12 CATS AND DOGS

"Look into her eyes," Mykonos suggested. We were on the grassy property surrounding the house Mykonos was caretaking for his teacher, standing outside the cage of two large monkeys. One of the monkeys was staring right at me.

"That's the girl," Mykonos said, explaining that the two monkeys were a mother and a daughter. "They are pretty aware monkeys."

I did feel like I was being *seen,* somehow, by this monkey looking into my eyes. Mykonos was cleaning out the cage, which was huge—the size of a small house filled with small trees, bushes, and even three chairs. The girl monkey and I held our gaze for several minutes before she decided to move to another branch and munch on a leaf.

"My teacher sometimes sits in one of those chairs," Mykonos pointed out, "and the two monkeys sit in the others. It's amazing. They spend hours together, the three of them, just sitting and looking at each other. I think my teacher prefers the company of some non-human beings more than he does some humans."

"Does he think animals can be as spiritually aware as humans?" I asked.

"In a way. It's like with humans. There are dense people and more open, aware people. Well, there are cats that are just cats, and then there are cats that are more in tune with the Great One than some humans are. Of course, non-humans don't have the language to talk about it, but so what? They commune with the Great One through different means than humans."

"What about dogs?" I wondered.

"Most dogs have been too domesticated over hundreds of years. They have been bred to obey. They aren't free enough to feel much beyond their lives of obedience and reward. Some dogs can break free, but not most. Cats, on the other hand, are less domesticated, freer in their feeling. Less manageable. Try teaching a cat to fetch a stick, or to sit when you tell them to. Cats are too free in their feeling to obey like a dog."

Before I ever met Mykonos face to face, I had heard about him. I had been getting to know some of the students of Mykonos's teacher. They told me that Mykonos had been kicked out of their spiritual school–by his teacher. When I asked them why his teacher had kicked Mykonos out, they told me that Mykonos had disobeyed him by refusing to teach in public. Because Mykonos refused, his teacher kicked him out, and then told the entire community of students to shun Mykonos–not to speak with Mykonos or interact with him in any way.

Then, over the next few months, I heard more stories about Mykonos, who had been ousted by the teacher he gave his life to for almost 20 years. Mykonos was now living with his wife

in a friend's suburban house. A few students tried to speak with Mykonos and convince him to obey his teacher. Mykonos apparently chased them away with a baseball bat. I heard another story about Mykonos punching one of the students who tried to physically drag him to a meeting with the other men of the school.

These stories intrigued me. I had been studying and practicing with various spiritual teachers since I was a teenager, but I had never heard anything like this before. Everyone who I talked with agreed that Mykonos was the most advanced student in their community, yet now he seemed hated for disobeying his teacher.

I got Mykonos's phone number from one of the students who was still his friend and wrote it down on a little piece of yellow paper. I held onto that phone number for days, sometimes taking it out of my pocket, looking at it, and putting it back, afraid to call this man who chased people with baseball bats and beat them up, this man who was, I presumed, far more spiritually advanced than I was, yet kicked out by his own teacher for disobedience and shunned by the community of his peers. I knew he had spent the last twenty years meditating, doing spiritual exercises, and living in his teacher's company. I had to meet this man, but I was waiting for the right time to call.

One day, I was standing outside a building waiting for Gia to finish shopping. I saw a payphone, put a few coins in, took the piece of paper from my pocket, and dialed the number.

"Hello?" the voice answered.

"Hello, I'm trying to reach Mykonos," I said.

"This is Mykonos."

"Hi. I've been speaking to some of your friends, and, well, I feel I have to meet you."

"OK. Come on over," Mykonos said, and gave me directions to his house.

I dropped Gia off at home and drove to the house where Mykonos was staying. I stood in front of the door, ready to knock, not knowing what to expect. I thought Mykonos might wear robes of some kind, or he might look like a saint, downtrodden, rejected by God. Or maybe he would attack me like he had the others who tried to speak to him.

I knocked on the door, and a woman opened it.

"Hi," I said, "I'm here to see Mykonos."

"Come on in," she said, motioning me toward the living room.

I walked into the living room. A football game was on the TV. Mykonos was sitting on the carpet, cross-legged, somewhat hunched over, wearing a T-shirt and shorts, staring at the TV.

I didn't know if I should disrupt Mykonos–I was pretty sure it *was* Mykonos–while he was watching TV, or if I should wait until he looked over at me.

I stood and waited.

Finally, when he didn't do anything, I said, "Hi."

"Hi," Mykonos answered, his eyes still on the football game. "I'll be with you in a second."

I stood in the living room, watching Mykonos watch TV. When the game was interrupted by the next commercial break, Mykonos

stood up. He opened the sliding glass door that led to the back yard, and he walked outside. He did not close the door behind him, so I followed him out, and slid the door closed.

Mykonos sat down on the bench of a picnic table set up in the back yard. I sat down across from him. He still didn't look at me. He gazed out over the small pond that divided the yard from the neighbor's.

"I don't really know why I'm here," I said, needing to say something to break the silence. "I've heard stories about you and your teacher, and I'm trying to understand. How can you trust a teacher and yet go against him–if that's what you did?"

I waited for an answer. Mykonos didn't move.

Finally, he turned from the pond and looked directly in my eyes. It was the first time I felt Mykonos's peculiar gaze, piercingly deep. His eyes were a bottomless well of open blackness. His nose was clearly crooked to one side, like it had been broken and healed off-center. His hair was long, scraggly, and unkempt. His shoulders were somewhat hunched, his limbs wiry, and yet the overall impression was one of intense strength–he could have been a hired killer.

Mykonos looked into my eyes for a few seconds. His face looked so serious.

Then he looked back over the pond, and spoke.

"What do you want to know?"

I felt like my entire life had led to this moment, and this question. My body was trembling slightly, but deep inside I felt calm and clear.

"I've heard you are the most advanced student of your teacher," I said.

I waited a few seconds to see how Mykonos would respond. He didn't move or change his expression at all.

So, I continued. "I'm not exactly sure why I called you, but I felt you had something to teach me—and I wanted to know what really happened to you, how you ended up here."

Mykonos smiled very slightly, still looking over the pond.

"What did you hear?" Mykonos asked.

"I heard that your teacher asked you to teach in public, and you refused. So you were kicked out by your teacher, who instructed the rest of his students to shun you."

Mykonos didn't respond, so I continued.

"I also heard that you threatened to hit some of his students with a baseball bat when they came to visit you," I added.

"Assholes," Mykonos said quietly, looking over the pond.

I waited without speaking. I didn't really have anything else to ask. If Mykonos wanted to say something, I was eager to listen. But if he didn't, then that was his choice.

A woman—not the one who had answered the door—appeared with some iced tea. By the way she and Mykonos exchanged glances, I assumed she was Mykonos's wife.

"Hi," she said to me, placing the tall glasses of tea down on the picnic table, making eye contact with Mykonos again before walking away. She wore more make-up than I expected to see on someone who was supposed to be a spiritual practitioner. Most

people thought Mykonos's wife was at least as spiritually advanced as he was–but to my eyes, in that moment, she looked too dressed up and Mykonos too hunched over.

Mykonos took a sip of tea, put the glass down, and looked into my eyes.

"There are a lot of assholes out there," he said. "I'm just lying low, doing some writing."

Mykonos glanced toward some books that were stacked on the picnic table. Spiritual texts, mostly imported from India. Then he looked again over the pond.

"Did your teacher ask you to start speaking in public?" I asked Mykonos, trying to get the conversation to go somewhere. "I heard that he wanted you to be the head of some branch of your school, and you refused."

"I'm not about to be the head of anything," Mykonos said.

"But I thought that if you trust a teacher, you're supposed to obey him," I said, hoping that Mykonos would clarify this for me.

Mykonos drew back his lips and exposed his front teeth for a few seconds, looking like a mean beaver about to bite into wood.

"Years ago," Mykonos said, "my teacher told me that one day he would have to kick me out, send me out into the world, and all I would have with me is this orange book." Mykonos nodded toward a small book with an orange cover that was sitting on the table, separate from the other books.

"So you knew this was going to happen?" I wondered aloud.

"I didn't know anything then, and I don't know anything now," Mykonos said, "but here I am."

I started to feel that he was avoiding my questions. Then he looked into my eyes and I felt the endless black openness.

Holding my gaze, Mykonos spoke.

"There is obedience, and then there is *obedience*. Those assholes don't have the slightest idea what's going on. It's not like the teacher tells you what to do, and then you're supposed to do it. It's not like that at all. It's all a play, a test. I'm not about to fucking become an institutional-type."

"But your teacher said that you should head up some kind of institution, didn't he?" I asked Mykonos.

"Yes. He's said lots of things," Mykonos told me and looked over the pond without saying anything more.

I really wanted to understand this. I was at a point in my life where I realized I needed a teacher to help me take the next step, and yet most people I saw who had spiritual teachers did, in fact, seem like assholes. Mykonos knew something deeper, I felt.

"Mykonos, I don't mean to be rude …" I said, and Mykonos turned his horse-like head straight toward me.

"I need to know what you know," I told him.

"Why?" Mykonos asked.

"You know why," I answered, shocked by my own brusqueness.

"Yesss," Mykonos said, smiling, "perhaps I do. Are you willing to give up everything? Because that's what it takes. My teacher, he's taken *everything* from me. I've got this orange book, and that's

it. He's taken my wife, my daughter, my life. I have nothing. He's even kicked me out so I can't live with him," Mykonos smiled. "It's a beautiful thing."

"So, you don't mind being kicked out?" I asked.

"This? It's nothing. You have no idea, my friend."

We continued talking for a few hours before I said goodbye, shaking Mykonos's hand, thanking him, and leaving. In those few hours, Mykonos somehow imparted–more through his disposition than his words–what it means to be an authentic student. My heart was opened to a depth of love–an actual and tangible depth of reality–that I had never felt before. This depth had always been present, but I had been more attentive to the surface of things, what people said and did, the events in my life.

Sitting with Mykonos in that backyard, a depth unperturbed by time swelled into my feeling, and it became obvious how Mykonos could seemingly disobey his teacher, and yet remain *obedient* at a level that most people couldn't even perceive. As he told me, on the surface, it looked like he and his teacher were at war. But the war was always already over, and love had won, even if the fight continued to appear on the surface.

After my meeting with him, Mykonos remained apart from his teacher for three years, and then he was, once again, closer to his teacher than any other man. It was as if the separation had never occurred. In Mykonos's heart, it hadn't. In the years that I subsequently spent with Mykonos, he disobeyed his teacher all the time. Eventually, as I observed their "battle" more and more, their

tussling came to feel like a chess match between two close friends more than an actual fight. And yet, underneath all the scheming and apparent disagreements, a huge oneness of love prevailed. This immense being, this open force of love-bliss, emerged through whatever seemed to be happening, and communicated itself regardless of what Mykonos was saying or doing.

"Cats are, in general, less domesticated than dogs. But then there are the silverback gorillas," Mykonos continued speaking as he cleaned around the monkey cage. "The silverbacks know they are facing extinction. There are only a few of them left. My teacher said he'd much rather spend time with the silverbacks than with most people that come to him. He's spent a lot of time with these monkeys here," Mykonos said, nodding his head toward the mother and daughter who were now grooming each other. "If you look into their eyes, you can feel the same love-bliss you feel around my teacher. These two monkeys are more in touch with where it's at than most humans."

"Mykonos, do you really think that monkeys are as evolved as humans?"

"Well, they don't have the same kind of thinking mind as humans. They don't speak like humans, but then, they don't need to. Humans are unique in their capacity to reflect upon themselves–which is why we are so into sex and death. We think about our own life all the time, wondering when we will finally be fucked like we've always been waiting for–and you know what I mean by 'fuck'. Humans are also aware of their impending death, so they begin to wonder about

the meaning of their life. Most non-human beings don't think about fuck or death. So they don't build culture like humans."

Mykonos looked at the monkeys as he continued speaking.

"They don't need monuments or books to help them reflect themselves to themselves, like human do, like human thought does. Of course, they don't have the capacity for self-understanding that humans do, either. To be born human is to be born with a capacity to transcend what appears through self-understanding–non-human beings haven't developed that capacity. But then, most people haven't, either. Compared to these monkeys here, most people are self-enclosed assholes, don't you think?"

I looked into the mother's eyes. She looked right back at me, relaxing, chewing on a leaf. She jumped to a closer branch, checking me out. Looking into her unflinching gaze, I felt her depth of consciousness, a feeling of alert and gentle openness.

Mykonos finished cleaning around the cage. He stood up–as straight as Mykonos ever stands–and gazed out over the grassy landscape. My mind stopped. The birds and crickets chirped. Occasionally the monkeys would jump to another branch. The wind was warm, and now and then the leaves would rustle in the breeze.

"I'm leaving soon," Mykonos said. "I'm not sure exactly when, but I'm going to see my teacher."

I knew Mykonos's teacher was currently residing outside of the country, but I didn't know Mykonos was planning to leave.

My mind began to move again, imagining Mykonos gone. But then the ripples of thought subsided, and we stood in silence. The

quietness felt like soft wool pressing down, muffling the vibrations of the world. I could still hear, but sounds seemed so distant. I could still see, but the landscape seemed translucent and thin, as if silent light were shining through a space barely occupied by tickles of form.

The silent light felt emergent from my heart, but even my body dissolved in the invisible fullness.

"Non-human beings are of the same One," Mykonos said, "but humans can develop the capacity to live entirely free as that One, open beyond the tendencies and patterns that seem to move in this place. But you've got to practice feeling the Great One opening as every moment and everything you do, and not get bound in patterns of self-reflection, needing an other–a *seeming* other–to love you, distracted in sex, afraid of death."

Mykonos's words arose in the silence, striking my deepest heart-knowing, and vanished. Their force continued to ring, soundlessly, appearing as everything, the shimmering grass, the trees, the monkeys. No separation spaced between my mind, his words, and all that appeared in the world. A deep and infinite wholeness bloomed outward, his words revealing depth's truth, and time relaxed wide open. Happening ceased to enfold. Just like gazing into the eyes of Mykonos's teacher, all opened without a crease or event of self-curl.

"No experience or knowledge exceeds this openness of love," Mykonos said. Then he turned to me and smiled.

"Have you seen my new chainsaw?" he asked.

"No."

"C'mon, I'll show it to you."

As we walked to the tool shed, the pattern of time was a soft breeze, and I could feel Mykonos smiling, although I could not see his face.