

# Introduction

If you haven't been to a mosh pit, you've probably seen one in movies. A mob of people are crowded together, body to body, dancing and slamming into each other, usually at a live music club or concert. Occasionally, someone dives into the pit from the stage and "surfs" on the upraised arms of the crowd. The challenge of "moshing" is to work your way as close as possible to the band and to avoid getting trampled. Security guards keep watch in case such a thing happens, but any mosher will tell you that the pit is dangerous.

I've come to see the mosh pit as an apt description of American society—and of my childhood home. I was number nine out of ten bright, creative, and mostly LOUD kids. My dad, an eccentric genius, had wall-sized speakers in the living room that blared out classical music. When the family sang together, we sang five-part harmonies of the uncompromising Handel's *Messiah*. On Christmas Eve, we had a talent show and family service, and later tore into our presents all at once, paper and ribbons flying everywhere and voices crisscrossing the room shouting out "thank you!" and "just what I wanted!" These are happy memories, because there was a part for each of us. But instead of ripping paper and shouting, I sat in my corner with my pile of gifts and handled each as a treasure, slowly and carefully opening them, preserving the paper and lingering in the delight of discovery. I was meditating in the mosh pit.