



LULA — *I admit to having done some stalking before meeting you, so I'm a little clued up, but could you introduce yourself to Lula readers in your own words?*

BIET — I was born in NYC two months after my family emigrated from Russia and I've been singing my whole life. It's like I came out of the womb singing! I haven't talked about this much until recently, when it suddenly seemed more pertinent to my current story. My family is very musical. My grandfather was a violinist for the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra and my dad [Dr. Grigory Simkin] played the sax. In addition to this he was also a shaman and a psychoanalyst. He also drank a lot of vodka, but in a fun way.

LULA — *Wow, he must have been a big influence on you. What kind of things did he teach you?*

BIET — Even when I was really young we would sit around and talk about philosophy. He introduced all the books to me when I was about fourteen. We started doing exercises together, hypnosis exercises, and energy exercises. But I've never considered myself a healer—he was a healer.

LULA — *But you rebelled against that aspect of spirituality when you hit your teens?*

BIET — So I took music on when I was a teenager and got signed to Sony when I was 18 or 19. Then I shaved my head and travelled the country by myself with a guitar. I started going to lots of parties and having all this fun, then it became total chaos. The thing is, I was always searching for enlightenment in all that. It was five in the morning, drugs, alcohol, beautiful people, all in some fancy hotel. And I was that girl sitting in the corner talking about the meaning of existence and God.

LULA — *You felt you were searching for something bigger?*

BIET — I'm a passionate person who is always seeking a fourth or fifth dimension to live life through. I just think these three dimensions and these five senses are extraordinarily limited. I don't find them to be fulfilling. Drinking and taking drugs is a form of meditation, but it's a shortcut.

LULA — *It's like a rockstar syndrome: how do you get to that place when you're not high?*

BIET — Yeah, I wanted to find that. I felt like I couldn't touch it and that caused me to feel a deep, dark sadness. I needed to connect my heart, my mind and my instincts. Then a few years ago I created Center of the Cyclone [Biet's suite of services for guided meditation]. It's not like I'm speaking to dead people or anything like that, but through my own meditation it was suggested to me that I needed to become who I am today. I was not exactly thrilled. I was, like, 'What, a spiritual teacher? I'm only 33!' I mean, I just had this vision of what a spiritual teacher looked like and it was not me. It was a beard, and probably a man over the age of 50.

LULA — *Someone like your father?*

BIET — Exactly. I'm a very wolf-clan type of person. I love to work with others. And my father was a lone wolf. He didn't have a teacher or a group, he just rolled deep in his own thing. So I associated enlightenment with being alone. I didn't know I could find a way that was both with people—being in groups, and guiding large groups of people—and doing something similar to him. So that was a huge breakthrough: Oh! I don't have to be all alone? Yay!

# HIGHER GROUND

*Raised by her Russian shaman father, BIET SIMKIN shaved her head and revolted against spirituality as a teen, seeking out a higher dimension through music and partying. After cleaning up her act, she needed something special to replace that chemical high. ALISON BECKNER talks to the rocker-turned-meditation instructor and CENTER OF THE CYCLONE founder about her path to self-enlightenment.*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY KATHERINE SQUIER



LULA — *So through this breakthrough you became a spiritual leader. Help me understand what that means.*

BIET — I am a translator of ideas that are between ideas. A spiritual teacher helps others to remember the unknown. I help people through private sessions, corporate groups, large groups in museums, to find the part of them that keeps them joyful.

LULA — *You were meditating from the time you were a child. What type of meditation and techniques did you explore?*

BIET — I've tried a lot of techniques. My father taught me mantra meditation when I was a kid, and pranayama [breathing meditation]. We also did the eye-gazing technique. When you gaze into another person's eyes, you connect with them and see yourself in a way that you wouldn't otherwise. It's very intimate. Rumi [Sufi mystic and poet] wrote about this. It's an ancient tradition of transportation to another state of consciousness.

LULA — *To what would you compare the highest state of consciousness?*

BIET — I would equate the highest states of life to an effective montage. It's when you can see the whole story all at once, rather than piece by piece, when for a brief moment or a matter of hours or days we can remember the true meaning of our whole existence. Meaning is the essence of why we are alive.

LULA — *Okay, so this sounds good and sort of makes sense but isn't that because you have such a depth of experience and practise? What about someone who is just getting started?*

BIET — I find it important with someone new to remind them that prayer doesn't have to be something religious. When we pray, we ask the higher self 'Please help me, please be with me today, please guide me.' It's going to look different for each person, but be open to just introducing a prayer: 'Please help me to meditate.' When you start asking for help and taking 10 minutes to meditate, all of a sudden your world starts to pop.

## — 'Drinking and taking drugs is a form of meditation, but it's a shortcut'

LULA — *How about you just drop into child's pose?*

BIET — Yeah, on the 7am train that's really practical.

LULA — *How often do you meditate?*

BIET — I do 30 minutes every day without fail. Every morning. Time is an illusion and so, ironically, I have more time in my day as a result of taking that half hour. And I'm not as big a dick to everyone around me.

LULA — *Where is the strangest place you've meditated?*

BIET — One of the things that I do is called 'divided attention'—I have one eye turned inward, facing the spiritual realm, and one eye on my life. So, is it during an orgasm? Is it while I'm banging my boyfriend? Is it while I'm shopping at Whole Foods, deciding whether I want one lemon pepper or two lemon peppers? Yes.

LULA — *So the most curious place you've meditated is at Whole Foods and during an orgasm?*

BIET — Yes, correct. But not simultaneously! I did NOT have sex with someone in the produce section of Whole Foods.

LULA — *Not yet...*

BIET — Not yet!

LULA — *Can you tell me about where your love of meditation came from?*

BIET — Well, in many ways through cinema. Film is my love so I started seeing my own life like a film. For instance, if I were starring in a movie about me, who would I be, what kind of woman? I would be a lot cooler. I'd have to ramp up my game. Not only how I dress but also how I look and how I move. That's what I do, not just in terms of vanity—though there is an element of vanity inside my personality—but in terms of, would I do this differently if there were an eye watching me? Yes, I would, and so I try to bring myself back to that all the time.

LULA — *Do you ever lose your shit? How do stress and anger manifest themselves?*

BIET — Anger is not my go-to feature. I get sad and melancholic. Self-pity is a real favourite from my toolkit of destruction. Or I'll pull out shame, a negative form of doubt. I go to those places less and less as I do this work more and more. I used to spend so much of my life in those places of deep, deep sadness but I don't think I could help people the way I do now if I didn't know what that looks like on a real human level.

LULA — *So the devil doesn't come out of you any more?*

BIET — No. I mean, I'm human, I bicker with my boyfriend sometimes but it's never that big a deal. I attribute that to meditation, for sure.

LULA — *You do guided weekly meditation events at art galleries around NYC, but I also love that on your website you have a wedding section, a first-aid kit for the big day. Tell me more about this.*

BIET — I'm ordained now, so I can actually marry the couple as well! I offer different services the couple can choose from but the one I like most is the idea of the bride and groom waking up on their wedding day and meditating that morning for an hour before they get into the whole process of the dress, cake, family, friends. It can be at the rehearsal dinner, or even just everyone for 10 minutes at the ceremony. I mean, how cool is that? You're about to get married, your entire family is with you and then you just drop into a meditation.

LULA — *Where do you plan to go from here?*

BIET — I've been growing my Center of the Cyclone [project]. About six months ago, I started the idea of bringing music into it. I did an event recently [with Lululemon] in a huge space where every wall was covered in projections of stars and about a hundred people came and meditated with me. In the end they were able to pick an eye-gazing exercise with the music from my new crowdfunded record, which is a spiritual record of hymns. My vision is to start performing it in museums, a Marina Abramovic-type of thing where I'm performing the record and then guiding people through a meditation. It will be like a calmness festival. Merging the worlds of fashion, art, music and spirituality is what I came here to do. LULA MAGAZINE

*ALISON BECKNER is the founder of Scout Services and features editor-at-large at Dapper Dan.*

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