them so that the chakras of the hands are closed and the movement of energy stopped. Take two deep, fast breaths in and out... Lower your hands and open your eyes.”

After the meditation, when we started to share impressions, I understood that everyone experienced it differently. Tatyana, for example, didn’t see the flame; instead of it she felt some kind of light movement through her hands. Andrew had a shiver in his legs and light dizziness. Kostya shrugged his shoulders and answered, “I didn’t feel anything special, except a pins and needles sensation. But that is quite a normal reaction resulting from the oversaturation of the body with oxygen.”

“After the third, fourth breath in, maybe,” answered the Teacher. “But at the beginning the brain becomes fixed by the thought, in particular before the movement of the Qi. And if you listen to yourselves, relax and breathe in deeply, you will immediately feel a widening or paresthesia feeling in the head, or in other words, a certain process that develops there. That is exactly what you need to understand, what is moving there, and learn to control it.”

“Why didn’t I feel anything?” asked a disappointed Slava.

“What did you think about?” Sensei asked half in jest.

It turned out that Slava didn’t really know what he had been expecting, maybe some kind of a miracle. Sensei replied, “Right, that’s the reason you didn’t feel anything because you concentrated your thoughts not on the work but on waiting for some extraordinary miracle. But there won’t be a miracle until you create it yourself. You shouldn’t wait for anything extraordinary when you breathe correctly or concentrate on something. No. **The biggest miracle is you, yourself, as a Human!** After all, where does all great spiritual art lead? It helps you become human so that you gradually wake up and recall the knowledge that was given to you primordially. These meditations are only a means of awakening from spiritual lethargy and recalling long-hidden and forgotten information that you knew and used once upon a time.”

“What do you mean knew?” Slava didn’t understand.

“Well. For example, everybody knows how to read, write, count, if, of course, he is normal, without mental disorders. Right?”

“Right.”

“But first he had to be taught. While later he already easily reads, counts and so forth. That is, he already exactly knows that, for example, one plus one equals two, two plus two equals four. It seems so simple and real! But at the beginning he was taught all this, although in reality he simply recalled. These are hidden, subconscious abilities. Or, here is another easier example that has to do with the physiological level. If a man who doesn’t know how to swim is thrown into the water, he will drown. But it has been proven and confirmed by deliveries in water that a newborn baby, when lowered into pool, swims like any other animal. Does it mean that he already possesses these reflexes? Indeed. But later it’s simply forgotten. It is the same with a human. He has a lot of knowledge that he doesn’t even suspect he has.

“But... all of this works *only with a positive factor*. If some mercenary interests prevail in him, for example, to learn to cheat somebody or to be able to hit someone with energy from a distance, or maybe he wants to be able to bend everyone’s spoons so they throw him money for that, *he will never achieve anything*. Only when a person learns to control his thoughts will he really become human, and only then will he be able to achieve something.”

“So, does it mean that spiritual practice is a method of awakening a human?” asked Andrew.

“Absolutely right. Spiritual practice is only an instrument for repairing your mind. And the result depends on how you use this instrument. In other words, it all depends on the desire and skill of the master. And in order to learn how to hold this instrument in your hands it is necessary to control your thought, to concentrate it, and to see it with your internal vision. In our case it means to learn to control our breath, to feel that you breathe out through the chakras of hands. You need to learn to evoke certain feelings so that later you will be able to control the internal, hidden energy.”

“In my opinion, this is a hallucination,” remarked Kostya.

“Yes, a hallucination, if you regard it as a hallucination. But if you regard this energy as real power, then in reality it will be real power.”

“It’s strange, but why?”

“Because, I repeat, a thought controls an action. While energy itself is an action. That is all. Everything is very simple.”

We remained silent for a moment, while Nikolai Andreevich asked, “From the point of view of psychology, is it nevertheless an objective factor or a subjective feeling? For example, I clearly felt the concentration on the tip of the nose. But movements through the arms I felt only partially, where I was focusing my attention.”

Sensei started to explain something to the psychotherapist, using terms unknown to me, probably from his professional language. And as I understood from their speech, they touched on the problems of sensitiveness, including healing and diagnostics of different diseases. The latter interested me very much.

During this discussion, while the other guys were listening, Slava was carefully examining the palms of his hands. And as soon as a lengthy pause appeared in the discussion, he hurried to ask, “I do not completely understand about chakras. You said that there should be opening points. But there is nothing in here!”

The senior guys laughed.

“Of course,” said Sensei. “Visually there is nothing like that.”

Eugene, standing next to Slava, couldn’t help it, turned his hands around and seriously asked like a doctor, “Well, patient. Do you see bones and tendons there?”

“No,” replied Slava, still puzzled.

Eugene smacked his lips and mournfully said, “He is hopeless!”

The guys laughed.

“You see, chakras are certain zones on the human body that are more sensitive to warmth,” patiently explained the Teacher. “They, of course, can’t be seen, but this is real and can be registered by modern equipment. For scientists, just like for you, these zones are still a mystery: the cells are the same, the connections are the same, but their sensitivity is higher. Why? Because chakras are located here while chakra belongs to the astral body, that is, to another, more profound physics. A thought is a binding link between the astral and material bodies. That’s why it is very important to learn to control your thoughts... Then you will be able really to guide Qi moving inside of your body.”

The senior guys joined the conversation, discussing some kind of their own meditation issues. At the end of our meeting, Sensei asked Eugene and Stas personally to accompany us to the tram stop and help us to get to the tram.

“And no tricks of yours!” Sensei ordered jokingly to Eugene.

“Yes, sir,” Eugene saluted, “no freaks!”

Sensei hopelessly waved his hand. When the whole crowd moved laughing towards the path, the Teacher called the cat. But it grandly walked out in a different direction. Sensei tried to run it down to catch it, but to no avail. That prankster slipped into the nearest bushes. Squatting down, Sensei tried to pull it out. Using this opportunity, I came up to the Teacher, as if helping to catch the cat.

“Can you diagnose...”

Without letting me finish, Sensei replied, “You mean that wound in your head, my dear... Samurai! Now you want to scratch. You naughty cat. Come out!”

“How does he know?” I thought to myself, simply shocked. Inspired by hope, I thought, “If he knows about it, then maybe he’ll help heal it!” Meanwhile Igor Mikhailovich asked, “What is the diagnosis of Aesculapius?”

“My parents say nothing serious, something with vessels. But as far as I understood by eavesdropping in the conversation between my mother and the doctor, I have a malignant growth in the cerebral cortex. And it’s not clear how it will progress.”

“An impressive argument,” said Sensei, shaking off his hands and looking towards the bushes as he addressed the cat. “Well then, sit there as long as you wish. When you freeze, you’ll come out yourself!”

The crowd, noticing Sensei’s “trouble” with the cat, started to come back, offering to help catch it.

“Never mind!” Sensei waved his hand. “He will come home on his own.”

To my complete disappointment, for that small amount of time that could have been used for conversation, we walked with Sensei keeping silent until we joined the others. I expected him to show some kind of a reaction, some sympathy, some hope for a possible cure. But in vain did I think that he was about to say something. His answer was only silence. Inside of me there was a small hope that I would hear some kind of hint or advice or moral support during general conversation. But he was simply walking and joking with everyone, followed by loud laughter of the crowd. That made me completely furious.

## 10

All the way home, I was terribly angry. And at home I simply couldn't sit still. "Everything is over, everything is over!" I lamented in my mind. "Just when some kind of hope appeared, it all collapsed. I'm fed up with it, I'm tired of everything. Everything in this world is so senseless! I can't stand it anymore, it's too much for me. Damn it all, this struggle for life with this stupid school, meaningless training, and indifferent Sensei. The end is always the same!"

My imagination was already drawing a horrible, terrifying picture of my own funeral, the bitter tears of my mother, relatives, and friends. I clearly visualised the nails hammered into my coffin and its lowering into a damp pit, thrown over with dirt. There was an absolute scary darkness around, emptiness and hopelessness. And that's all!

What happens afterwards, above me, where life runs like a full-flowing river? Another picture appeared in my mind. Everything was just like before, nothing has changed. My parents as usual continued going to work. My friends went to training, looking cheerful as usual, laughing happily at their endless jokes. While Sensei, just as before, continued his interesting training, demonstrating and telling the amazed crowd about their own abilities.

Nothing has changed in this world! Except, I was not here anymore. That was the point, the reason for my resentment and sorrow. This was only my personal tragedy. And in general nobody else but myself needed my thoughts, my worries, my knowledge, and my life. I was born alone, and I will die alone. Then what is the purpose of this senseless existence? Why are people even born? What is life for?

This mixture of the philosophy of life and the fear of death was going on in my head. A horrible melancholy seized me, and it was quickly changing into depression. I was fading under the pressure of my depressive thoughts. My health rapidly became worse, and horrible headaches appeared again. I missed school and all my hobby classes, including my favorite dances. I really didn't need anything in this world. But...

The time of the next training was drawing near. Despite the external squall of negative emotions, I had somewhere deep inside me a permanent, unchanging feeling of confidence in my own strength and full tranquility. That's why I argued with myself, to go or not to go. This exact internal feeling for some reason irritated me most of all.

My friends appeared at my home and settled my doubts. Before that I didn't even think of getting ready. Their inspiring laughter, discussion of simple problems, and exchange of impressions about how they had worked on the meditation at home distracted me from my heavy thoughts, raising my mood a bit. My friends were finally able to drag me out from my "graveyard" to the training, declaring that I was being an incorrigible pretender. Andrew also lectured me for a while using his eloquent examples, and made a conclusion at the end:

"I understand when we miss school classes. That's clear, it's boring. But the training?! It's a real adventure that you won't read in any book or see in any kind of a movie! It is so interesting and cognitive! While you, sleepyhead, say 'Don't want to; I'm not going to go.' Then you'll sleep over the best years of your life and you would have nothing to remember later."

"Aha," I thought gloomily. "If that 'later' will ever come."

## 11

As usual we came early. Having greeted Sensei, the guys ran to the changing rooms, while I unwillingly dragged myself behind everyone with my head hung low. And suddenly very close to me I heard the voice of Sensei: “You’ve mastered yourself, well done!” It was so unexpected that I even got embarrassed, surprisingly looking into his eyes. He was carefully looking at me, and his eyes shone with endless kindness and sympathy. And as usual, without giving me time to collect myself, he added, “Well, it’s time for you to go change.”

Meanwhile another group of people came up and greeted him. They started to tell him about their problems.

“There you are!” A thought flashed across my mind. “Is it possible that he knew about all my thoughts, doubts, and torments?! Then if he knew, maybe that’s normal, maybe that’s the way it should be? And if he said well done, it means that not all is lost yet.” Nevertheless, the words of Sensei affected me like an elixir of youth given to an old woman. I rushed to the changing room, having forgotten that very recently I hobbled all broken and tired through this life.

“Where are you rushing to?” Tatyana asked puzzled, looking at my wild speed of putting on my kimono. “I can’t believe my eyes, just recently you were dying, and now you are rushing headlong into the sports hall.”

“Ah, Tatyana,” I smiled. “Andrew was right when he said that we shouldn’t worry too much.”

Looking at the surprised expression on her face, I added, “I’m in a hurry to live, so that ‘I won’t later regret the senseless years of my life...’”

Tatyana laughed, and I ran into the sports hall full of overflowing energy and joined the other guys who were warming up. To tell the truth, I myself didn’t expect such activity from my almost dying body. Where did it come from?

Five minutes before the beginning, Eugene, who was warming up next to Stas, looked in through the door and shone in the rays of his blinding Hollywood smile.

“What good luck! I see a familiar face.” Eugene moved his hands apart.

A sturdy built guy, not too tall, with a strong-willed face and military bearing, entered the sports hall. The amazed exclamation of Eugene made others look around. Sensei and the senior guys came up to the newcomer:

“Hi, Volodya!”

“Welcome back!”

“We’re glad to see you!”

When the delighted participants calmed down a little, Sensei asked, “So, how was your trip to the south? Did you warm your bones thoroughly at the resort?”

“Aha, I have even burnt myself. I wouldn’t wish such a trip on anyone. As they say, if you have nothing to worry about, your command will help you with it.”

“What’s going on down there?” Eugene asked.

“What, don’t you watch television, country boy?” Stas said with a smile.

“What? What? What is a “tilivision”? You should know that news is spread in our village only through rumors. And if somebody doesn’t understand it, one fist punch in the ear, and the heads of brothers get clear. That’s it!”

The guys laughed. Eugene transformed into the role of priest and addressed Volodya, “Confess, my son, confess in detail, about your overseas sufferings and about the sorrowful deeds of hell. Relieve your soul!”

“Well, Eugene! Even the grave probably won’t change you,” remarked Volodya, laughing with everybody. He added more seriously, “What can I say, people are getting mad there, they can’t share even a piece of earth... They ruined such a resort!”

“They know well how to make a tempest in a teacup,” Victor agreed. “They learn it from birth.”

“Yes,” Eugene drawled, “they couldn’t avoid the bloody front, unfortunately. I suppose you also chattered your teeth with fear?”

“We are used to it, holy father. It’s not my first time,” Volodya comically mimicked him.

“All right, guys, we’ll have enough time to talk.” Sensei stopped this funny exchange of impressions. “Go change. It’s already time to start the training.”

The warm-up went by at an active tempo with moderate exercise stress. I noticed that Volodya, despite being a stocky guy, moved softly and easily, like a snow leopard. When the main crowd finished repeating the basics, Volodya and the “speedy” guys started emotionally discussing something with Sensei. Having finished our exercises, we also hurried to join them, trying to grasp the subject of the conversation.

“Was it possible to undertake something over there?” Volodya argued hotly. “We had to work mostly at night, in complete darkness, and often in cellars. There you can’t light a flashlight or even a cigarette or you would instantly get a lead bullet. So many of our guys died because of that! The only thing you try to do under such circumstances is to fire back at every sound in the darkness.”

“But you are supposed to have special equipment for night vision,” said Stas.

“Aha, they only show that in movies. But in reality, maybe they have it in anti-terrorist units... but where can we get it from?”

“Why do you need special equipment?” Sensei asked, shrugging his shoulders. “The human is a lot more perfect than any piece of iron.”

Volodya reflected and remained silent for a little while before adding, “Well, I think I tried it all. I tried to narrow my eyes, so my vision would adapt faster. We tried to train in the darkness in order to improve the perception of sounds. But all in vain. Still, in most cases we were caught by surprise despite the fact that we seemed to be ready.”

“Vision and hearing here are absolutely irrelevant,” ascertained Sensei. “Humans have a completely different level of perception, thanks to which you can control your surrounding space at a desirable distance around you.”

Volodya briskly glanced at Sensei and said, “Sensei, show me.” He placed his palm against his heart and added with a smile, “My soul missed your examples so much.”

Sensei smiled ironically, waving his hand as a sign of agreement, “All right, kamikaze, come on...”

Volodya and the guys developed a whole plan for how to disorient Sensei. Meanwhile the crowd got excited about the unusual demonstration. Someone brought a thick scarf to blindfold Sensei’s eyes, checking its light impermeability. Others discussed how to create more noise and vibration in the air. Our company observed that process with interest, standing next to Stas.

“Who is this Volodya?” Andrew asked.

“Volodya? He is a friend of Sensei’s. One of his old disciples,” Stas replied.

“And how long has he been training with Sensei?”

“Well, I’ve already been training for five years. When I met Sensei, Volodya had just come back from the army. Actually, he had trained with him even before the army.”

“He is a serious man, athletic,” remarked Andrew.

“Well, I would think so. Volodya is a master of sambo, served in the marines and in the intelligence service. And after that, in the Ministry for Internal Affairs.”

“Where does he work now?” I asked.

“Right now, he trains a newly created special force,” Stas explained. He added, “A fine fellow indeed!”

Our entire group, under the supervision of Volodya, sat on the sides of the sports hall, forming a circle. Sensei walked into the center. Volodya blindfolded his eyes with a scarf, thoroughly closing

every possible chink. After this preparation, he disappeared into the crowd. Meanwhile Sensei took an odd stance. He looked like a tired pilgrim who took a rest for a while leaning over an imaginary staff.

“Wow!” Eugene exclaimed with admiration, rubbing his hands in anticipation of something special. “Shortly we’ll see something very interesting.”

“That’s for sure,” confirmed Stas, attentively looking at Sensei.

“What kind of a stance is that?” Andrew inquired.

“If I understood correctly, this is from the style of the ‘Old Lama’,” Stas answered quietly.

“I have never heard of such a style before.”

“Hmm, and probably you’ll never hear of it. It is an ancient, dead style. As Sensei says, it was forgotten even before the birth of Christ. Today there is left only a poor remnant of this school. In China it is known as the style of the ‘Dragon’.”

“Not bad for a poor remnant,” Andrew was astonished. “As far as I know, the style of the ‘Dragon’ is the most powerful style, as it absorbed the wisdom and power of all of the martial arts schools...”

Looking once again at Sensei he added, “How do you know about this ancient style?”

“I had an opportunity to learn about it two years ago. Some tourists came to us. So Sensei, as a polite host, regaled them with the style of the ‘Old Lama’. That was quite a show, I tell you, we couldn’t tear ourselves away from it!”

After such an advertisement, we stared at Sensei in order not to miss something thrilling. Meanwhile, Volodya gave the signal, and our entire crowd started to make an unimaginable noise, chaotically clapping our hands and stamping our feet.

Making use of this cover, Volodya started to come near Sensei, going around him clockwise. His movements were soft and light. He stepped like a panther before the jump, getting closer and closer to the enemy. When Volodya neared Sensei’s right side, with a quick, light under-step, he started to execute a strike of *mavashi-geri* in the head. Practically simultaneously, Sensei moved his right leg behind and, rotating his right hand into an arch, slightly touched Volodya’s face with the edge of his palm. Sensei just touched him, like a light feather, and didn’t hit like I expected him to. Judging by what we had seen, it wasn’t an accident or a miss. All movements were executed by Sensei with ease, smoothly and with special accuracy. Volodya reacted to this light touch as if he had been hit by a cannon-ball. His legs sharply flung up, and he was catapulted backward, crashing down with force against the floor. Everybody in the sports hall was completely silent. Volodya moved, sitting up on the floor. People exhaled and buzzed, like a beehive, discussing what had just happened.

“How did he manage to fall down?” Kostya asked Andrew with curiosity, but he shrugged his shoulders.

“Maybe he just lost his balance. He was standing on one foot. Probably so, because it seemed like the strike was very light. And you can’t even call it a strike.”

Sensei, shedding the scarf, asked Volodya, “Are you alive, self-killer?”

“Alive,” Volodya drawled, holding his right eye. “I don’t understand, where did I make a mistake?”

“Your mistake is that you tried to get me from what you thought was my most unprotected side, in other words, from the most vulnerable point.”

“Of course!”

“That’s why you got into trouble! If you had attacked me from the front, you would’ve had more of a chance than attacking from behind or the right side. Had you attacked from behind left, you would’ve been hurt even more.”

“But why?”

“Because you think like a human, possessing vision and hearing. How many times did I tell you, you must take into consideration your opponent’s way of thinking. Since I see and hear nothing, you could logically assume that my mind is controlling the worst protected places a lot better and stronger.”

“And how about the front?”

“In front of me, there is weaker control because the body is already prepared for attack. A human, without natural perception, is more physically ready for the fight in front of him and spiritually from behind, and that’s a lot more dangerous. It means that the more vulnerable the side of the opponent seems to be, the more it is protected and, correspondingly, the counterattack can be more unpredictable.”

“And what if I had had a gun?”

“If you had had a gun, we would have greater use for you tomorrow.”

“What do you mean?”

“Exactly what I’ve just said. We would have eaten at least soul pies.”

Volodya smiled in reply to Sensei’s black humor.

“Well, no need to, I will better bring pies to you myself...”

When Volodya took his hand away from his face, we were taken aback a little. A big bruise has swollen under his eye. The skin around his eye became dark blue and was covered with blisters, as if after a burn. Girls from our group began to bustle about and brought Volodya a towel, which they had wet in cold water. But even this compress didn’t help him. Nevertheless, it seemed that Volodya worried least of all about his eye. He stood up, shook his clothes off, and merrily joked with Sensei, while we were commanded to exercise our techniques.

After the training, almost at the very end of the additional training, we again heard something interesting.

“Sensei, is there such a technique to control the surrounding space that can be taught in a simpler form, so that it could be understood and practiced by the guys of my sub-unit?” asked Volodya.

The Teacher thought for a little while and replied, “Yes, there is such a technique, although you will need a partner for it. Best of all is to practice it sitting in the lotus pose. You should do the following: on the level of your head suspend a soft tennis ball on a rope, so that during its swinging or pushing by a partner the trajectory of its flight would coincide with the location of your head. Your objective is simply to learn to dodge it without using your common organs of control in the surrounding space, and to rely more on intuition. You should perceive the ball in its spiritual interpretation. Try to feel the object approaching the back of your head and, guided by your internal intuition, move your head before it hits you. The most important thing is to train your mind, and again we got back to our subject,” smiled Sensei. “Speaking frankly, you should bring your mind to a complete calmness so that it reminds you of the mirror-like surface of a lake. And in that full silence of your consciousness, the approaching object, in our case the ball, will be like a pebble thrown into that glassy surface, causing ripples, or like a boat, call it as you wish. But it will be cleaving your space. All the rest that is located farther, such as people standing in the circle, will be like trees or people on the shore, whatever you prefer. And you are the center of that lake. You should learn to feel any vibration on your surface, any penetration in your space. Finally you will learn to feel the approaching alien object and all that’s happening around.”

Andrew, who stood with us next to Sensei, asked, “Can we also train in this way?”

“If you have such a desire, certainly, train yourselves,” answered Sensei.

“And in this case, what kind of a perception will it be?” Volodya asked.

“Almost the same as the one during this demonstration. The most important thing is to come out with your consciousness over the boundaries of your body.”

“And how is that?” Andrew didn’t grasp the idea.



“Well, I’ll give you this simple example. Any human, when he sits down, relaxes, and tries to calm his thoughts, will start to feel that his consciousness is widening and comes far out over the boundaries of his body. Consciousness becomes three-dimensional. It covers enormous spaces. In this case, you simply limit it with a certain place. In the example that I showed you, it was the sports hall. Although, if you train hard enough, you will be able to feel what is going on at the other end of your district. Actually, it’s not that difficult.”

“In other words, the most important thing in the exercise with the ball is to achieve a complete calmness of the mind, like in the example with the lake?” Andrew asked again.

“Absolutely correct, and make an effort so that not a single thought could enter that space.”

“That’s hard.”

“Hard, but possible.”

“Stas said that the style of the ‘Old Lama’ is very ancient. Is that true?”

“Yes.”

“Does history record the names of those who mastered it?” asked Kostya.

Sensei smiled, thinking about something and answered, “You might know only Buddha. And, of course, his first followers.”

“Buddha?” said Kostya, surprised. “But I thought that he had a different kind of philosophy, the philosophy of good. Why did he need to fight?”

“Even good people may need to fight,” Sensei answered calmly. “But to master that art doesn’t always mean to attack someone. For them it was sort of a stage in spiritual development.”

Thus our additional training ended, and again we became witnesses to the valuable knowledge and abilities of Sensei. Our delight was endless. Having changed, we awaited the others near the sports hall. When the crowd came out to the street, Eugene glanced at Volodya and exclaimed with horror, “My God! Oho... What a shiner you have, beautiful.”

At these words everybody directed his attention to Volodya. His eye was completely swollen, turning into a big, black spot.

“Don’t worry,” Eugene tried to cheer him up, puffing up his chest, and declaring, “Bruises make men more attractive!”

Volodya replied with a smile, “And how about you, don’t you want to become more attractive?”

Everybody burst out in laughter.

“Of course he wants to. And I’ll be like a witness in that joke,” Stas was developing the situation. “When he was asked, ‘Did you see how one man hit another on the head?’ he replied, ‘I don’t know if I saw, but I heard a sound, as if somebody hit something empty’.”

Victor added, “And I will be a second witness. If I am asked why I didn’t come to help the victim during the fight, I will answer with a clean conscience, ‘How could I know who the victim was when they were fighting with each other so hard?!’”

Another wave of laughter rolled through our crowd.

“Come on, guys,” Eugene mimicked everyone. “Your jokes are good only for soldiers in barracks. Sensei, did you see, I hardly said a word, and they have already fabricated a case!”

## 12

Joking and poking fun at each other, the guys moved on. The weather was calm, and the sky was covered with scattered stars. Enjoying the evening cool after the intensive training, we didn't noticed that our group was a little stretched out. Kostya and Tatyana had gone far ahead. Volodya, Eugene, and Stas dragged somewhere behind. And Victor, Andrew, Slava, Yura, and I were walking in the middle with Sensei chattering about trifles.

Just around the corner, we came face-to-face with a group of miners, about eight of them, all considerably drunk. They seemed to have seriously angered Kostya in passing, as when we approached them, his face was red with rage. Kostya kept snapping at them, obviously annoyed with the drunks. Andrew added fuel to the fire in an attempt to defend his friend. The most impatient of the miners rushed towards the two to fight. Andrew and Kostya dashed at him. But Sensei arrived just in time and stopped them, addressing the miners, "Calm down, men! Why should you curse here, in the presense of women? Noblemen do not swear."

"What are you talking about?" A furious miner croaked, having seized Sensei. "Move along or else I'll break all your bones!"

At this point we could not stand it any more and moved in a crowd to the instigator. Even I flew into a rage towards these drunkards and was ready at that moment to tear them to pieces. The senior guys ran up to us, but unexpectedly Sensei stopped all our attempts and gave a sign to Victor for everyone to leave. We grumbled with indignation. But Victor, Stas, Eugene, and Volodya took us away like diligent shepherds leading a flock of sheep without letting us stop.

I kept turning around, waiting for the Teacher to show off one of his supertricks against eight enemies. But Sensei only stood there smiling and explained something with gestures as if he were making excuses. When I glanced back the next time, I saw that the smiling miners were fraternizing with him, saying goodbye to him as good friends. "Well, really!" I thought. "What is the point of practicing Kung-fu for so many years?" Judging by the puzzled responses of my friends, I was not the only one who thought that.

When Sensei came up to us, Andrew said with indignation, "Why did you make excuses to them? They were the ones who bothered us and stirred up trouble. We should have beaten them to teach them not to do it again. If you hadn't stopped me, I would..."

"Surely," Sensei interrupted him, "if I hadn't stopped you, they would have been seriously injured, not only in their soft tissues but also in their organs, and they might have even gotten a concussion of the brain. Do you realize that these are men who have families at home, who are probably the only bread-winners of these families? Do you realize that they are miners? Have you ever been in a mine?"

"No," Andrew replied.

"I have been there... These guys, whom you wanted to break to pieces, they go down to a mine like to hell, to a depth of up to one kilometer and more. Just imagine the pressure on their bodies. Not to mention," Sensei started to list on his fingers, "heat, lack of oxygen, very harmful methane... And despite all of this, they realize that they risk their lives every second. Because any moment they can be crushed, injured, or even killed. Injuries happen regularly in the mine. And people take it hard. Their mind is always on the brink, so to say, at the breaking point. This state of mind is comparable with the state of mind of soldiers on the front line during the war. That's why Stalin used to say, 'The mine is the second front.' Do you know why they drink? In order to relieve somehow this stress, this internal feeling of permanent fear. That is why highly qualified specialists in psychology and medicine should work with miners for them to overcome this psychological block. But of course they don't get this help. That's why many of them drink."

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