

THE LAST INCARNATION



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PUBLICATIONS
\$8.95

HIS BODY TURNED GOLD . . .

... he began to shrink, then grow to tremendous heights. He raised his arms and a shower of energy rushed down onto us while lines of power pushed up through my spine. His body turned gold, then it turned into a doorway. It became an absence. I felt myself drawn into it and through it into other realities. I felt myself spinning, floating, turning in various directions, then expanding and contracting. Then, gradually, I found myself back on the beach in a peaceful, calm, yet very electric state. Rama then stood in front of each of us and meditated on us. I felt myself merge with him. The level of energy in my being began to rise in intensity — I knew he was dissolving my human form. I felt that I had no boundaries. My mind was not able to conceive of myself as a fixed being in a solid body.

BOOKS BY RAMA

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OLD ZEN

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Talks By Rama On The Nature Of Existence

THE SPIRITUAL TEACHER'S HANDBOOK

THE LAST INCARNATION

**EXPERIENCES WITH RAMA
IN CALIFORNIA**

THE LAST INCARNATION

**PUBLISHED BY
THE FREDERICK P. LENZ FOUNDATION
FOR AMERICAN BUDDHISM**

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MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 82-83869

ISBN: 0-941868-02-8

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**FOR
VISHNU**

INTRODUCTION

The following pages are filled with stories, accounts, reflections and statements about Rama. They were written by persons who have had personal contact with him for periods of time ranging from a few months to six or seven years. Together they create a catalogue of spiritual experiences that retells an ancient story: the search for God and Truth in human experience.

Rama is, and probably will remain, an enigma. He changes so quickly that you are never quite sure who he is or what he will do next. At times he appears to be hundreds of different persons and at other times he is no one at all. This book presents a few of his ten thousand faces.

The accounts, stories and reflections presented in *The Last Incarnation* are a catalogue of spiritual growth and development. They reflect the experiences of over one hundred persons who have come into contact with something that far transcends the boundaries of what most of us would refer to as human consciousness and experience. These accounts do not, in my estimation, fully reflect all of Rama's many sides; they present the aspects of Rama which are most readily accessible.

Trying to describe what it is like to be in the presence of an enlightened person is one of the most challenging assignments any author could have. Few of us have the insight or patience of an "M," who so faithfully recorded the words of the Indian saint Sri Ramakrishna in his voluminous *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

The following collection of accounts is not an attempt to provide a definitive understanding of Rama's life or teachings; it is instead a reflection of the experiences of persons who have crossed beyond the borderline of the known and the familiar.

The accounts in this book are a journey into consciousness. They have been arranged in chapters by theme. Many of the stories overlap and retell the same experiences. This enables the reader to see and gain insights into a desert journey or other event that might be lacking in a single narration. The editing of each story has been kept to a minimum. Common mistakes in conventional usage and grammar have been admitted in the interest of preserving the unique "voice" of each writer. Many of the accounts in this book were written by persons who have had little or no writing experience, but what they may lack in literary style or pretense is counterbalanced by the simplicity and sincerity with which they are written.

They are told as you would tell an experience to friends sitting together. They are frank, contradictory, emotional, turbulent and honest.

The Last Incarnation is not an attempt to prove the validity of Rama's spiritual prowess. If someone is interested in personally encountering Rama they can do so at one of his seasonal public meditations and determine for themselves who or what Rama is. The Last Incarnation is a group journal, a variety of shared and individual experiences along the path to spiritual knowledge. While at first reading the focus of this volume appears to be Rama, on closer analysis we soon discover that very little of who Rama is, what he believes in, what motivates him, or how he sees life, is revealed. The Last Incarnation is more accurately a reflection of the consciousness of the individuals who have written it. Rama seems to serve as a catalyst for the experiences and reflections in this volume; he is the ever-present backdrop or unifying theme for these individual explorations of the nature of consciousness and reality.

The Last Incarnation is not a narrative with a point of origin or destination. You may choose to read the stories in their order of appearance or simply dip in and out of the chapters as you see fit. The *raison d'être* of the book is the book itself. I hope it will bring you to a greater awareness of the limitlessness of

INTRODUCTION

your own being.

— Dr. Margaret Greenwald

NOTE: The names of persons whose accounts appear in this volume have been changed to protect their privacy, with the exception of Mark, Neil, John, Gerry, Lakshmana and a few other characters in the drama who said that it didn't really matter.

CHAPTER ONE

FIRST MEETINGS

*“There is no life and there is no death.
Life and death are moving shadows cast upon the
Ground by clouds that sweep across the sky.”*

— Rama

CHAPTER ONE

FIRST MEETINGS

BOB

Here I am in 1982, on the planet Earth, studying with a spiritual teacher. This may not sound like such a strange occurrence to you, but in my opinion, it is. I will be thirty-two years old this year, and I have done my very best to live these years in the fast lane. I have developed and own a million dollar business, I have eaten repeatedly at the finest restaurants, and I have traveled over much of the world, including remote areas accessible only by helicopter where I have skied virgin snows. I have chartered boats to fish and among my catches is a 500-pound world class marlin. I have experienced the finest in drugs from all over the world and drive whatever car I choose. The list goes on and on. Nothing was handed to me on a silver platter. I began chasing these dreams when I was twelve years old, putting away empty pop bottles for fifty cents an hour. I admit that I was probably in the right places at the right times, just as I was in October of 1981 when I first met Rama, my spiritual teacher.

Being in the right place at the right time is not always by one's own choice. I know that this meeting with Rama was not because of an independent decision of my own. I had seen spiritual teachers before with my sister, and I was frankly unimpressed. I have given you some of my personal background to give you some idea of what it might take to impress me. The spiritual teachers I'd seen appeared to me to be persons educated to help lost souls. You know the types, with problems at home, who just lost their job. These spiritual teachers seemed to be group counselors with only a slight insight into life in general. My sister, whom I love dearly, seemed to get involved with this sort of person on a regular basis.

I have always been interested in spiritual teachings. I meditated for a period of time once and experimented with some spiritual theories. I was a vegetarian when most people here thought that you would die if you didn't eat meat. I had pretty much led my life being my own spiritual teacher, believing that the human race had not yet produced a spiritual teacher real enough to teach me. What the heck! I didn't think I needed a spiritual teacher. Everything seemed to be going fine for me.

One day my mother called and asked me if we could have lunch together. As we were dining, she began to tell me about my sister's new teacher. She said that even she felt drawn to him in a very magical way. She asked me if I would go see Rama. Knowing that I had been to a number of spiritual meetings and had been unimpressed, she made it sound pretty interesting to secure my attendance. She finally convinced me, and I made the drive to the Los Angeles Convention Center.

I got there early and met my sister near the door. She introduced me to a few of her new friends, and we all "hung around" waiting for the evening to begin. "Sit up nice and straight," she told me, "when he says it's time to meditate."

There I was, sitting in the back corner, figuring out what I'd do for the rest of the evening after the meeting. I was paying just enough attention so that I could discuss the evening with my mother and sister to their satisfaction.

Rama entered the room. After he made a few jokes and some spiritual remarks we began to meditate. I sat up straight and started to study him. He was young, about thirty to thirty-five years old, had curly

FIRST MEETINGS

brown hair and looked like an average kind of guy. He was dressed like people in Los Angeles dress. It was a ready-for-anything type of apparel, good for anything from a rock concert to a fine French restaurant.

As we continued to meditate, I got more intensely involved. I quieted my mind and sat up very straight, in order to give Rama every opportunity to do whatever he could do. He began to scan the room very slowly, occasionally stopping to look at someone in what seemed a casual manner. Suddenly he found me in my island of safety in the back of the room. Our eyes met and an inner dialogue began with a magnitude I had never before experienced. As we communicated, the room seemed to empty of all other persons. A bright gold aura filled the room and light streamed around Rama in a vivid visual display unlike anything I had ever seen. When the meditation ended, and I had had a chance to regain my composure, my conscious mind immediately attempted to deny what I had seen.

After the meeting was over, my sister approached me and asked what I thought. I answered that it had been alright, thinking to myself that I'd better keep this under my hat for a while, until I had time to analyze it.

We walked to the car in silence. Suddenly I had to tell her what had happened to me at the meeting. As I told her, I felt a great weight lifted from my shoulders. It was as if I was admitting to myself that perhaps, just perhaps, there was something to Spirituality, and perhaps there was a place for it in my life.

I applied to become a student of Rama's and was accepted. Between that night at the Los Angeles Convention Center and the first Center meeting I attended, enough time had elapsed that my mind had convinced my being that whatever I had seen had not been as vivid as I had imagined. I needed to verify the experience. As meetings go on, week by week, I am able to accept more and more of what I have been witnessing. I have had breath-taking experiences of visual light displays and feelings of inner peace. The highs I experience are unparalleled by any others I have encountered in thirty-two years. The whole process is still baffling to me, to say the least. But I am a spiritual seeker, and I admit it.

CINDY

One night when I was at home reading a book, I received a phone call from a friend who is a veteran of spiritual circles. She had phoned me regularly over the past 12 years to tell me of new soul saviors and suggest that I attend the conference/lecture/seminar — whatever. I rarely went. In my mind, I already had a teacher — an Indian man who taught a particular technique of meditation which I had been practicing for many years.

This time my friend said, "I have just found the most *fabulous* teacher. He gave the *best* meditation I have ever had. There was gold light *all* over the room. Honey, the man is *really* powerful."

My friend had raved about other teachers before but the phrase that resonated in my mind was the presence of gold light. I asked her to tell me more about him. "He's young, American, funny and humble," she replied.

"I'll go," I said.

The lecture took place the following evening at UCLA.

I sat on the side of the hall about six rows back from the lecture area. Rama was wearing light blue pants, a plaid shirt and an assistant college professor-type wool vest. Style-wise, he blended in with the blackboard, but I liked that. He dressed the part of humility; his face looked honest and without pretension.

As he began to speak, I found him to be extremely interesting and clear and was glad I came. I congratulated myself on deciding to hear another teacher.

After about 30 minutes, Rama said we were going to meditate and suggested we keep our eyes open

for part of the time. I started out with my eyes closed doing my regular mantra meditation and then I opened my eyes. Rama was sitting cross-legged on a desk and gazing out at the audience. As I looked at him, I saw him rise off the desk to a height of about 12” off the surface. He simply floated straight up.

My previous teacher ostensibly taught a technique of levitation so I had long been mentally prepared to believe that levitation existed. But this was the first time I had seen it — unmistakable and effortless. Rama hovered for several seconds and then floated back down to the desk.

I watched closely to see if he would do it again. Suddenly, however, I wasn't looking at anything. He had disappeared. All I saw was the blackboard and the desk. Just as suddenly, a moment later, he was back, meditating quietly on the people in the lecture hall, making individual eye contact with each one.

Once again, I was Joe(anna) Cool about this phenomenon. I was prepared to see disappearance because that was another technique my Indian teacher claimed to teach — except that no one had ever done it. Now I had seen it done.

As the meditation continued, I saw Rama levitate two more times and saw him disappear completely and then reappear in the same spot a total of five times. Once, his body disappeared and only his head remained, like a Cheshire cat. Joe(anna) Cool began to feel elated.

After the meditation, Rama asked for people's experiences. Several members of the audience mentioned seeing gold or multicolored lights around him; others reported seeing his face change. No one said anything about levitation or disappearing and I was too timid to raise my hand.

After the lecture was over, I had promised to meet my spiritual friend. She was lingering at the front of the hall and socializing with others of the L.A. seeker set, so I looked around for Rama.

I noticed him standing behind the desk, apparently waiting to talk to people. No one was there except for one girl. “I will give this man a break,” I thought, “and tell him I enjoyed his talk and meditation.”

I went up to the desk and caught his eyes. We looked at each other openly. Then he extended his hand, which I thought was strange since most spiritual teachers do not like to touch people, much less strangers.

I gave him my hand and our eye contact continued.

That was it.

Something occurred which had never happened to me before. I recognized Rama. It wasn't a mental feeling, like I knew his face, or an emotional feeling, like I understood his heart. Rather, everything in my self responded.

Inwardly, it was like a vast yet quiet explosion. Outwardly, I said I enjoyed the lecture, turned around and headed toward the door. As I trudged upstairs, new feelings washed over me. I knew the “marriage” with my first teacher was over. With the accompanying sense of freedom, I felt like I'd shed a hundred pounds. I sensed that my yearning for spiritual adventure would be fulfilled.

Mainly, I *knew* at a deeper level than I had ever known anything before that I had found a real teacher.

I knew I had found a friend.

Later, after leaving the campus, six of us from the audience gathered at a local restaurant. It turned out that five of us had seen Rama levitate and disappear.

BARBARA

The way I met Rama was not premeditated at all. I am a Catholic, and our only interest in the realm of religion is to conform to dogma; as long as you do that you are safe. To meet Rama was really fortuitous. I was not seeking it, or so I thought!

FIRST MEETINGS

Looking back, I see I had a clear and complete internal road-map that successfully guided me to exactly what I have always wanted — a union with what is eternal within oneself.

It was Thanksgiving Day, 1981, and my mother was visiting me from Canada. I had recently gone through a divorce and she had come to check on me, like mothers do. We were sitting having a last cup of coffee together and enjoying simply being together for another half hour before having to leave for the airport for her to return home. I had been given a gift of a game board and I took it off the shelf. I asked my mother if she had ever played the Ouija talking board and she said she had not. I asked if she would like to try just for fun and she said she would. We took the board out of the box, put it flat on the kitchen table, and placed our fingers on the triangular wooden indicator. It started to move across the board as we started asking questions of it and just having fun with the game of it. My mother asked if I would be meeting any powerful people in the near future. The board moved to “yes.” I asked what their name was. It started to spell R-A-M. I stopped the movement over the letters, as it didn't seem to make sense what it was spelling. I asked if it was spelling in English and the indicator moved to the “yes” position. I asked what this person would do, and the board spelled out: EASY FOR HIM. Well, that was that. It was time to leave for the airport. We were giggling as we put the board away beside the Monopoly game on the shelf.

As we drove I was sharing with my mother about my recent path of studying meditation with a guru from India, and of my recent interview with him in New York for a cable television show which I host. I had wanted some relief from a world of constant stress. And I thought he might be of some help.

We arrived at the Air Canada terminal with 5 minutes till boarding time. We kissed good-bye and Mom boarded the plane.

One night three months later, my guru appeared to me in my dreams. This was not unusual. He had done so many times in the past. In this dream, he was walking around in a circle with his hands clasped behind his back. I was standing to the side and would not look him in the eye. I did not want to get his attention. Finally, he walked right up to me, looked me straight in the eye, and disappeared, like a genie into a lamp, in the area of my throat. It seemed like some kind of “guru death” had occurred.

I woke up very distraught and called the Ashram to speak to the Swami about what I thought a distressing dream. The Swami put me at ease, telling me how auspicious it was for my guru to appear to me in my dreams and to think of it as something good.

The next night, a glowing silhouette with curly hair appeared to me in my dream. His energy was impactfully intense, and the white light around him was vibrant. For the next five nights, this silhouette appeared to me in my dreams, radiating light and energy.

Two days later I received a phone call from a friend of mine inviting me to a “public meeting” for a meditation with some new teacher she had. I told her I was not interested anymore in enlightenment, that I had to handle the “real world” now. She asked me to mark the time and place on my calendar “just in case,” which I did, however, with no intention of going at all.

The night before this scheduled “public meeting” in Los Angeles, I had a dream in which appeared a tall figure, with curly hair, wearing shorts and hiking boots, walking in what appeared to be a beautiful desert. There were some other people around him — I particularly remembered a woman with long blonde hair, and three other men. It seemed to be a place of fun and pure love ... of ecstasy. A picture of bliss beyond understanding. There were some birds flying in the sky and laughter was pervading. As I watched this scene, a huge red heart-shaped ice cream cake appeared in the foreground ... and my alarm clock rang loudly.

The next day I found myself driving in the direction of the beach to the hotel where my friend had invited me. I almost seemed to be on automatic.

My friend greeted me as I arrived and took me to a seat near the front. I saw five or six friends in the audience I had not seen for a long time; a friend I had competed against in a giant slalom race last year, another television host, and an attorney from a large law firm in the city that I used to work in. I had the

reputation of being a highly participatory person; vivacious, loved to laugh and dance with life. I prided myself on my ability to manifest results in the world. I had the symbols of success, but my sense of Self seemed very limited. I wondered what contribution this evening might make to that.

There was music playing and I could feel myself start to dance inside. My indifference was being chased away, and my apathy and the worries of my mind melted away. There were approximately 350 other people in the room. At 8:00, Rama quietly entered the room, sat on a table covered with a colorful woolen afghan, and started to talk to the audience. His very presence and grace spoke for themselves. The tone of his voice was settling.

He spoke about what to look for when you choose a teacher; about women attaining liberation; about love, and self giving. He was full of aliveness and his sense of humor was sharp. He was also very humble. He spoke honestly and the profound truth of his words penetrated beyond anything superficial or obvious. His commitment to others was clearly evident. He then said, "Let's meditate for awhile." I sat with my eyes open.

The room filled with golden light and white light emanated around Rama ... his face utterly transformed; it was still, attentive; he changed forms — a clown, an elephant, a king with a crown of candles, a black man with a beard, a woman, the face of Michelangelo's David, some scary creatures. He expanded, then contracted, like a balloon when you blow it up and then let the air out slowly. He put his hands up and a ball of light bounced on his lap. The whole room was full of brilliance — dazzling divine light. *I had never seen light before in my life.* I have always been dazzled by magic, but here in this room were Miracles — all around me. Oh, my god! ... he disappeared. Oh ... he came back — now there was a red aura glowing over him. I was enjoying the show on one hand, but was also afraid of what I was seeing ... my concept of what I held as reality was dramatically shifting before my very eyes. Rama then looked at each person in the audience and when he looked at me his face was like the sun — the light was vibrant and sustaining. It also seemed to sprinkle on and around me, like Tinker Bell's magic dust. Something was happening inside me — my heart felt like it was expanding. Something new was pulsing within me. Although I was not consciously aware of it, I had been waiting for this moment all of my life.

Rama ended the meditation and rose off the table his normal self.

What had I discovered here in the City of the Angels? No one I had heard of in America had these powers!! Who was this august Teacher?

During the break my friend introduced me to Rama ... he smiled, and after the introduction said "yes," like he recognized me and shook my hand. I thanked him for the work he was doing, and asked what the music was that he had played. He told me it was Jarre ... *Oxygene* ... Tower Records on Sunset ... holding up the cassette so I could see it. I told him how hard it was for me to be here in the world. He told me it was hard for him too.

"But didn't I choose to be here?" I asked.

"No," he replied, "you didn't."

The trust and love I felt at that moment was pure. It had no conditions on it and there was no investment in maintaining it.

Later that evening I found myself filling out the application to become a student. It seemed the most natural thing to do. I had gotten almost to the end of the application to a question which read "What is your favorite flavor of ice cream?" and something clicked. Talk about being in a dream — clearly I recollected the experience and dreams of the last couple of months. *Rama was the silhouette and dazzling light in my dreams.* He had worked very hard to get me here. I now had a reference point. I felt like I had come home.

I walked away that evening dazzled by existence. I felt new somehow ... somehow purified and healed by the light Rama had transmitted.

During the weeks to follow, I saw others in a new way. My body felt like it was in a process of

purification and I became very sensitive. I could even feel the energy from the food as I walked down the aisle of the supermarket. I noticed I did not smoke cigarettes at all ... that habit dropped off like a piece of dead bark off a tree. There was evidence of my whole body regenerating its functions and balancing its systems. My meditations were regular and one hour exactly, where before the discipline was quite a struggle. Each day I had new realizations that filled me with wonder. Something was shifting within me. I felt more sensitive but at the same time stronger. *I was different. I did not feel the same person.* Would my mother still recognize me? I was moving through the situations in my life in the spirit of love.

The gift of the evening was that Rama was who he said he was. Fresh newness is being awakened and inspired in me all the time as I learn the true nature of reality.

I have no idea what is possible ... yet.

MARIA

My first experience with Rama was the result of a curious misunderstanding. Expecting to hear a lecture of his I stumbled instead into a workshop on meditation.

At that time I was studying literature at the University of California at San Diego where I kept seeing posters on a series of workshops on Zen Buddhism given by a Dr. Lenz. I was just beginning to explore the subject of mysticism and Eastern philosophy; so the topic was of interest to me. Before I knew it, however, the workshops were over, and I had missed the occasion.

A few weeks later I got another push towards the inner life, this time in the form of my twenty-year-old niece who came to pay me a visit from Switzerland. I had always been close to Eveline. She seemed more lively and adventurous than any other member of my family. On her visit she brought along several books by Carlos Castaneda which had been translated into German. I was familiar with them from many years before. Eveline's enthusiasm was catching and in no time we were engaged in a lively discussion about Castaneda and his adventures with the two Indian sorcerers, Don Juan and Don Genaro. "Wouldn't it be exciting," Eveline exclaimed, "to actually run into someone like Don Juan!" She even suggested that we light out for the Sonora desert to try to track him down. I didn't intend to go that far, but my interest in Don Juan's world was rekindled by her youthful sense of adventure.

The day following this discussion I saw another poster at UCSD announcing a workshop on the very subject of our conversation. I was of course not a little surprised when I read that it was given again by that Dr. Lenz, or Rama, as he was also called, who had talked on Zen Buddhism a few weeks earlier. "What a coincidence," I thought. "I guess I am destined to see him after all." I was sure Eveline would jump at the idea of hearing a talk on her favorite subject. As was to be expected, my niece was all for it.

A few days later, on April 14, 1981, to be exact, we drove up to UCSD. Little did we know what we were getting into. As we were waiting for the evening to begin, I watched the people slowly fill up the room I knew so well from my studies, which would soon turn into a quite unfamiliar world. I noticed right away that the participants of the workshop were not the students with the pens and notebooks I was used to, but a rather mixed and colorful crowd of people. Aside from the regular middle-class citizens there were women with long, flowing dresses who reminded me of the 1960's.

We had been waiting for some time when a tall man of about thirty, carrying a tape recorder, walked into the room. As he went up to the table by the blackboard, I had to assume that this was Rama. His appearance strengthened my growing suspicions that the evening would turn out somewhat differently from what I had expected. Because of his workshops on Zen Buddhism, I had taken him for a scholar of Eastern philosophy. With his curly, longish hair, his down vest, and his tape recorder, he reminded me more of an anthropologist on a field trip.

The talk he gave after greeting the audience was informal but eloquent I was struck by the ease with which he discussed complex issues dealing with alternate planes of reality, as if the subject was familiar

to him from experience, and not just from scholarly research. I had no idea at that time how true my impression was.

If Rama's "lecture" was not exactly what I had expected, what followed was even less so. "All the explanations in the world," he suddenly said, "cannot really make you understand the realities I live in. Instead of merely talking about the beyond, let's take a journey there together. I would like to meditate with you and give you some direct experiences."

The nature of the evening finally dawned on me. The talk had only been an introduction to a meditation. I noticed my niece's puzzled face and tried to explain to her as well as I could what to expect. Up to this point I had never formally meditated. All I knew about it was the little I had read in some books which wasn't suited to prepare me for the kind of meditation about to follow. Eveline welcomed the change of program. She had not been able to understand very much of Rama's talk due to her language problem and was ready for some action. "Sounds exciting," she said, "this might even beat a trip to the Sonora desert."

Rama took off his shoes and sat on the table, crossing his legs in the fashion of the Indian Yogis whose pictures I had seen in some books on Yoga. Rama turned on the tape machine, and after a few last words of advice he closed his eyes. The journey to the beyond began.

At first I could not get over the utterly unrealistic scene which presented itself to me. An American, sitting in lotus-posture in a lecture hall at UCSD, claiming to take us into another world, posed a real challenge to my conception of reality. A quick glance at the other people's calm faces convinced me that they did not think the whole thing at all unusual; so I decided on a "willing suspension of disbelief." Listening to the electronic music on the tape machine I began to enjoy the calmness which slowly permeated the room.

In his beautifully balanced pose, with his eyes closed, Rama presented a picture of perfect serenity and harmony. As I watched him I felt my apprehension and suspicion give way to more tender emotions. I could not help being moved by the kindness and peace he emanated. Just as I began to merge more fully with the stillness the first meditation was over.

During the short discussion following the meditation, Rama invited us to relate any experiences we may have had. I was suddenly wide awake when I heard someone talk about changes of light in the room. At one point I too had seen the room become slightly brighter, but had dismissed it as a figment of my imagination. Rama explained that what we had seen and felt were manifestations of a higher reality. "The world is not what you think it is; it is infinitely more beautiful. What you just experienced was a glimpse of true existence. Now we are going to meditate once more. There is no reason why all of you should not see and feel something the second time."

His words and his compassionate voice struck a chord in me. I felt my heart open up. To try to describe what happened from there on makes words seem painfully inadequate.

As soon as we began to meditate, I felt myself slipping into another world. Suddenly golden light filled the room, coming as if from nowhere. My mind could not believe what my eyes perceived. I focused more sharply. The light disappeared. As soon as I relaxed my gaze again, the golden mist was back. Surrounding Rama was an aura of luminosity. While he was scanning the audience and looking in my direction I saw the people in front of me fade into what looked like a river of liquid gold. Some force was sweeping through the room which had a curious effect on me. I felt energized and at the same time unable to move.

A world at once strange and yet somehow deeply familiar had opened up. I felt like I was coming home to a place I had been at some point in the distant past, which I had lost and found again. I was overwhelmed by a feeling of joy and wonder. A thought flashed through my mind, "This is what I have been looking for all my life."

After the experience had passed and everything seemed back to normal again, joy was followed by confusion. I looked at Rama in a daze, wondering whom I had been dealing with all this time.

The second meditation concluded the evening. In a way I was glad. I felt I had had all I could take. A glance at my niece's face told me that I had not been dreaming. She too had been in some strange land. She didn't need any encouragement to share her experience. "Wow!" she exclaimed (in Swiss German, of course), as soon as we were outside. "This man is magnificent." She had seen the golden light as well and felt the flow of energy. "I wish I lived here," she continued with a tinge of regret in her voice, "so I could come back."

"Maybe you will, one day."

On the way home it was very quiet in the car. We both tried to come to terms with our experiences. I sought to bring some order into the thoughts and feelings which rushed through me. I was both deeply happy and utterly confused. I felt that within a few minutes my life had changed forever in a way I could not yet comprehend. Something in me was afraid of that loss of control. And yet I did not wish anything undone. Deep down I knew it was right. The door to eternity had opened a crack, enough for me to never want to shut it again. A few weeks later I applied to become a student of Rama's and was accepted.

RICCARDO

I was born in Ferrara, a small town in the Po Valley of Northern Italy, first male in a very crowded family. My first name, Riccardo, was also my grandfather's name, and I believe, also that of his grandfather. Besides my first name, I was given two more: Giuseppe and Dino. They are the names of the two most respectable members of my family, after my grandfather of course.

The first time I was given a free choice was at the age of 18, when I surprised everybody, myself included, by choosing to study to become a geologist and not a lawyer or a medical doctor — as my grandfather would have liked — or a priest (if God had only listened to my aunt's prayers), or an astronomer, if I had listened to my heart. But at the last moment I seemed to have realized that stars and galaxies are much too far, unlike the colorful rocks and minerals I used to hide in my pockets or under the bed (my mother's curse). But compromises can do wonders. So, after an Italian Doctorate in Geology and a Canadian Ph.D. in Geology, I decided to start working as a Cosmochemist, studying extraterrestrial rocks.

All this to say that if I hadn't decided to become a Cosmochemist, I would have never been offered a research position at UCLA and who knows when and where I would have met Rama. Because I met him at UCLA on May 12, 1981.

Imagine a scientist who feels at ease with words like *mont-morillonite*, *omphacite*, *epitaxial growth* and *reciprocal lattice*, meeting people who talk about *kundalini*, *shakti*, *samadhi* and something that sounds like *shushumna*. I had no idea of what these people were talking about. But, being an adventurous man, I accepted the challenge and decided to approach the problem with the same enthusiasm I had when starting to work on a new scientific project.

After all, I thought, it's just a matter of time. A few weeks, maybe some months in order to understand the terminology and the meaning of those words (probably all of Indian origin) and then I would finally know what's going on. I always felt at ease with foreign words and I can speak quite a few foreign languages. Little I knew! Because, with the unfolding of time, all I seemed to understand was that the human mind is too limited, making it almost impossible to clearly describe and understand the meaning of what we are trying to do with Rama.

But the people attending the lectures seemed really nice and, when approached, seemed to behave like normal people. And, of course, I loved listening to Rama speak. I guess what hooked me at first was the sound of his voice, and his eyes; plus all the unbelievable things that were happening in the meditation room — like the room dissolving into a purple haze, while Rama's body was becoming bright and beginning to glow. I had also seen him transform into different people, mostly oriental. All these incredible experiences were, of course, challenging my scientific and strong Roman Catholic backgrounds,

throwing me into a deep confusion.

When I applied to join the Los Angeles Center and become a student of Rama's, I probably felt as scared as I did before an examination at the University. I feared that Rama wasn't going to accept me as his student as I didn't think I could clearly explain why I wanted so much to become his student. So I felt really shy and confused when my turn arrived for the interview with Rama, on a Sunday afternoon at his house in La Jolla, in June 1981.

I remember that my heart had started beating faster while I walked across the room toward him. He was sitting in a chair, looking at me. "Hallooo" he said, greeting me with a huge smile. I answered "Hi" and sat on the floor in front of him. He started scanning through the application form.

"You are from Italy?" he asked.

I answered, "I'm a Cosmochemist. I work with extraterrestrial rocks."

"That's fascinating," he said.

My heart lost a beat. Then, having gained courage, I started talking and rambling about my degrees and my jobs in Germany and at UCLA, clearly trying to impress him. But he didn't seem to listen to my words and kept looking at the form.

So I tried to jam as much impressive information as I could about my scientific background in the little time I had left.

"OK," he interrupted me.

"What?" I asked.

He smiled and nodded.

"You mean ... you don't want to know ... I don't have to tell you — I corrected myself — why I'm doing this?"

He kept smiling, shook his head and said, "No."

"I guess you know," I whispered after a moment of silence.

"Yes, I know," he answered.

I jumped up and started shaking his hand with Italian fervor. "Thank you, thank you." I couldn't believe it had happened. He seemed to be having a lot of fun.

JANE

"Meditation? You've got to be joking." I've been running tedious experiments for ten hours and I'm exhausted.

All I really want is dinner and a good stiff drink, but my friend insists: "C'mon Jane, you're always talking about spirituality. This guy's the real thing; he's enlightened. Last week was great. I saw the whole room turn gold." I'm too tired to argue. I've had an awful day and I just can't face an evening alone.

So, I find myself in a U.C. San Diego auditorium, which is rapidly filling with a variety of people. I'm relieved to find that the crowd appears fairly normal. Many are students, but a cross-section of ages is represented. About 60% are women.

I've been trudging along on my own, studying religion, philosophy and psychology. My primary interest is consciousness. I've been meditating and practicing yoga since I was 19, and I've taken classes on 'dreaming,' and hypnosis.

The room is suddenly silent. He has arrived. Dressed in white pants and a baggy blue sweater, he looks much more like an English professor than a guru. He sits cross-legged on a table covered with a brightly-colored afghan and asks if anyone has questions. People ask what I later learn to be standard

questions at any public meditation. They want to know about hallucinogenic drugs, occult powers, raising the kundalini. He patiently answers each question, drawing examples from a wide range of philosophy, psychology and literature. I'm impressed by both his knowledge and the way he weaves the various disciplines together. But what has caught my attention are his interactions with each individual. Before entering grad school at UCSD, I had begun training in clinical psychology. I learned that a good therapist listens not to what a person is saying, but to the motives and sincerity behind the words. Rama was more skillful at this than any therapist I'd encountered.

I raise my hand. "My problem is that meditation and my career don't mix. Meditation seems to make me more vulnerable to the aggressive, egotistical people I work with." He asks what I do. "I'm a neuroscientist." He looks at me for a moment and I realize I haven't really asked a question. I continue, "Well, I suppose I have two options: I can leave my career and meditate or cease meditation for the sake of my career." Suddenly I see the absurdity in my commentary. "Thank you for letting me talk to myself," I say. The room fills with laughter. I realize that without saying a word, this man has gotten me to laugh at myself, a good trick, because I tend to take myself far too seriously.

Someone then asked him what he does — he explains that he trains people to be spiritual *and* to live in the world, he says. This is appealing. I've always thought that if I were meant to join an ashram, I'd have been born in the East. But this is America, a country high on technology and hedonism, and we seem to need a new brand of spirituality. Looking in his eyes I remember a dream I've had; a community of people working together to expand their consciousness while living successfully in the world. I see he has the same dream.

I hear him mention women and my awareness snaps back to his words. "The reason so few women have attained enlightenment is because they give power away to men. I am particularly interested in the enlightenment of women ..." He goes on to discuss ways women lose power and offers suggestions on how to prevent this, but I no longer hear what he's saying. I feel his sincerity; it's not just a rap, he really cares about "women's liberation." I want to laugh and cry. I have found my teacher.

We meditate to "Chariots of Fire" by Vangelis. The room fills with beautiful whirlpools of light; they seem to spin around me and through me. I am overwhelmed with joy and love, but what I feel most strongly is relief — I have come home.

I see Rama change into many different people, faces that I will later recognize as memories from past lifetimes. Suddenly it is as though the room is empty; only Rama and I remain. I realize I have been seeking for him all of my life.

CAROL

It was a warm, relaxed Saturday night in the midst of summer and I was going to UCSD for an evening meditation. I had been coming to meditate with Rama for about four months now. One night I just wandered into a lecture of his at the University and kept coming back.

I had never been into meditation before that. I had tried it every now and then, but never for any extended period of time, nor with any real understanding of what it was I was trying to do. I didn't even know why I was drawn to Rama. His words excited me and gave me new ways of looking at life, but there was something else. Something that kept bringing me back week after week and that made the days in between seem almost endless.

That night I found myself in a bit of a playfully rebellious mood. I was questioning and challenging what I was doing there. I sat right in the front row of the classroom at the far end of the aisle so that I would have a good view of Rama. I then sat back in my chair to enjoy the evening, to check things out, to size them up so to speak.

Rama spoke, about what I don't remember, but what I do remember was watching him, looking at him

as if I were trying to figure him out. I was trying to see who he was. He began to meditate and, instead of trying to concentrate, I just continued to watch him, more interested in this perplexing man than in his ability to meditate or in the meditation itself. All of a sudden Rama began to change into another person.

He became an Oriental gentleman, around 30-40 years of age, but with a timeless quality to his features. He was clothed in robes so it was difficult to tell his build, but his face was rather rounded and his head was shaved. His expression was one of gentleness, compassion and wisdom. He also struck me as one who possessed a sense of humor as there was a slight smile in the corners of his mouth and a twinkle in his eyes. Sort of a cross between Santa Claus and the Mona Lisa. I felt a deep sense of love and friendship, as if I were looking at my best friend whom I hadn't seen in years. He melted back into Rama and I knew I didn't have the same feeling for Rama. I felt I was beginning to love him, in the way I knew how to love, but I recognized that the feeling I had experienced when I gazed at this Oriental man was coming from a depth I had never reached in this life before. So being curious, I wanted to see him again. I had learned once before that sometimes I could see Rama change forms if I just squinted my eyes slightly to blur his defined outline. So I tried squinting to see if it would bring back my friend. Sure enough, there he was again. But just as quickly he disappeared. Again, I squinted my eyes and again he appeared and disappeared. It was as if we were playing a game with each other. By this time I had completely forgotten Rama and the fact that I was supposed to be meditating. I just wanted to see this man. I guess I wanted to see if he were real, to bring him back into my world so that I could possibly understand why I had felt such strong feelings for a man that I had never seen before. So again I squinted my eyes to bring him back, but this time it was as if I were trying to will him back to me. He appeared again, but this time I was taken by surprise. Rama was still meditating facing straight out into the middle of the room. I was sitting far to the right of him so that I had a side view. When I first saw the Oriental man, he was looking in the same direction as Rama, but then as Rama continued to look forward this man turned right towards me and gave me a smile that would have put the Cheshire cat to shame. It was very quick, but it also seemed to be a moment frozen in time. That smile was something I could never forget. And in the brief moment he looked at me I knew that I had known this man before, not in this lifetime, but in another time and country. I also knew that I had been very close to him.

About a week later at our weekly meditation at Rama's house he called me over to talk to him before I left. I was going to ask him if he was that man in another lifetime, if I had been a student of his in another life? Was he my teacher somewhere long ago and was that where all these feelings were coming from?

Rama just looked at me as if he were looking right into me and before I could get out even my first question he just smiled at me, a smile reminiscent of the week before, and very matter of factly said, "Of course."

MAGGIE

I want to make one thing perfectly clear. I have never been a spiritual-type person. It would embarrass me to death to jump up and down and bang a drum in an airport. You would have to drag me, kicking and screaming, to one of those spiritual group groups. I've never been attracted to Eastern religions and can't recognize, let alone pronounce, the names of the famous gurus. Nope, not for me.

I was supposed to be a Catholic, but they blew it. My loss of faith can be directly attributed to two incidents. At the age of 8, after having memorized the entire script in Latin (I had that Mass down cold), I discovered to my horror that girls could never, ever become servers. We were never to wear those classy dresses; never to ring those little bells; banished forever to the outside of the Communion railing. We could become nuns, though, which leads me to the second incident.

When I was 13, Sister Camillus passionately flung her arms around me, pressed me against her ample, heaving chest and wailed, "Maggie, dear, fall in love with Jesus! Become His bride! Put your sex

life on the altar!” Now, I had little idea of what my sex life was — much less where I wanted to put it. Most of my friends fell for it and virtually marched off to the convent in their graduation gowns. That was when I found out I wasn't religious. They could no longer speak to me because they were and I wasn't. One consolation was that I had finally figured out what I was. I was an agnostic! It had such a nice ring, “agnostic,” so down to earth!

I spent my college years as a philosophy major, assiduously searching for the meaning of Me. It took me until graduate school to discover that there wasn't any.

I then embarked on the only logical course — hedonism, or, the search for freedom. I sought freedom by becoming totally dependent upon various people and substances.

I don't mean to suggest that I was a total washout in the spirituality department. I had, after all, read *The Lazy Man's Guide to Enlightenment* (although it did take me a while to finish it). I had also chanted “Nam Yo Ho Renge Kyo” for a full month because a friend swore it would bring me my every wish (it didn't), so I wasn't completely out of touch.

In January of '82, I abruptly quit my cushy job. Life slowed down and meditation assumed a larger role. I would often daydream about meeting a teacher; someone really special; someone evolved. Now, I had nothing to complain about externally. I liked my life. But down in the depths — somewhere around the pit of the stomach — I felt something was wrong. Vague longings would wash over me. No doubt about it — something was missing. It wasn't until several months later that I realized that this period had been a quiet preparation for meeting Rama.

As Walter would say, “And that's the way it was” that night in March when I walked into the public meditation.

Rama looked very pleasant; appealing; disarming. He was obviously intelligent, and had an outrageous sense of humor. I liked him immediately, and sensed that the rest of the audience (about 150 people) also warmed to him rather rapidly. He suggested that we meditate with our eyes open and that, my friends, is when samadhi hit the 'ole fan for yours truly.

I felt uncomfortably warm. I was wearing a clean silk blouse and was annoyed when I noticed that my arms were so wet it was plastered against my skin. I thought the heat had inadvertently been turned up. When I looked back up at the stage, it was as if a light switch had been clicked on. Everything was bathed in a soft, golden light. The walls started to move, slowly, like honey sliding off a spoon. I remember thinking, “This is exactly like a psychedelic drug.” (My drug experience was, I hasten to add, very limited. The highlight was the time that, believing I was a mushroom, I tried to dig my way back into the earth.)

Then his face began to transform from one face into another. They appeared and disappeared like flickering candlelight. I vaguely remember thinking something about the march of humanity (or something equally prosaic). There was a gold hat, which was layered from the peaked top down to the forehead, on his head and an extra pair of arms behind him. His solar plexus was a bright purple/blue, a gorgeous, vibrant color, which also bubbled up out of the top of his head.

I had been so engrossed in all the physical and visual sensations that I had totally forgotten to meditate. When I tried to focus, he disappeared — gone; out to lunch; no forwarding. When he reappeared, he began gazing directly at each person in the audience, row by row. When he looked toward the area where I was sitting, it was as if a white beacon was scanning us. The bodies of the people in the rows in front of me were opaque, but outlined in a bright yellow/gold. His eyes continued to move down my row and then met mine.

Imagine, for a moment, that when you look into a mirror the reflection is as real as you are. The mirror is all that separates you. When Rama looked at me, I felt propelled forward until (to follow the metaphor) I collided with the mirror and it shattered. There was no separate me and no separate reflection. For a fraction of an instant we were one and the same. I was simultaneously looking inside and outside. He smiled and the stage exploded in waves of purple and gold.

When the meditation was over, Rama asked people to talk about what they had experienced. I was incapable of reciting the alphabet at that point, but many others did an admirable job. Someone mentioned the heat in the room. Rama explained that he had raised the kundalini energy. Someone else mentioned the gold light and all the faces. Another person saw him disappear and Rama said, “Yes, isn't that neat?”

Now, I have to admit that, in years past, if a friend had called me up and told me she had seen a blue bubble come out of some man's head, I would have whistled for the guys with the butterfly nets. But in my months as a student, I've become a vegetarian; started jogging three miles a day; and stopped smoking and drinking — all with little effort. This kind of crazy I can handle.

When I glance back at the curious tapestry of my life, I'm grateful for every single person and event that led me here. I'm happy. I'm home. I've seen the light.

ANNE

The first time that I meditated with Rama was at the La Jolla house about a year and a half ago at a class for the University for Humanistic Studies. Rama had been invited to be a guest speaker for the class and he in turn had invited us to his house for a meditation.

At that time I was attending the University for Humanistic Studies to get a Masters Degree in metaphysics. I wasn't sure what I was going to do with an M.A. in metaphysics, but I figured the classes would be interesting. I hadn't particularly experienced any psychic phenomena in my life, but I knew that there was more to life than what I saw and experienced in my everyday reality.

It was funny that the U.H.S. class was on Metaphysical Leaders. I didn't realize that Rama was one. The teacher of our class had asked Rama to speak to the class on kundalini and the kundalini masters. And Rama's naturally casual manner certainly didn't make me take note of him.

About 15 of us from the class sat in the living room in a circle, some on the floor, some on chairs and couches. In a relaxed manner Rama gave us a very interesting talk on the kundalini and the kundalini masters. And then he said he would demonstrate the kundalini in a meditation. To me the kundalini was a theory with which I had had no real experience. When we meditated Rama told us to keep our eyes open. I thought that was strange. But I felt and saw swirls of energy around Rama. And I felt energy well up inside of me, in my heart. When Rama meditated on me, I felt as though he reached inside of me and embraced my total being. I was very much taken aback and my first reaction was to rear back. But I felt the love, and the compassion, the type of love that I had looked for all of my life, but had never found. And I fell in love. I applied and became a student a week later.

SUZANNE

How do you know when you meet your Spiritual Teacher ...

How do you know when you meet your Spiritual Guide ...

For me, my inner being knew that Rama was mine long before my mind would accept the fact. My first encounter with him was at the public meditations held in the spring of '82 at the Miramar Sheraton in Santa Monica. Since the only image I had of God-Realized people consisted of long hair, beards, robes, blankets, and japa beads, when I saw the poster of Rama I thought to myself, “You've *got* to be kidding!!! This guy is supposed to be 'Self Realized?' ... no, no, no ... doesn't fit in at all with the image. Looks like the guy is Phi Beta Kappa.”

I continue reading, “... He *is* Phi Beta Kappa,” which gave me the giggles ... Oh no ... (already he had me laughing) ... I read on ... Hmmm ... he's gone to the University of Connecticut ... that's right near my home town ... *What!!!* Someone who's Self-Realized from Connecticut ... Now you've *really* got to be kidding ... Hmmm ... Wait a minute ... I've been on a Spiritual path for over eight years, read numerous

Holy books by spiritual people ... how come I haven't heard of this guy??? Then the poster went on to list certain past lives that he had experienced from a Zen Master in 1531-1575 to Head of a Tibetan Monastery in 1912-1945. I didn't believe it. How could he know that??? Then to put it on a poster ... this guy's really asking for it ... But Monday is my day off, maybe I'll go to the lecture and give the poor guy a chance ... (big of me, eh?).

So the evening of the lecture rolls around and I find myself at the Miramar Sheraton along with one of my friends. We walked in the room, which was quite large and filled with an energy that seemed to buzz. A feeling of anticipation began to flow through my veins. We found two seats fairly near the front.

The music in the background started filtering into my consciousness and I realized it was electronic music ... I don't know ... maybe I was expecting Gregorian chants or hymns of some sort.

I start to hear whispers, "Hey, there's Rama" ... "Look, there he is" ... I turn around to see him walking towards the front surrounded by an entourage of four men. Part of me must have still expected to see him dressed in at least "white" clothing because when I saw him wearing a navy blue blazer and dark pants I couldn't believe it. He looked just like he did in the poster. My scrutinizing antenna went up.

He greeted us and there was "something" about him that I liked right away. He began speaking to us and before I knew what was happening, everything I needed to hear at that point in my life about relationships, anger, love, attachments, meditating, were all being verbalized. I found myself sitting on the edge of my chair feeling like a sponge, trying to absorb all that he was saying.

After talking for a time about meditation he suggested we all meditate together, and this time to try meditating with our eyes open. A minute or so into the meditation my whole visual field was becoming altered by different gradations of Light, finally having the periphery dissolve so there was only his face defined by a clear pulsating Light that would change in intensity and hue. Then tears started flowing down my cheeks and wouldn't stop. I had never ever in my whole life experienced what I went through on an inner level during that meditation. It was as if a street cleaner had gone right through my emotional being.

The lights went up and Rama offered to answer any questions we might have. He meditated with us again before the lecture for that evening ended. Once again I experienced the same unraveling, and was left utterly speechless and physically unable to move for quite some time after they turned up the lights.

For the duration of the lecture series I found myself inwardly experiencing a tug-of-war ... my rational mind was doing the best job it could denying my experiences that followed at other meditations I attended, and the fact that an awareness of Rama was with me all the time, in my thoughts, dreams, and meditations at home. After awhile the constant challenging of my attraction to this Light was beginning to lose its power. But still I wouldn't admit I wanted to become a student and study with Rama, yet every Monday, there I was, at the Miramar ... I couldn't seem to stay away. Even at the last Intensive, I wouldn't say to my friend whether or not I was going to apply to be a student, and I wouldn't say it to me. But at the last minute, my love of the Light actually propelled me to the back of the room to get an application. In my heart there was a feeling of love and happiness that was overflowing into my whole being ... For it knew.

It knew.

ELAINE

This is actually two stories. The first is of how I was cured of a disease. The second is how I met Rama and became his student.

I have worked in the health field for the past ten years as a physical therapist. I have been involved in taking care of people in pain and ill health. It was therefore with some amount of reluctance that I began to realize that there might be something wrong with my physical health.

When I look back I can realize that my health first started to change about three years ago. At that time I had been exercising rigorously, at least twice a day, engaging in total vegetarianism, fasting, and generally putting a lot of energy into getting my body into good shape.

One day I noticed that every time I went out and pushed myself to the maximum physically I would end up sick for the next week. This pattern had repeated itself three or four times and I had decided that I must have had a touch of anemia and reduced my exercise levels. Since that time I hadn't noticed any problems.

My health had come to my attention again because of the increasing drain I felt with even the normal amount of work. I had been used to working hard and feeling the effects afterwards, but this was different. I was working at the time at the Solana Center For Total Health, and I found that I would barely drag myself home, eat something for supper, and then collapse on the living room floor.

Our clinic offered a wide range of health practitioners including acupuncturists, chiropractors, psychologists, medical doctors, and nutritionists. I decided that I was going to have to discover what was wrong with me soon, and so I made appointments with, and talked to, several of the staff.

The problem was that I *looked* healthy. Whenever I was asked to describe my symptoms, the closest I could get was fatigue, lack of energy, slightly changed eating pattern, and a "feeling" that something was wrong. Although I didn't realize it at the time, about the nearest I got to understanding the problem was during a rebirthing session when I both became aware of a great deal of tension in my solar plexus region. In the rest of my consultations I checked out as perfectly healthy.

The feeling that there was something wrong persisted, however, and I began to ask God to help me. As a one-time devotee of Yogananda, I had dropped off from regular meditations for several years. Somewhere in the time between October and December I had begun to meditate again with consistency. It was during these meditations that I began to cry to God to help me. I really didn't even realize what it was that I needed help with. It was just a feeling that the world was overpowering.

About this time, early January, the director of our clinic wrote me a note asking if I would volunteer my services to give physical therapy to members of the office staff. I had written him a note in reply in which I told him that he didn't have to ask me to do that, because I already had been trying to help ease the strained necks and backs of our overworked staff.

I went to put the note in his mailbox when an urge came over me and I added at the bottom, "but who is going to take care of the physical therapist?" I stood for several minutes debating whether to give him the note. I ripped it up, rewrote it, tore that one up and rewrote it again, all the time struggling with whether or not to keep in the last question. It has never been easy for me to ask for help and this note was one of the few times that I had. Finally some part of me won the struggle and I put the letter in his box amazed that I had actually asked someone to help me.

The next night the clinic director asked me if I wanted to go with him to a meditation at Rama's house. I had heard a little bit about him from several of his students that also worked at the clinic, and their stories of "watching him turn gold," and "watching the room light up," had struck me as being a little incredible. It just seemed to be out of the realm of human possibilities.

We got there just before Rama walked in the room. I recognized a few of his students and my reasoning mind let go of certain doubts because of the respect that I had for them as responsible, rational human beings. Rama entered the room and sat down and began to lecture on meditation. I found myself experiencing an instant trust and liking for him. There was a definite truth to what he was saying. The world began to fade, the people I knew, and the room around me just seemed to slowly leave my consciousness. I became totally immersed in what he was saying and then suddenly I noticed what looked like a gold color of light encircling his body and spreading out to fill up the whole room. I kept trying to come back to my "senses," but the light persisted. About this time Rama asked everyone in the room to meditate. In the next 30 minutes my consciousness became quite altered. After a few minutes of meditation I found myself looking not at Rama but at an older person with Oriental features and a beard

and mustache. I had immediate feelings of recognition, total love, and trust. My instant perception was that I must have sat with and loved this person for many, many lifetimes. I remember that I started to cry out of happiness and from the intense love that I was experiencing. The meditation was continuing and he was looking at each person in the room one by one. He came back to me several times and I would be overcome by the love each time and by sensations of intense heat. The meditation ended and I sat there in a bit of a trance as the world as I knew it began to filter back into my field of perception. He thanked everyone for coming and asked for questions or comments on what people had experienced. Much to my relief several people in the room talked about experiencing heat, seeing the room light up in a golden glow, and seeing him change form. I didn't talk because the feelings I had experienced were too real, too deep inside of myself to be able to find the words to describe them. After he had answered everyone's questions he thanked everyone for coming and then asked us all to enjoy a few refreshments. I wandered up to the fireplace, still in a daze and stood warming my hands. One of my friends came over to me after awhile and told me that I was glowing. I couldn't respond other than to just smile more and feel my heart opening. Rama came over to the fire after a few minutes and put another log on to burn. I longed intensely to say something to him, to connect what I had just experienced to this seemingly friendly, "American," human. Finally I murmured a half question, half statement, "you're so familiar." He continued to play with the fire and replied with assurance, "Japan."

I left the meditation and went home still feeling my heart and feeling a great deal of energy. I stayed up all night and most of the next night. All of my resistance and skepticism were gone and I looked forward to seeing him again.

The opportunity presented itself in the next week when he invited all the staff of our clinic to a dinner and meditation at his house. Rama entered the room and we all sat down on the floor in front of him. After a few introductory remarks he asked if the girl who was the physical therapist was present. I raised my hand from the back and he proceeded to tell us that when he had seen me the previous week he had seen that I had a large black mass growing in my etheric body in the region of my solar plexus. He said that he had cleared me of it and that I would be okay, but that I, and everyone else, would have to become aware of picking up energy from people.

He told us that there was a karmic transfer of energy from patient to therapist, and this was especially so when you physically touched them. He said that this energy was quite damaging to our subtle physical bodies.

As he spoke I could remember instances in which I would wake up with the identical symptoms of a patient that I treated the day before. I could also remember patients that I had dreaded to see, feeling that they were draining me of my energy. I would treat them anyway because of my sense of responsibility. I sat there in a state of shock. Finally someone had seen. The feelings I had that there was something wrong were real after all, and it had taken Rama to see and to help me. He had not needed "physical" symptoms to see that there was something that was drastically wrong with me.

Rama then asked us all to meditate with him. This time, whenever he looked at me I felt such intense energy entering my body that I actually leaned over backwards. There was a feeling that my body was spinning and that I was sitting next to a burner that was turned up to full heat. Once again the feelings of love and familiarity overcame me and I began to cry.

Suddenly the meditation was over and I sat there with tears of happiness rolling down my face. It was as if Rama had tapped a well that did not want to stop flowing. After awhile the clinic director came over and asked me if I wanted to meet Rama. I sat down in front of him, tears still pouring out, and thanked him for what he had done for me. He told me that I would be okay, but that I was going to have to become extremely careful about picking up energy from people.

The tears were continuing to pour down my cheeks and I sat there, speechless. Finally, from somewhere inside of me a voice took form, and I asked him if I could be his student.

"Are you willing to care for other people more than yourself?" he asked me.

“I think that's my problem,” I replied.

He looked at me intensely. So intensely that I drew back. He smiled and said, “I'm just looking.” He paused for a moment and then asked me, “How much do you want to obtain enlightenment, 50%, 70%, 90%? You need to want it 100%. You need to want it more than anything else in the world. You need to want it with all your heart and mind.”

I sat there for what seemed like an eternity and then finally he told me that he would accept me as a student. My heart almost burst with joy as I felt the weight of the world lift from my shoulders and a peace and sense of safety settle into my being.

How can one describe the feelings of someone who realizes that someone has just saved their life? I left his house with a smile that almost cracked my face while at the same time crying from a source that did not want to stop. When I woke up the next morning I had a deep sense of peace and the feeling that God had answered my prayers.

I instantly began to change the manner in which I worked, reducing the number of people that I treated, washing my hands thoroughly between patients, and refusing to treat people with a lot of negative energy. As a woman, he had advised me to avoid treating certain men because they would transfer sexual energy to me that would be damaging to my subtle physical. My health began to improve and I experienced a growing level of energy and increased happiness. My friends and co-workers began to remark about the sparkle in my eyes. Inwardly I have become aware of how easily I lost my energy by opening up too much to people. It was my empathy with people that had attracted me to the therapy field in the first place, but it was this type of caring that was the problem.

I asked Rama how I was doing, recently, and he said that I was much better when compared to before, but that I still needed to put distance between myself and certain people. He told me that it's not that other people intend to hurt you, they just do.

I'm certain that one day I will do some other type of work. Until then, I am eternally grateful to Rama for saving my Me and helping me to see and grow. It has been his love for me that has helped me to realize that we need to save our best love for God and for Eternity.

PATRICIA

I could hear Elizabeth on the other end of the line congratulating me, but my mind was not on what she was saying. Somehow, the excitement and the seriousness of what I was holding in my hand had all my attention. I had just received a letter from Lakshmi informing me that I had been accepted as a student by Rama.

“Well, Pat, I've got to go.” It was Elizabeth's voice. “I'll talk to you later.”

I thanked her for calling and hung up the phone.

Sitting on the edge of the bed, looking at the tall eucalyptus tree right outside my window, I began to wonder how the events in my life had brought me to this point.

Wasn't it only seven years ago that I was living in the ghetto of East Oakland? I was a Mexican-American with only a high school education. Would I fit in? Would there be other students like me?

Thinking about it made me kind of nervous. “Oh well,” I thought to myself, “I've always been kind of different anyway. What else is new?” Besides, I knew everything would work out. It always did.

Making decisions concerning my spiritual life was something I seemed to be doing more and more of. I had gone through so much change since I started meditating seven years ago, that by now I had learned to just watch my life.

I had been brought up by two spiritually open-minded parents. My mother believed in God, but was not into organized religion at all. My father, I felt, was always searching and, because of this, I was

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exposed to many different ways of finding God. He knew that spiritually we were always changing, and so I felt that I always had the freedom to worship God in whatever way I felt was comfortable at the time.

So, I had asked myself this same question many times before, and had always come up with a clear answer every time.

So what was it that made me decide to take this direction?

I thought back to my first meditation with Rama, on March 11, 1982. It was held at the Moscone Convention Centre. I sat in the back of the room because I really didn't know what to expect, and so if I decided that I wanted to leave early, I could do it quietly.

I remember being there only a few minutes before Rama walked in. I really wasn't sure if it was him, because he was so average-looking. But then I immediately became aware of the intense energy that filled the room. I knew it was him. I realized that I was in a meditative state without any effort. He took off his shoes and sat in a lotus position, on a table that was on the stage.

He began the evening by thanking everyone for coming that night. He said that during his flight up from Los Angeles he had watched how each of us had come to him. He talked a while longer about different things, and then proceeded to give instructions on a way to meditate.

He asked us to sit up straight. Almost at once I could feel a wall of intense energy rushing towards me. I felt that I was locked in it. I could see this golden light everywhere, but being much brighter around each person. I continued to watch him. At some point he began to take on a different physical appearance. The person now meditating on the stage was much older, with salt and pepper hair, a short beard, and wearing a white robe, not unlike a biblical-looking figure. And then again, without really knowing how, I found myself looking at a very old Oriental monk, with a long white beard, holding some kind of staff, and also wearing a robe. Then I found myself looking at Rama again. He bowed his head and asked us to sit back and relax.

At that moment, I remember finding it very hard to accept what I had just experienced, thinking things like this only happened in places like India!

He talked for awhile, then answered a few questions. Before he started his second meditation he asked us to sit up straight. I began to meditate again. After a moment or so, I began to see light radiating from him until it was everywhere. The room and everyone in it seemed to be swallowed up by this light. Parts of him became transparent. I could actually see right through him. Then he completely merged with the light. At that moment, I felt that all there was was my mind pulsating in absolute nothingness. The next thing I remember was hearing his voice telling us to sit back and relax.

It was a few seconds before I began to come out of meditation. My head was buzzing. I was very high on energy. I sat and watched him as he spoke. I felt that it was going to be very hard for me to believe that all this really happened, once I left this place. But that really wasn't what was bothering me.

Something else had taken place that night that would cause me to want to change my whole life. The real experience that night, for me, was love. I knew without any doubt that this man loved me. All during the evening I felt so much love and humility coming from this person it would make me cry at times. I had never experienced love on this level.

He closed the evening with something like "good night," stayed for a while longer to answer a few personal questions, and then left the room.

I sat there for awhile before getting up to leave. As I stepped out into the cool San Francisco night, I remembered feeling all the beauty of that moment.

ARLENE

A voice kept coming up inside of me: "Go to California." This was in August of 1979. I was

living in New York. The same week, I later found out, Rama moved from New York to San Diego. I hadn't met him at that time.

It took me almost a year to follow my intuition. I ended up in Los Angeles. Shortly thereafter I made a new friend, Jack, who called one day to say that he was going to check out a spiritual teacher who was lecturing. Having nothing better to do, I tagged along. I had been a member of another spiritual organization for twelve years and doubted that I was going to learn anything new. So I approached the event with no expectations.

Rama turned out to be very funny and I liked him immediately. When we started to meditate Rama suggested that we do so with our eyes open. I sat there wondering how anyone was supposed to meditate with their eyes open and Rama looked at me.

And then there was a moment. When I met Rama's eyes something happened and I left this world for a few moments. It was as though his eyes became a gateway to eternity, and as I looked into them, I passed through the gate and on the other side, there was no time, no space. The room didn't exist. Nothing existed but eternity itself. It was like passing through a golden doorway of light and standing for a moment on the edge of nothingness. It was the most beautiful experience I had ever felt and I longed to have it over and over again. Because it was like coming home. It was like finally coming home after being away for a long, long time.

SANDY

I remember noticing the poster on my way to the chemistry library. It was winter quarter at the University of California in Los Angeles, and as a Psychobiology major, I had to spend a lot of my time studying in that library trying to train my mind to think scientifically, analytically, and rationally. I remember reading the poster, looking at the picture and thinking, "Wait a minute. Who is this guy? He can't be enlightened, he's too Caucasian. Everyone knows that you can't be enlightened unless you come from India. So what's going on here?" Then I reread the poster that came complete with his resume of past life enlightenments, his present life education, and accomplishments, and his promise of a direct channeling of peace, light, power, and ecstasy to the audience, and I thought, "Why not? This guy is either a madman with delusions of being a messiah, or he's the real thing. Either way it's bound to be a good show. What have I got to lose?"

I slipped into the room he was to speak in just as the school clock announced that the appropriate time had arrived. I came in wearing my scientific, rational person's attitude, and I was prepared to leave at the tiniest sign of pretentiousness or deluded egotism or anything of that nature. He was early. (That's the first and last time I've seen him come early to any event since then.) There were about thirty people there, the lights were dimmed and there sitting on top of the table where I was accustomed to watching stuffy chemistry teachers perform experiments, was this guy who looked like he could have been a misplaced history graduate student. At this point I'd love to be able to say that I immediately recognized him as my teacher and threw myself at his feet, but that is not the case.

Instead, I slipped into a seat on the aisle in the fifth row, and just sat and listened to this man with curly hair and intense eyes talk about Nirvana in my chemistry classroom. Then we meditated. He put on this wonderful, spacey, electronic music by Tangerine Dream. The music fascinated and relaxed me, but meditating with my eyes open did not. Open? How can you meditate with your eyes open? I don't know, but that's what he told us to do so I gave it my best shot. It made me very uncomfortable. My eyes hurt no matter how many times I blinked to keep them wet, and I was distracted by all my thoughts and the strangeness of having my old comfortable chemistry classroom so transformed by this person and his presence.

After the meditation, he opened the floor to questions. It was at that point that I noticed that there was something definitely different about this man. He was not deferring to us. I have been in enough

audiences, and given enough speeches to know that the usual game when addressing the public is that the speaker is supposed to deliver his ideas in a way that will win the audience's approval and support. To do this, a speaker will often have to bend or sweeten the truth to make it palatable. This man wasn't doing that. He was just up there telling the truth as it was. Instead of stretching the truth to fit our awareness, he was stretching our awarenesses to fit the truth. And he wasn't the least bit intimidated by our status as rational, skeptical, scientific UCLA students. A blonde woman in her thirties who was sitting to my right asked him if she could maintain her upwardly mobile career if she was to become a student of his. Rama gave her a very polite and sincere answer about how the spiritual life and the physical world life did not necessarily need to conflict with each other. He spoke for a while in this way, then he glanced down for a moment, and his face took on the expression of someone who was listening inwardly to something very funny. He raised his head, looked straight into her eyes and said, "But you know, ultimately it doesn't make any difference, because you're not that important." And he gave her a big beaming "can you catch that one" smile. She didn't catch it. You could feel the indignation and resentment pour off her as she and her ego folded her arms across her chest, and closed her mind. For some reason, I did catch it. I knew what he meant, and I loved it. He had spoken the truth without worrying about how she would react, and I respected that. I liked him. He had power and integrity and knowledge. But because I am basically a devotional person, winning my intellect is not enough. To get me to change my life, you have to win my heart. This is exactly what he did during the first Spring public meditation at the Sheraton hotel.

The setting was entirely different from that at UCLA. We were in a large banquet hall with carpeting, warm colors, lots of people and heavy security around Rama. This was quite a contrast from the dimly lit, dingy, intimate atmosphere of the chemistry classroom back at school. And although the tone of the evening was more formal, and the distance between Rama and the audience was greater, there was an electricity here that was not present at school. Maybe it was this energy, or maybe it was the fact that it was my birthday, or maybe it was both or neither, but the meditation that evening changed my life. I don't remember if he played that lovely, alien music or not. I just remember sitting in the third row from the front, and really wanting to know whether there was any destiny between Rama and myself. I started the meditation with my eyes closed, focusing on my heart chakra, and inwardly asking the Universe to show me whether we had a connection or not. I sat this way for a time until at one point I saw a strange sort of metallic beam appear that originated at my heart chakra and ended at Rama's. I sat looking at this thing with my mind's eye; completely confused as to what this weird thing was. Then, just as if someone had poured kerosene on this beam and lit it at his end, I saw a golden fire race up the beam towards me, and engulf me. I saw the flames bursting in a sort of halo that covered my body, but stood about two inches off the surface of my skin. I could feel my skin flush, and my heartbeat accelerate. Well, I got so excited and amazed, that I forgot for a second that I was meditating. I opened my eyes, and saw Rama looking right at me! Too much! Much too much! Right then I knew without a doubt that something was definitely going on here, and that no matter what I had to do I was going to be part of it if he'd let me.

BRIAN

I was born in Shanghai, China. My mother and father lived for twenty-four and thirty-one years in China respectively, for much of the time in the interior of the North. We refugeed from Shanghai in 1940 when I was eight months old, since the international situation was becoming very dangerous. I grew up in an environment of Chinese and Tibetan artifacts. My earliest recollections are of the mysterious power and serenity emanating from the Tibetan Buddhas in the family collection. When I was very young, I gained a tremendous sense of peace from looking at them and was imbued with wonder, curiosity, and a desire to recapture something I felt I had known long before.

I grew up in a Christian religious sect with an emphasis upon healing, but in an environment in which we read and discussed oriental and western religion and philosophy. I broke with the religion in which I was raised after finishing my first four years of college, and I became very involved with western

Kabalah, Tarot, and practiced Transcendental Meditation. I was always searching for something: that serenity with which I had had vivid phantasmagoric contacts as a child, and the light of which I had gained some brief glimpses.

In my searching, I have encountered a number of Swamis, Gurus and Spiritual Teachers of one sort or another, all of whom had something to offer. However, even though I knew others who had found that for which they were looking, for various reasons I did not. Occasionally, I would find that a group was too immersed in ritual and mannerism and I had difficulty appreciating whatever spiritual quintessence a teacher or group alleged or offered because of this. At other times, I found that teachers generated more ego games and coercion than light among their followers, or simply that they were too egg-headed or too emotional or too puritanical or whatever else for my tastes and inclinations. In all my searchings I have become a person used to making his own rules through making his own mistakes. I do not like to be told what to do by others, or to surrender my faculties for self determination in any way whatsoever. I have tried this and found that for me, it never has worked. A friend whom I respect introduced me to Rama's public workshops in February, 1982. About a year before, I had seen Rama's picture on a bulletin board somewhere on the campus of the community college where I've been teaching English for fifteen years. I recall having reacted to the picture with a mixture of skepticism, a sense of "ho-hum, here's another one," and a certain twinge of curiosity. After all, I reasoned, someone who blatantly announces that he is an enlightened, self-realized Spiritual Teacher if he is not a charlatan or self-deceived, might simply be telling the truth.

I did not associate the picture with "Dr. Frederick Lenz" till I saw it again at the convention room at the Miramar Sheraton Hotel in Santa Monica, California. Then, I saw it and naturally made the connection with my first reactions. In any event, the particular friend who suggested I attend a public workshop is one whose judgment I trust, with whom I had been on numerous spiritual adventures and quests. It was a matter of course that I would stay and experience the influence of a Spiritual Teacher whom he in particular had recommended with an unqualified but calm enthusiasm.

The person who came into the convention room at the Miramar Sheraton Hotel that evening did not resemble my first impressions of the picture I saw. He looked and looks like a successful young Ph.D., which is one of the things he is. He is tall and imbued with a power I found to be all the more impressive because of its being devoid of egotism or sanctimony of any kind, and because of his abundant and natural good humor. He impressed me as being professional and moreover, his students impressed me because although they obviously revered him, they were devoid of any ambience of being "holier" or "more genuflective" or "spiritually more profound than thou." Having lived in Southern California all my life and having traveled throughout the world, I've seen a lot of groups and games. This one immediately struck me as if it were going to be something very different.

It was Rama went into lotus position and began meditating after telling us to meditate with eyes open a few moments into the meditation. Almost immediately after I opened my eyes, I saw rings of gold and pure red light around him. I am no stranger to auras and other paranormal phenomena. I had seen other teachers and a number of natural psychics manifest various phenomena. However, I had never experienced anything as intense or vivid as this before, and particularly had never experienced anyone who could emanate energies at all resembling what I saw here who was so unselfconsciously humble about it.

During the meditation, I felt my heart and throat chakras and third eye activate and was permeated with a powerful peace. Previously with occult Kabalists I had experienced power; however, it was always flavored by a certain ego-freezing ferociousness. Also previously I had experienced serenity; however, it all too often was accompanied by an ingenuous blissfulness I found to be repugnant. Never before had I experienced a teacher who emanated peace, power and genuine humility all at once.

While watching him, I became aware that I was seeing the subtle physical in a partially lighted room. Again, I had seen the subtle physical aura before, both in the dark and in partially lit rooms. However, in each case it was after a great deal of ceremony, ritual and presuggestion. Rama, in contrast, had not

suggested anything. This was not hypnosis and certainly not the kind of altered state it is possible to achieve after hours of ritual and hocus-pocus: it was natural. I could blink my eyes and snap out or think of other things and it was still there. I had a sense of lucidity, yet I could make it come and go. I was observing what I was observing not because of hypnotic induction but simply because it was there and Rama was quite simply who he said he was — nothing less and nothing more.

This first meditation and many others during the public workshop were to music, specifically sections of Tangerine Dream's *Exit* and *White Eagle*, as well as a few other selections from other groups. I had meditated to music before; however, when meditating with Rama I felt the music echoing inside my head, as if I were wearing a good pair of stereophones, and I was not. As a child I was synesthetic till I was about eight years of age and it faded. During my first meditations with Rama, the light and color emanating from him sometimes interblended and at others contrasted with the music. Later, it was to occur to me that my synesthesia¹ was coming back.

Between meditations he asked for comments and questions from the group of two hundred and fifty to three hundred people in the convention room. A number of people saw what I saw and experienced similar phenomena, and some did not. I noticed that his response to people in the audience was supportive and laconic without being judgmental or falsely pollyanna. His ability to communicate impressed me as being all the more powerful because of his lack of any need to impress or hype or judge his audience.

During subsequent meditations that evening, I saw the same light and started to see Rama change form on the subtle physical level. During the second meditation that first evening, he appeared to go into a cubistic form, then to change to what looked like an Oriental teacher, possibly Zen Buddhist. During the second question-answer-comment session, I told him about this.

“Ah, you're going through some Bardo,” he responded. Indeed, I was. In the past I had experienced various flashes and openings and group phenomena, only nothing as steady and consistent as this — nor as calm. Previously, I had experienced everything from mild positive upset to exuberant enthusiasm bordering on hysteria when experiencing observations or openings with other teachers and groups. Also, very often, the insights or flashes from these experiences would go away or dissolve, even if I would write them down. With Rama, right from the beginning everything that was taking place, all that I was observing, tended to calm and center me. Instead of wanting to shout from the rooftops, meditating with Rama made me want to fade naturally into the crowd, something I'd never wanted to do before.

During the first public workshop, Rama made clear that he is a proponent of “sophisticated spirituality” — that he is not a therapist or marriage counselor and that he is interested in working with students who have attained autonomy and wish to maintain it. This particularly struck a positive chord in me. I definitely wanted to come back for more. In meditating daily during the week — something I had through preoccupation or indifference set aside and which I recommenced upon beginning the public workshop — I experienced an intensification of my meditations which he said would manifest, one which I had not previously experienced. Also, I sensed his laughing presence come and go as if he were looking in on me. Rama's humor is something I've come to find a particular boon in my quest. It is the fulcrum keeping one balanced and moving forward away from such traps as the narcissism of self-studied humility, the narcosis of blissful ingenuousness, or the sting of self castigation which he has explained as one's arrogance turned inward against oneself.

But I was particularly moved during the third public workshop in February, 1982. The second workshop had been as powerful as the first, and its effect was to calm and center me. However, during the second question-answer-comment session of the third workshop, Rama was sitting and responding to the audience but the light kept on emanating from him as if he were still in deep meditation. The light behind him flickered in gold and pure crimson, and suddenly I saw the serenity I had sensed and experienced in Tibetan Buddha figures I was surrounded by as a child. All at once I knew in an inexplicable way what it

¹ Synesthesia: a sensation produced in one modality when a stimulus is applied to another modality, as when the hearing of a certain sound induces the visualization of a certain color.

was that the Tibetan craftsmen had captured — only instead of being in the presence of a statue, I was in the same room with it manifesting as a living being.

I did not know that I would later become one of Rama's students at this time; however, I did know I had come home to a peaceful and powerful place. Instead of searching I was now seeking more light. Everything had changed.

DAVE

My experiences as a Bay Area club musician were probably fairly typical; more or less just what you might imagine, provided you possess a somewhat lurid imagination. Suffice it to say that although in the 10 years since college I had continued to pursue my interest in philosophy and esoteric religion via avid reading (all the usual stuff), you'd have seen little evidence of it on gig nights.

March 4, 1982 got off to a good, although agonizingly early (9 a.m.) start. I succeeded in remembering my newest friend's name, and after a quick breakfast headed across the Golden Gate Bridge from Marin into San Francisco for a recording session at the "Automatt." My excitement was heightened by the splendor of the morning sun reflecting off a city so lovely to look at that the drive there from the north never ceases to thrill. It's not every day that Bill Graham puts your band in the recording studio, knowing full well that the record companies aren't exactly fighting over Chicago Blues bands right now. But at the very least we'd get a first class demo tape for future use, and I thought I might even hang out in the City for the meditation lecture or whatever it was at the Moscone Center (a block from the studio) that evening. I had both enjoyed and been inspired by Rama's newspaper, *Self Discovery*, in which the Bay Area meditation had been advertised. My roommate had picked it up at a sandwich shop and said, "Here, Dave, you'll probably enjoy this." I had indeed, and had decided it would be fun to spend an evening with someone outrageous enough to list his past lives under his picture.

By 6 p.m. we were through for the day. After several unsuccessful attempts to overdub a part, our guitarist conceded to the reality of being hopelessly overamped on chemicals and threw in the towel. He alternates between brown rice weeks devoted to playing his sitar, and periods of ridiculous (by anyone's standards) self-abuse. "Let's go check out Rama," I said. "Then we can head to North Beach afterward." He was up for it, so we packed up and split. At Ted's suggestion we sat separately. "You can tell more that way," he said enigmatically. Rama spoke for awhile on applying spirituality to daily life. Profound truths were gently couched amid delightful humor. Then, at a certain point he said, "We talk about these things because it's fun to talk about them; but in reality God can only be experienced, so I'd like for all of you to meditate with me. My gift is the ability to allow the Light of Eternity to pass through me into you. So I would like for you to meditate with your eyes open and be aware not of me as a personality, but of the fields of energy around me." Then, seating himself in the lotus posture, he began to formally meditate.

For a moment I felt ridiculous. Here I was, sitting in a convention center attempting to meditate for the first time in my life, with my eyes open to boot. Ted and I had planned to be at Broadway and Columbus chasing topless dancers by now. Having no clear idea of what I was supposed to be doing (or even *what* I was doing there), I decided to relax and follow Rama's advice to "Just try to feel." It was then that I first noticed a golden haze in the room, as if I were looking through pastel gold lenses with a slightly soft focus. As the light became thicker and thicker, I decided it was high time to make this effect go away. I'm from New York City, baby, and wasn't about to let the power of suggestion take me on any funny trip. I blinked my eyes (no luck), and then squeezed them tightly shut for several seconds. I found that by doing this I could make the light diminish in intensity somewhat, but only for a moment. It would soon regain its former intensity and continue to increase in density. Just then I thought to myself, "If the light gets any thicker, I won't be able to see him at all." Famous last words ... he was gone, vanished without a trace in the field of gold that had become my only visual reality. My amazement was now so profound that my sense of the progression of events in time ceased to have any significance. When I could see Rama again, I first saw him in shades of grey and gold, but reversed like a photo negative. Then

these shades began to increase in intensity until Rama's form burst into an iridescent sea of silver, black and gold ... shimmering like molten metal. During the remainder of the meditation I was able to see Rama for periods of time, or sometimes not at all. The most amazing phenomena, however, were experienced inwardly and cannot be verbalized or written of effectively.

After the meditation, Rama thanked us for coming and told us to drive very carefully.

I found Ted by the back door. He's from Chicago and talks like it. When I asked him about his experiences he said, "I seen a lot of things — I seen his face change and all these faces go by. I seen him turn into a *lion!*" When I told Ted how inspired I was to study with Rama he said, "Dave, if you study with Rama you'll never want to gig at 'The Saloon' again." "Sure I will," I said, "I'll just transcend it."

One of us was right.

DEBORAH

What I remember most clearly about meeting Rama is that there was no sense of casualness in it. I found a flyer announcing his lecture in a place I didn't usually go. When I took the piece of paper it seemed familiar, like something I'd had for a long time, something I'd seen every day.

Rama's a real California guru; he came out in tennis shorts carrying a Diet Shasta. He made me laugh. I wasn't looking for a teacher or a leader and certainly not a male one. But after the first lecture I stood by the table next to where he sat. I didn't know why I was standing there. I just wanted to stand next to him. I hoped that maybe he'd look at me. I remember being disgruntled, standing there with my hand on my hip and my brow furrowed, sort of angry. I wanted more from him right then. I wanted very badly to get him to react to me.

Driving to the second meditation I again felt an odd sense of purposefulness. There is a certain quality to the light in Los Angeles, especially in the summer, a feeling of enclosure, a feeling that this is the only time and the only place. On the night of the intensive the street was shimmering with this enclosure.

I remember exactly how the room looked when I arrived; it was a dirty academic room with the lasting vibrations of students frustrated with chemistry.

He was going to meditate on people row by row. I placed myself in one of the last rows to be meditated on. Again and again, when he gazed on someone in front of me I felt a force moving through them and transforming them. Sometimes his presence was funny or teasing. Sometimes stern or serious or tender.

Then it was the turn for my row. Person by person he approached me. I became nervous, frightened and excited. All I could think was that he would look at me and then it would be over. That his gaze was coming nearer and nearer. I could feel what was coming from the depth of his eyes.

And then those eyes turned on me. I fell through them into some blank and beautiful place. My being lurched forward into his. I didn't know until later that I was in love and inextricably bound. I was awash in relief.

I think the relief came from knowing that this feeling, something I'd struggled for all my life, was a real possibility. I had fought for this in my loves and work, I had insisted on it, fought for it, scratched for it. But I had come to fear that maybe it was a figment of my frustrated, inadequate mind. When Rama looked at me it was as though I had been an orphan and then had suddenly turned, seen my mother and fallen into her arms. Then his eyes moved on to the person next to me. I nearly screamed out loud, "No! Don't leave me!"

I wanted to run and hold his face in front of mine, bind his gaze to mine forever. I was furious. I knew it would all get taken from me. I knew that this ecstasy, like everything else was scarce, finite and precarious. I would have to go back to scratching and kicking and searching and yearning. I felt more

empty than I had ever felt. Why had he done this to me? Why had he proven that limitlessness was possible if he was only going to take it away? This agony was worse than not knowing it was possible. Here he was: real, magnificent and powerful. And I could not keep him or hold him. Just like a man.

Slowly this agony began to give way, to yield. He hadn't left me at all. He hadn't deserted me. Even though he wasn't looking at me his love was still with me. The love he was giving to others didn't mean that there was less for me. There was enough love, enough light. There was enough. Finally, there was something, someone, somewhere where there was true abundance, surfeit. I began to cry, tears streaming silently down my face. Relief washed in on me this time much more deeply, much more fully and with great passion and simplicity. The meditation ended. I sat rocking, my arms around my own body, trembling, crying.

I looked at him and asked, "Do you know what we're feeling?"

He closed his eyes. The wave of compassion and understanding that came from him was like a physical embrace. He said, "Yes."

I stood in front of him when the meditation was over. He said, "Hang in there, kiddo." Since then Rama has said, "Hang in there, kiddo," to me many times and each time I'm filled with the same childlike delight I felt then.

I drove home that night on the same streets I'd always driven. The air around my face was tender. I could feel the caress of the night against my cheeks. It was fine, perfect and lovely. I was not the same.

I had taken a pamphlet called, *Studying with Rama*. I waited to open it until the quiet of my room was exactly right. I read it with the attention due a sacred text. I had never wanted anything so much as to be accepted as his student. His gaze had bisected me. I was afraid that he wouldn't accept me — that he'd seen my inner being and I was not worthy. I wanted nothing more than to have him cut through to my soul again and again.

I floated all that night somewhere between meditation, wake and sleep, feeling Rama laying out instructions for me. Something in me followed them.

CHANDRA

My first experience with Rama came at a time when I was needing some kind of a spiritual upliftment. I had arrived at a plateau in my search for truth, and spirituality seemed a waiting out process rather than a lively participation in self discovery.

At the time, I was working in a large metaphysical bookstore and there was no dearth of books to read about mystical happenings in the lives of great yogis and saints. In my mind, I knew this stuff was all very wonderful, but I longed for personal experience. Without experience, all was mere words and ideas — and these I had enough of.

All types of metaphysical handouts arrived at the bookstore on a daily basis. Amidst all this literature, I came across a large color poster announcing a public lecture series given by a spiritual teacher named Rama. At first, I regarded the poster as outrageous. It listed his past lives and the exact dates of those lives! It also mentioned that during meditation Rama would enter into samadhi — a state of consciousness in which this world as we know it dissolves and one becomes absorbed in spiritual ecstasy. Now in my estimation, samadhi is something that happens to great yogis and saints in India — something you read about in the lives of sages and mystics. The idea that some young American Ph.D. could enter into such a state was utterly ridiculous to me. The scenario of an American absorbed in Nirvikalpa samadhi in the middle of the San Francisco financial district seemed absurd.

Nevertheless, I turned up at the Intensive and sat in the front row. I was impressed by the casualness of the evening. Rama seemed to be a very normal human being — at least outwardly. After he entered the room, I was still anticipating the arrival of 'Rama.' When I realized the man standing in the front of the

room was Rama, my mind flashed back to all the images that I had of saintly persons. Somehow Rama didn't fit the description. In his sporty outfit, he looked more like a tennis player than a saint.

What he had to say I related to quite well. He spoke of God realization as something quite normal and accessible. The analogies he presented were refreshing. He spoke of meditation as an act of self sacrifice, like throwing oneself into the fiery rays of the sun to burn up and each time one comes back, there remains a little less of the old self.

What struck me most was his discussion on spiritual absorption. He said one should strive to be "absorbed in eternity" in order to reach higher levels of awareness. I did not fully comprehend the meaning of that phrase, but I intuitively felt the truth of those words.

The discussion was interspersed with meditation. During the first meditation, I felt a strong surge of coolness moving up my spine and when I looked at Rama, he began to recede in a rotating swirl of purple colors. I didn't realize how deeply this meditation had affected me. As the night progressed, I sensed some changes were taking place at inner levels. I was experiencing a high level of energy, but I did not think much of it at the time.

During the break I had a brief encounter with Rama in the hallway. I told him I liked the music he played during meditation and he asked my name. After the Intensive was over, I went to a restaurant with some friends I had met at the meeting. I sensed that I was feeling different. It was only after I went home and sat down to meditate that night that I perceived a profound alteration in my level of awareness. Instead of the usual efforts to silence my mind, I immediately plunged into a state of absorption. The meditation I had that night in my room was unparalleled to all other previous meditations.

For the next few days, I felt myself soaring in meditation. I also felt impersonal toward everything. Things didn't matter as much as they used to.

How did this all happen? What happened that night to have such an impact on my consciousness? I don't know. Whatever happens while meditating with Rama is as baffling to me as ever. I do know that I have stumbled across something I had inwardly longed for — direct experience.

TONY

I have been a seeker, a rather persistent one, for all my life. Trekking to all the major gurus, and some not so major, has filled my adult life. My search has been an exhaustive one permeated with Indian teachers who had been sent from the East by their masters to these tumultuous shores of the U.S.A. Little did I know that someday I would ask to be a student of one born in this country.

I never wanted to study something from afar and the bottom line to me was "Did the teacher glow? Really glow?" I have always dreamed of sitting with a complete master who really emitted a powerful light. To be taught by and to be an apprentice to an enlightened being who was not merely human but who had a compassionate, supranormal effect on his/her students certainly would be the penultimate human experience, period. But I had just about given up on that ever happening.

So, walking into a bookstore on Ventura Boulevard in Sherman Oaks, California in July, 1981, what do I see but a poster announcing a lecture in a UCLA seminar room the coming Tuesday evening. Dominating the poster was a picture of the face of a youthful man, obviously Caucasian, with curly brown hair looking rather solemnly straight ahead at me. Oh yes, he was wearing a dark turtleneck sweater. The poster announced his name as Dr. Frederick Lenz/Rama. Ah, I said to myself, "a Self-Realized Dentist!!" But still something inside my stomach told me with a jolt that my Teacher was here. At UCLA! I quickly wrote down the lecture room number and the hall where the lecture was to be given on campus and chewed up the next couple of days in anticipation of the coming encounter on Tuesday evening.

The audience had already filled the graduate school chemistry lecture room to the brim. The seats in the room were slanted theatre style so that the audience in the rear of the hall sat up high, enabling

everyone to have a good view. I grabbed a seat on the aisle close to the rear and immediately was impressed by the young 18-35 year-old movie audience all dressed in bright colored clothing; like the summer evening, very active and alive.

I had the feeling I had walked into a special screening of a surfing movie. But one thing was definitely clear and that was the energy that I felt in that room. You would have to cut it with a machete knife. An energy so strong it made you either edgy or made you swoon. It was an electricity that is the sign of enlightenment. The room was charged with something tangible. What in the world was going on here?

A few minutes passed as everyone in the audience settled in and then a very small entourage of men walked down the steps leading to the front of the audience. In the middle of the convoy was a tall man with an athletic bag. I knew it was Rama because my stomach jumped when I looked at him. As I continued to gaze at him, I thought that he looked like the starting forward for the Baltimore Bullets professional basketball team. Rama ignored the audience and quietly, almost anonymously started to ceremoniously organize his lecture paraphernalia on the large chemistry experiment desk facing about one hundred and seventy men and women who watched his every move. One young man who was obviously Rama's traveling companion, set up a curious looking cassette player next to Rama. The cassette player was rather large and definitely qualified to be affectionately called a "ghetto blaster." Rama, it appeared, was an aficionado of music. Rama very gracefully sat his very tall frame up into the smooth sturdiness of the table and after fiddling rather shyly with his collection of cassettes, carefully selected a tape and popped it into his tape player but left it unplayed for the time being. He crossed his legs in the lotus position, one leg folded over the other. As I looked at him I was reminded forcefully how familiar he looked and how elegant and powerful his features are. His eyes were a brilliant blue. He closed his eyes in a spiritual salutation and then in a toned voice announced the evening's topic, "Nirvana." As he began to speak I thought of my own state of mind up to this point.

As Rama spoke I was astounded at his flow of words, his beauty of pronunciation, his handling of the attention of the audience, his absolute certainty of what he was saying and the clarity and humor that poured out so effortlessly from him. Most of all, his contemporariness was so striking. After all, he was dressed in "jogging chic!" He used recurring images of media heroes, movies, songs, literature, and current fads to make connection with his audience. I had the sensation that to listen to and watch Rama was like going on a ride. Rama was taking us all somewhere. I could feel very subtly, but surely, that Rama was meditating on us while he lectured. There was a very fine brightness spreading throughout the audience. The outline of the person in front of me was on fire with a whitish corona which moved to other people as I looked experimentally around the room. I knew at this point in my life, the last thing I wanted to do was to manufacture experiences. What I was encountering so far that evening was beginning to get very strange.

Suddenly he stopped talking about the unspeakableness of "Nirvana." He said it was time to experience meditation ourselves. He invited us to a rare and unbelievable treat. With our eyes open, Rama began formal meditation by turning some beautiful, ethereal electronic music up on his cassette player. As we all stared at his form, per his request, the light surrounding him turned gloriously golden and spread evenly throughout the room. The back of the heads of the audience sloping down in front of me changed colors and polarized like a huge negative print and Rama himself appeared and disappeared within his own blinding light. Rama was for real!

I was awed and grateful to have the opportunity in my life to be there on that warm summer night. At the conclusion of the meeting I finally worked up enough nerve to approach him as he let members of the audience come up to ask individual questions privately and when it was my turn, all I could say to him was what a relief it was to finally find him. He very politely and sincerely said "thank you" and smiled. I turned and walked away, not really remembering anything he said that night but awestruck by his presence. I walked through the crowd out into the night across campus to my parked car. The street lights and the houses trailing down from the UCLA campus appeared so neat and tidy, the stars in the sky so

luminous and clear. For the first time in my life I had witnessed something so authentic that I felt relieved and certain. Light was possible. Somehow Rama was really light. Somehow I had just witnessed something unforgettable.

CRAIG

For the last three years I'd been living in an Ashram in Oakland, California. This meant getting up at 4:30 a.m. every morning, meditating for an hour, having a simple breakfast, chanting for an hour to an hour and a half, then going to my regular job outside the Ashram. After work there was more chanting, a talk on a spiritual topic, or work around the Ashram before retiring for the evening. I was generally very content but occasionally I felt an inner longing for more of that pure clarity I was experiencing occasionally in my spiritual practices.

One night a friend and I were deciding what to do with an after dinner evening. We had both seen the poster with Rama's picture on it announcing a lecture series at University of California at Berkeley. We wondered about the list of past lives as a spiritual teacher in different traditions under the picture on the poster; but, we thought, why not? It just might be true. We decided to go. The hall was a typical institutional green with fairly comfortable seats raked down toward the front. It was a familiar place in that I'd sat through an English Literature class in that hall about 12 years before. There was a Joni Mitchell or Judy Collins tape playing on a small tape recorder located on a table at the front of the hall. It was a little strange for me to hear that kind of music as most of my meditation teachers had had an Eastern orientation and if there was any music at all it was usually an Indian Raga.

After we'd been sitting for a while a tall, casually dressed American in his early thirties came in. He looked like a young English professor about to give a lecture. It seemed perfectly natural for him to be speaking in a University lecture hall. I admired his lack of pretension. He sat cross-legged on the table and meditated for a few moments before beginning his talk. I'd heard or read most of what he had to say before. His presentation, however, was different in that he seemed at ease with the American culture. Other teachers that I'd been around were either from the East or were trying very hard to espouse an Eastern way of life.

After talking for a while, Rama invited us to meditate with him. He said that he had no specific techniques. He asked us to try to be as aware as we could, keep our eyes open, and focus our attention on him. I wasn't used to meditating that way. I usually sat in an almost fully darkened room, repeated a Mantra, then focused on the point between the in and out breaths.

I began to feel that somehow he was transmitting a kind of energy to us. I felt extremely awake and alert. As I looked at Rama, his form appeared to change. First, I saw what looked like an older oriental man with a costume from a different era. Then, he appeared to take on another form. This time it was that of a man in robes but with more Caucasian features. At first I assured myself that it was merely some land of optical illusion. I reasoned that if you stare at anything long enough it is bound to take different shapes. But then I realized that I'd never witnessed any phenomena like this before and decided to try to quiet my mind and continue observing. Then, Rama's body looked as though it was levitating about six inches above the table. After that his form multiplied and his multiple forms began to rotate clockwise above the table.

After the meditation Rama invited us to share our meditation experiences. Well, there was no way that I was going to stand up in front of 300 or so people and share what I had just seen. Fortunately, others in the hall that night weren't quite so inhibited. One man stood up and described several forms that Rama had changed into during the meditation period, two of which I'd seen. There were murmurs of recognition from other people in the hall and soon another woman told us that she had seen Rama levitate and rotate. Perhaps I wasn't hallucinating after all.

While I was considering what was going on I noticed that I was sitting perfectly erect, back barely

touching the chair. It was as though I was being supported by some very strong internal energy, each vertebra floating above the one below it. I also noticed a lack of bodily sensation from time to time. We'd been sitting for over an hour and I felt no discomfort. It was as though I was losing bodily consciousness from the neck down.

Although I had a few doubts about Rama — he didn't quite fill my stereotyped image of a spiritual teacher — there was a part of me that was irresistibly drawn to that energy that was passing through him. There was a crystal clarity and deep truth to him. I didn't feel that he was recruiting for an organization but that he was sharing a very special phenomenon that he was experiencing, or perhaps radiating. I decided to go with that feeling of clarity and spend more time around him.

ANNIE

One night with friends, in May of 1981, I happened to find myself going to a lecture at U.C.L.A. on meditation. I knew nothing much about it, but still it seemed like an interesting way to spend the evening. I had already made a commitment to join friends in India, later that summer, who were studying with a teacher there. I was convinced that this step was necessary for my spiritual progress and therefore was not expecting much from meditating with anyone else. Still, it seemed like a fun way to spend a Friday night.

When we approached the room at Young Hall, I noticed that there were only about sixty people in the room. I had no trouble finding an aisle seat close to the front and closed my eyes. Immediately upon sitting down I felt a sensation similar to that of being pulled backwards! *What was happening?* A feeling of lightness filled me, and a light azure-blue light pulsated in front of me. I remember I gulped and took a couple of deep breaths to try and get a grip. Arcs of shimmering gold hues seemed to surround me. Quickly I opened my eyes only to find that the colors still flooded my senses. I sat there confused and surprised, but continued to flow with the energy. It felt as though heavy, cloudy thoughts were being emptied out of me, drained out, and a new sense of clarity and well-being poured in. A palette of colorful lights flashed before me only to dissolve into a brilliant white.

The meditation continued to flow in this manner. Near the end of the night I opened my eyes and found myself gazing at the teacher in front of me. I kept squinting to try to actually see him through all the gold light, but could not. Everything in the room had disappeared, or so it seemed! There was a white hazy mist floating throughout the room. As I strained to see, I watched a clear tube form in the center. Peering deeply into this window, I noticed a “close-up” of the person leading the meditation. He seemed so close, in fact, it was almost as though he had been magnified. Feelings of intense warmth and delight filled me. It was a deep and beautiful moment.

I felt truly wonderful, however my mind was frantically struggling to comprehend the sight before me: *There sat Rama!* My mind could not accept it. He was young — about thirty, nice looking with a friendly smile, and wearing a pullover sweater and running shoes. He gave off an easy, calm, laid-back manner as he sat on a hand-knit afghan expounding basic dharmic truths, the Eight-fold Path, and the virtues of Haagen-Dazs in the next breath! The most unbelievable part of all was he was American! Nothing in several years of investigation of spiritual study had prepared me for this! I had experienced interesting meditations with an Eastern teacher (so much so that I was going halfway around the world), but *nothing like this!* My mind fought to deny it, yet the beautiful stillness in my heart persisted, and I felt content inside. Wherever I looked there was gold light. My body felt dissolved, while the rest of me felt fully alive. Clearly I could not deny what was happening.

This was my first encounter with Rama.

LAKSHMANA

If a Tibetan Buddhist fails to realize the Truth when alive, or doesn't recognize the Clear Light of the first bardo immediately upon death, then, presuming he takes another human incarnation, his desire is to at least be born again in a land where the Dharma is taught. You didn't hear much about the Dharma in America in the early 50's. We worshipped the Gods of industrial know-how and material success. America was the beautiful, America was strong, but it sure did lack any aspiration for spiritual insight, spiritual illumination.

Then something called the 60's happened. Suddenly a great wave of social change engulfed this country and part of that transformation entailed a search for the meaning of existence, a quest for the truth behind this transient world. Right before the disbelieving eyes of an older generation the former Little Leaguers, Boy Scouts, Brownies, Davy Crockett Impersonators, and Camp Fire Girls started looking like characters out of the *Mahabharata*. Indian print bedspreads invaded the land, incense became a new consumer item, and hair, hair was long and getting longer. The crew cut was dead, the wandering saddhu and world oblivious yogi look was in.

Stoking these fires was a literature that, while previously available, was now readily accessible. D.T. Suzuki's Zen treatises, Evans-Wentz and his Tibetan tetralogy, Joseph Campbell and Heinrich Zimmek bringing their scholarly researches in Eastern metaphysics into paperback and thus, into the waiting hands of truth-seeking hippies everywhere. Also new voices, Western voices were being heard and believed. Alan Watts, with his eclectic, Occidental shoot-from-the-hip and be happy approach to Spirit, the beat Buddhism of Snyder and Kerouac, and the unforgettable, enchanting Carlos Castaneda.

By the time 1970 crashed into reality, I was ready to hit the Bodhi Trail, though American style of course, and I began accumulating the necessary equipment for my pilgrimage. The plan was to wander into the Canadian Rockies and become a yogic squatter on Crown land. It was the closest thing to the Himalayas I could reach by truck. Slowly the stockpiles of down coats and pants, a tent, shovels, axes, saws, etc. began to grow. But growing alongside was an inner cry for a Teacher, a guru. I knew only too well that the feeble light I could generate alone was nothing compared to the luminosity of the Great Ones I had read about. I wanted to realize the Infinite and, being an American, I wanted that realization now.

Spring of 1972 was to be my gangplank to the beyond. I was to graduate from college and with a bachelor of arts in hand, put the pedal to the metal and motor my way to an envisaged Shangrila.

However, a funny thing happened on the way to English 290. There on the wall amidst all the postered furor of youthful unrest, film festival announcements, and pleas for financially solvent, non-smoking vegetarian roommates, was the transcendental countenance of a genuine, albeit living in New York City, Hindu God-Realized yogi!

I couldn't believe it. A *real* one. Under his photograph glorious credentials appeared and under that an open invitation to learn more from a trusted student of his. How could I say no? I went and was thoroughly impressed with the sincerity of the young man describing his search and his guru. Those interested in forming a meditation group were requested to stay after the meeting and receive further details. I was reluctant to join anything in those days- I mean, I was the Lone Ranger of the spiritual world. I couldn't stand a crowd, let alone an organized group composed of bliss ninnies and pseudo meditators, but overcoming a mountain of Hubris, I signed up. If Naropa was willing to get the hell kicked out of him for his enlightenment the very least I could do was to put my "X" on the dotted line.

For those of you that have had some experience in searching for the Light, or the Truth, or the Infinite, or whatever you want to call it, you know how unbelievably bizarre the process can become. Quirks of fate occur again and again. Reaching for an apple you knock a diamond off a neighboring branch. Looking for help from this Hindu yogi, I met Rama the following week.

The night before our first meditation group meeting I had thrown the *I Ching*. It came up with the ultimate bell ringer. The good old you will be carried up to heaven on the back of a dragon motif.

Engaged in conversation before the meeting with a small group of people, I mentioned my miraculous coin toss. A tall, somewhat eccentric-looking fellow, later to be known as Rama — who at the time was studying with the Indian guru — immediately began an enthusiastic appraisal of the significance of this event and its portent for the future. I was amazed. Up to that point I was the only person I knew that was *really* into this stuff and here was this guy just going to town on the *I Ching*.

After the meditation, which was very pleasant aside from the saccharin readings of a member trying to be “soulful,” I approached my new found friend, my fellow truth seeker and started shooting the spiritual breeze. He produced more and more knowledge of the things I had only begun to chip away at. He was outgunning the Lone Ranger. Another pound of pride got put out in the trash that night. I realized how far I had to go and it seemed that with people like Rama in this group it would be an appropriate vehicle. I began to unpack the truck that looked like the inside of a Hudson Bay Trading Post and exchanged my snowshoes for a year's supply of incense.

In those early days of lofty aspiration and yearning, the power and poignancy of my meditations began to slowly grow. The blossoming of consciousness was a wonderful thing to experience. All the glorious occurrences that I had read about were beginning to become true inside this thing I called me. Of course, I would share these tales of increasing spirituality with friends after the meetings and Rama would often participate in these discussions, but he and I never got together socially outside the group. I was very hungry for one thing, and that was being in the immediate presence of the guru. I wanted to bathe in that scorching intensity and that alone. I was demonic in that pursuit and had little need for the pleasantries of the social surroundings. I participated, to be sure, but with that single goal in mind. However, Rama and I did have our encounters. I remember one day when I bumped into him by chance in the supermarket. Despite my cry for the Infinite, I was being hassled senseless by the task of trying to buy enough food for a week with half the necessary funds. My consciousness was a little above that of the fresh produce I was attempting to purchase. Suddenly from somewhere behind the frozen foods came a beaming Rama, his face aglow with a radiant smile of contentment and inner joy. “Can't you just feel it?” he asked. I knew what he was referring to, but the only thing I could feel at the time was a mounting anger over being so damned poor.

My way to the inner circle necessitated my physical relocation closer to the guru's home. In an attempt to lighten my caravan I offered a cherry wood table to anyone in need. Rama put in a request and asked me to drop it off at his home. At the time, he was living in a quaint, rural, one-story dwelling along a well-wooded country road in northeastern Connecticut. His house was done up in the decor of the day — student Bohemian — and it was very pleasant, but with unusually heavy vibes. Also, there was a unique patron of the video arts perched on a pedestal in the middle of the living room — Ariel by name, a toucan by nature. I admit to being a little puzzled at the time. I mean, a bloody bird occupying all that space in a very small house, but with a name like Ariel and with an owner not too unlike Prospero, I was cautious not to say anything against this feathered companion lest some Caliban be found lurking in the basement. To my great relief something infinitely more appealing was there. Rama had a small workshop in the cellar where he would manufacture dulcimers. They were beautiful and very well made. My own woodworking skills consisted of slamming 2x4's with 12-penny nails, so of course this demonstration of craftsmanship left me, once again, duly impressed.

After situating myself in “Bengal West” (the guru lives in Jamaica, Queens, NY), my brief career in the guru's organization lasted two and one half years. It was, by anyone's definition, meteoric. A blazing burst of brilliant energy and then a quick near-fatal plunge back into the night. Rama and I would see each other periodically, talk over the events taking place in the ashram, discuss a little poetry, or laugh hysterically at a joke or two. I remember endorsing the Saab automobile once and he wound up owning three or four of them. I'm not sure whether he thanks me for that or not. But anyway, soon I was gone.

I found I could no longer swallow such a horrendous pill of what I unwillingly began to see as the guru's blatant hypocrisy, falsehood, and unmitigated frustration on the part of his disciples. Friends had given all and gotten little in return. Arranged marriages ruined lives. Careers forsaken brought near-

poverty and financial woes. And the light, the cherished long-sought Light became more and more elusive until it finally faded altogether in my darkening despair.

Several years passed, years spent for the most part in the woods of New England rubbing elbows with Zen, and then finally I found my little Tibet and its awesome, elemental chakra opening magnificence high in the Oregon Cascades. Like Gary Snyder and other “Dharma Bums,” I lived in the Pacific Northwest’s version of a hermitage — a fire watch tower or lookout. But each autumn the seasonal employment would end, and winding up in Portland amazed at man’s continuing inhumanity to man, I knew I would need to buy some land of my own. A place to build a small cabin, a spiritual retreat, and continue my bootstrap meditations and pray for the descent of infinite grace. But for that miracle to manifest itself would take bucks, and the big dollar and I weren’t seeing much of each other.

So to San Diego I traveled in search of the tangible means to establish my one-man monastery. Two years in the business world, its wrangling madness, its canine frenzy, the fast-paced social inanities, and I knew I was dying. The little light I had managed to keep alive was dwindling rapidly. I knew too that the Truth existed, and that it could be found and realized, but I was sinking fast. I sent out a Mayday. I needed help so I called the past.

Telephoning a friend who had somehow managed to stay all that time with the demagogic Master of Bhakti Devotionalism, I was informed that he too was calling it quits. His youth near spent, his goals still far away, he was blowing out of the Ashram and heading for the Caribbean. In passing, he mentioned that someone I knew quite well had also left, but he, instead of following the lead of Paul Gauguin, was forming his own spiritual center. I couldn’t believe it. No one I knew could ... but wait a minute, “Who is it?” I asked.

“Rama,” was the incredulous reply, “and he’s in San Diego too.” That instant, the slow turn back to the Light began.

Upon obtaining Rama’s phone number, I gave him a ring from my office.

“Hey, Rama, how yah doin?”

“Fine, real well,” came the immediate reply.

“Listen, a mutual buddy told me something that, to be perfectly honest, I find more than a little hard to believe. He said that you were holding public lectures, giving workshops, going into samadhi, emanating luminosity and a whole bunch of other far out things. Is it true?”

Without hesitation Rama confirmed the former rumors, and gave me a brief rundown of the events leading up to this explosive transformation. I listened attentively, told him I would call again, and hung up the phone. I was stunned, I was shocked, I couldn’t believe what was going down. Rama a liberated soul? A yogi with powers and doing the Bodhisattva trip? Unreal! I turned to a guy who shared my office with me and told him that an old friend of mine had gone absolutely bonkers. My office-mate, another former hippy turned, by necessity, mock entrepreneur and I would break the constant pressures of the Willy Loman syndrome by occasionally taking turns reading passages from Mircea Eliade’s *Yoga Immortality and Freedom* in a style imitating a pundit from Pondichery. We used to roll on the plush wall-to-wall carpeting in hysterics brought about by the other’s highly exaggerated Indianisms. And now I told him about Rama going into samadhi, teaching students, etc. He rolled his eyes far back into their sockets and shaking his head violently, returned to trying to make a dollar out of nine cents. I couldn’t go back to anything, however. I had to know. Was it really true? Samadhi? The big “S”? A week later I called again and once more Rama very patiently laid it all out to me with, however, some additional information. This new stuff described late evening and very early morning extravaganzas out in the Anza Borrego desert. Rama stated quite matter-of-factly that in order to bring his students out of their complacent acceptance of the everyday “real” world, he would bring them out into the desert’s surrealistic environment and put their heads through some real changes a la Don Juan and Don Genaro. Hold the phone! Did I really hear that? My old friend was revealing a passage to a reality similar to the wondrous never-never-land of Castaneda and the Sonora Brujos? Oh come on! I can’t handle *this* one. But he

assured me that it was true and I thanked him for his time, for I was sure he was quite busy with a bunch of students if he was really putting this kind of show on the road, and once more I hung up the phone.

Weeks passed and I was still trying to digest these tantalizing tales when fate had me run into Rama at the supermarket again. This time, however, he wasn't in the flesh. There, on a laterally sliding glass door from his own outrageous poster, his visage was bouncing back and forth in front of the housewives, the construction workers, and the kids trying to get change for Pac-Man. Its proclamation offered a "Journey Through The Void" and it struck me like something out of Jules Verne, but *then* there was the most outlandish resume I had ever read. It spanned 450 years! Hey, Rama, I'm a sucker for spiritual hooplah, but this is really going out into the ozone. However, his photograph revealed someone's face that, while it had a resemblance to my old sidekick, it was somebody somewhere else. It glowed, it shined, the eyes, something about the eyes. And there was another zinger, a little passage concerning his desire to help his students from previous incarnations. From deep within the vault of my own hidden self the faint click of a tumbler falling into place was heard. I again read the double live garbonzo resume. Images of life in the zendo, mother India, and the vast, eternal snow-clad ranges of Tibet raced through my mind. Were these the shadows of forgotten lives, or was my own desperate need for truth manipulating my imagination? Why ask dumb questions at a time like this, I thought. I got back on the phone.

I told Rama about my head-on collision with his poster and he suggested I attend the workshop he was giving at the Vacation Village Hotel in San Diego. A couple of days later I found myself driving down I-5, once again in search of the Infinite.

The series of public workshops was being held in one of the touristy sections of town at a hotel in one of their convention halls. The blessed parking lot was full of cars from all over the western United States. Some were owned by guests at the hotel, others by those attending Rama's spiritual revue. After driving endlessly through the chromed maze of General Motors' contribution to Maya, I surrendered and parked illegally. Bad Karma, but give me a break. Upon entering the foyer of the convention building, I was greeted by a covey of neatly dressed, conservative looking, clean-cut, shiny-faced kids. O brother, I thought to myself, just what I need most — cookie cutter stamped, wind-up, automated, disciples. And then, to top that initial negative reaction, they were selling tickets to the evening's performance? Tickets. What's this stuff about tickets? I thought the Light was free. I mean, come on now players, don't put me on. What's the idea of having a turnstile at heaven's gate? I ranted and raved for a while about this bourgeois element sneaking into my well defined sense of what should and should not be, and during the conversation let it be known that Rama was a personal friend of mine and that he had invited me here. Presto change-o, I got a "Why didn't you say so before? We heard you might be coming tonight." Magically the doors to the sanctorum swung open free of charge.

The place was packed. I had no idea that there were so many of us dissatisfied with the pounding dull march of reality, that there were still a lot of people out there looking to wake up, to realize the truth behind the veil. And the audience didn't even look like they were coming for a 60's revival. No, they were reserved, urbane folks, patiently waiting for Rama's appearance. I felt a little out of place, which was unusual considering the nature of the evening's program, so I sat on the floor in the back of the room in a defiant full counter-culture asana. Neil, one of the attendants, was quick to inform me about certain fire code regulations concerning the use of the auditorium and I obliged him and took my off-the-wall attitude and put it discreetly in a back row seat.

Coming from a medium-sized tape player was some electronic music I had never encountered before. Was I supposed to be able to meditate to this stuff? I liked it, but in the past I had only meditated to ragas. You see, I was really a traditionalist at heart. If they wanted something a little more contemporary, something to bridge the chasm between East and West, how about Jimi Hendrix live at the Benares Forum? But this stuff filling the room was definitely from another planet. I chanted a few silent *Neti-Netis* and tried to swing back up in the contemplation saddle. It had been a while. Periodically, when the mood was right, when the inspiration was there, when the moon was blue, I would meditate, but nothing regular and certainly nothing with a group of people. More *Neti-Netis* and some of the old feelings of peace

returned. I continued to wait for Rama.

Soon from a side door accompanied by another group of attendants, in he strode. Except it wasn't the same Rama I had first met ten years earlier. This one was different. "Somewhat eccentric looking," was now nattily attired and confident like a heavyweight champion jogging towards the ring knowing he'll take the challenger out in under five rounds and retain the title. Seating himself upon the dais in a classic cross-legged meditative posture, he turned off the music and fractured the audience with a "Good evening and welcome to New Wave Spirituality." They, that is to say, *we*, loved it. Rama had always been funny, but now he could pulverize you with a sense of humor that I found uncanny. During the question and answer period he was coming up with one liners that would have cracked up even the most austere ascetic. Half the time I was in tears, mostly from laughter, but some were shed because of the sensations, long dormant, beginning to revive inside my heart.

Then the formal meditation began and, Oh Boy, that's when the show really got under way. Slowly, like the first traces of a new day arising in the sky before dawn, the light in the hall changed. The spotlight's off-white faded and was replaced with cerulean hues. Their source was Rama and he flooded the room with them. I looked away, it was still there. I shifted the focal point of my vision, still no change. It was happening. It was *really* coming down. He *had* it. Rama could actually fill an enormous auditorium with subtle blue light. To say I was impressed was putting it mildly. I was amazed, awed even. After regaining some composure, I took a high dive into the pool of visible light and palpable vibrational bliss. It was fantastic. To meditate like this was something I had fervently wished for, but thought it would only come to pass after many years of diligent, hard, painful work.

After the meditation was over, John — one of Rama's staff members — motioned to me to come up to the front and speak with Rama personally. It was something I had looked forward to since our preliminary phone conversations. I started to get up, but immediately realized that I was still a bit distant. During the meditation someone had done a tap dance on my nervous system and the synapses were still having too good a time to respond to the despotic Simon Legree up in the control booth, but I managed to whip them back into a reasonably functioning unit and slowly made my way up to where Rama was still sitting. As I approached, he got up, walked off the dais and extended his hand, a glorious smile on his face. I knew I was still in the zapped zone, but Rama was gone. I could see in his eyes that he was nowhere around. I was now dialing Brahmaloaka and that's still a long distance call. Somehow he could talk and said it was nice to see me again after all the years. I returned the compliment and added that I didn't know if I was seeing him again or someone else. Up close, the difference in his physical appearance was even more striking. He laughed, mentioned something about the light being intense and transforming things. I tried to focus my attention on the words, but this time my control room was rebelling. It wanted to dissolve into the void right there on the spot. Luckily, I heard his invitation to come and see him at his home that following weekend. I assured him I'd be there and with a good deal of concentration, navigated my way back to my seat. I didn't know whether to laugh, cry, scream, or jump up and down. My consciousness was experiencing Christmas morning, New Year's Eve, and July 4th all at once. To utilize the waggish utterance of the immortal, amoral Randall Patrick MacMurphy, "I was lit up like a pinball machine and ready to pay off in silver dollars."

Astrology has never been one of my interests, but when an eclipse occurs or a solstice or equinox comes to pass I sit up and take notice. Things do seem to be affected by these events. My first visit to Rama's home coincided with the vernal equinox.

It seems that Rama had taken to heart the adage — a man's home is his castle. He was living in a reproduction of a 16th century Spanish-chateau-fortress-villa on top of the highest hill in Del Mar. Carefully following the directions given to me, I wound my way up the twisting curves that led to his less than humble abode. Approaching the imposing iron gates I pressed the call button, gave my name and through the magic of some humming electrical motors, the gates swung open and the way was made clear. As I proceeded to the front door, I noticed several of the attendants were doing some gardening and lawn maintenance. Much to my great relief even when not "on stage" they didn't act peculiar or blissed

out. This was not a legion of space cadets, not a bunch of slack jawed ninnies. They seemed like conscientious hard-working young men, but still awfully straight looking.

A lovely woman responded to my knock on the huge, elaborate front door. I asked for Rama and she replied, "Are you a student?"

"Nope, I'm a friend."

She gave me a strange look and asked that I wait there. Minutes later she returned, let me in, requested that I place my shoes in the rack nearby and wait for Rama in front of an enormous fireplace in the main hall. I had been impressed with the exterior of the place, but the inside was just knocking my socks off. It was everything a medievalist could ever want. I'm surprised that the Society for Creative Anachronism hadn't petitioned Rama for a chance to utilize such a tremendous facility. This was their element, but it was doing things to me as well. I was getting subliminal flashes of an incarnation somewhere in England. The Middle Ages ... but dropped the notion upon Rama's appearance.

Dressed casually and wearing down-filled slippers, he sauntered into the room. "Well, what do you think? Not bad, huh?"

I responded with a couple of appropriate superlative exclamers and began to flash again, this time off the slippers. They reminded me of something a Lama would wear in perennially cold Tibet, but I was slipping into a strangely vivid past again and the present was too good to miss. I resurfaced to hear, "Let me show you around the place."

The tour began, and it was something. We passed through the dining room with its gothic, banquet, seating-for-eighteen table, and ornately decorated fireplace. Then on into the kitchen which was also grand and where I was amazed to find still another fireplace. After acquiring a couple of sparkling apple juice drinks, we adjourned to the back veranda and began to talk of things in our respective pasts, disclosing what each had done in the years since our last encounter.

Finishing our drinks and a lengthy conversation, the tour proceeded. We made our way through the rest of the spacious accommodations on the first floor. Much to my delight there was an authentic Tibetan *thangka* hanging on the office wall depicting the Wheel of Life. No *gompa* is complete without one, you know. Another minute flash started up, but I didn't have time to nurture it for we were on our way to the *piece de resistance*, the tower.

The central axis of this "in days of old when knights were bold" mansion was this tower. I mean, a real, circular, imposing, honest-to-goodness tower that rose above the rest of the place and provided a view of the surrounding area that was just magnificent. I immediately recognized it as the setting for a very heavy dream I had ten years earlier!

In the dream I found myself in a circular room with cushions along the wall and was asked to sit down and wait for the Master. I remember being taken aback, for the seat offered was just to the right of the yet-to-appear spiritual teacher. I felt I didn't deserve such a hot spot and started to protest the decision when through a small door (the same door in the library which led to the very top of the tower) I walked the illumined one everybody was waiting for. I remember I could see only a tiny portion of his face and then the dream ended. At the time I didn't have the slightest idea who the mystery yogi was. After one of the old group's meditation meetings, I had told a friend about this screamer of a dream — you know my friend, the crazy guy later to be known as "Rama." He said it sounded like a "real good one" and that I should not forget these dreams that have a deep impression on the psyche. When I related to the now full-blown Rama the details of my dream of ten years earlier and told him that the room we were presently standing in was the one in the dream and mentioned that his profile resembled that of the personage I had seen, he calmly endorsed the validity of this sleep-wrought vision. He told me I had somehow been able to get a sneak preview of things to come, I had been able to see my path before it had actually manifested itself in reality.

We made our way up the remaining stairs and sat along a low wall, basking in the warm Southern California sun enjoying a steady, cooling breeze out of the northwest. We continued talking of things past

and things present. Exchanging views on how a spiritual community could go wrong and what was indispensable. Meanwhile, I noticed every now and then Rama would close his eyes and I'd start to feel a little funny. I asked him about it and he said he was "Just bringing the consciousness up a little bit."

"Don't just bring it up, knock me off my mundane feet!" I exclaimed. I wanted out of the illusion, I wanted illumination, and now right before me, disguised as my old friend was the means

We descended the stairs, returned to the main hall, and sat on a couch together. Rama then asked a question which I later found out he puts to all his potential students, "Well, what do you want to do with it?" I knew exactly what he was referring to. I was sitting next to a spiritual Maserati and the illumined chauffeur was adjusting his helmet and driving gloves, asking if I needed a lift. With glee I commanded, "Let's put it in fourth and get the hell out of here." I was ready for warp factor 10. I wanted a blazing, speed-of-light tour of infinity.

Since those days in which Rama and I have reestablished our friendship, many wonderful experiences have occurred during trips to the beach, excursions into the desert, at public meditations, and in the privacy of his own home. I will leave the relating of these high times to others. Many of them have a far greater capacity to "see." Their subtle vision is more finely tuned and a good number of them have had a much closer and longer relationship with Rama than I. I'm sure the accompanying entries in this volume will satisfy all your longings for juicy stories of the spiritual life. However, I will add that I have seen Rama dissolve completely in a bright golden light. I've seen him vanish without a trace into the darkness of the evening. I've seen him transform himself into a Tibetan-looking guru and also into a Zen Master that levitated upwards and slowly rotated to the left and right. But this stuff is the icing on the Lakshmi cake. The cake itself tastes of the possibility of finally realizing the ultimate Truth in this lifetime. The accompanying meal provides the confidence to know it can be done.

I would like to thank the powers that be for yielding to all my kicking and screaming for the Light and affording me this opportunity to go for it. The convoluted pathways of one's sadhana are always strange and mysterious. Let the mysteries reveal themselves, let the Infinite bring out its big guns. I'm ready and my definition of reality is open to constant revision. It's like Rama once told me after blasting the living daylights out of my physical, subtle, causal and any other bodies I might have late one night at a power spot by the ocean, "Lakshmana, your world will never be the same." And you know, that could turn out to be the understatement of the Yuga.

CHAPTER TWO

DESERT EXPERIENCES

“You are in the world of the dream. The power gets stronger as we move up the gorge. We go deeper into the center of the circle.

“You change forms. You confront death passing through you and birth passing through you. But that is not your essence. They are shadows and are not you.

“This is the dream of the opposite self. You are on the luminous edge of existence. There is no past and no future. You are eternal. You are in the land of the other. You are the dark side. And you are the light side.

“We are one self in fragmented pieces. But I bring you together into one self.

“You are a fluid metaphor for existence. You are your own death and your own rebirth. Here is forever. It never changes. We bring Perpetual oblivion until we change the world.

“Feel this wind. This wind blows from world to world and from life to life. This is the wind of dharma.

“Be in love with the wind. It is an intimate lover. It enraptures you. It blows you through eternity.”

— Rama

CHAPTER TWO

DESERT EXPERIENCES

MELISSA

I had been a student of Rama's for three months when it came time for a desert journey. I've always loved the desert; one can look in any direction and see forever, losing oneself in the vastness and endless silence. Needless to say, I was very excited to be going with an Enlightened teacher.

Rama told us to make sure that our lives were in perfect order before we left. We were to take care of all unfinished business, clean out our closets, making sure that we had no worries to carry with us. In other words, we were supposed to go to the desert with the attitude that we might never return, that we might meet our deaths out there.

He told the new students that we could expect anything from an uneventful to slightly unpleasant evening. We probably wouldn't "see" anything out of the ordinary. We should only anticipate going for a nighttime walk in the desert under the stars with occasional stops for meditation and food.

I had been ill, running a high fever for several days prior to our departure. I had been looking forward to the journey for a long time, but that morning I seriously questioned whether I should go at all. I was so weak that I had almost passed out in the laundromat. In my noon meditation I inwardly asked Rama whether I should go. I received a very adamant "yes." So, that was that, body or no body. During the drive out my fever subsided, the nausea and weakness entirely disappeared. By the time we arrived my energy level had reached a peak. I hopped out of the truck and started bouncing around doing warm-up stretches.

We gathered together and headed up the gorge, about three hundred of us. Rama and company walked in front, sweeping the bushes with their flashlights, eyes peeled for snakes. I felt like part of Rama's body. He was the eyes, director and coordinator of awareness. We were the legs and arms, a huge caterpillar creeping along the desert floor.

We entered into an ancient world of harsh, dry beauty. The rock formations on either side of us grew taller as the gorge fanned out in width. I got smaller and smaller. My consciousness expanded to encompass the experience as thoughts about the world and my life fell away. I felt as if I extended about four feet above my head, as if I were riding on my own shoulders. As we walked, that "me" grew very white, clear and radiant. I felt clean.

We stopped at a circular clearing, nestled against the side of the gorge. Rama stood near a large group of rocks and we sat around in a circle. He talked a little about the desert, then he stood silently, arms outstretched, calling the wind ...

"The wind," he said, and it started rushing down the gorge, sweeping over and through us. He introduced us to the different types of wind which come at different times of the day, each one bringing a very distinctive quality of energy. He said that the wind was our friend, and if we listened very carefully we would hear its message. Again it came, gentle but strong, swirling around me, touching every part of me lightly. It felt as if it were erasing my edges, melting away my skin, the illusory border between myself and the universe. Then I opened up my being and let it inside. A feeling of sadness overcame me and a vague memory of who I've been started to form, but the wind turned it into dust and blew it away.

“Dissolution,” he said, and I watched his form fade into the darkness until there was no one there. I felt empty and a little scared, insecure as my reality lost its realness. “Levitation,” he said, seated cross-legged on top of a rock. His body lifted up about four feet in the air, and then returned to its original position. There was no sense of motion or spatial displacement. It was much more gentle and still than any movement I had ever perceived. It seemed not to take place in time or space. It was very soft yet threatening to the part of me that operates in a fixed universe of “natural” law.

“Heat,” he said, and the air around me got very dry and hot.

He had us fix our gaze on some distant mountains. Then he raised his arms and pointed at them. As I watched, I saw two streams of light shoot forth from his hands and extend to the mountains. As the light hit them they seemed to lose their solidity, and they became fluidly viscous. The slopes and tops of the mountains began to move like waves, undulating, until there was no peak. The mountains had vanished. Then I started to see tongues of lightning licking the tops of the surrounding ridges.

At one point Rama said he was going to send his double up to the mountain peak. As I watched, I saw him start bouncing back and forth between the desert floor and the mountaintop. He was traveling along a wide band of light, almost like a huge sliding board, which joined the two points. All the time there was an excited knot in the pit of my stomach, almost as if I'd drunk too much coffee. We took turns speaking, sharing our experiences with the group. I was amazed at the variety of perceptions. Some people saw more than I did, some saw less. Nevertheless, we had all been transported into a reality that most human beings never witness.

We had something to eat, and, bathed in moonlight, headed back down the gorge. During the walk back I wanted to stay out there by myself. I didn't want to return to the world, but right behind me were two of Rama's staff members, following up with walkie-talkies to insure that no one was left behind. I walked very slowly and turned around every few minutes to soak up the beauty. The sun was beginning to rise and the colors were constantly changing. At some point I remember a staff member asking me if I was okay. I was quite fine, indescribably so. When we reached the entrance to the gorge, we stood in a huge circle around Rama. Everything shimmered and I wasn't sure if we were really there at all. He focused on each one of us for an instant, directing his eyes and palms towards us. I felt a tremendous surge of power rise up inside of me, and I knew that this power would enable me to make certain necessary changes in my life. A deep gratitude filled my being. Then he shifted his gaze to the person on my right. After completing the circle he went around again and again, faster each time. I felt like we were one unbroken ring of energy, instead of separate individuals.

He told us to say goodbye to the desert and to offer it our gratitude. Rama told us that we couldn't be sure if we would ever return here again and that we should seal this moment within our hearts forever, that way it would become a part of us and we would never lose it. Needless to say, I have never been quite the same since.

DEBORAH

We are in the desert during Easter and Rama is talking about Christ. I'm not “seeing” much. When this happens I get disgruntled and pissed because it is clear that everyone is having more fun than me and I like to have all the fun. I also conclude that Rama is a charlatan and a maniac and we are all under his spell. (On one of the trips as I was thinking this he said, “I know you're thinking I'm a charlatan or a maniac.” Hmmm.) I figure he just wants to rip us off and abscond with the funds to Tahiti.

He keeps walking forward taking little steps. I know something's going on but I can't tell what.

I let out a gasp. The ground under his feet has disappeared and he is walking on light. I think, my God, this is what Christ did when he walked on water. This is a very odd thought for an absolutely nonreligious, very Jewish girl.

I'm afraid to say anything, but I am seeing what I'm seeing. I expect it to go away and it doesn't. He's off the ground, walking on a cushion of light. I start to tremble. My body is telling me that I really am seeing something.

Everyone keeps guessing what's happening and Rama keeps saying that they're wrong. He's getting a little impatient with us. I get up courage.

My voice is shaky. "The ground isn't solid beneath you."

"Well of *course* the ground isn't solid beneath me."

Another woman says, "You're walking a couple of inches above the ground on light."

"Yes, that's exactly it," he says.

I say, "It's like a hydrofoil, except on light."

"Yes," he says.

He still seems a bit annoyed with us for having taken so long to see it and says, "Come on, you guys, you know how much *energy* that takes?"

Very impressive.

NATALIE

In this lifetime they named me Natalie. I am almost 12 years old. I became a member of the San Diego Center on April 27, 1982.

I remember on June 12, 1982 was my first desert trip. At first I was not really sure I wanted to go, because Rama had said, "You probably won't see anything the first few times." However, deep down inside I knew I wanted to go, and boy! was I glad that I went.

When we arrived there we walked up a riverbed of about 1 1/2 miles each way. There were around 250 people. As we were walking, Rama would bring us into different worlds. They looked the same, but were more mystical. When we arrived where we were going to meditate for the night, we sat down in a horseshoe shape, Rama sat in the middle on some rocks.

First, he called to the wind, and if you listened very carefully you would hear the wind coming down the riverbed and a few seconds later the wind would be blowing in your face. He talked about all the different types of winds and then showed them to us.

Rama was so much like a kid the way he was having so much fun.

I saw very many things that some people saw and some did not. At one time Rama appeared with four arms. Once he made the moon and a star disappear. At one time he appeared to be jumping over some mountains. He made some beings from a different world appear. They are called astral beings. The way I saw them they just seemed like balls of light.

Rama went over to Neil (one of the men on the staff) and threw some mystical powers at him. It made Neil fall into Rama's arms. Rama carried him over to an open spot and laid him down on the ground, while Neil was going into a lot of different worlds. Nobody knew what Rama had done to Neil. Thus, some of the students asked funny questions. His physical body was there, but his inner being was totally in a different place. To bring him back to this world is just like waking him up from sleeping.

Much of the time I could not see Rama as he was continually disappearing. When it was possible to see him, I could see right through him.

While I was there I just felt so happy, and Rama said, "For a few days you could change your whole life around." It was because he put so much energy behind us. I had a feeling of wanting to do so much for others.

This was an amazing trip for me — one I shall never forget.

FRANCINE

We arrive, a little after sunset, at the entrance of a gorge in the desert of San Diego County. It is the beginning of October. We are about one hundred and fifty students from San Diego and Los Angeles. We are all waiting, silent, attentive, meditative. When Rama arrives, there is no word, we just start walking. Little by little we leave behind feelings, worries and thoughts of the past week. Everything that happens tonight is the now. It is the beginning of a journey and all of our awareness needs to be in this moment. The walk has a healing effect, the wind is gentle and getting cooler now that the sun has set. It blows beyond the surface, within. The hills that surround us on both sides are getting more foreign as the darkness settles in. There is nothing familiar, it is like entering a no-man's land.

We walk further into the gorge, the night is clear even though the moon is absent. It is getting colder. The more we walk the easier it becomes to meditate. Rama asks us to be alert, and to bring our whole attention into the different fields of energy we will be crossing. It is like going through chapters, each chapter a complete reality, an energy of its own, a world we become sensitive to. We stop and Rama is sitting on a rock ledge. There is a small ravine behind him. We start with a meditation, and I perceive him as an old Indian chief, in complete harmony with the desert. Then he is standing up, and for the next hours he will be like a magician giving a performance. He is opening the doors to those other worlds. My consciousness loses its rigidity, its heaviness, the desert becomes fluid. It is not the 'reality' I am used to any longer, nor the one I grew up with.

He is teaching us about the Four Elements: Air, Fire, Water, and Earth. They are the composites of his magic, they are nature itself. We forget we are one with nature. Each element brings forth its consciousness. Rama is extending his hand towards the end of the gorge, and soon after, a gust of wind sweeps our consciousness. It is like having a direct perception of the reality of the wind, a certainty more than a thought process. It is almost like becoming the element. I remember when the fire was 'manifesting,' our surroundings felt warmer, and so did we; as for the water, they became liquid.

He is telling us to look at the sky. He says he has a 'new one,' meaning a new special effect, and I can see the sky undulating in and out as a giant wave; the next moment I see the sky as if it was high noon and I feel threatened, or my reason-logic does, and I rebel. One after the other my 'solid' frames of reference are disassociated. I go from anguish to laughter, from despair to fascination. It is a complete disorientation which becomes almost absurd, comical. He is also teaching us to have a sense of humor. When I resist, the magic disappears, when I don't, the magic is there again. There is no time for that either. By now Rama is laughing, he is showing us how he can fade in and out of our sight, at will. He captured all of our attention.

During the dinner break, he is physically dissolving, and looks divided in two sides, one vibrating with light liquid-like, the other dark, immobile, still. He brings all the extremes together and confronts them. He is 'playing' with the forces, sampling and detailing each one for us. His art is very exacting. The movements of his arms are very precise and correspond to different impressions and visualizations. In parallel to those gestures I go through an avalanche of emotions. The next minute they disappear, I watch them pass. More and more a sense of detachment, then a sense of unimportance tread on each other. Going back to a memory or a concept that has value only outside the desert, holds me back. On the contrary, if I watch, it becomes easier to unfix from those concepts. "Be a witness of immortality," Rama often tells us.

It is getting late into the night; after a rest we start heading back. About half an hour later we stop for our last meditation. It is about four o'clock. It is pretty chilly and the energy is almost electric. It feels like the journey reached a crescendo or a new, new world, more transcendental. The moment Rama sits to meditate, he physically disappears, there is only absence, the silence of the gorge becomes a sound. It

takes me out of this context and its physicality. I hear my mind protest. Where he is sitting, there is only a vibratory 'presence.' It is like becoming absorbed in the perception, and each time he is looking in our direction, it is like a flow of concentric circles, as if they carried awarenesses with them. He becomes his 'essence.' The circles are merging with the cosmos. There are no boundaries. Far in the distance, on the mountain ridges, I see two iridescent silhouettes drawing a line on the sky. They look like Hindu deities. They will be present during the whole meditation. The silence fills my whole being as if absorbing emotions and thoughts.

From time to time I remember he was talking to us about the Dharma, a word for Truth, and how many words for Truth there are how to seek to return to the source of Truth. The more he talked the clearer the Infinite was bringing the radiance of those ancient teachers through him.

There is a moment when his Samadhi is pure joy, penetrating serenity. I feel Ramakrishna's presence. Our meditation becomes very joyous. Now it is like being in the middle of the Himalayas, in the solitude of the highlands, their stillness pulls me into a deeper state. There is new radiance flowing through Rama. It carries eternity, it permeates that corner of the gorge. At this moment everything and everyone disappears, the moment itself loses its limitation of 'moment,' it becomes clear. It is almost like being given a grasp of Truth, of space. It did something inexplicable to me. Only two days later, at home, the reality of this moment came into my meditation, leading me through.

The sky is already clearing up, the stars are fading one by one, soon the sun will be rising. There is no time to cling to anything. The desert is already returning to its silence.

MAGGIE

You're what?" my husband, Alan, said, staring at me as if I were a stranger.

"We're going out to the desert to meditate under the full moon," I repeated. I could see it all in his eyes: witches, cauldrons, animal sacrifices. Hoping to diffuse the tension, I nonchalantly added, "Yeah, and I need a few things before I go. Do we have any extra newt toes or bat wings laying around?" His head recoiled in surprise and we both laughed. "Thank God," I thought, "no battle for the moment."

If Alan could change one thing about me it would be my irrational fascination with things metaphysical. He shakes his head at the way I waste my time. "I'll just tell everybody you're spending the weekend with the Moonies," he said, pretending to joke.

"Just tell them the truth," I sanctimoniously replied.

But I must admit that I haven't been entirely truthful with him. I've been playing it "pretty close to the vest" as they say, jealously guarding a secret. I am now about to open the floodgates and, as the truth spills out, I'm afraid I'll sound a little like a voice over in a Grade B Raymond Chandler movie: "It all started innocently enough ..."

I went on my first desert trip with Rama two months ago over the 4th of July weekend. For several weeks prior to the trip, every time I closed my eyes to meditate I would see the same image: I was an Indian on a mountaintop, awaiting a vision. Although it was the middle of the night, the moon became as bright as the sun, began to pulsate and then revolve in the middle of a sky that looked like a Van Gogh painting. It slightly annoyed me that I didn't understand what it meant, but then the image would fade from sight and memory until the next time I meditated.

I arrived at the desert at sundown. I could see about 200 people in the distance, sitting cross-legged, meditating on the setting sun. They looked like an Indian nation. As I approached them, I had a weird sensation that I was about seven feet tall (I'm actually 5'2") and that, as I walked, my life (up to that moment) was telescoped behind me like an after-image or ghost on a television screen. I was elated and felt a determination, purpose and grace in my stride that was unfamiliar.

We walked through the gorge and stopped to meditate next to a mountain. Rama said it was a power

spot, and directed our attention to the top of the mountain. He pointed his arm towards it and it began to shimmer, became transparent and then completely disappeared. “That's what happens when I meditate on each of you,” he said. I broke into a cold sweat. Bob Dylan was hammering away inside my head, “You know something's happening, but you don't know what it is, do you, Mr. Jones?”

Lifting his hands to the sky, he told us to watch the moon. B became very bright, separated into two separate moons, reunited, began to pulsate and then slowly to revolve. “The sign, the sign,” I thought. I can say for sure that somewhere along the line I had stopped breathing because the next time I took in air I gasped. My cheeks were wet, but I had no recollection of crying — on the contrary, I was filled with a sense of peace and well-being.

He then asked us to lie down our backs and watch the sky. I thought I saw red, blue and white brushstrokes across the sky and chuckled deeply at the 4th of July joke. Since no one else made a sound or subsequently referred to it, I assumed that my imagination had run wild. But then, the constellation I was watching moved. There was absolutely no doubt about it and I didn't even glance around to see if other people were noticing it. I'm telling you, that sucker moved and I was awestruck! I could hear Rama saying something like “Unless they see, they will not believe.”

“No, no, no,” I shrieked inwardly, “I'm not ready for this.” I felt that he was about to blow the sky wide open and I panicked. I squeezed my eyes shut, gritting my teeth, and said, “Not yet. I've only been a student for 6 weeks. I can't handle this.”

All right, so I was a chicken. I admit it.

After that, I relaxed and surrendered to the experience. I simply stopped resisting. Many things happened that night. I saw and I believed. I went home with a wild look in my eyes. As Hamlet says to his best friend, “There are more things in Heaven and Earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.” But I couldn't tell anyone. Who would ever believe me? I hugged my secret against my chest.

“I'm just afraid that the things you're doing will drive a wedge between us.” I was abruptly brought back. Alan had tears in his eyes. “We have to have a common ground of things we believe in, or we'll drift apart. You've been different since you came back from the desert in July and God only knows what you'll be like this time.”

I sadly touched his hand and struggled to find words of reassurance.

But he's right, of course. Once you've seen a miracle, there is no going back.

MATT

Expect nothing,” Rama said, “except a walk in the desert with some friends and a good meditation.” Still, I hoped to see displays of power.

It was the fourth of July. We walked up the gorge as the sun went down, three hundred members of Lakshmi. I had been a student of Rama's for eight months. This was my second desert trip. A full moon that night added to the feeling of a special evening. We walked for about fifteen minutes and then stopped. Rama told us to leave all our self-importance right here, at the start of the journey, to walk with love and humility. He said the power was especially strong in the gorge tonight and he wanted to show us some things. He instructed us to lay on our backs and concentrate on the full moon. It began to expand and then to contract, and finally to bounce like the ball one follows in those old sing-a-longs. Then he made a large mountain dissolve. He made a section of stars disappear. We were ready to move along.

We walked for another forty minutes and rested. He talked about reincarnation and how a person is able to burn through many cycles of death and rebirth in a single lifetime. But one must progress spiritually to accomplish this. His aura was visible to me in the semidarkness. Before we broke to eat, he told us to lay on our backs again and watch the stars. They began to move in circles like pinwheels in the night sky. Besides being awestruck at these displays of power, I felt a corresponding chord struck within

me as they occurred. As on the first desert trip when I didn't see as much visibly, I felt the power within me in the form of memory, a connection, an undefined inner joy. When the mountain dissolved, I dissolved.

We moved for another forty minutes up into the sandy gorge, between two mountains. I was having trouble with my boots and my pack. I fell behind the main group and when I did catch up, the other students were already seated around him. I couldn't sit comfortably in my big boots. I had to take them off.

“You are in the world of the dream. The power gets stronger as we move up the gorge. We go deeper into the center of the circle... You are on the luminous edge of existence.” As Rama spoke these words, there was no doubt that we had moved into another reality. We were no longer on the earth. He showed us some spirits, which I perceived as a very faint, swirling gold light moving continually around him. He told us that we were about to move into the psychic plane. The whole hillside lit up like a thousand light bulbs. The intensity of the vision was startling. Rama was loose and open and funny. On the return walk, the wind was blowing and I became aware of it blowing through me. Rama had mentioned this might happen. I was dissolved enough that the wind came through me, as through loose knit cloth.

When we returned to the parking lot, I was exhausted, with many rocks in my shoes. I tried to keep my consciousness high, to keep my meditative state and to somehow ground the night's overpowering experiences. Rama assisted me in this by riding around on a three-wheel dune buggy with a silly grin on his face. His jacket was off now and he wore a tee-shirt with the words 'BE ABSORBED' on the front and 'NIRVANA' on the back.

CARMEN

It was the second stop on the journey. Rama was silhouetted against a desert tree which shone silver in the near-full moonlight. About 250 students with backpacks were seated around him in a semi-circle. It was probably about one o'clock in the morning, although I didn't bother to look at my watch because time doesn't exist when you're in the desert with Rama. Rama told us to turn and watch the mountain to our left. As he meditated on it, its aura became very bright and the top of the ridge seemed to dissolve into a jelly-like consistency. Then I saw Rama's double appear at the top of the ridge. The glowing blue form jumped without jumping from place to place along the mountaintop.

“Observe the moon,” Rama said as he turned to face it. I watched as the hazy ring around it dissolved. The moon separated into two moons and the subtle moon circled around the physical moon. That one got a lot of “ooohs” and “whoahs.” Then Rama did a special light show — a fireworks extravaganza in the subtle physical to celebrate the 4th of July, 1982.

After a lengthy discussion of the phenomena and other related topics, Rama asked us to lie down on our backs and observe the sky. I was expecting to see the 'usual miracles': rearrangement of the star patterns and such. But something very different happened. As I lay there gazing at the star-spangled array, wave after wave of sparkling light began to explode across the sky. My whole being was inundated with each rush of light. Soon the entire sky was a swirling mass of colorful glittering light. The radiance was like none other I've ever perceived; it was alive, almost tangible I was bathing in a profound feeling of all-encompassing peace and love. I thought to myself, “I feel so close to Eternity right now. Then the whole sky disappeared and I felt that I was actually looking at God. I felt a quiet intimacy between myself and Rama; between myself and my Self. For a moment outside of time, the sky was alive. God was real.

CARMEN

Rama uses the desert as the main “training ground” for the path of mysticism. Several times a

year we venture forth 'en masse' down the Gorge, and we never really come back. It's quite a sight to see such a huge entourage of women and men with backpacks hiking determinedly under the moonlight in the soft sand. I sometimes wonder what passers-by in their cars must think when they see us entering the gorge ... a midnight field trip of the Sierra Club? ... Moses leading the Jews out of Los Angeles? ... a practical survival drill in case of nuclear devastation? ... what's going on? No one would ever believe the truth; a self-realized teacher taking his students out into the desert to dissolve them and their concepts of "reality."

On October 18, 1981, about 150 of us assembled in the Anza Borrego desert at four o'clock p.m. and walked into the gorge until sunset. When we stopped and sat down, Rama had us observe two adjacent ranges of power on a mountain. One of them had a very light, psychic vibration. It looked to me like a stream of molten energy trickling down the mountain. The other field of energy felt "ominous;" the same way a dark thundercloud rumbling in the distance feels. Rama informed us that an occult being lived up there and that it didn't particularly appreciate the fact that Rama had brought us all to its front doorstep. All at once this being jumped at Rama in attack; that was its last act. Rama is a ruthlessly detached warrior in the desert — it's no place to fool around. A student spoke up and related what he saw:

"The being looked like a centaur, and when it leaped out at you I saw it shatter into millions of tiny fragments."

Rama affirmed this perception and then said, "Look up in the sky." I looked up, and there was his double, a brightly glowing blue form, hovering above us.

We walked about two more miles and then stopped again. Rama said, "I'm going to introduce you to a couple of my friends. They are cosmic goddesses who exist in a higher astral plane. These beings are real, and they possess great powers which they use to aid spiritual seekers." The first celestial friend to manifest was the goddess of rapid spiritual transformation — Kali. The energy of Kali was very intense, volatile and powerful. The image I saw was a huge intricate golden fan spread out against the rock wall. Then Lakshmi, the goddess of beauty and prosperity appeared. When she came, everything seemed to take on a delicate blue hue, and I felt a sense of peace and harmony.

Rama then had us lie on our backs and watch the stars. Gradually, the stars that we all know so well disappeared and a new pattern emerged from the emptiness. These new stars were like negative" stars; they were very luminous but they reminded me of black holes in space. After a few minutes it seemed as though we all rose up and merged with the stars. I felt tremendous love for the universe.

A bit later, Rama told us that he was going to call in his allies. Allies are powerful beings that 'work' for an occultist. I was sitting in the front row of the semi-circle surrounding Rama when he raised his arms straight out to his sides. The wind picked up and brought a powerful wave of energy. Rama said, "These are my two allies; one is to my right and the other is to my left."

I clearly saw the one which was to his right. Overwhelmingly in front of me, looming about six or seven feet tall, was a huge white doorway. I had seen it once before with Rama at Torrey Pines beach, although I didn't know that it was an ally at that time. I focused my attention on the other ally, but I couldn't see it very clearly. It had an animal-like shape to it and perhaps a bird's head, but I couldn't be sure. Rama asked us to report what we saw. I decided to speak up.

"The one on your right is a large white doorway," I said.

"Right! Very good seeing!" Rama answered. "Now what does the other one look like?"

Since I didn't feel that my perception of that one was particularly accurate, I decided to try and give a humorous answer. At the time, Rama and many of his students were living in San Diego county, which is known for its holistic fanaticism. Rama used to love to razz his mellow, organic-type students.

"Well, I can't quite make out the other ally, but it's definitely more organic ..." I said, hiding a smile.

Rama seized the moment and said, in his best 'Suzy-Holistic' voice, "Oh ... fer sure ... like we have organic allies; we're mellow" An uproar of laughter filled the silent air.

The walk out of the gorge was five miles non-stop at a fast pace, although it seemed like ten miles because we were all tired and no one had brought enough water. As I walked on, I could sense and almost see the Indian spirits who stand guard over the gorge from atop the canyon walls. Then, for the finale of my desert experience, as I neared the end of the trek I happened to look up at the top of the ridge to my left. I saw a beautiful woman in a long blue gown. She was made of white light and her smile radiated sweetness. I think it was Lakshmi. She seemed to be 'seeing us to the door' of the desert as we left. I smiled and walked on. Despite all of the visual phenomena — I saw cosmic goddesses, stars disappearing and appearing, beings from other dimensions and the like — I felt that these manifestations were merely Rama's sideshows to distract our minds from what's really going on on a much deeper level. I sensed what Rama was doing was melting the glue which holds together our world — the perceptions and definitions we adhere to that bind us to the illusion that we really exist.

LAURA

This is a place of power, where different planes and realities intersect. It is easier to see and enter into other planes here. A long time ago a very powerful race of Indians lived here. They were not American Indians, they were much more ancient and evolved. They were a warrior race. They had tremendous wisdom, power and insight. They knew how to manipulate energy and use the elementals. They were from another cycle, their being was of another composition. They are still here, even now, you can see them on the mountain rims. They are able to traverse many worlds and realities. They are the guardians of this place of power. They guard the doorways here, into other worlds and realities.”

There was silence in the group. Everyone focused their attention on Rama's words and tried to enter into the plane of Indian warriors. Rama had told us about these ancient warriors on other desert trips, but tonight the power was more intense than ever before and he spoke with more urgency. We listened more attentively, straining to enter into that world. We were on the desert trip that would end the Summer Trimester. This was our last chance to jump to a higher level, to throw away our old selves and become new and clearer. It was August 5, 1982, there were 374 of us, all students of Rama's. By this time it was around midnight and close to 90 degrees. The amount of energy Rama was putting out was so incredibly intense, any remote sense of individuality or sequential reality was completely obliterated. Nothing was real or constant, we had nothing to grasp onto. Our everyday lives and worlds were lost in eternity. Then Rama spoke again.

“Now gaze on that mountain range, especially where those two mountains come together and form a 'V.' Gaze with your subtle vision, try to see and feel the wisdom and power of the Indian warriors.”

We all shifted our positions to face the mountain range. I gazed at the mountains and soon my mind was silent. The mountains began to ripple and pulsate. There was a thick aura of white light over them. The mountains began dissolving and the 'V' between the mountains filled with light, making it even with the mountain tops. Immediately, a tower of red and blue light appeared on the top of one of the mountains, then it exploded into a shower of red sparks. Only one spark remained. It jumped around joyfully bouncing from mountain to mountain. I knew it was Rama's double playing with the energy. Then, suddenly, my attention was drawn up to the 'V', I felt an incredible force, a mixture of power, light and knowledge.

At first, I was not able to distinguish any form, but gradually the light up there took the form of an Indian. He was strong and firm in body and stance, yet there radiated from him an all pervading calmness and precise control. I looked into his eyes they were very clear, yet deep and very serious. Pure knowledge and freedom emanated from him. I flashed back a couple of years when Rama had taken a few of us to a place of power on Mount Palomar. There he had become one of these warriors. He manifested in the middle of a fog-covered valley. He walked on the fog and began spinning faster and faster. He spun so fast that his form, one of an Indian warrior, became a swirling beam of power and light. The warrior I saw now felt the same. I glanced over to the mountains on the opposite side of the gorge. I saw those

mountaintops lined with warriors. They manifested a certain aspect of eternity, that of the impeccable warrior full of power and discrimination. They served as examples. They seemed to invite us to take on the challenge to become pure light, to become impeccable and wise. They gave us the opportunity, they left the door open. I knew Rama was one of them and that they were all part of a tribe. Any of us could become one of them and become one with them, if we only could let go of our limited selves. We had to become clear and fluid.

At the end of the trip, Rama spoke to us.

“Only part of me will go back to Los Angeles, a larger part of me will remain in the desert. I will be here waiting. When you are ready to leave your relationships, lifestyles, jobs and limited ways of seeing reality behind, when you no longer have desires or attachments to this world, you should look for me out here in the desert. I'll be here waiting to take you out of this world and through other realities beyond time and dimension. Whenever you are ready, I'll be waiting.”

GARY

We went to the desert on Sunday. I drove out in my car with Don, Dave (my roommate) and Donald. When we arrived at the gorge, Steve and Mark were directing people to park their cars and walk up the gorge to the area near the stop sign and wait for Rama to arrive. I remember sitting there with the wind blowing at my back. Some people were meditating, others were watching the sun go down. The colors were beautiful, all sorts of pastels, with a lot of orange. Roy came up to me wearing his bicycle book bag that he used to carry his food. We passed the time by telling jokes about snakes wearing golf hats and sunglasses

Rama arrived wearing his customary jogging shorts, T-shirt and sunglasses. We lined up to be counted, with the guys on one side of the path and the girls on the other side. A couple of people on the staff took attendance. That way we would know if we left anyone behind at the end of the journey.

We walked for about twenty minutes and stopped just in from of the side of a mountain. Rama took a position facing away from the mountain and we formed a semi-circle around him. I remember sitting in the second or third row, so I had a pretty good seat. He said this was the beginning of the trip. At the center meetings we usually come in with all sorts of bad energies stuck to our subtle physical bodies, the bodies of light that look just like our physical bodies. We pick up the energies in the world as we work or go to the store. Walking through the wind that comes blowing down the gorge washes those nasty things off us. Sort of like a psychic shower. The desert can be very healing.

By now the moon had come out and the sun had been down for some time. Rama asked us to look up at the moon. So everyone turned and looked up there. I started to meditate and saw the moon pulsate. It got bigger and smaller. It was pretty easy to see I also noticed the face in the moon more distinctly. We called it the man in the moon as kids. Well, that face seemed to take on a life of its own. I didn't believe it, but the face up there opened his eyes real wide and looked around. As if it was looking at us. Then it winked at us. Right after that, Rama turned back toward us and asked what we saw.

A bunch of people said they saw the moon get bigger and smaller. He said that was right. He was making the moon do that. One person said that she saw a light jump up to the moon. He said that was his double. He asked how many people saw him jump to the moon. About eight people raised their hands. I didn't say anything about the face I saw moving around, but on the way home from the desert I told the guys in my car about it. One of the guys said that he saw it too, but didn't believe what he was seeing.

Then Rama had us look up at the moon again. He usually doesn't say what he is going to do so people won't think he is suggesting what to see. But sometimes it gets frustrating not knowing what is going on. So he said he would make the moon get bigger and smaller while he said “in” or “out.” We were supposed to feel what he was doing to the moon while he was saying those things. I'll be darned if I didn't see that ol' moon getting bigger and smaller. I didn't have to meditate to see it. It was that plain.

He did some other things, like projecting beams of light out of his arms. I remember this one thing directly. He moved his arms up toward the sky, and a bluish sphere of light built up around him and moved outward, enveloping the whole group. His hands were burning brightly with two different colors. I had the feeling that he was doing these basic manipulations of light to warm us up for the really heavy stuff to come.

He told us that we can see everything he does. But we won't let ourselves see it, because if we did it would cause us to change our view of reality.

We hiked up the gorge after taking a break. We must have walked for about forty minutes until we reached a tree that was on the southern side of the gorge. Rama was standing right in front of the tree, but still in the shade from the moon.

John went up to talk to Rama. One person said later that they saw John and Rama as balls of light, and as John got closer they melted into one ball of light.

Rama started to talk about how we should let go more. We should believe what we see, go ahead and trust ourselves and enjoy the evening.

Usually what happens to me is that I start to let go and the world begins to disappear. I lose sight of Rama and become afraid of what might happen, so I bring myself back into the regular world. But what he was talking about inspired me to let go, and let the winds of eternity take me wherever they wanted to. So I let go.

I guess what happened next was the highlight of the trip for me. The world started to disappear and I just watched it. Then it felt like the entire world that we were sitting in changed. I really felt like we were no longer on the face of the Earth. Not only did everything look different, but everything felt different, too.

Some scenery came back into view, but it looked entirely different than before. The light of the moon had a different shade to it. It didn't even look like moonlight. But I was still able to see everybody's outline. I looked over at Rama. I didn't really see his body. I only saw an outline. It must have been his subtle body or aura. The outline looked to be about a half a foot thicker than his regular physical body.

Then Rama started talking about how he really doesn't have a fixed form any more. Rather, the Infinite constantly brings different forms of light through him. When he was saying this, I was watching his form change. Sometimes the physical would totally disappear and the only thing left would be different shapes of light. I saw several forms of light before I really started to believe it.

When it struck me what I was seeing, the weight of the situation took hold and blew me away. Here was a guy that talks about American things like going to shopping malls, and movies like Conan the Barbarian, Road Warrior or E.T., with no physical form.

Instead of really dealing with the situation, I just stopped myself from seeing those weird things and went back to normal vision. I mean, that stuff can be scary. How would you like to walk around on the street and see all sorts of light all over the place. And if you talked to anybody that didn't know about this kind of stuff they would think you were crazy. Just try to tell your father about it.

Anyway, one form looked like lines that extended about six feet in many directions, sort of like Superman's hideout in the movies. Another form was a sphere of light about four feet in diameter. The inner part was a bluish hue and the outer ring was gold. When I saw those forms, I couldn't even make out the slightest glimpse of a physical body. It's like the guy does not have anything in him except for Light. Most of the time I see his physical. Probably, because it is easier to relate to a person than a form of Light.

I turned to look at the wind that rolls down the gorge. That wind blew all night long. I don't remember ever having been to the gorge when the wind was not blowing. I saw the wind as a form of light. It looked like waves of sparkly gold light about a hundred feet high. The different waves were separated by about fifty feet, coming one after another. This stuff was going on while Rama was answering people's

questions. Questions seem to be really important. I remember that Rama said once, "How do you expect to get to enlightenment if you don't ask questions?"

Later we looked up at the mountain to the right of us. I saw the mountain's aura, and the peak sort of round off and move up and down. Then Rama sent his subtle body, I mean his double, up to the top. We also turned around and looked at a star that was just above the horizon of the hills behind us. The star waved back and forth like it was tied to the end of a long string. That was really plain to see and a lot of people were giggling because they must have seen it happen too.

Next he had us look up at the sky. The pattern of the stars changed to the pattern of a different world. Later he did the same thing, but then filled the sky with golden light. After he filled the sky he said all of his circuits were on. The power that flowed through him was so overpowering that it would be hard to stay with it and let the power flow. It was the highest state he could be in while still being around.

Then we stopped to eat dinner. I think we stopped because we were getting to the saturation point and a break was needed so we would not go bust. The Lakshmi staff that came out in a four-wheel drive brought ice cream along for everyone. Pretty strange being blown away in the desert, in the middle of nowhere, eating a Rocky Road ice cream cone.

Then we hiked again for about forty minutes, to a place way up the gorge. It wasn't quite as far as the farthest we have been as a group. But it was pretty far up there.

We were waiting around for some of Rama's friends from other worlds to arrive. It was neat because he said that we would never be the same after what he was going to do to us. Then he laughed the laugh he laughs when he really thinks something is funny. He did a few things with his hands. He did the disappearing act where he brings his hands down to his feet starting at the top of head, disappearing as his hands go down.

The first guy to show up was an old friend that was a great chief of a mighty Indian nation, the Indians that lived there a long time ago, much longer ago than the present-day Indians. All that was left of him was a band of light. The chief came and manifested himself at the top of the little hill we were sitting in front of. The guy was at the top of a rock. I remember that a little bit later Rama shot some light up at the guy. Maybe he gave him a blast of kundalini like he does to us.

The next being that showed up was Mahalakshmi. She is the patron goddess of our center. We waited around for a while as Rama entertained us with neat stories about himself. I guess after awhile, Rama noticed she had come in the wind. I was a little disappointed because I wanted to see her. But Rama said she was clever. Oh well, maybe next time she will let us see her.

The stuff he talked about while we were waiting was really interesting. Like he said that this was going to be his last incarnation on Earth. And that he was looking for as many of his old students to take with him to the next place we are going. He said that this is not the only world and there are many others that are much nicer than this one.

Rama then began his comic routine to lighten us up. He told us a story of how he got his assignment to come to Earth. He was walking around the bardo one day. On one side were wrathful deities saying, "Come this way." And on the other side were cosmic angels saying, "Oh no, come with us." But he was stuck with this ticket to earth. He didn't know where Earth was, so he walked up to a big cosmic book that lists all of the worlds.

Rama asked one wrathful deity if he had ever heard about Earth. The deity said a cousin of his went to Earth, but they had never heard from the cousin again. Sounds pretty bad to me.

Then Rama switched topics and talked about how they had sent him to public schools in this incarnation. The ones with the metal lockers in the halls.

Later, a being, I think it was a witch, kept bothering us by sending big blasts of wind down the gorge. We would be sitting there with the wind blowing mildly, then all of a sudden the wind would start to blow really hard. I mean storm force. Rama turned to us and said that the wind was being caused by a being

further up the gorge.

He reached out with his hands and stopped the wind. It dropped to a gentle breeze again. But then the wind started right up again. Rama looked up the gorge and warned the being that he didn't really enjoy the game and it better not get him upset. So he reached up the gorge again and the wind stopped a second time. Back to the nice breeze. But then it started right up again. Talk about flirting with danger. Then he looked a little ticked and reached up the gorge rather intensely. Whereupon the wind stopped abruptly.

“There, that's better,” he said.

He did a whole group of things that I promptly forgot. But just as we were about to leave we heard a coyote barking from the other side of the gorge. The tone of its barking was definitely not friendly. Rama said it was a dark force battling for power with him. Power battles are a winner-take-all situation.

Rama reached out with his left hand, like he did to the being that was hassling us with the wind, and grabbed the being. The being barked a few more times like it was fighting its last battle on earth. I could feel what Rama was doing. Then the being let out a couple of whimpering yelps, like a dog that is getting beaten. Then the gorge fell silent.

Rama looked around at us and said, “That's right,” as if we all knew inside what had happened. I guess one does not mess around in the mystical worlds unless one is ready for heavy duty action. No fluff and puff in the mystical worlds.

We took a break before hiking back to the cars. When we were almost to the road we formed a large circle so Rama could meditate on us once more. As he turned around looking at each one of us

I could see light coming from him. It looked like he was a big searchlight.

After meditating on everyone, he reached up into the sky. I saw gold light come flashing down to him. He quickly moved his arms horizontally and the light moved out of him to all of us in a flash. It was a very deep experience for me.

Then off we headed for the cars to drive back to the cities. For the days to follow I felt very unglued. The glue that regularly holds my being solid was not there. So I tried to change into what I wanted to be. To be more humble and pure. Slowly the glue set into a different pattern. I became a completely different person.

BOB

I had been in the Center only a short time when I went on my first desert trip. Although my first meeting with Rama had been an excellent experience and the center meetings had been filled with light and had given me a feeling of inner peace, I was still skeptical. How I could be skeptical baffles me, because a mere glance from Rama would hurtle me through endless realities.

I drove to the desert alone to try to gather my senses and wits about me. I arrived early and proceeded to examine the area. I have lived in California all my life and, at first glance, this seemed to be average California desert. My mind started becoming skeptical again. I had driven four hours from Los Angeles to this gorge in the middle of the Anza Borrego desert. I was thinking that I must be unquestionably insane. I proceeded to mill around with my fellow seekers, some of whom were on their first encounter with the desert meditations and other “old pros” who had made at least one other trip.

When Rama arrived, within minutes we were racing into the desert at a very brisk pace — with him and two or three of the staff in the lead. The gorge is about a half mile wide, very flat and covered with soft sand. We walked for about two miles and stopped to rest. We meditated for about twenty minutes and proceeded on our way. We stopped again about five miles into the desert. We gathered around Rama, all sitting on the sand.

The show began. Although I was still very skeptical about the experience, those feelings began to be

washed away as Rama proceeded. First he filled the area around us with a golden light. He then looked over the group and announced that we should pay particular attention to the moon above our heads. He then, without question, made that moon move. At this point, I got a little more attentive, to say the least.

The sun had been down for some time, and the chill in the desert air was starting to make us quite cold. Rama sensed that some of the seekers were short of clothing. He raised his arms and said, "Heat," and I felt a blast of warm air equal to that of an electric heater blow across my face.

He then scanned the sky and fixed his vision on a small but very dense cloud right over our heads. It was a cloud, not smoke or fog, it was a cloud, white and fluffy.

"Watch this," Rama said with a smile. He pointed his finger at the cloud, and it began to change ever so slightly. There was a side of me that was convinced that some of the phenomena I had seen could have been imagined or misinterpreted. That side of me had my eyes fixed on this cloud. I wasn't going to let this go by without a fight from my conscious mind. I brought myself down from meditation and gathered all my senses. I stared at that cloud while it continued to change form very slowly.

"He'll never make this cloud do anything much," I thought triumphantly. Suddenly the cloud started to disappear. It grew smaller and smaller and as I stared at it intently, my mind screamed in disbelief, "Was it possible?" Possible it was. That cloud totally disappeared. It was no longer in the sky above the gorge.

Rama also painted, with light, the hills white and gold that evening. He made the desert appear as if there had been a snow. He disappeared and levitated, but nothing had quite the effect on me that the cloud disappearing had.

The trip to the desert had the effect of giving tranquility to my being. As I drove home, I realized that I had just begun to scratch the surface of what is reality.

JAN

On July 4, 1982, Rama met 312 of his students in the Anza Borrego Desert, at dusk. I had been to the desert many times before, as I have studied with Rama for a couple of years. No two trips are ever the same.

It was late, probably around midnight. We had been meditating for about 45 minutes when Rama asked us to lie on our backs and look up. He said he was going to perform some energy manipulations in the sky. A soft breeze blew across my face. I felt happy.

As I looked into the sky I saw a few stars disappear. New stars appeared in different locations. I closed my eyes. When I opened them, the stars were still moving, disappearing and relocating. The constellations were rapidly changing. Now the sky was full of new constellations, ones I had never seen before.

Lines of golden-white light began to shoot across the sky. Some were straight, some were slightly curved. They shot across the distance of the sky at a high speed. I wondered if the lines had a destination.

More and more lines appeared. The light in the sky became brighter. The lines were moving faster. The entire desert sky was full of lines of light. They formed a net, or glowing latticework, that stretched as far as I could see.

I felt ecstatic! I couldn't believe what I was seeing, yet I knew they were there. The lines were so beautiful. I have never seen a physical object that can even be mildly compared in beauty to those lines of light. I felt the movement of the lines in my body. An electrical current filled me. I was physically numb.

The lines continued their play. The intensity was reaching a climax. I wasn't sure if I could handle much more ecstasy, but at the same time I didn't want the experience to stop. The lines kept multiplying. Suddenly the individual lines merged. Their movement ceased. The sky became pure golden-white light.

It was so bright, it appeared to be noon rather than midnight! I squinted my eyes. The shift in the degree of light had been dramatic.

I felt that the light filling the sky was Rama, as if his physical body had dissolved and he was now able to fill the sky with his essence. I looked away from the sky, to where Rama had been standing. He was not there. He was nowhere else, either. He had disappeared!

I wanted to become the sky, as Rama had. I concentrated on the light. I tried to enter into it.

The meditation was over. I couldn't feel my body. I felt very high and mentally clear. I wanted to speak. I tried, but no words came out. Everyone else seemed to be having a similar experience. All 312 people were absolutely silent.

Rama asked us to comment on our meditation. I spoke. I described what I had seen and felt. Rama smiled. I knew he had become the sky. He did, too. I didn't think he would say so, though. Some things are too incredible to be put into words.

He looked at me, and said very simply: "You saw the light of the Infinite. You saw God."

And that is the last event that I clearly remember of the July 4 Desert Trip.

CHERYL

Do I just forget what happened? Do I make a big deal of what happened? It matters! It doesn't matter! Who knows? How do I recapture those moments? Do I try? How do I explain what happened? Is it significant? Rama says things have significance only if we give them significance. So do I give his mystical feats significance? Let me tell you what happened — what I saw. You decide if the mystical feats were significant.

As a source of background, I want to share that experiences like the ones I will relate never occurred to me before I met Rama. I met Rama a little more than a year ago. Prior to that meeting, life for me was centered in the physical American world. I was a teacher for hearing-impaired children and I played tennis and jogged for recreation. I enjoyed the TV program, *In Search Of*, but that was the extent of my attention to unexplained phenomena.

The particular mystical feats that I observed occurred during the September 6, 1982 desert field trip. Rama brought 374 Lakshmi students, including myself, to a special place of power in the Anza Borrego Desert. It was an overnight excursion during which Rama performed various mystical feats.

Rama moved the stars in the night sky and made the stars disappear and then reappear. He said the stars were his specialty I ask you: "Is it significant to see your spiritual teacher change the position of the stars?"

Rama projected his subtle body to the top of a nearby ridge. He danced and moved along the ridge. He said he always enjoyed performing that feat. I ask you: "Is it significant to see the subtle body of your spiritual teacher?"

Rama walked on air. He appeared to glide over the desert sands as if boards with rollers were attached to his legs. His legs appeared as light beams that formed triangles at the bottom. I ask you: "Is it significant to see your spiritual teacher walk on air?"

So do I just forget what happened? Do I make a big deal of what happened? It matters! It doesn't matter! One moment I am in the desert absorbed in mystical experiences. And now, I am here, involved in a different experience. And life just keeps happening. I ask you: "Is there significance to Rama's mystical feats? Is there significance to any experience?" I guess Rama is right again. Things have significance only if we give them significance. And life continues whether we label experiences significant or insignificant. It doesn't matter! It does matter! Who knows?

JEFF

Everything was as if seen through a veil. Nothing stood out clearly. A thin haze was everywhere. If I looked into the distance I could see what looked like fog filling the valley. It wasn't thick fog. It was just a very tangible mistiness that obscured the vision. As Rama spoke, increasing mistiness was sweeping over us in waves. Now it was so thick that it was like a dense blanket that threatened to envelop the whole world in blackness. Now it was thin enough that I could see the large group of people gathered together in a semi-circle around Rama. In wave after wave the energy was slowly gaining in intensity. The pressure was fairly constant and centered in my midsection. There was no sense of time or place. I suppose it was about 11 p.m. and we were in the Anza Borrego desert, but my mind was not occupied with such things. In the fog world, time and place did not exist.

Fog was not the only thing that existed here. Every now and then I was aware that I wasn't alone; there seemed to be some other people there. This realization, however, resided more on the fringes of my consciousness. The focus of my attention was Rama and the fog. I slowly became aware that something else was happening. Thin strands of light extended from Rama. They were like fibers that connected Rama with the world around him much in the same way a spider's web connects him to his world. I had seen this before but never to such a large extent. It was really very beautiful. Rama introduced us to the moon. He told us the moon was our friend. Every time he tells us that something is our friend, it changes my world a little bit. I actually acquire a new friend. Friendship really means something to me. It involves communication, sharing, and a real exchange of love. It might seem a bit strange to share this with the wind or the moon, but I've found out you can and it really feels nice. These are powerful friends. They can sort of look out for you like a big brother or sister. They are also very wise. You can learn a lot from them.

Things were really starting to happen. The moon was dancing. It was bobbing all about the sky like it was a balloon attached to a string. I felt exhilarated. For a moment I felt as free as the moon. Then Rama told us to look at a low spot between two mountains and try to feel as if we were up there and looking down. In the beginning I just felt a lot of energy and saw the mountains undulating. Then I took his suggestion and tried to project my feelings to the top of the mountain. I felt a rush and got a bit dizzy. It was a strange feeling. I tried it several more times and felt the same thing. It wasn't very comfortable so I quit it. While gazing at a lower part of one of the mountains, something caught the corner of my eye. I could see a vast amount of energy and light radiating from the gap between the mountains. I could only see it if I avoided looking at it directly. While engaged in this I became aware of something else. There was something that resembled a glowworm that seemed to be hanging from a series of thin strands of light. It was doing tricks as if on the high trapeze in the circus, except that everything seemed to be in slow motion. It was spinning and doing somersaults and slowly traveling across the side of the mountain. It traveled using the strands of light much the same way a spider does. Once again I couldn't see anything if I stared right at it, but if I looked a little bit away I could see everything quite clearly. I knew the glowworm was Rama. I couldn't recognize him from his appearance. I knew it was him from the type of energy I felt. This was quite an experience for me. I was thoroughly amazed.

Throughout the rest of the journey the energy just intensified. Usually I come to a point where I achieve a sort of "breakthrough" and the energy kind of levels off. Not this time. It just got stronger. The pressure on my midsection continued to increase. It wasn't too much fun. It seemed to me that I had to radically change. I tried to facilitate this change by crying out to God for help, but it didn't do any good. I seemed stuck. Meanwhile my mind seemed fairly quiet. There was just this incredible intensity all around me that I couldn't seem to tune out or shut off. The whole world was intensity. I felt like I was ready to black out. I was scared.

The climax came at the very end of the trip. We all gathered together in a huge circle around Rama. The energy was at a peak. I had never experienced anything like this. Even though he wasn't too far away, I could hardly see Rama at all. He disappeared repeatedly and I could see right through where he supposedly was. At other times he was thoroughly enveloped in swirls of violet light. The light was so

intense I could hardly look at it. The energy had at long last become too much for me. I was shaking like a leaf, my knees were buckling, and I was beginning to black out. He was speaking to us about our level of commitment to the process of self discovery. What he said stabbed me like a sword. I guess I didn't want to hear that right now. I gagged and bent over double. I sat down and bowed my head hoping I wouldn't be sick. I felt ready to die. Maybe I did die. It was over. As we left I stopped to thank the desert, eternity, and Rama for what I had learned. I was feeling pretty humble just now. What would become of me I didn't know. I still felt incredibly lucky. I even managed a smile.

ALISON

There is a guy who lives in Los Angeles who walks on air. He did it last night in the Anza Borrego desert, and he didn't leave any footprints. He did it under a fullish moon, miles up a dry river gorge, at about three-thirty in the morning. There were three hundred and seventy-four people watching. I was there. I'm an anthropologist and a lawyer, and I work at a large university psychiatric hospital in Los Angeles. Part of my job is to know who's crazy and who's not. I'm not. But there's something going on, and it got me out of my beachside home yesterday on a blistering summer's afternoon for a long drive to an all-night desert outing replete with scorpions, cacti, and an 'overnight low' of about 85 degrees.

I went to the desert on a Greyline bus, feeling a bit like Charles Couralt checking out a human interest story. I'd been on several desert trips, but I still didn't feel I'd gotten the scoop. There were more than fifty of us on the bus and it was an interesting tour group. There were secretaries, physicists, students, computer programmers, nurses and business professionals, all decked out in snorts, carrying small backpacks filled with water and food, off to take a hike in the desert on one of the hottest days of the summer. Dino, our bus driver, had been driving for thirty years. His nervousness made it clear that he had his doubts about these people who wanted to be left in the middle of nowhere at nine in the evening and picked up again at dawn. At the last rest stop before the desert, Dino talked to George, the bus driver from San Francisco, and saw hundreds of other people in their private cars, all resting before going to the same nowhere. As it turned out he'd met George once before when they'd parked their buses next to each other at Disneyland. It made him feel better to know that his bus was part of some larger event.

And what an event it was. The buses dropped their passengers, cars were parked and packs secured, and attendance was taken. The 374 names were checked off roll sheets as the crowd sat quietly in the moonlit gorge. Then the signal was given and the march began. The man from Los Angeles, Rama, walked in front with two companions, setting a brisk pace. The rest of us followed behind him, hiking through soft sand up the shining white expanse of the dry river gorge. The mountains looming on either side of the riverbed shimmered with reflections of the moon and stars. I felt like an extra in "Lawrence of Arabia." I was one of hundreds of people, young and old, walking silently through the desert night.

We were hiking to a sacred place, a place of power. Rama had told us that the gorge was a place where Indians had engaged in spiritual practices in previous ages. In the present day, the desert was certainly not part of our ordinary life. Out there, in the middle of the night, we had left behind the world of comfortable homes, supermarkets, and nine-to-five jobs. We walked through that still landscape and felt eternity because we had no choice. The stillness and the night began to feel natural, like old friends, and we walked, wondering how we would share the sense of this night with our incredulous friends.

It was a wonderful night. I won't attempt to describe it in full. I will say, rather, that wondrous things happened all night long, and that one thing seemed to me to be the heart of the experience. This man, this spiritual teacher named Rama, walked on air. I sat with hundreds of people in a semi-circle and watched as he walked on pads of golden light. He would lift a foot and drop it down with extraordinary grace and tenderness and care, and it would support his weight without ever touching the ground. Chills ran throughout my body as I watched him walk, and an indescribably sweet happiness flooded my mind. I don't know if everyone saw Rama walk on the pads of golden light. But everyone could see that Rama

was moving across soft sand without leaving footprints. He walked down a steep sand ledge without causing any sand to slide down with the force of gravity. Everyone could hear the deep silence of the night, uninterrupted by the crunching of feet on sand. Rama told us that he was walking on the Grace of God. He was walking on the strength of his knowing that the physical universe is not what it seems.

Today, riding back to the city in the Greyline bus, I know my world has changed. I have to deal with the fact that I saw real evidence that the world isn't as straight-forward and solid as I've been told. Fortunately, I have hundreds of friends and acquaintances to help me accept this perception. But driving along the California coast now, through the early morning, I can't really think of those of us who were in the gorge last night. I just keep wondering, where was everybody else?

RUSSELL

Having been a photographer for the past ten years, I have grown to love light. I enjoy its many facets, its color, brilliance, and its sheer quality; whether it be from a natural or artificial source. The early mornings and late afternoons are the two times of the day when the subtleties and shading appear. The light then is predominantly red and those times really offer the greatest variety of color. Indigo skies opposite the sunset, green above the horizon fading to yellow and orange at the zenith, it is really beautiful — but nothing like my experience at Anza-Borrego.

It was a desert trip in the early spring. The group was forming by the cars and I wandered off a few yards just to acclimate myself to the surroundings. I felt very much at peace there. It was a muggy afternoon, as the sun played hide and seek with the low clouds. The wildflowers were beginning to bloom vibrant colors on the almost colorless vegetation.

The group formed and we all started to walk into the canyon. About fifteen minutes later we stopped at our gathering point, waiting for instruction. All of us sat in the shade of the western canyon wall, quietly meditating. It felt wonderful, an uneasiness, an excitement, and always the unknown. Rama trekked in, dressed in the usual attire befitting a teacher — shorts and a T-shirt inscribed “No More Mr. Nice Guy” — we were not put at ease.

He explained to us the usual rules, and when finished, brought up the force for our first meditation. I sat facing east watching him. Behind him, the clear blue sky met the sun reflecting off the glistening orange canyon walls. He just projected. Standing there, hands held high, things began to happen that we did not have a reference point for.

Everything was transforming, the air filled with light, it was everywhere, a dancing sky. Sparks, as if from sparklers, flew everywhere starting from nowhere. Colors formed, small purple and orange balls formed and floated across my field of vision exploding with more bursts of energy. The air was alive, it was invigorating. Rama stood, he was absolutely radiant. Not like a bride at a wedding, but more like an enemy being shot with a phaser on Star Trek, with that burst of special effects — a one-foot glow of white light emanating from all over his body. Just pure white. He was the catalyst.

I felt so alive. I wish there were a way to record what I experienced. Coming to terms with something I could not photograph is difficult, the image on the film is so real, but what was it that I just saw?

I then realized a major theme of this entire study, cognitive dissonance.

DEBORAH

I arrive in Anza Borrego about 7 p.m. I have just finished Tales of Power, the part where Don Juan leaves Carlos Castaneda. I am feeling sentimental and sad.

I go up a hill to watch the sunset. I find myself lying on the ground, hugging a bit of desert. I look off into the gorge where we will hike. The forces look benevolent, stern and caring.

We sit waiting for Rama. I sense beings looking at us and laughing. As a joke they are all lined up, as we are. There are 312 of us here. When Rama arrives he says, "We're pilgrims walking into eternity. The conditions are favorable."

I feel a sense of very clean, very free play. As we walk we are being cleansed, purified and hung out to dry. The wind is very strong.

When we sit to meditate I feel very etheric. It's as if I am goo and someone has taken a palette knife and spread me over a very large space, very very thinly. Rama says that the energy is elegant. This is a good word. It is smooth and lyrical and precise and profound. "You are having a beautiful dream tonight," he says.

We are served ice cream. Over 300 people in the desert in July are served ice cream. This is a lovely mind fuck. People in Lakshmi will go to any lengths for a good stunt.

Someone asks Rama a question about something that happened two minutes previously. He answers, "I don't know. That was several incarnations ago."

I have the sudden realization that he means this literally. I start to see the selves passing through him. It's like a wipe in a movie. The selves are passing through him and being eliminated rhythmically. Then I feel this happening to me. With Rama, on every beat his total being is reformed. With me, a thin layer peeled back with each beat. It is effortless. I realize how I often bear down and strain to change. Out here it is easy and correct, like sighing or taking off a tight shoe.

"I use only twenty percent of my power in the meditation hall because you're not open to me there. This is my world. My heart is here.

He has us lie on our backs and look at the sky. This is a high point for me. The sky wipes clean and I have the wonderful feeling that I'm not stuck in this world. I see a star blink in, like a flashbulb, then disappear. It is a very delicate moment.

Many see the sky fill with celestial light, a kind of star rain. When Rama speaks again there is a sweetness in his voice, a fragility. He later says that this was a pivotal moment for him, too. He was able to go higher than he'd ever gone while still maintaining a sense of himself as perceiver. He was able to transcend and yet still be with us, and teach us. He had found a new resource.

We walk again and ten minutes before our next stop the energy shifts. Everything seems more serious and pointed. The desert is caring but very severe and not to be trifled with.

"You are in the world of the dream. The power gets stronger as we move up the gorge. We go deeper into the center of the circle

"You change forms. You confront death passing through you and birth passing through you. But that is not your essence. They're shadows and are not you.

"This is the dream of the opposite self. You are on the luminous edge of existence. There is no past and no future. You are eternal. You are in the land of the other. You are the dark side. And you are the light side.

"We are one self in fragmented pieces. But I bring you together into one self.

"You are a fluid metaphor for existence. You are your own death and your own rebirth. Here is forever. It never changes. We bring perpetual oblivion until we change the world.

"Feel this wind. This wind blows from world to world and from life to life. This is the wind of dharma.

"Be in love with the wind. It is an intimate lover. It enraptures you. It blows you through eternity.

"My friends are coming now ... They're here."

A beam of light visits us. This being was once the chief of a great nation. Rama says he wishes us well.

“There's a goddess coming. Where is she? She's in the wind. What will I do with you? 312 of you? There are beings all over the place, sitting amongst you.

“You're thinking, 'I could have stayed home and gotten the same tiling. Do you know how far I have to walk back? And now he's getting crazy.' You're thinking, 'What does this have to do with eternity?’

“There's life, death, rebirth. Sepulveda Boulevard. It's hard to keep your dignity in the bardo.”

Rama's speech is going into his stand-up comedy flow. He seems to have dissolved into his great, fluid, monologist.

“There are all these beings saying, 'Come with us! Come with us!' and you've got this ticket in your hand that says 'earth.'

“You guys ever hear of it? A being says, 'I had a cousin that went there once.' What happened to him? 'We never heard from him again!’

“Nothing lasts forever. If I wait it'll all go away.

“To think I was on the Phil Donahue Show, talking about reincarnation. There were all these ladies from the Midwest in the audience saying, That's not Christian!’

“What a place to be born into. This is my last incarnation on earth. So I'm trying to get all my old students out with me. I've had it. That's the score.”

Someone asks, “Do you know where you'll be stationed next?”

“Wherever the company sends me. It's a good company, though. Good pay, benefits. I'm going to do some neat stuff before I leave though, you'll see.

“God has a great sense of humor. She must, to get you out here in the moonlight. The void is ready to snatch you up like a Pac Man machine. And Lakshmi is on vacation. You chant, 'Srिंग,' and you get her answering machine. 'Vishnu and I are on vacation. If you leave your name and loka we'll get back to you as soon as possible.'

“I'm going to take you to a psychic plane, a place with pretty things in it. Just be consistently luminous.”

Suddenly everything is completely, absolutely still. Cool blue rays come from his hands. I see the sky turn mottled, like those high clouds that are broken. The sky turns red.

We walk out and gather to be counted. It is dawn. Rama is zipping back and forth on a three wheeled vehicle looking very silly, grinning like crazy. He's wearing a T-shirt that says, “Nirvana” on one side and “Be Absorbed” on the other.

We gather around him for the final moment of meditation and send off. When his eyes sweep past me it is hard to stand. The dawn is so golden behind him. I am so of him. He is helping us all

When I look in the mirror the next morning much has left me Much has washed away. I care differently. I am not so fixed on the illusion that I am. I am not so much anymore. I'm lighter cleaner, less.

ELIZABETH

I was born in Africa, of English stock. A white woman in a black man's land. Africa is earth itself, just the thinnest veil of technology to cover the mystery. Though my parents gift was a city lifestyle in western mode, the pulsebeat underfoot was not. In the vast space of the African veld, a dream was formed in the mind of a little girl. A dream that began to find some substance nearly ten years ago, with reading the works of Carlos Castaneda. An outer journey of ten thousand miles brought me to Los Angeles, and suddenly the dream had a chance of becoming a reality. I was lucky enough to be accepted as Rama's student, and so an inner journey began, with a teacher I'd hardly dared hope to find.

I had been in the center a short time when the first desert trip was scheduled. I prepared zealously for

the experience. Rama had recommended we say all our goodbyes and tidy up our lives. It was important for us to be clear and untroubled if we were to get the full benefit from the experience. Dreams, visions, and inner promptings were telling me to let go, to say goodbye. All week I diligently processed every shred of the images. Saturday came and I felt ready. It seemed obvious that on returning life would be something new.

The stark beauty of the desert created a sober mood. We drove through the desert as the sun was setting, arriving at the gorge at twilight. There was a strong wind blowing. When everyone had arrived, the group set off into the gorge. With Rama striding out in front, we were able to find, as a group, a mutual resonance.

The wind, constant and strong, seemed to blow the instrument of my being; and I was able to see clearly how out of tune it really was. As the evening progressed, more and more discordant notes were heard from within. I was cold and uncomfortable. In the centrifuge of spiritual light that surrounded us all night, great knots of fear and resistance were surrendered. Finally it seemed the wind had blown me empty.

By this time we had stopped walking. We were all seated in a semi-circle around Rama, who had his back to the rock face of the cliff. He spoke to us for awhile, as we settled down for a journey through the different planes of reality. We sat grouped around him for hours, small specks of mortality on the cold sand. We felt the immensity of eternity all about us, as he interspersed demonstrations of power with his wit and humor. He demonstrated the four winds, making each blow in turn, and explaining their individual properties. He made the mountains sway and undulate, and moved the moon out from behind the clouds.

Some part of me was numb. I had totally suspended all thought processes, all judgments; there was no way I could accommodate these events in the old format of my mind. I felt myself encapsulate them in a memory, and simply procrastinate about looking at them.

Toward dawn, when it was nearly time to leave, Rama walked over to the rocks and sat down on a ledge. He began to meditate; slowly and gradually his body began to disappear. At first, one make out the contours of his body, then he became Through the lines of his body could be seen the contours of the rocks, until finally the rock face behind him was in clear detail. There was not a trace of his body to be seen. A few moments passed, then his body slowly began to materialize again in the same spot. I felt form and formlessness begin to integrate in a new way.

When it was time to leave, we walked down the gorge; there was no need or desire to speak. I silently watched the sun begin to fill the sky with colored light. Feeling both empty and full -empty of tension and resistance, and filled up in a new way with divine light — my vision and perception were totally innocent. The inner noise was stilled, and at last the separated person felt integrated, one with everything.

This was sealed into our awareness as we stood in an immense circle, at the journey's end; silently absorbing the loving power that Rama, at the centre, radiated toward each of us in turn. We were all part of an immense column of light, one energy, all intermingled, one being.

On returning to the city that morning, sleep and meditation were inseparable; the rest of the day was spent floating in a sea of bliss and light. I felt myself ascending into light that became steadily brighter, until I saw an enormous gateway in front of me. I stood for awhile gazing in through this elaborate structure, enraptured by the rays of celestial light that shone through.

It felt like coming home. I was aware that nothing was solid any more, everything was moving, undulating, breathing. Something dull and heavy had left me forever.

FRANK

It was a cold and windy night. The clouds were flying rapidly across the moonlit sky. Most of

them seemed to be following a distinct pattern dictated by the wind as it swirled around the mountain tops. Suddenly one cloud detached itself from the others and drifted into a clear section of sky. Rama called our attention to it and had us lie on our backs and watch it. He lifted his right arm and pointed towards it. Nothing happened at first. Then, within a minute or two, the cloud started to become thinner as wisps of it broke away from the main body and disappeared. Before long, no more than three or four minutes, the cloud was completely gone. None of the other clouds seemed to be affected by this phenomenon, and I saw no other cloud break from its usual flight plan.

I was with Rama and about 90 of his students. We were 6 miles up a dry river gorge in the middle of the desert. I had been on several other outings with Rama up this gorge although never to this spot. I thought that he had picked it solely because it was sheltered from the wind that was blowing very hard that night, but judging from the power I felt there, there must have been other reasons also.

After the cloud had disappeared, Rama told us what he had done. He said, “When I saw that cloud separate itself from the others I knew it to be a moment of power. While all of you were looking at the cloud, I asked it if I could disperse it. It was reluctant at first, but when I explained to it that my students could learn from it, the cloud allowed it to happen.”

Rama then said, “What I then did was to dissolve the cloud's subtle body. Once that is gone, the physical can't hold together for very long.”

I was very amazed by this phenomenon. I had been with Rama on other occasions when he had used his power to manifest one thing or another, but they had always been on the subtle planes. Sometimes I would see them, sometimes not. This was something that happened in the physical. Everyone there saw it. If a camper on the other side of the mountain had been looking, he would have seen it too. The thing that I liked most about that night was that it left no room for doubt.

RICCARDO

A few nights ago, meditating with Rama in the Anza Desert, I fell in love with Death.

A hot wind was blowing and the night was clear. The air was vibrating with a strange form of electricity, as if a myriad of bubbles of energy were floating around and the hot wind made them burst into a rain of golden sparkles. Everything around us was still and spoke of Eternity. Only the crickets, busily rubbing their wings, trying to send their mating call across the sands before the end of their short season, reminded me of the passing of time.

That night, for the first time in my life, I felt that I was a part of everything and that everything was a part of me: the wind, the sand and the mountains, and the sky with the moon and stars. That night I understood that I am eternal.

Rama told us that the place where we stopped for the second meditation was a place of transit, like an obligatory door or tunnel through which creatures from other planes must pass in their journey through Eternity. I thought that perhaps I had also gone through places like this in my journey and that I had probably lived in many other worlds. I would like to be able to remember these things, but I cannot. I then realized that at the moment of my Death, finally freed from this shell of imperfection, my journey will continue. I will be able to see and grasp the immensity of a Great Plan, and see things that these physical eyes will never see. I understood that Death is the most exciting adventure in one's life, and I felt free as I suddenly realized that I had lost all fears of Life. Then, Rama started talking about Death, his Death and that of his students.

Whenever Rama talks about his Death, I start getting worried. In this life I have been able to find him, after searching a long time in my journey across the countries. Will I be so lucky to find him again in my next life? How soon is he going to leave us? And how much time is still available to me? There might be so little time left and still so much to do.

I have decided from now on to live my life as if every day were my last, as if I were to die tomorrow every day.

I returned to Los Angeles full of energy. I know that in the Anza Borrego Desert, on September 5th, 1982, I have become a warrior.

MONICA

From time to time over the years I have found myself standing at a freeway rest stop in some hilly or mountainous location, staring off into the distance, longing to somehow walk to the other side of what I was seeing and see what was there. A place no one had been, a place you couldn't drive to, a place to just be and feel and see what would happen. And then I'd get track in my car, drive off and more or less forget my longing.

I remembered this as our bus approached the desert where we were to hike with Rama. Suddenly as I gazed out the window at the hills and rocks passing by, I knew that at last I was doing it. I had found someone to take me there.

We were all assembled and about to begin walking through the sandy gorge into the desert. It was very warm, about nine at night, and soon the full moon would be with us. We were eager to begin. I was about twenty feet away from Rama, who was standing in front of a rock formation. I looked at him, but there was no one there. I could clearly see that where his head and body were there was just nothing. His clothes were there, as if a person were in them, but I could not see any person. And then where his body was became just light. I saw and felt it so strongly and with such total certainty that I said to my friend, "Sally, there's no one there! He's just light, just light."

"I know," she said.

We walked to a resting place where Rama told all of us that he was not pleased with us and that we had all come in a crummy consciousness. He said we'd brought a lot of baggage from our regular world, and that for him to take us further down the gorge we'd have to drop it all and just be open and receptive. He said that the power was stronger this night than at any other time he'd brought us to the desert, and that many of his allies and other powerful, helpful beings were there waiting to help transform us. All we had to do was leave behind all our attachments to our houses and loves and jealousies and pet cats, and just be there. Finally we were all ready to begin our walk, in a clean state of awareness. The hike began.

Rama explained that we were going not to a place on this earth but rather, we were journeying into Eternity. He said that everything was Eternity, was God. The sand, the stars, the mountains, everything.

We walked through the gorge for a couple of miles with the sand crunching under our feet like snow. Soon we arrived at our next gathering place and sat in a big semi-circle. Rama was in the center and talked and moved around in a flat space in front of some rocks. He began by saying that he and his friends were about to change the very structure of our beings, altering them so that we would never be the same again. He said that there was no way we could stop this from happening even if we wanted to, because it was too late and we had gone too far. We'd never be able to go back to what we had been. Right away I had a subtle feeling that I was different, that it had taken place. I liked it.

Rama said he would show us a few things he could do by using his power on Neil, one of his students. First he wrapped Neil in power by walking around and around him until Neil couldn't move. Then both Neil and Rama became very transparent. It seemed like Rama's form, which wasn't much more than a dark sort of shadow, moved behind, around and sometimes through Neil's form, which was a thin whitish area. Then Rama said he would take Neil beyond the body. He reached his hand into the light form, which was what I could see of Neil's body, and then pulled his hand out. The white light form just crumpled to the ground like a shirt. Then he simply lifted it up as though it were made of air. He explained that Neil was feeling no pain and that they were playing together in another reality. He said that

if a bad occultist were working on Neil it would all be very serious and dark, and that the type of allies the occultist called forth would be quite frightening. The way Rama was doing it felt lighthearted and, in fact, Neil was laughing from time to time.

One wonderful part of the evening was after Rama finished with Neil. He began answering questions and Neil just lay there with a big smile on his face. Rama said that Neil was moving through many other planes of reality, and that we were all moving through them with him, though we might not be able to perceive this. He said that his voice and the questions were just to distract us while this was going on.

During this time I saw Rama's form grow smaller and become shadowy as he moved about. Then he just disappeared. It was very quiet, and in the moonlight I could see all of us sitting there on the sand meditating. It was as if we were there and Rama was gone. It was strange for a moment or two, but then he began to talk. A bit of a shadow appeared where his body had been, and it was like he was with us and talking to us, but he wasn't really there in the usual sense. And neither were we.

While he was talking I closed my eyes and was amazed at what I saw. There were shapes and colors of a type, intensity and focus that I had never seen before. There were long curving tube-like shapes, some pointed on the end, with triangles and other shapes in the most vivid colors. Turning and slowly moving, they changed. At the same time, I was listening to the questions and Rama's voice answering them. It felt as if we had all been together a long, long time ago and sat like this, asking him questions and meditating.

Perhaps the most beautiful part of the whole desert experience was at the end. I was one of the last to come out, and all three hundred seventy-four people stood in a gigantic circle. It stretched all the way across the gorge. It was almost sunrise. Rama walked to the center of the circle. It was exquisitely beautiful standing there with the wind blowing and the sky beginning to color. Rama began to speak.

“Just remember, you are not from this world. You are in it, but it's not where you came from. Soon you'll be going back to what you call reality. I'll remain here. I'm always here just waiting for you. Oh, some of me will go back with you, but I'll always be right here, waiting. You see, careers are fine, credit cards are fine, but someday you may find yourself saying, 'The heck with it. This just isn't me, not really.' And when you do, I'll be here waiting, So until then, drive carefully when you leave. And may you feel joy, peace, hope, excitement, caring....”

The sky became brighter and truly it seemed we were not on this planet, we were in Eternity. It moved me more than anything I have ever seen or felt or known. Then Rama asked us to please thank the desert, the spirit of the desert, for letting us be there and for teaching us. To give thanks to Eternity.

PATTY

The desert air was very clear and still, yet very alive and crackling with energy. The full moon lit up the desert floor. As we walked down the riverbed of light, all ninety of us were immersed in its clarity and purity.

At moments Rama was a teacher showing and explaining truths about the nature of existence. At other times he would be like a child playing with his friends.

We walked for a half an hour then stopped. We did that four times throughout the journey. At the second stop, Rama did many manipulations with light and energy. As he raised his arms his body disappeared, yet I could see his body outlined in a bright white light. He grew extremely tall and ominous. His fingers lengthened and stretched out towards the sky. He asked us to look at the mountain on our left. It vibrated with light and the ridges fluctuated as if they were fluid. Then he walked away from us towards the mountains. He told us to watch. I saw a gold light shoot to the top of the mountain and bounce around. This lasted for a couple of minutes. When he started to come back in our direction, he was gliding along the sand about one foot off the ground. I blinked my eyes many times to see if it was really

happening. He asked us what we experienced. Many others had seen the same visions I did. Rama explained that the light on the top of the mountain was his double. The other beams of light were his friends. They were playing in other worlds.

We reached our fourth and final stop before we started our walk out of the desert. The moon was beginning to set over the horizon. The stars became very bright and shiny. Rama asked us to lie on our backs and look up at the stars. Within a couple of seconds the whole sky changed. Many stars disappeared and new ones appeared. The constellations began to move at an even pace. Then all of a sudden, when I looked at the Big Dipper, its stars began to zip around in the sky. They shot about with great speed and had trails of light following in their path, like little comets shooting across the sky. It was as if I traveled out there in space beyond time and experienced what is beyond our vision on this planet.

When we rose and began our walk out of the desert, I was conscious of many new feelings. I felt energetic and at great ease in that very desolate land of sand. My heart and soul felt expanded. For the first time I was able to see in the subtle physical with such clarity that I couldn't doubt my visions. I no longer felt separativity among those around me. There was a feeling that all the visions were always there, I just had to let myself see them.

Although it had been my fourth journey to the desert, I really had never been there before this time. I felt as though I had entered a doorway where I was given the opportunity to watch other realms of existence. The moment was magical. For me, living in it was being like a child, spontaneous and free. Only then was I able to see the wonders existence had to offer.

TERESA

It was a clear, cold late winter night. The big full moon suspended over the desert gorge filled the night with incandescent white light. About sixty or seventy of us were assembled at our customary place at the edge of the desert awaiting Rama's arrival,

In a way it was like any other desert trip; we've done this many times before. There was a difference, however. Whereas we usually have several weeks' notice to prepare for a trip, this time we had none at all. If you happened to be home when the call came for a spontaneous trip to the desert, you dropped any other plans and headed out to be in the desert with Rama! You could tell by the silent intensity that everyone was keyed to whatever was in the offing. I, too, was so caught up in the exhilaration of the moment that, not knowing what to expect, I had no expectations at all.

When Rama arrived, he informed us that we clearly must be crazed to venture out on a cold night like this. It was obvious that we all wanted to be here more than anywhere else. "There are times of power and there are times of power!" he said. "Tonight the surf is up." Our journey was a walking meditation because of the cold. This would also provide the appropriate mood for being in the moment, from moment to moment; just experiencing what there was to experience right there and then.

We set off down the moonlit ravine, a silent group, with Rama some distance in front of us. Watching Rama walk with his long strides filled me with reverence and a peculiar nostalgia. As we proceeded down the gorge, a succession of worlds unfolded before me. I was seeing them with my feelings, touching their essence directly, intuitively. In the first part of the gorge, an ancient pyramid world presented itself. I was in a marketplace. Golden-hued people emitting an aura of radiance and dignity passed by me. I wanted to reach out to them, but the scene faded. Further on, I perceived a beautiful, pristinely pure snow world. It was sparkling and vibrant, yet silent and peaceful. I felt a tremendous longing to somehow crystallize the qualities of this world into my life. Then a dome world emerged. It was quite large, inhabited by numerous beings of light. I felt very much at home. I remember thinking how wonderful and relaxed this trip seemed in comparison to some of the others. So clear and effortless.

We stopped by a tree in the middle of the ravine and sat down in a semi-circle around Rama. He told us to watch very carefully. As he started walking off into the distance toward the left, I had to turn around

to keep him in sight. The farther he walked, the more his physical being gave way to light, until all I could see was swirling white light. As I strained my eyes to see better, Rama's barely perceptible physical form reappeared from the light. He was coming towards us again. There was something odd going on. He had no feet. In fact, he wasn't walking. He was gliding above the ground, intermittently disappearing into white light and then reappearing in the physical.

When he was standing in front of us again, he asked in a hushed voice, "What did you see?"

Total silence. No one said a word. After a while Neil offered, "I saw you levitate."

Rama confirmed the observation. "Like this," he said. He raised his arms above his head and lifted a few inches off the ground. Lowering his arms to his sides, he hovered for awhile before descending. I experienced a lightening in my whole being. After a while, everyone became uncomfortable due to the cold and we moved on.

Our last stop of the night was at the foot of a mountain at the edge of the ravine. The full moon drenched us with cool liquid clarity, blanching the desert night into ethereal perfection. I became aware of Rama's voice. He was talking about what was fun for him. He said it was this beautiful, high, clear, all-encompassing consciousness. When I looked at him, all I could see was light. I closed my eyes. All I could hear was a gentle wind and Rama's melodic voice. I could not feel my body. I felt like I had no body at all; no mind. I felt like I was Rama's voice, that I was the desert, that I was everybody. There was no separation at all. I felt like I was just hanging out there and could have stayed like that forever.

Afterwards, it struck me that in working for an inner connection with Rama, I had been overlooking something. I had been bringing worldly attitudes and expectations to the very relationship that was supposed to clarify me and take me away from those attitudes and expectations. That winter night's journey transported me to a plane where there is no inner, no outer, no dimension at all. I realized that the world I had known was an inaccurate view of the complexities of existence. At the same time, I realized that existence is not complex at all. All is one. Rama and I are one.

NEIL

In my day-to-day life I believe that the extent of my time on this planet has been twenty-four years. But when I forget myself and the world around me it seems that I could be very old; that I come from a time long ago.

On September fifth, 1982, Rama took the members of Lakshmi on the field trip to the desert that we take at the close of every trimester. Almost four hundred people attended.

We met in the desert in the late evening and, after organizing ourselves, started hiking up our favorite gorge. The moon was several days past full and it was a hot night. By the time we started, the temperature had cooled from 117 degrees to a more comfortable 75, but even with the wind it was a night hotter than most.

As a group we had not arrived in a very high consciousness. At the first stop in our hike down the gorge, Rama did what he could to rectify this, and told everybody to consider that we were starting the desert trip over from that point forward.

We resumed walking down the gorge and continued onward for about an hour. We stopped at a clearing in the desert brush and spent the rest of the evening there.

Rama told us to watch the mountain range to our left. He sat down and meditated on it. I saw the mountains undulate and grow luminous. I saw the forms of ancient Indian warriors from thousands of years ago standing on top of the mountains and Rama spinning and dancing among them.

He told us to lay on our backs and watch the sky. It was a very beautiful, clear night and the stars shone brightly. Within a few seconds, however, the stars began to move from their normal positions in the

sky and seemed to dance, swirl, form other patterns or disappear entirely.

Then Rama demonstrated a feat that he had never performed before: gliding above the sand. I could see an inch of light between his feet and the sand, and where he walked, he left no footprint. He told us that he was walking on faith.

Sometimes I came on the desert trips to see these kinds of things. But that wasn't what I had come for this time.

We took a break to eat dinner and relax. Rama called me to him.

“Neil, I am going to use you as a demonstration model,” he said.

That was fine with me. This was what I had come to the desert for. I had even made sure to sit close to the front in case he called for me.

“Do you see the stars, the sand, the mountains?” he asked, pointing them out to me.

“Yes,” I replied.

“Good. Then look carefully because in a little while you won't be able to see any of them.”

He bent over to pick up his flashlight and raised himself back up as if he were an old man.

“Old age is a terrible thing,” he joked. Then seriously, he said, “Neil, I'm billions of years old. Did you know that? I'm older than this earth. And you're pretty old yourself.”

He started the demonstration by walking around me in ever tightening circles and wrapping me in a field of energy so thick that I couldn't move. Then he grabbed me by the back of the neck and all of my muscles went limp. I collapsed into Rama's arms and he lowered me gently to the ground. He put his foot on my navel and sent more energy through me. By this time I couldn't see or sense the physical world around me. I was in a state of bliss. People told me later that during the whole demonstration I was smiling and laughing almost constantly, although most of the time

I was not aware that I was doing so.

Rama wanted me to stand up again, but I was so out of the body I couldn't even sit up.

You can do it,” he said. “Just pretend that you're on a different world. I forgot that I was in the desert on earth and felt like I was in a dream world; suddenly my inert body found the strength to stand up.

“Now I am going to separate him into the different parts of his being,” Rama told the group.

From three feet to my right, he projected energy at me and I felt myself drift apart into several different awarenesses at once. It was like being on a fast train and watching the world go by through the window, only you're not there to watch it

He shot energy from the base of my spine throughout my body, explaining that he was putting me back together. After that I felt more solid and in the world.

He continued channeling energy through me in various ways while people were asking questions about what had just occurred. When the questions were over, Rama touched my neck and once again my muscles melted and Rama guided me to the desert floor. As I lay there he spoke to the group.

“When Neil and I were standing up there in front of you before, for a moment we were not in this world at all. Just for a moment, we were doing something together in another world. If you had been watching at that time it would have appeared that we were slightly drunk, because our bodies were standing there but we were not in them.

“I am billions of years old. I don't come from this earth. I come from another world far away. Some of you have been there also in one life or another.” He paused for a moment. “You see that star?” he said, pointing at the sky, “The world I come from is just a little to the left and further up.”

Rama talked on, describing his homeland and other worlds where we have lived. I just lay on the desert sands, listening and remembering.

JANINE

I had heard that Rama moves stars and vaporizes clouds in the desert. I did not really believe it, but to go see for myself sounded like a good adventure.

Full of enthusiasm, I traveled with a fellow U.C.L.A. student to our meeting place outside of San Diego. We were not sure of the exact location, but two hundred and fifty people in the middle of the desert were hard to miss.

I thought that mysticism was a tough, everyone-for-himself school, but Rama was full of love as he told us, "Please move out of the highway, I don't want you run over." He had us carefully counted for safety and led us down the gorge. Although I began the walk excited and curious, I found the soft sand difficult to walk on and soon tired. Rama sensed our difficulties and cut the hike short. Two miles into the gorge we sat in a semi-circle facing our teacher and a high cliff.

"So, here you are again, wanting to see truth and perfection?" Rama began. "No, never, all you want to see is miracles. Well, let me think... Why doesn't everyone turn around so you can all see that mountain." He pointed to a specific peak across the gorge. I had no idea what to expect. Concentric circles of light appeared at the top of the peak and I knew that it was Rama I was seeing. The circles were bright white, yellow, and gold, but the colors had an unusual quality; they were not colors I had seen before. The light disappeared and the edges of the peak started to move. The mountain folded and squashed at the top, then at the sides. The entire mountain undulated. It looked liquid, yet had a spongelike surface.

I looked around. My glasses were fine; the other surroundings looked the same. I was amazed. There was no way it could be a trick. A horizontal crack was widening across the upper portion of the mountain. The crest pulled away from the base. Just as it was nearly broken, the mountain resealed itself and was again solid. Without having mentioned what would or did happen, Rama said one word, "Comments." I kept quiet and listened to perhaps twenty students describe seeing precisely what I had seen.

"The mountain dissolved."

"It became porous."

"The mountain undulated."

"I saw you as concentric rings of light on top of the mountain." How we knew that the light circles were Rama I do not know.

He later indicated another mountain to watch and a light appeared on its crest. At first it seemed he had moved a beautiful star there, but it was much brighter and larger than any star in the sky. Again it was Rama on the mountain. The "star" moved across and down the slope and vanished. He reappeared as the concentric circles. I was fascinated. The entire mountain became soft and pliable. It wavered for several minutes and reformed. All this was clearly visible and undeniable.

Again Rama asked for comments. The students described what I had seen and more. One lady told Rama, "I saw you standing on the mountaintop with your arms outstretched."

Another student said, "When I saw a light on the crest, I looked back to see what you were doing. It looked as if you were both here and on the mountain, jumping back and forth very quickly."

After four hours of similarly fantastic events, each described by the students without any prompting from Rama, we hiked back down the gorge at dawn. I felt that the desert was our home and we were setting out on a journey to another world for awhile. I was intensely happy and felt that I had the power to adopt any qualities or effect any changes I pleased. I skipped through the sand and would have run had Rama not wanted to keep us together. I looked back and saw a trail of light winding out of the gorge that retraced our path.

Before leaving the desert we formed one large circle with Rama in the center. "Now I'll give you each something to take home with you," he said, slowly turning to face each one of us. When he passed me, I

saw an orange-pink light, the color of the dawn, in his heart chakra. He turned again to face the four directions and told us, "Each in your own way, thank the desert. Leave a part of yourself here, for we don't know if we will ever return."

SHIRLEY

After the last desert trip a few of us got together the next night at Rama's house. We gathered in the room that Rama refers to as the Lakshmi Room. Rama sat on a couch in front of us.

"O.K." he began. "Let's talk about the desert."

"I think my favorite experience," someone said, "was when you were walking on the air."

"All right," Rama responded, "Let's talk about that one a little more."

The night before, he had at one point stood up in front of the 374 students who were sitting in a semi-circle around him and said, "Now watch me closely. Don't try to see with your eyes. Just try to feel what I am doing."

It had taken a little time for him to do what he wanted. I was sitting in the back and I had to stand up to get some idea of what was going on. He walked forward very slowly. Each step seemed to require a great effort. His body would roll ever so slightly from side to side. With each step he would fade into the night sky and a few seconds later reappear, looking almost transparent and glowing with a golden light. I was aware that he moved forward each time he disappeared from my sight. He seemed to gain some facility with the movement and his progress across the sand became smoother. He moved toward a bush off to the side of the group. I had been able to see his shadow reflected by the moonlight. It moved before him with each step. Just before he reached the bush, he hesitated and seemed to reach out and grab his shadow, merging with it and using it to hide his body as he became invisible.

Monday night, one of the men who had been in the front said that he had been able to distinguish when Rama began to levitate because he could no longer hear the sound of his steps in the sand. Some people had been close enough to see that he actually left no footprints when he walked. One girl said that she had seen Rama grow very tall and then very small as he glided across the * sand.

"Is that how the Indians walk on hot coals?" someone asked

"Yes," he explained. "Their skin is not different than anyone else's. But they are not actually walking on the coals. Instead, it is as if they walk above the coals, on a thin cloud of energy that is present around every object."

In the desert, after he had levitated, he had said, "I am walking on the grace of God." Monday night he explained further.

"You have to have total faith. Part of me, my mind, said that I couldn't do it. But I turned off my thoughts and entered into samadhi. Then, when I could feel that I was no longer a physical body, but a mass of energy or light, I began to walk. It was like walking on Frosted Flakes or like walking with snowshoes on snow which has a very thin crust on the top. If you think too hard about what you are doing you fall. You must have complete faith that you can do it."

Then he paused, looking at all of us.

"Now what have we not discussed? What are we not talking about? How about that long discussion about the relationship of the student and teacher after death?"

In the desert, a student had asked, "What will happen to me if you die before I do? Will you continue to help me in my spiritual process even though you are no longer on earth?"

"Fat chance that I'll die before you," Rama had answered. "But if I do, then when you die, I'll come for you as you begin your journey after death. You'll recognize me because I'll come in a Porsche, a

Turbo Carrera. If I came in my true form, the form of all spiritual teachers, which is Light, none of you would recognize me. That was why Christ, when he came back after the crucifixion had to appear just as he had during life. His disciples would never have believed him if he had not taken on that form. So when I come, I'll come as you know me now.

“You see, I have this world all picked out for us. I don't plan to reincarnate here on earth again. The world I picked out for myself and any of you who want to join me is out towards that star,” he pointed to the sky, “and a little to the left.”

He laughed.

“It's not really a physical location, but you can think of it that way.”

It had been a long night. We had watched Rama move the stars and cause them to disappear. He lit up the sky with blue, gold, red and purple fireworks that seemed to stream from his fingertips. It was difficult to tell whether or not he was serious about the Porsche. I was skeptical, but I knew that he had a crazy sense of humor.

Monday night, as we talked about it, Rama began to laugh. He shook his head in amusement.

“I bet some of you aren't sure if I'll show up in a Porsche.” I felt silly with him looking directly at me, but I couldn't help it. Part of me could still see Rama, sitting in his wine-colored Porsche, waiting for me after I died. It was just his style.

Rama began to laugh again, slapping his thigh with his fist and shaking his head. I didn't know what to believe any more.

Then, as I was looking at him, I had a glimmer of understanding. I remembered the circle we had formed at the very end of the desert trip. It was just turning dawn. The sky was beginning to light up with pinks and oranges as we formed a huge circle at the entrance to the gorge. Rama stood in the middle. He gestured to the sky.

“The dawn greets you. Our sister, the moon and our brother, the wind, have helped us tonight in the desert.” The wind began to blow softly through the group.

“You must remember to thank them and to thank the desert. We never know if we will return here again in this life. This morning they bring you clarity, awareness, eternity, stillness, beauty, love, joy, truthfulness, humility ...”

He continued on and on, turning around the circle of people as he spoke, meditating on each of us. His arm pointed to the sky his body was glowing so brightly that I could no longer see him clearly. He blended imperceptibly into the desert. As I looked around the circle I saw that each one of us glowed with that same light. It was as if we were all made from the same element. At that moment we were not human. It would have been closer to say that we were pure energy, moving and breathing and approximating the human form. I had the feeling that what I was seeing was much closer to reality than my usual perception of form

Rama spoke again, “We leave the desert now to return home. I'll send a part of myself home with you to do the public lectures, run the centres, and answer your questions, but most of me stays here. I'll wait for you here. When you get tired of your lives, your friends, your jobs, and your petty worries, come talk to me. I'll be out here waiting. I'm always waiting, just waiting for someone who is ready Goodbye.”

I came back to the present. Rama was sitting in front of me in his home, surrounded by the electronic and technologic conveniences of our age. I struggled to merge his desert personality with the image I saw before me. It was impossible.

Rama echoed my dilemma. “It's too late for you now. You have all seen too much to go back to your previous conceptions of reality, to your old worlds. Sooner or later you will have to accept that reality is the same in the desert, at home, at work, or at the time of death. You will just have to learn to deal with the fact that you see life differently than other people. You are neither better nor worse than anyone else,

but you are different. You have seen things which have changed you forever. You can never go back.”

GREG

I never thought I would return to the desert for the fourth time. On the first three trips I had gone with a “phenomena-orientation.” As a result of not “seeing,” I felt intensely inferior, which engendered anger, sadness and depression. Anger both at Rama and at myself — which turned into depression. What was interesting was the intensity of the feeling. It seemed so intense as to be out of proportion to my everyday range of emotions.

This intensity was due to high energy which I felt being generated by Rama, but which I was not focusing on. I felt the energy, and from time to time felt very good with it. But since I was looking for certain experiences, my frustrated critical faculties increasingly channeled the energy into anger and sadness as they did not register the quality of “seeing” that other students were reporting. On the one hand I felt like a haughty critic who had uncovered a case of spiritual fraud and hypnotism. On the other hand, I felt like a sad small boy who had been rejected by his mama. The duality of feeling was intense and anguished. I did not want to return for the fourth trip.

I’m not sure why I did return. Maybe for the same reason I had returned three times before. Despite the misery of the experience, it was so intense that there was a feeling of accessing tremendous power. This was heightened by the stark beauty of the desert in both sunlight and moonlight. Also, I was having deep meditations with Rama in the weekly meetings out in the city.

I entered the desert for the fourth time feeling good, but fearful underneath of a recurrence of my earlier experiences. I was determined to endeavor to continually meditate, focusing on the energy of Rama and the energy of the desert, and not worry about whether I saw Rama rearrange the stars or dance his “double” on top of a mountain range. Early in the trip I rolled a red bandana and tied it around my forehead in the fashion of a samurai warrior about to do battle. This was a talisman for my resolve to fry to break my habitual judgmental pattern, a pattern which was very much a part of my personality and which caused me no end of sadness and loneliness in my whole life.

From the moment I entered the desert, I brought myself back constantly to a meditative state. Whether eating, walking or sit-ting I kept bringing myself back to the inner focus on the energy. At one point I began to sense a new awareness in this process, a feeling that focusing on the energy meant not only holding a focus on energy, but also letting go receptively into the energy. This awareness served me well from the beginning.

Sitting in a half-circle, Rama asked us what we wanted from the desert. There were at least 20 or 30 different responses “enlightenment,” “going beyond the unreality of the world,” “more love,” “bliss,” “change,” etc. etc. The response that really impaled me was “humility.” When I heard that my heart started to ache I wanted to cry out, “I want humility too.” I wanted Rama and everyone to know it. This feeling seemed to crystallize the desire for growth that emerged from my misery on the first three trips. I had always tended to see myself as a self-effacing, humble man who always understated rather than overstated. But what I learned from the first three trips was that I was not humble. I tended to be understated because I did not want to take a risk and suffer the harshness of my own internal judge. It was also more safe and socially acceptable to appear humble. I was not open, I was not accepting of the world. Instead, I was judgmental and manipulative. If the world did not fit into my particular dualistic framework of true and false, good and bad, I would immediately either get angry and reject, or get depressed and sulk. This meant closing myself down and separating myself from life like a snail pulling back into its shell. The energy of the desert trip was so strong that these “normal” responses were so highly exaggerated that I was in misery. I was so miserable that I was brought to the point where I must either look for a new way of responding or feel like dying.

I did not get a chance to cry out to the group, “I want humility.” But maybe that was the first part of

the lesson. It's enough, I realized, for me to feel something, I don't need to get others' approval or judgment in order to feel good about myself. In the same way, I don't need to judge or approve of others in order to live and enjoy the world. I wanted to be more humble, and I experienced a clearing, opening and cleansing of my feeling.

In the middle portion of the trip, I kept my constant focus of receptive meditation. Though I did not see the flashy phenomena that others were seeing, I felt shifts in energy, and different qualities and vibrations. I felt energy working in different parts of my body. Sometimes the energy was so strong that I would lose my visual field completely except for an undifferentiated miasma of moonlit desert landscape or sky. And the energy felt good, relaxing, vibrant and "timeless." There was a sense of the "eternal" with the energy, a sense of large distances, of inner and outer continuums unbroken by time and space. The same sense I get when I am stimulated to write poetry.

To my surprise, at one point I did see something. I was standing in the rear of the group semi-circle, watching Rama demonstrate walking. Diving beneath an inner tirade of skepticism, I brought my awareness back to a meditative feeling. I slipped into a receptive state of openness with a corresponding energy shift. Suddenly the images in my visual field became more vague and immaterial. Objects and people seemed less fixed and corporeal. I saw Rama walking in a crab-like fashion in front of the group across the moonlit desert floor. At one point it looked like he was on a skateboard, rapidly moving back and forth across the sands. At another point, it seemed like he was gliding in and out of the snowplow position familiar to beginning skiers. I was astounded. I had seen something out of the ordinary. My mind felt so proud and skeptical at the same time that it put me on edge and seemed to block me from further seeing. After all, how could I, the doubting Thomas, have an experience like this? But I did. I experienced it, and I want to try it again soon.

The trip drew to a close. We began the walk out, something which I had always hurried through and detested because I never felt the power zones Rama told us about, which changed every couple hundred feet. For this walk out, Rama said he would stay behind and generate energy down the gorge as we walked out. In a resigned way, ready for failure, I started walking. However, by continuing to meditate, I was not carried away by the residue of the past experiences. As I walked, I felt so much energy from inside that my pace slowed to a crawl. Sometimes I stumbled, once I almost fell. I felt so absorbed inside that I was euphoric. I felt completely in tune with myself, and didn't care a fig what was going on around me. Energy was coursing through me. Every couple minutes energy would flow in specific patterns, in vivid images of flying, spinning, dancing, gesturing. The energy was so strong that it felt like I was spinning, flying, dancing and gesturing far beyond my normal range of body movement. I felt powerful, and extended. At one point I came across two girls, one with her shoe off at the side of the trail. To my surprise, I spontaneously felt compassion and asked the girl if she needed a Band-Aid for blisters. She did not, but what surprised me was that despite my inner absorption, I was externally perceptive and caring about others, and much more spontaneous than usual. As I continued the walk out, the energy decreased closer to the mouth of the gorge, but I continued to feel very intensely the details and patterns of the environment. It was similar to an LSD or creativity experience.

I began to realize that I was not on the trip to judge whether Rama was an American version of Castaneda's "Don Juan," but to experience that timeless energy which we call "eternity." Connecting with Rama was one way of touching that experience, and that was intensely beautiful in itself. At one point I realized that it didn't matter at all whether any of my experiences in the desert were real, provable or scientifically-verifiable. The experiences in themselves were fun, profound, beautiful and deeply moving, and I was not causing harm to anyone or anything. As a human I did not have to deny myself deep pleasure just because the scientists at Harvard do not write textbooks endorsing these experiences. Throughout history, the Establishment has not tended to be on the side of the mystical or personally-spiritual. We all remember the fate of the Gnostics in early Christianity.

The lesson of humility in the desert was a, sweet and simple acceptance of my experiences without having to prove or disprove. That receptive feeling seems to bring seeing, and it also brings energy and

love. And I yearn to learn more of the lessons of humility.

CLAIRE

What's the etiquette — how do you make small talk with Eternity?

Carefully. Politely. Eagerly. Lovingly. Yes, all of these, but basically, you wing it.

This is what my husband, Esmond, and I did on September 5th at Buckman Springs in San Diego County. Rama had suggested to his students to rest there a while before descending to the over-100 degree temperatures of the lower desert where we would journey to learn and experience the mystical arts.

Many students were at the highway rest stop by seven p.m., dotted about the area, dressed for the heat, geared for action, high and happy. The red Porsche belonging to our teacher was parked on an outer road behind the main parking area. Rama stood on the grass for a while, talking to someone, then began to stroll towards his car, waving at students as he passed.

Esmond was cleaning the windshield of our camper, while a few feet away I gave water to our dog, Roger. Roger is a black and white Border Collie with the sweet intelligence of that breed, but he also has a touch of spaniel, evident in the ears. (Whenever he does anything stubborn and stupid, we blame it on the spaniel blood.) Rama altered his course and came over.

“Hi, folks.”

“Good evening.”

“This is the hound. Hello.” Rama admired Roger.

Roger looked the other way.

I was embarrassed. So this was how our dog reacted to a Self Realized master!

Again Rama tried to be friendly to the dog. And again Roger looked the other way. My estimate of his spaniel blood soared upwards. Oh, unspiritual canine!

Rama started to move on, then changed his mind and went over to the camper, which is a conspicuously orange and white VW.

“Nice.”

She's called Orange Mother,” I offered.

“What year?”

“Seventy-three,” Esmond said.

“I had a seventy-three Bug. No, it was a sixty-seven.”

The three of us discussed the peculiarities of various vintages of Volkswagens. Esmond volunteered the information that we were on our second engine, having put on 130,000 miles. And that we were on our way through Arizona and New Mexico.

“If we don't break down,” I muttered, mindful of the numerous times Orange Mother had become as stubborn and stupid as certain canines.

“You won't break down,” Rama said, putting his foot on the bumper casually.

I was grateful. This was a guarantee no automotive repair establishment could ever issue.

“We're going on to Aspen,” Esmond said. “Staying with friends there. A writer I work with.”

“Aspen is good,” Rama nodded.

Esmond, who wouldn't be at all fazed by a social encounter with Queen Elizabeth or Pope John Paul, reacts to a spontaneous contact with our teacher by sticking to safe subjects like the weather and the

number of students coming in. I, on the other hand, who would never even consider disturbing a famous person in an offstage moment, often find myself becoming pushy. I tend to grab the chance to ask about anything that might aid my spiritual progress. In both cases, a lifelong pattern is reversed. So, rather than let Rama get away, I asked: "Do you think there are places of power in Arizona and New Mexico we should see?"

Rama considered for a moment, out of kindness omitting the reminder that he is not a travel agency. "Taos," he said. "Taos is happening."

"So anywhere around there. There are lots of little pueblos, I gather. And what about Acoma, the sky city?"

"I don't know. Could be."

"Maybe we should skip it."

"Not necessarily. But what I get strongly is Taos. The whole area."

We talked about mountain ranges in New Mexico. Rama remembered he once gave a lecture in Albuquerque and afterward drove out to look at the mountains.

"Will you get any rest at all this vacation?" Esmond inquired.

I was glad Esmond had said it for both of us.

"I have too much to do," Rama explained, "a lot of writing."

"It's a shame you can't get away, though."

"Maybe around Christmas. But it won't be too bad now. It'll be a change."

I wanted to say: take care of yourself. Don't work so hard. We love you and need you so. But of course I didn't. You don't say that in small talk, but hope that the underlying feeling comes through.

"There are a lot of people coming," Rama said, referring to the fall series of public workshops. "I have to prepare for them. It's as though you're giving a big party. You must prepare the hors d'oeuvres, and the food."

He looked off toward the hills. An orange glow lit the sky. "Power's up," he said.

At these words an electric charge went through me. Later I learned Esmond experienced the same.

Rama pointed. "Look at the auras of the mountains."

I had seen them before. Esmond hadn't. I was anxious for him to do so.

"See?" Rama gestured. "There, just above the outline."

"Yes."

Esmond did see them.

"What are the sparkling lights we see in the gorge?" I asked. "Lights flashing over all the hills."

"Those are beings."

"Are they sort of signalling to each other?" "No. Those lights are their bodies. Just as we," he pointed to my arm, "have our physical bodies."

"Oh."

"I'm going to sneak out the back way now," Rama told us. "I have to stop and buy some oil."

Esmond asked: "Did you drive down alone?"

"Of course." Rama seemed surprised at the question. We both realized how much he needs to be alone.

"See you later." Rama strode off.

Esmond and I grinned at each other in elation.

How do you make small talk with Eternity? You chat. You speculate on the merits of Volkswagens or the mountains of New Mexico and all the while Eternity is teaching and imprinting you. You talk and listen on many, many levels.

A mile down the road from Buckman Springs we stopped the car and got out to look at the end of the sunset. The sky was on fire. Rama's words resonated: "Power's up."

Another journey to the desert had begun!

ESMOND

We awoke on Tuesday morning to the voice of authority coming over the prison intercom. In the Southwest they play down the Teutonic bark, but the good ole boy delivery still barely covers the menace underneath.

"Where on earth did we end up last night?" I grumped.

My wife, Claire, gave me a knowing look and said nothing. She was still glowing.

Some 400 strong, we had emerged from the Gorge at dawn on Monday. We had spent the night with Rama hiking through that austere and beautiful desert canyon, meditating with him and learning something of the mystic arts. I am not an apt pupil. Many fellow students experience the altered states of reality, the other worlds and planes of consciousness to which Rama opens the doors. I listen to their voices speaking up out of the dark and I have learned enough to hear the truth behind the recounting of their experiences. But for me the mountains do not move and the stars remain pretty fixed in their courses. I asked Rama once why I didn't see more and despite, I suspect, a querulous note in my voice, he smiled that sweet and faintly humorous smile of his:

"Oh but you do, Esmond, you just don't admit it. You will."

So I go to the desert knowing that one night the glass will undarken and until it does I find serenity in the beauty and warmth in the community.

Driving down that Sunday in September, Claire and I had a chance encounter with Rama at sunset. He had pointed out the aura of the hills to me and yes, I did see the band of light between their silhouettes and the sky. When he had driven on I hugged my inner self - this desert trip would be different, it would become that journey without and within that I knew one day I would take. It had been promised.

But it was not to be. Although, just at the very end ... As usual we formed a circle at the mouth of the gorge with Rama at the center. Four hundred plus persons makes for a big circumference, but somehow Rama's voice carries clearly with no trace of strain. Dawn was bright in the sky but the sun itself lingered below the horizon beyond the road.

I straggled in and plumped to the ground. As I looked slowly up towards Rama, it seemed to me the packed sand surface of the ground between us was about to grow transparent, to become liquid. I guess fatigue had lulled my watchdog, and for a perceptible pause reality teetered on the edge of change; but he's a vigilant beast and quickly the low growl of reason restored the dull old status quo. Rama gave that slow turning of his gaze around the circle that is his benediction, the sun edged over the hills and another desert trip had ended. The long line of Lakshmi cars headed south then turned west toward the ocean. Claire and I went east into the sun across the Sonora Desert to our holiday in Colorado.

Opposite the gates of the State Prison - "The Home of the Outlaw Rodeo" — in Florence, Arizona, is an unlovely motel called the Blue Mist. But at close to midnight, with the temperature still pushing 100 and the penal intercom system turned off for the night, it looked - well, if not inviting, at least cool. But still not a spot you'd expect to remember with affection.

Rama speaks of an epiphany, which I suspect has connotations undreamt of in the simple definition of 'a gift.' I had hardly settled my bad-tempered bones into the posture of meditation when I received a gift.

THE LAST INCARNATION

Into my maya-ed and ungrateful person flooded a wave of such loving warmth that I was hung suspended between breaths. And then another surge and another. My eyes were open and in amazement I was aware that that exquisitely ordinary room remained determinedly its motel self. I could not believe that even inanimate matter could be unaltered, be unchanged, be unfired with gold by the power surging through.

Beyond that there was no thought, no other awareness than the revelation of what the love of master for pupil means and how wafer-thin can be that membrane of maya that separates the Self from Eternity. The waves receded leaving knowledge that they would, as the tide, return. Breath also, and with it a touch of sorrow that it was over, to be instantly overwhelmed, drowned in gratitude. I looked at Claire and the quiet joy in her eyes told me enough. We had been gifted, and the 'epiphany' had a fuller meaning.

CHAPTER THREE

AT HOME WITH RAMA

*“Consciousness comes about through awareness.
Awareness is the dream of consciousness.
In Nirvana there is pure being.
There is no individual awareness of form.
You have returned home and everything is complete.
There is no craving or disappointment”*

—Rama

CHAPTER THREE

AT HOME WITH RAMA

MARK

You study Literature and Computer Science at UC San Diego, but comes lunchtime, you jog home, fix yourself an avocado and swiss cheese omelette and see your housemate and friend Rama sitting out on the back lawn, in Samadhi. A bright lattice of golden light swirls all around Rama and you just polish off the eggs. You glance over at the cover story in the Los Angeles Times and look back outside. You see Rama still, with the Pacific as a backdrop, poised and totally motionless, until you are well into your second dish of ice cream. Rama faces the ocean and bows. He stands up and strides over to the house, still glowing.

“Hi Rama.”

“Hi kid. How were classes so far today?”

“Okay, I guess.”

Rama disappears into the pantry. After you hear some crumpling of paper, Rama emerges and sets an impressive array of cookies in front of you on the counter.

You help yourself to a Pecan Crunch, starting to say something like, “We discussed *Canterbury Tales* today,” but you switch trains of thought. Rama has suddenly started hopping around the kitchen area like a kangaroo. So you grab two mystic mint cookies and hop along right behind him. You stop thinking about school now because you're laughing too hard, or you're too tired.

You used to think that Rama hopped because he enjoyed hopping, the way Snoopy of the 'Peanuts' cartoons dances for the pure joy of dancing. But you learn otherwise: after entering into an advanced state of meditation known as Samadhi, Rama becomes so charged with energy that his entire body tingles as though it were on fire. So it is to dissipate this excess power that Rama hops.

But you ask, “Rama, aren't there other ways to dissipate that kind of energy?”

“Sure there are, kid,” he replies, “but I just enjoy hopping around.”

Now you have to get back to campus so you're not late for that course on Assembly language. You say goodbye and leave. You are going to hop to the building with the Terak Micro Computers but instead, you walk, just to blend.

NEIL

One day in the late summer I was at Rama's house in La Jolla. His house was not just the place where he lived. It was also used as the meeting place for his students' weekly meditations and for offices and as a production facility. I was there tutoring one of his students in computer science, which was my major at San Diego State University, when Rama walked into the room where we were working.

He was wearing his running shorts and a tee shirt and he was holding the keys to his car in his hand.

He asked us what we were doing and I told him that I was helping the other person with his computer science homework. Rama exchanged pleasantries with the other person and asked how the tutoring was going. Then he stood there, not saying anything, for several moments.

“Why did you come here today?” he asked me.

“Well, I had to help him with his homework,” I replied.

Rama looked at me as if I didn't know what I was talking about, and that there really was another reason why I was there.

“Why don't you come running with me?” he said.

We drove down to the beach where Rama liked to run. It was around six-thirty and the sun was low in the sky, approaching sunset. It reflected off the water in beautiful shimmers of gold. There was about a mile of beach which had a restaurant on one end and a pier on the other. We were right in between.

We started our run, barefoot, with the ocean to our left. Rama stayed close to the water's edge and I ran next to him.

“I prayed to the cosmic gods and goddesses very intensely this morning during my meditation,” Rama said as we ran. The cosmic gods and goddesses are fields of energy. They are not physical, but they have tremendous power and can help spiritual seekers in accomplishing many things in the world.

“I asked them to intervene in our behalf with the forces that have been keeping us from reaching the spiritual seekers that I have felt that I could help,” he said.

Rama explained to me that in many lives he and several other people who were close to him have tried in whatever way they could to bring light to as many people as possible. But they were always thwarted by the dark forces of the world from doing all that they could.

By this time we had reached the pier, turned around and were running in the other direction. The sun was lower in the sky and I felt a sense of joy and excitement growing within me.

“They said that they would help us,” Rama continued, “and that from this day forward we shall not be held back by the negative forces of the world.”

We continued to run. I felt a powerful force emanating from Rama. I allowed myself to be carried by this energy and it seemed that I was gliding over the sand with no effort at all.

We reached the restaurant, turned around and doubled back. Rama then outlined for me the major events of our lives and I strained to see into the future with him as he spoke.

As we approached the end of our run Rama made joking references to the fact that several thousand years ago the in-habitants of the area were Indians who had a very highly developed, spiritually powerful culture and performed many of their sacred and mystical rites on the cliffs that overlooked the beach where we were running.

“Yes,” he told me, “this is the land of our *four* fathers. Mother was kinky.”

When we stopped running we were back where we started. We entered the ocean up to our thighs. The sun was setting now and it was just above the ocean in the sky. Blue, purple and red spread out across the horizon. We lifted our arms up over our heads and pointed our palms towards the sky and meditated facing the sun.

“Today is the gate that we walk through to the future,” Rama said.

Then he instructed me in a new way to meditate while we were standing in the water.

“Feel that the ocean is entering you through your navel,” Rama explained. “Now, in gratitude to the ocean, offer it your life force and let the power and purity of the ocean enter into you.” We still had our palms raised to the setting sun and he said, “Now feel that you are in the sky, that you are part of the sky. And if you can, spin and twist and turn.” For a moment the immensity and power of the ocean frightened me, but I overcame my fear and felt that I was offering myself to the ocean. Then I felt my palms tingling

and a force came out of them. It was as if I could feel myself in the sky with the force that was emanating from my hands. Then my awareness shifted. I felt that I was in the sky looking down at the ocean and that I was spinning and twisting madly with joy.

CATHY

One day, when I was sharing a house with Rama and three other friends, I happened to bang my shin hard against our coffee table. I grabbed my leg and started hopping up and down howling, feeling sharp pain and anticipating more. Rama, who had walked into the room behind me, came over and had me sit down. He put his hand over the sore spot on my leg, and started talking to me.

He told me I had to get more sleep, that I got clumsy because I was overtired. He noticed that I often walked into walls and fell over furniture when I got tired. I knew he was right. What he said was true.

I felt much calmer as he talked. It didn't seem to matter what he said, his tone was very soothing. After a minute, he took his hand off my shin. I looked at it and rubbed the spot that I had knocked. I couldn't feel a thing. From experience I knew that it should already have become a large, painful bump, yet there was no sign of anything!

My mind was blown. After all the flashy experiences in the desert, at Torrey Pines, and in the back yard, where Rama had dissolved mountains, the moon, clouds or us, somehow this was much more real to me. I *knew* there should have been pain, at least a lump or a bruise, and I examined it very carefully. There was a little mark where my skin had been broken, but there was *no pain. None.*

A few days later I had an opportunity to test this discovery on my own when I stepped on a bee. I realized I had been stung when a jolt of sharp pain shot through my foot and a crippled bee was twisting on the floor. Remembering that Rama says it makes no difference if we contact him in person or just by thinking of him, I put my hand over the bee sting and thought of him intensely. I imagined his face, and remembered how it felt when he had placed his hand on my shin.

A minute later I removed my hand and the pain in my foot had completely disappeared. I could see the stinger in my skin, but once again there was no pain. I was so excited I ran to tell Rama. He just smiled.

PETER

June, 1981: Final exams are over! A beautiful summer day, I have just finished a good workout in the gym and am on my way to Rama's house on the cliffs in La Jolla. This is the third time I will meditate with him, A thrill of excitement runs through me. What will happen tonight? I remove my shoes before I enter the house, placing them on the little shelves outside the door which are reserved for this purpose. Neil greets me as I enter His face is glowing with light; an unearthly, clear-light radiance There are perhaps forty of us present tonight, about half of whom are Rama's students. They sit in the back of the room while newcomers — like me — sit in front. The meditation room — the house's living room — is very lovely, with thick sky-blue carpeting and panoramic windows that reveal the cliffs and the sea. An empty chair is in the corner. It is difficult to describe the exquisite atmosphere of Rama's house: it is so pure and peaceful that indeed it does not seem to be of this earth. I sit in silent anticipation. Rama makes his way through the group and sits in the chair.

“Good evening, everybody. How are you tonight? Good.” Then he jokes a little about a book on Tibetan dreaming that one of the ladies is reading.

Unbelievable power radiates from him. Unwilled by me and obeying some secret impulse, my eyes pop shut, my mind turns off, and I enter a meditative state. A warm glow fills me.

“Tonight I'd like to talk a little bit about higher meditation. In this study one studies a person rather

than a subject. This is how higher meditation is taught, by sitting with one who is absorbed in the higher states of awareness, the supraconscious.”

I can feel this happening as he speaks, as if he is backing his words with the experiential essence of his teaching.

“No words are needed for this. One learns simply by sitting with the teacher. Through meditation one learns to be humble, pure and self-giving. These qualities will add tremendous beauty to your lives.”

He jokes and laughs with us like a child, very casual and unaffected by the intense effect he is having on us. My awareness is shifting levels. I feel my body dissolving, and I seem to become a point of consciousness located within my head. I feel this point — myself — rising and expanding into the center of a great calm.

Yet, there is still some physical awareness; feelings of warmth and well-being pass through me. In the great stillness I am aware only of Rama's soft, gentle voice. As I meditate on his words, I actually seem to become them, and they pull me to higher and higher states. His words become slower and softer.

“Shall we meditate a little bit?”

He meditates on each person. When our eyes meet, a wonderful thing happens: I am suddenly filled with wave after wave after wave of Light and Bliss. Like a lovely golden mist — delicate but powerful — the Light enters me in waves and puffs, filling me with exquisite feelings of warmth, joy and love. There is no room or people or teacher — only Light! A delicious tingling warmth begins in my chest and pulses out into my body with almost unbearable ecstasy, as if the wellspring of joy and life itself has opened within me and is bathing each cell of my being with its radiance. Warmth, love and joy radiate from my heart like a star. I feel as though I am inside Rama, out of my own body and somehow merged with him, yet still separate, experiencing what it is like to be him, a receptacle of Light. For indeed, he is filled with nothing but the purest Light and Love.

Rama bows his head with folded hands, signaling the end of the meditation. I lie back in the Ocean of Bliss, fulfilled, and lazily basking in the Light as he asks if there are any questions. Our words, deep and full, not really conversation but the resonance of Love, flow around us.

“What did you do to me?” I ask. “I feel so wonderful ...”

“When I enter into nirvikalpa samadhi, Light passes through me and into you. Your being becomes saturated with Light. I meditate on you and merge with your awareness.”

I feel such warmth, such pure love and compassion emanating from him — from us!

“Wouldn't it be wonderful if everyone felt like this?” I ask.

“Yes it would, wouldn't it? I would like that for everyone.”

Slowly, softly, we float together in the ocean of Bliss.

DIANE

There is a miracle that Rama performed for me. It in August of 1981, about four months after I had joined the Center. I had been working at a local university as an academic dean. When my marriage had dissolved four years previously, and my two daughters had gone to live with their father, I poured the major part of my love and attention into my job. My job felt like my baby. It was the work of starting a new university, promoting, selling and designing academic programs and I loved it. It was challenging and creative and always full of stimulating people and events. I often worked 50-hour weeks, at night and on weekends. In many ways my work was my life. Love relationships would come and go and other parts of my life would change, but pouring myself into my work was constant.

Then suddenly in August I stopped in my tracks. Through a series of events, I realized I couldn't stay

at the university any longer. I was in a state of shock. My whole identity was wrapped up in my job. I was in such inner turmoil over the idea of leaving the university that I was spinning in a fire of anger and confusion.

Not only was my identity wrapped up in my job, but my financial survival would also be at stake if I were to leave. Prior to finding work at the university, I had looked for two years for a teaching job to no avail. At one point, my family's financial condition was so bad we were on food stamps and Medicare. There was no money for clothes or entertainment. My children and I wore clothes that friends and the school nurse passed along to us. So, I carried with me the shell-shocked memory of how financially desperate I had been in earlier periods of my life when I had been without a job, fearing that a similar situation would develop again if I left the university, and this time I was without the moral support of a spouse.

I walked into the meditation hall in this state one night, feeling like a prize fighter who had been pounded in the ring so many times that he was about to fall in the big K-O. After the meditation Rama walked up to me, obviously aware of my pain. I told him about the discrimination against women and the lack of fair return on my energy investment in my work at the university. I told him that I thought I would have to leave the university due to ethical principles I was feeling inside me. He was very sensitive to my situation and shared a similar experience he had been through where he had given all he had to an organization and felt used and unappreciated. His commiseration eased my panicky feeling.

He invited me into his room where we could talk away from the mulling crowd. Still dazed from the shock of my situation, I looked around his room. His single bed was draped with a hand-crocheted bedcover made of multi-colored squares, that seemed happy and childlike and simple to me. On one wall was an altar. Rama swept his hand by the altar pointing to Sri Ramakrishna's picture, saying "This is the center of the operation. He is my inspiration." He walked to the other wall of his room, pointed to his new word processor and with the same enthusiasm talked at length about all the things it could do. All the while he was talking I was barely following the facts and figures about the "amazing" word processor, but was using the time inwardly to try to regain my emotional balance.

Suddenly Rama turned away from his word processor and began walking into another room in his suite. His back was spotlighted by the overhead lighting as he slowly and deliberately walked away. He said, "I have many powers that you don't realize. I am going to activate the Dharma for you to help you in your situation."

Being a relatively new student, I had no idea what Rama meant about his powers and the Dharma. At that point in time, as I look back on it, I had no idea of the magnitude of Rama's being. I really didn't know who he was as a self realized being. But I had nothing to lose by allowing him to "activate the Dharma" for me. Talking to him did make me feel better, so I said thank you and went home.

I thought maybe he would say a prayer or do some affirmations for me. I felt his comfort and support, but did not expect much else.

Within two weeks after that night, my house was sold to a buyer who had never seen the inside of it, allowing me the financial security to leave my job and the freedom to follow my spiritual pursuits. The house was somewhat of a white elephant in that it was made out of one-quart oil cans — yes, literally! The cans were piled up on their sides in a honey-combed fashion to make the supporting walls of the house. Then chicken wire and stucco were placed over the cans to finish off the walls. The house was built during World War II when there was not much wood available in San Diego and the eccentric and ingenious builder of the house apparently didn't have much money either, because he put little cement and more water and sand in the stucco mixture. Every time it rained, water would ooze in through the lightly stuccoed walls and the roof leaked irremediably. So, needless to say, the house was not an easy one to sell. It had been on the market for over a year, during the lowest real estate market in the history of San Diego, without even a nibble.

Two weeks after Rama activated the Dharma for me, the house was sold to a buyer who knew its

history and structure, who didn't even care to see the inside of it and who paid exactly the price I wanted for the house. Some people say a miracle is not so much in the action that takes place, but in the timing of the action. To me, the sale of my house was a miracle, coming at a time when I needed relief from an unbearable situation.

Later when I told Rama about this miracle and thanked him for intervening on my behalf, he received the news casually and in an uninvolved manner. "Oh well," he said, "It never would have happened if it were not the will of the Dharma."

In addition I realized it never would have happened if it had not been for Rama!

KEN

My name is Ken, and I have been studying with Rama for a little over a year and a half. One of the moments that really stands out for me was at the very beginning when I first met and talked with Rama. It was an amazing day. I went from one of the lowest times of my life to the highest in just a few minutes. All I did was go out for a walk one day and I ended up meeting Rama. Since that meeting nothing is the same as it used to be.

At the time, I was a student at the University of California at San Diego. I got fairly good grades but I wasn't really studying anything in particular. I didn't really have any ambition. I lived at my father's house about two miles from the campus. He was letting me stay there for free, and I did some work for him on the side. I wasn't happy there but it was easy, so I stayed there for many months; eating, drinking, taking quite a few mind-bending substances, and sleeping a great deal.

January 4, 1981 was the first day of the winter quarter at school. I woke up that morning intensely depressed with the thought of going through the motions of life like I had been for so long; there wasn't any heart in what I was doing. I knew that I had to change, but I didn't see what I could do that would be worthwhile.

A few months earlier I had gone as far as to sign up for a well-known training program where they put you through an intense process that is supposed to change your life in a couple of weekends or so. I then changed my mind about the whole thing, which resulted in a barrage of phone calls from the organization urging me to go through with the process. So when the phone rang on this particular morning and continued to ring 15 or 20 times I had a pretty good idea of who it was. I went and answered the phone, intending to tell them firmly that I wasn't going through with it, but I ended up being on the phone for an hour and a half with the head of the San Diego branch who oversaw their recruiting efforts. I was pretty depressed to begin with, but when finally hung up on the man I was despondent. I had hoped to hear him tell me something that could have helped me out of the state I was in, but all he really told me was how messed up I sounded, which I already knew.

After hanging up on him I knew I couldn't stick around the house because I was in no shape to talk to anybody. So I left the house and started walking around aimlessly. For a while I tried to figure out what to do with myself. I tried to figure out if I should just go ahead and do this training thing in the hopes that it would do me some good. I watched the cars that flew by me and thought in a very detached fashion that it was a couple of small steps out in front of one of them. But I just kept walking.

I had been walking along like this for about a half hour, not paying any attention to where I was going, when suddenly the whole situation turned around. A lot of things passed through my mind. Without understanding how or why, I knew what I needed to do. I had to find somebody who knew more about life and about people, and being happy than I did. The next thing I knew I was walking along with a smile on my face thinking about Rama. I had seen him give a lecture at UCSD a few months before and I had gone to his house for a meditation afterwards. It was the first time I had done anything like that and I had left and not really thought about it since. As I thought about having seen Rama before, I looked up and realized that I had been walking straight towards his house for the last several minutes. I knew then

that something really strange and incredible was happening. I felt like I was connected on some level with a force which in turn connected everything else, and that I was actually being helped along. It was like being tuned in with the sky and ground somehow. For a while I just went along feeling all of this, happy that I wasn't just one little isolated person anymore, and before I knew it I was standing in front of Rama's house.

The house was close to UCSD. It was situated overlooking a small canyon that ran down to the sea. A road wound down to the beach, coming out between the cliffs which run along that part of the coast. As I stood there in front of Rama's house, I started to have second thoughts about trying to see him. I had never spoken with him before. Part of me was saying, "Go ahead, just knock on his door." But another part of me said, "You can't just go knock on someone's door in the middle of the afternoon when you're a total stranger. Besides, he's probably not home anyway ..." I walked by his house two or three times but I just couldn't make myself go up to his door. Finally I realized that if I left without at least making the attempt I was as good as dead, which strangely enough was what the guy on the phone had told me earlier in the day. So out of desperation I went up to the front door and knocked. I felt that my whole life had come down to this one point.

The door opened and there was Rama, standing there regarding this stranger on his front porch. That first moment when he opened the door totally stunned me. I started shaking and I had a hard time talking. But Rama was very friendly and invited me in. At this point I felt like I had been pulled back from the brink of a cliff and I was happy just to be there with Rama. At the same time, however, part of me kept wondering what was going on.

Inside the house I looked around and had the feeling that something was very different from the last time I had been there. Rama seemed to read my mind.

"I'm in the midst of a change right now," he told me.

I was a bit disappointed upon hearing this because I thought he must be moving. But this wasn't what he meant at all. What Rama meant was that he was in the process of breaking away from the Indian teacher he had worked with for eleven years. He was forming his own meditation center. He took me back to his own room and sat me down and asked what it was that he could do for me. I told him about what had happened earlier that day and I asked him if it was worthwhile to take the training course that these people were trying so hard to get me to do. Without hesitating he replied, "That's the last thing in the world you want to do right now." He said that instead I should spend the \$300.00 they charged for the course on some new clothes or something fun. He went on to tell me a little about this organization and as he talked I felt a weight being lifted off of me. I told him that this guy had had me practically writhing over the phone. He said, "this guy must have been pretty powerful to do something like that."

I thought that he was being funny, at the time. After a while Rama asked me what it was that I wanted.

I didn't know what to say. I didn't want anything as far as I knew. "Come on Ken, what do you really want?" he asked.

"I don't know. I don't even have any idea why I came here" I replied.

"Ah, that was wisdom, my friend."

As we sat there in his room I felt like everything was energized. I was still shaking, and I couldn't really look at Rama. Finally he just looked at me and said, "Come on, fess up. What is it that you really want? Fess up with yourself and say it out loud."

"I don't know," I said, "Enlightenment is a pretty scary word."

At that Rama started looking all around with a puzzled, frightened look on his face. He looked under the rug we were sitting on and I started laughing. "What do you mean, scary?" he said to me. "You want to learn how to love, and be happy and all good things, right?" Then he told me that he would shortly be having a series of public meditations at his house and that I should come. He took me back to the front

door and told me to read Carlos Castaneda's *Tales of Power* before the first meditation and to practice meditating on my own.

I returned home in a very different frame of mind than when I had left earlier in the day. I was ready to die after that phone call, and then all of a sudden I had something to live for. I returned to Rama's house for other meditations and became a student a couple of weeks later. I wondered for a long time how I had just happened to walk over to his house that day. I found out later that Rama had sent out a certain type of energy in meditation that day which called out to anyone in the world who needed the kind of help that a Spiritual Teacher can offer. It was that energy that I had tapped into while I was out walking around, which guided me right to Rama's house. Nothing has ever been the same since.

CATHY

One day I went to visit Rama to help him with some office work. I arrived at his house, and got out of my car. I started towards the door when I heard a voice calling my name. I followed the voice, and found Rama sitting in the sun talking with another student. I was pleasantly surprised to see him there. It was very unusual to see him in the sun because he is always so busy he never has time.

I walked over to them and sat down. For some reason I felt somewhat off-balance. Sometimes the energy around Rama feels so intense that all my perceptions lose their perspective, and this was happening now. Time seemed to have lost all dimension. My thoughts were contradicting themselves one after another. I didn't know whether I felt good or bad, happy or sad, friendly or unfriendly, perceptive or unperceptive. I couldn't make one feeling or emotion stick. At the same time, I knew it wasn't necessary to have a definition of myself or the world and I didn't have to be caught in a mental maze.

Rama asked, "How are you today?"

I wanted to say "Great!" but I knew from experience that he would just laugh, seeing my confusion, so I answered "Hanging in there."

He responded, "I see you're going through one of your 'transitional phases.'"

I had to agree. This was not a new plane of awareness. I attempted to explain. "I feel that I don't know whether I'm happy or unhappy, and it doesn't matter anyway."

"And it doesn't matter that it doesn't matter," he added.

I nodded in agreement. I was glad he understood.

"May I offer a suggestion?" Rama asked. "When you feel like this, step outside yourself and just observe. Say to yourself, 'Oh yes, I see that now I'm going through this, and now I'm going through that. Today I love myself, today I hate myself. At this moment I'm off-the-wall, at this moment I'm in focus.' At the same time, work as hard as you can for others. Make sure you keep busy and focus on the welfare of others, and you will forget all about it. Now go on in and get started; I'll be there in a minute."

Since then, I have found this technique to be very helpful. Occasionally my mind seems to freak out from the changes I go through, yet I am able to get my work done and not worry about my thoughts or emotions because now I can realize that they are simply transitory and insignificant and don't make a difference to anyone but me — and only if I let them.

Rama says this is a 'caretaker personality' (an approach to help you through the inner life) called "The Witness"

KEN

Every year Rama observes the Summer Solstice with a lively feast and meditation. The Summer Solstice is the day of most light in this world, so we celebrate it with a big party. The

Winter Solstice is more of a quiet day of reflection. My first Solstice festival was an important day for me; one in which I saw and felt many things for the first time.

Rama lived in a house that overlooked the Pacific Ocean in La Jolla. When I got there, people were walking around the house, playing out on the grass in the back yard, or just meditating in the sun. We all got together after a while for an incredible feast and then, while we recovered from this, Rama spoke to us about the importance of the solstices and of many other things.

After everything was cleared away, Rama did a long meditation. I sat in the back of the room and watched him as I meditated. As the meditation progressed I began to see some things that I had never seen before. The room and everything in it began to change. Rama became less sharply defined so that it appeared as if I was viewing him through a golden mist that hung in the air between us. Then I noticed that all of the people in my line of vision had a golden glow around them. If somebody moved their head it left an intense patch of brightly colored yellow or orange in that space where their head had been. As the meditation went on, the light coming out of Rama became so bright that the people between us appeared as silhouettes, with bright light forming the outline of their bodies. Shortly after this I began to see beautiful blues and greens appear in front of him, like patches and ribbons, made of light. Then the meditation was over and my perceptions returned to the way they had been before the meditation, except that the room remained full of gold light.

I sat back and considered what I had just seen, and thought how great it was that things aren't what they seem to be in this world. Yet still, I didn't really stop and consider what this meant; to see that incredible display of light should have awed me, one would think, but I sort of filed it away somewhere and didn't concern myself further with what I had seen.

As I sat absorbing the meditation, Rama had someone bring up a chair, which was set down beside him, and then he had one of his students come up and tell us all about a trip to Yosemite he had just taken. As this person told his tale Rama sat to one side and just behind him and copied all of his mannerisms until we were all practically hysterical.

When he was done, Rama asked if anybody else had a good story to tell. I started to daydream a little about a trip I had taken to New Zealand the year before and in particular I was thinking about an embarrassing experience I had shortly after I got there. Suddenly out of the blue Rama looked at me and asked, "Ken, have you got a story?" I was shocked and said, "Yes, I guess I do."

I weaved my way through everyone and sat down next to Rama at the front of the room. As soon as I sat down my whole body started to vibrate, as if I had a huge charge of electricity going through me. I looked at Rama and he was looking at me and grinning as if to say, this is the real thing, kid. I held my arms out in front of me and looked at them because they were buzzing so much that I wanted to check to see if they looked strange at all, but they were normal-looking to me. I told my story, which was about a drug experience I had had in New Zealand. As I told the buzzing got more and more intense. When I finished I wasn't even sure what I had said. I stumbled back to my seat and enjoyed the rest of the evening from a new perspective.

JILL

At was late on Sunday evening when I arrived at the Lakshmi offices to finish up a project I had been working on I was informed that we would be having a women's staff meeting.

Rama arrived at the office, and we all assembled in a very beautiful conference room. He began the meeting by asking, "So, what's been happening to you ladies out in the world? What kinds of experiences have you been going through?"

The women responded honestly and openly. As Rama is concerned with the spiritual liberation of women, he affords us every opportunity to assess and evaluate the different situations that we face in the

world as women. This way we can learn directly what has held women back from attaining enlightenment for centuries, and how we can overcome these obstacles. The discussion was enlightening.

Afterwards Rama looked outside and decided to have an outdoor meditation. The sky was very clear and the stars were shining brightly. We formed a semicircle on a point overlooking the Pacific Ocean. Rama was standing near the edge of the point with his back towards us facing the ocean. As the meditation began, he completely disappeared. White light was emanating from his being, expanding throughout the sky. It fell into patterns of fluid motion and the movement of each molecule was clearly discernible. He raised his arms. As he did this, his subtle body spun out through his head and was hovering above his body. Time was standing still. He shot out his arms towards the ocean and then toward the sky. Huge beams of light extended out of his hands and he moved them through the sky, as though they were beacons of light shining forth from a lighthouse on a cliff. Once again, his body disappeared and there was nothing left but two brilliant focal points of light at the end of what used to be his hands. They were vibrating and flickering and had great force to them. The ocean, sky and everything around me began to disintegrate into the light, as though it were melting. In one sense it was awesome, and in another sense it was very much like child's play.

The magical show proceeded and the drama continued to unfold. The next act on the bill was a juggling and balancing routine. It was all done with manifestations of light and manipulations of energy. It was as if he was working with a physical entity such as putty or clay. It seemed very solid.

As we stood, mesmerized by this explosive light show, Rama rose up very high and his being extended out into the sky. Once there, he created a crack or opening. This was something I had never seen him do before. He was creating a doorway and everything around it was different from the rest of the scenery.

After finishing these manipulations, he told us to close our eyes because he was going to come around the circle and touch our foreheads. I closed my eyes and meditated. I felt him drawing closer. His presence was awesome. It wasn't the "man" that I always see sitting in front of me, but rather a totality, an encompassing of all of eternity, focused and concentrated in this one being. Since this event, it has been difficult for me to see Rama as a human being. He simply no longer is.

He approached. He was with the person right next to me. My being was getting bombarded with a forcefield of energy. It was becoming very hard to stand up. He was now in front of me.

I felt his thumb touch my forehead and instantly, as though hit with a bolt of lightning, I was jolted into a new and deeper awareness. I became aware of the movement of each atom of my being. Every part of me woke up and came forward. Neither Rama nor I had a form any longer. He had hurled me into some deeper "inner" universe. I was unsteady, and found it very difficult to keep my balance. Then he put his entire hand on my forehead.

He channeled a river of light through my entire being. He removed his hand, but I could still feel it on my forehead as though he never taken it away. I opened my eyes. I felt like I was 10 feet tall. There seemed to be no ground under my feet. I felt different and the world in which I live has never been the same.

JILL

I have been a student of Rama's for a year and a half now. In this time, my concepts of the world and especially of myself have been breaking down. Time after time I have had to face the oversized ego which had been so much a part of my interaction with the world. Rama proceeded to shatter this grand ego of mine in many clever ways. It became a game. How could he outfox the fox. I remember one time in particular. I had just left the man I had been living with for 3 years. I knew that to make any real progress in my development, I had to cut this relationship. It would have been too distracting and I never could have attained the independence and concentration needed to focus on my inner development.

When I told my friend that I was leaving, I felt incredible power and force behind every word that I spoke. I was an observer watching myself carry out the necessary actions. I was completely detached even through his emotional outbursts of pain. It was a clean cut. I told him that I was leaving and I walked out the door.

The next day, however, the emotions and attachments began to take hold and carry me away like a river. The pain of watching my friend suffer was almost unbearable. I went over to Rama's house, hoping for a shoulder to cry on. I called and asked if I could come over and he said sure.

When I arrived with red, puffy eyes, he looked over at me as he was watering his garden.

“Hi, beak,” he said cheerfully.

I couldn't even say hello. I just burst out crying.

Rama said, “Come on now. What are you crying for?”

I replied, “Oh Rama, it hurts so bad.” He asked me why I thought it was hurting. I said, “It really hurts me to see him in so much pain. I'm almost scared to think of what he might do (sniff, sniff).”

Rama turned, looked me straight in the eye, and in a flash he squirted me with the hose full blast. I was shocked! I jumped and ran.

He told me to come on back. I said no, I wouldn't, because he might squirt me again. He told me not to be so stupid, that he wouldn't squirt me again. As I approached, he began to speak.

“Are you so important? Do you really think that anybody's life is in your control? It's only your ego that thinks that somebody else's life is in your hands. He is an adult, and he alone decides whether he wants to be happy or miserable, to live or to die. Only he is responsible for his own life, not you.”

I didn't want to hear what he was saying but I knew that it was true. I wanted to believe that my friend's happiness, even his life, depended on me. By shocking me out of my indulgent self-pity, my teacher opened a doorway for me. I liked what I saw on the other side and I jumped through. I never cried about it again.

MARK

This particular experience started very casually, as though nothing at all was going to happen. I was in Rama's house, before he and I and several other students were planning to go out to the movies. It was not yet eight o'clock because that was when the others were due to arrive. Nobody was there yet. Rama and I sat watching the fireplace, drinking Tabs and talking about something which escapes me. Suddenly Rama leaped up out of his seat. He bounded over to where I sat; before I could react, the fingertips of his right hand were pressing against my forehead. I heard whistling sounds like you hear on mountain tops, and lost all awareness of my body.

The instant Rama had touched my forehead, a burst of what felt like electric current shot through my entire body. Then my attention, which is normally focused in my body, i.e., am I hungry, warm/cold, happy/sad, left completely and went elsewhere. I found myself traveling through space at an incredible speed. It was really a beautiful vision, the stars and galaxies, nebulae and colorful explosions, all passing by at what seemed to boil down to ten or twenty light years per minute. Everything blended together and yet time had no meaning and I could scan any star or event I wanted with total freedom. The only thing in my life that has ever come close to this kind of experience was at Disneyland, California, on an amusement ride called Space Mountain. When I am having a rough day at work, troubleshooting computer operating systems, I often think of this vision.

Then I saw Rama standing nearby, watching me. He seemed to be concerned about something. I tried to smile, but my muscular coordination was not up to par. So I just sat there.

“The guys are out in the other room, waiting,” Rama said I told him that I would go out and join

them.

I sat down on a couch in that room and nodded to my friends I tried to act as though everything was fine. I picked up a book about birds by Audubon. As soon as I glanced at one of the pictures of a Whooping Crane, an endangered species, flying through the sky, I lost all body consciousness. I found myself flying around with the bird, who didn't pay any attention to me.

Someone asked me if I cared for a soda. I opened my eyes and said, "Sure." I sipped an orange soda. Neil, Gerry, my brother Dave, Francis — they were all there. I tried making a joke but it didn't catch. Neil, who was sitting next to me on the couch, seemed to understand what I was going through. Rama came into the room. He stood about ten feet away and raised his palms so that they pointed towards me. He made that whistling sound again

Just then I was walking the aisles of a very familiar place to me called the Standard American Brand Paint Store. I walked slowly past the cans of paint, noting their colors. Navajo White, Antique White, Clear Enamel, Off White. I don't think that the vision had much meaning. I was just walking around in a vision in Santa Monica, on Lincoln Blvd., looking at cans of paint. Even though I knew that I was only in a vision, that the scene would soon fade into oblivion, it was just as real as anything else.

There were Rama and my friends again. It was probably time to head to the movies I felt as though I had a choice: go with my friends or spend the rest of my time tunneling through these kinds of visions. I knew I had to follow the visions. So I went to the movies with my friends and Rama.

MARK

When I was around nineteen years old I became unhappy and bored with life, though I would never admit it. At that time I was sharing a house with a friend of mine who was also my meditation teacher — Rama. Rama spent literally hundreds of hours back then attempting to cheer me up. Once he suggested that I heave myself into a pool, fully clothed. I suppose he was hoping that such an absurd act would instill some life back into me. I was cheerful for about twenty minutes, but then I felt sorry for myself and reverted back to my former miserable state.

A few days later, as I walked aimlessly around UC at San Diego, it occurred to me that it was Rama who was making me unhappy all along. I was certain that if he'd only stop inviting me to go with him on adventures throughout the mountains, deserts, and shopping malls of southern California, then I would be happy. So I decided right then and there to go away and live in the mountains, about one hundred miles to the east.

I went home and packed my gear. Right when I was about to sneak out the side door (seeing how Rama was in his room), the doorbell rang. It was Neil, one of Rama's students. Rama came out of his room to get the door.

I walked back into my room and shut the door. Then I sat down on my bed and listened.

Take out the hot sauce, Neil," I heard Rama say. Neil heartily agreed.

I wandered over to my closet where my backpack and boots were hidden. I pictured myself in a couple of days, living up in the mountains, eating wild berries and leaves, like a goat. Peels of laughter interrupted my deliberations. I looked out to the kitchen again and saw Neil and Rama hopping up and down. They hopped from the kitchen, to the living room, and back to the kitchen again. I knew they had been drinking hot sauce straight from the bottle.

I became sullen and hung my head. Drinking hot sauce used to be my favorite culinary experience, before I started getting depressed. Rama used to take Neil and me out to Mexican restaurants where we would drink bowls of the stuff.

At that moment, my door flew open and in walked Rama, followed by Neil. They sat down on my

carpet, Rama to my left, Neil to my right. Due to the mirrored wall in my room, I saw two images of Rama. They were both peering at me.

“Hey-ey!” Rama blasted, in a voice that reminded me of an Italian Godfather. “Hey,” replied Neil with an equally zesty accent.

“Da baby, he'sa tinkin' of leavin',” cried Rama, pointing his chin at me for Neil's benefit.

Neil raised his eyebrows until his forehead was totally imbued with creases and folds of skin. “Baby, you tinkin' of leavin'?” he asked, sweetly.

I became confused and angry. I wondered how they found out I was going away. What made me angry though was that, instead of helping me figure a logical solution to my problems, they paid absolutely no attention to me.

In fact, they started singing about Mozarella Cheese, while dancing about my room. They danced around me, like I was a statue or something. I was stunned and just sat there watching.

Rama cried out, “Gespacho, where have you been?” Neil, who had been doing somersaults all around, replied, “I been with a guacamole!” Then Neil sang some absurd tune about guacamole, some fictional maiden who turned bright green every time she blushed.

Suddenly, Rama asked Neil to wait out by the kitchen. In a normal voice he said to me, “You've got to admit, kid, we have a hell of a good time.”

He took his left hand and closed it into a tight fist. He shut his eyes, then opened his hand. I saw sparks flying out from his palms. **The magic was back.**

ROBIN

Once upon a time Rama lived in a castle. It was a nice place. Mostly, though, it was big. This was a good thing because Rama wanted a home large enough to have his students over for special meditations. A plan was formulated to invite small groups of students to the castle so Rama could meet them in a more personal manner. The first “castle party” was in late January of 1982 for ten of the newest San Diego women students. I attended the party that evening.

We started the evening with a brief meditation. Afterwards, we discussed it. There was a general feeling that it had cleared the energy of the day from our systems. One woman admitted that she felt uncomfortable around Rama and found it difficult to focus on him.

“Okay. Now why is that, do you think?” Rama asked.

The woman looked at him for a moment and said, “Because you're so *intense*.”

Rama nodded, “Exactly.”

He explained that the light which flows through him is very powerful and when people first come in contact with it they are often intimidated by its intensity. After a few more questions we moved on to personal introductions.

At first there were volunteers. However, the volunteers were few, so Rama began calling on people. There was a basic format to each introduction: name, occupation, and perhaps a brief discussion of the meditation or of future plans.

When my turn came, I half-smiled, took a breath, and said, “My name is Robin.”

At that point Rama interrupted me and said, “Tell them how brothers and sisters you have.” I was surprised he knew anything about my family. “I have ten sisters and four brothers,” I said.

The usual shocked looks followed.

Rama pursued the family information. “Now tell them how many of them are crazy enough to study

with me.”

“There are three, including myself,” I replied.

He seemed content for a moment so I continued with my introduction.

“I’m working at a cleaners right now,” I stated with much embarrassment. I knew I could do better than that as far as a job was concerned, so it was an uncomfortable moment for me.

Rama asked how old I was, my future plans, and things like that He gave a few helpful suggestions and moved on to the next person.

Collectively, the group consisted of a real estate agent, a few college students, a nurse, a physician, a typesetter, a homemaker, an artist and an astrologer. Next, we moved on to dinner

We sat around a long, 14-foot, antique wooden dining table. I was only one seat away from Rama, so the energy got more intense by the minute. Rama talked about a variety of subjects in a very casual manner. Finally, he told us the only reason he was talking so much was because we weren’t. The “hint” was well taken and everyone began to talk and ask questions.

The major concern seemed to be that of light retention This was quite valid, as the majority of the group was over twenty-five. (Rama has said that women tend to lose light rapidly after this age.) Rama told us that as women we had to be very careful in the world because of its “draining” effect on us. The biggest drain tends to be in the form of men who constantly bombard women with aggressive sexual energy. He explained that the subtle body loses its resiliency with age.

Rama pointed to a younger woman at the table as an example. “You can tell by looking at the youngest member at the table,” he said. He asked her age to which she replied nineteen.

My heart sank. “That’s how old I am and he knows it too because I just told him during introductions,” I thought. At that point, I felt a kind of pressure all around me. It seemed Rama darted his eyes towards me slightly when he realized she and I were the same age.

He looked straight ahead and continued speaking. “Of course, some people are wasted at nineteen. They have allowed their emotional relationships to damage them.”

Every word seemed to pound into me with more force than the previous one. I realized that he was talking about me. I kept looking at Rama really intently, hoping he’d somehow dispel my perceptions. He never did.

After that, I concentrated on my meal. I ate the quiche and chocolate mousse really fast and felt more uncomfortable by the minute. I wanted to leave but I knew I had to stay and endure the rest of the evening. Despite the fairyland castle, the party thus far was far from “enchanting.”

When dinner was over, Rama invited us to go back into the main hall where we’d talk some more. I was still pretty shaky when I walked into the main hall with everyone else. I didn’t say much to anybody, I just sat down and waited for Rama to come in.

Most of the evening was filled with difficult moments like those at the dinner table. It didn’t seem to matter what I said. Everything was met with a kind of aloof disdain from Rama. Mostly though, he ignored me. I could hardly say or think anything without seeing another aspect of myself that had to change or go. There was a kind of “unpeeling” effect in my being.

Finally, there was a point when I felt something break or shift inside me. I was flooded with a feeling of lightheartedness and excitement. All of a sudden I heard myself say, “Rama!” like I could hardly wait to tell him something.

Rama smiled and said, “Yes!” returning my excitement.

I didn’t really have anything in particular to say, so I just beamed a smile at him for a minute. It was like I was seeing a good friend for the first time in a long, long while.

I asked a question that just came up. The question didn’t seem to matter. I felt so good. It felt like an

incredible weight had been lifted off of me and I could breath again. More questions followed.

One woman asked about something pertaining to awareness. Rama told her she was too aware in an analytical sense and it got in her way. He told her she'd feel better if she'd lighten up a little bit. Then he looked straight at me and said, "And *you* need to become more aware."

I inquired, "Of everything?"

Rama said, "Of people mostly. You are much too trusting — you allow people to abuse you emotionally — you think that this is what a good person should do. But when you allow someone to injure you, you aid them in hurting themselves, in thwarting their own spiritual progress."

We smiled at each other for a minute. Then Rama began acting out some of the transpositions he was causing in my being He said things like, "Let's see. We'll take this out, she doesn't need that any more. Then we'll move this over here and then that can go here...." As he spoke he moved his hands around as if he was rearranging some kind of electronic board or something. Then he stopped for a minute and acted as if he were me. Then he laughingly imitated me saying, "What's he doing to me now!"

I started laughing and so did everyone else, including Rama. Everyone conversed a while longer, then we moved to a fluffy white rug to end the evening with a meditation.

As we were about to leave I got a little card off the flowering plant I'd brought. (Everyone had brought plants and flowers.) I saw Rama nearby and said, "Rama, I want to give you this."

He took the card and smiled. "Those are very pretty flowers," he said. He started to say something else but I'd just backed up into a large candlestick holder and I was busy contending with that.

Rama graciously left me alone, as I was getting more embarrassed by the moment. I wanted to say something to him but at the same time I wanted to get some more distance between us. So, I kept bumping into the same candlestick holder. Finally, Rama turned to someone else and talked to her about what effects the evening had had on her. I proceeded to go to the front hall and prepared to leave.

All of us were by the door, ready to go and Rama came in to say goodnight. I wanted to tell him something to sum up what I felt. So I said, "You know, you aren't as scary as I thought."

Rama exclaimed, "No, I'm not scary. Not now, anyway. Just wait until the desert though." Everyone laughed nervously.

As I was leaving, I felt like a new person. But the nicest thing of all was I had finally met my teacher, and I liked him a whole lot!

DEBORAH

In January of 1982 Rama rented a huge and opulent mansion in Del Mar. It was to serve as a home for him and some others as well as a place for Lakshmi parties and meditations. I was reticent about it; I come from the political left where one's material destitution is seen as indicative of one's commitment to social change. It seemed incorrect to use our resources for luxury when they could be used to help others directly (although I had no particular program for how). Well, at least the "castle" (the mansion is patterned after a Spanish castle) would serve an entire community.

But then I discovered that weekly meditations were not being held there and that the castle would be used by the community only on an irregular basis.

I felt like I'd been run over by a truck. I was more depressed than I'd been in quite sometime. I would wake up in the middle of the night trying desperately to justify his choice. Sometimes I could justify it, easily, and that scared me. Was I losing my ethics? Was my love for Rama making me unwilling to look at him truthfully?

I knew that my life had been totally turned around by him. I at no time felt personally exploited; if I

signed all my possessions over to Rama I could not have “paid” for what he'd given me. That wasn't the point; Rama stood for self-giving. Was this the best way to do it? Shouldn't he be living as modestly as possible? I was afraid that it was precisely the intensity of my joy with Rama, my love for him, and, I knew, my dependence on him that was blunting my judgment. I felt guilty for criticizing him when I loved him so much. I was angry that I felt guilty, and angry that I was afraid to question him. I was angry that he didn't solve my moral dilemma for me.

On Saturdays, many of Rama's students went to the castle to do yardwork and housecleaning. One Saturday morning I felt I had to go. I had to see the mansion, I wanted to work for Rama I wanted to be near him.

When I walked in I tried to laugh at my own reaction and to be open. But I was furious. I could not get past my feeling that a place like this must house a bad person, someone who has stolen and exploited. I felt like I did when I visited a poor area with an opulent church.

As I was cleaning, Rama passed me, smiled and said hello. I commented sarcastically, “Nice place you've got here.” I saw his face fall. I saw that I had hurt him.

As the day wore on I began to enjoy the beauty of the castle Was I being corrupt? Was I willing to accept luxury as long as I too could indulge? Yet this place had begun to feel like *ours*, not just Rama's. It seemed all right to use our resources to serve many, to serve a community.

Near sunset, after all but a few of us had gone, I was sitting in the foyer, singing. Rama came out and stood by the door.

“The house really is beautiful,” I conceded.

“The energy of it is very clean,” he said. “I got it mostly for entertaining. We have it for a year but I don't think I'd want to try to buy it. It's too much work. Just coordinating all the work is too much work.”

I began to soften. I felt him reassuring me that he still was what he was, even inside this place.

When there was a lull in the conversation I went and sat in the huge banquet hall facing the picture windows that looked out on the ocean. I didn't want Rama to feel I was hanging on him or that I expected him to talk to me.

I was surprised when he came in the room and stood silently for a long time looking out the windows. The sunset was beautiful and the room very still.

I was overcome by tenderness for him. He seemed almost sad and very, very alone. I suddenly understood that the house, and the spiritual organization were huge and taxing responsibilities that Rama had taken on, not for himself, but for us. And, standing there, he seemed like someone being crushed by his own power, by his own abilities, by his own drive to help others. I was looking at a man who did not have a trace of opportunism or a trace of exploitiveness. And I was looking hard.

I didn't know what to say. I felt an odd urge to comfort him. Sometimes Rama seems, despite his tremendous power, terribly fragile.

“It's so strange, you standing there in this big room, all alone, looking out the windows.”

He turned and said, “This is what my life is like, Deborah.” When he said my name I felt I poured into him. “I hardly leave this house. I haven't had literally twenty minutes to myself in months.”

“How can you stand that?”

“It's just the way it happens. We just want to keep up the standards and make things nice for people. Most spiritual organizations are corrupt.”

My God. He was responding to my nasty remark. He was addressing the inner struggle that my selves had been waging so fiercely.

“Why?” I asked.

“The same reasons as in politics. Greed, power.”

“And it won't be like that for you?”

There was no malice in me now. I wanted to feel that my love for him was ethically right.

“I have to look at myself all the time,” he said. “I'm always having to look at my motives.”

“You have so much power. That makes it very hard.”

I can let go for just a couple of days and suddenly I look at myself and I say, 'where did *that* come from?' Maya's tricky. It's like living in the tropics. In a couple of days there can be three feet of growth.”

That he had said these things to me was, I think, the most generous act I'd ever encountered. He had opened his heart to me. He had let me see that he, like the rest of us, was engaged in a constant struggle to be pure, motiveless and self-giving. His humility astounded me. He was making himself vulnerable to me so that I could trust him. He was helping me with trust, giving me the gift of trust. I had never loved anyone more than I loved him at that moment.

Often, when I meditate with Rama, I “see” phenomena. But they are, to me, an amusement, an entertainment, a wondrous stretching of my reality. What resonates in me is a person's integrity, their dedication to others and their grace in that dedication. The phenomena I see make me know Rama's power, but what he gave to me that day was a profound knowledge of his extraordinary grace.

My ethical struggle did not end that day — in some sense it never has. Nor do I think it should. Rama himself has said that he can still get lost in Maya. The self in me that wants to know truth runs slightly faster than the one that's afraid of it. Sometimes. Especially when I'm looking at others' lives and not my own.

I don't know if I'd make the same material choices as Rama has made if I were in his position. A part of me is stridently democratic; all are created equal. And yet I have come to know that Rama is a very different sort of being. I cannot know what his position is like.

I know his spiritual judgment is absolutely impeccable. And the deeper I go into that being named Rama, the cleaner, the purer and the more motiveless I find it. The deeper I go into him the more of a resource I find to face my own being, again and again. If he can do it, so can I.

SCOTT

I think that it was a Saturday afternoon. I had been asked, along with six other guys, to oversee a political party for a local candidate at Rama's house. Rama had opened the house, which was actually a castle, as a favor for the man that he was leasing it from, whose friend was the politician. It was a great place to throw a party.

We arrived in the early afternoon as some of the candidate's supporters were beginning to put up their posters. Rama wasn't around yet; he was on his way back from doing an early morning TV talk show in L.A. Around six or seven o'clock the guests started arriving. Everyone who came was dressed as one dresses for a cocktail party. Our job was primarily to make sure that everything was under control, and to help out in any way we could.

Some one hundred and fifty people later, Rama arrived. Drinks and hors d'oeuvres had been served, and the people were starting to get a little obnoxious. It was nice to see Rama pulling into the driveway. My friend and I timed our rounds about the yard so that we met Rama as he was getting out of his car. He asked whether we had seen the talk show. He was interested in finding out how well TV could be used to transmit spiritual light. I had missed the show, but my friend said that watching the show was just the same as being with him in person.

Rama said that he had cruised around Los Angeles after the show. I could see how much he had enjoyed the drive, so I asked him how long he thought it would be before he moved there. Instead of answering, he asked me how long I thought it would be. Although Rama had recently told the center that

he was planning to move in January, which was about eight months away, I never really thought that he would wait that long. So I somewhat, but not totally, jokingly replied that I thought he would move in a week or two. He laughed at my answer, and then inquired about the party. After that he went inside, and we returned to our rounds.

The people had stopped eating, but they hadn't stopped drinking. There were a couple of speeches, but I don't think that's what many of them came for. After the speeches, most of the people who weren't drinking left. In a way, the whole situation was pretty funny. There was this really high, strong energy coming from Rama, who had safely secured himself in his room, while, at the same time, there we were immersed in this group of people who were completely engrossed in this cocktail party. It seemed like something that you would read about in the *Bhagavad-Gita*. "See Arjuna, I am everpresent. You will find me even in the midst of a cocktail party."

It was around eleven or twelve when the party started to end. When everyone had finally gone, we closed the gates to the yard and went inside. Rama had us go up to the top of the lookout tower and wait for him. It was a crisp, beautiful night. The Castle was at the highest point in Del Mar, so we could see forever in all directions. We looked out over the ocean, and joked about anything that came to mind. After about fifteen minutes Neil came through the door loaded with several packages of cookies. We ate the cookies, and continued talking. One of the guys, Gerry, said, "You know, we're probably making a great past life memory right now." Everyone laughed, but at the same time we all realized that it was true. It was a special night. Everything was clear and sparkling

Rama came up a short while later. He joked about the party, and told us that it was a good experience for us to have had. Soon, the tone of the conversation changed. Rama told us that he was planning to move to Los Angeles as soon as he could find a place to move to. He said it would probably be about a month. I don't think that any of us was too surprised. After describing the vortexes of energy he had seen and felt when he was driving through Los Angeles, Rama said that he would like all of us to move up to Los Angeles also. I was really touched because I could feel the love with which he spoke. He meditated on each of us, and then we all went home.

SUSAN

One Saturday night about twenty of Rama's women students gathered in his living room. He had asked us over because he wanted to make a tape on the subject, "Why Don't More Women Attain Enlightenment," and he felt that having us present would inspire him. Also, we would record a question and answer session at the end of his talk.

Rama said to us, "I've got dozens of books about Enlightened men throughout history, and only one or two books on some women saints. Now what's going on here?" He looked around the room, narrowing his eyes as he does when he's "seeing" psychically. "There are lots of beings here for this one," he added. I looked around and saw sparks of light here and there, which is the way I see astral beings sometimes. Rama entered into a meditative state before beginning his talk. We all meditated as we listened.

He discussed the factors that hold women back spiritually, the things that drain our power. He gave a lengthy explanation of the nature of a woman's subtle body and the harmful vibrations that can injure it.

Then Rama said, "Women think they're supposed to be passive. They deny their power. But don't let men or society tell you what it is to be a woman. Go deep inside your being and *you* find out what a woman is." Rama's face had a soft glow. A very feminine aspect was coming through him.

Jill voiced the question that had just occurred to me: "Were you ever self-realized as a woman in a past life?"

"Yes," he replied softly, and leaned over to fiddle with the tape.

"Where, when?" came my immediate question.

“Now, come on, I can't tell you everything. You have to discover things on your own.”

On rare occasions Rama has told us about some of his previous incarnations as a Self-Realized teacher in India, Japan and Tibet, usually when prompted by a student who had had a past life remembrance of their relationship in former times.

This new revelation touched us all very deeply. I had wondered why Rama cared so much about the liberation of women, why it was a major focus of his time and energy. He had told us recently that we were beginning to see the dawn of the Age of Women

It was late, about three a.m., time to go home. Rama closed his eyes for a moment, filling the room with soft golden light, in a final brief meditation. He swept the room, stopping to meditate on each of us for a few moments. As I looked at him I saw that he was neither man nor woman. His image glowed with a golden radiance. Some part of me pulled back from the intensity of the experience. Perhaps some day I'll be brave enough to keep going

“Well, goodnight, and thank you,” he said. As usual no one moved, so he had to stand up and leave the room to get us to go.

MARCIE

Being enlightened isn't always as much fun as it's made out to be. I know, I see Rama every day. Oh, I see him at meditations and desert trips, glowing and disappearing, but I also see him when he returns from the meditations, the trips to San Francisco and at the end of the week after three days on the road. My name is Marcie. I am a registered nurse.

I remember one night I was giving Rama a shoulder rub. We were seated in his living room following one of the weekly Lakshmi meetings. I noticed my forearms were cramping. I thought it just meant my muscles were out of shape. Gradually the pain kept worsening. I reached the point where I wanted to run out of the room screaming. I knew that I was picking up on, but to a much smaller degree, the pain that Rama was experiencing.

We began to talk and I told Rama what I felt. I asked him if it was a particularly difficult night or if for some reason I was just feeling more. He told me that he frequently was in that much pain but that I usually was not sensitive enough to feel it.

I proceeded with trying to minimize the huge hard knots in his shoulders. As I rubbed I could feel or, I should say, sense, a kind of black sticky substance. It spread across the muscles of his lower neck and shoulders as if it had been laid there. It had a truly awful feeling to it. The densest areas of this substance corresponded to where in his shoulders these knots were located. As I rubbed these areas, I began to see mental images of different students of Rama's. Some were students that had been with him for a long time. Some were newer students at Lakshmi. I could somehow sense that each knot I was rubbing actually related to the person I was seeing. I also sensed that for one reason or another these people were angry at Rama. I told Rama about this but I didn't mention who I actually saw. I asked him who he thought could be angry at him and sending him negative energy. He named five people straight off that I had been perceiving.

I asked Rama why it was that he experienced so much pain. Did all Realized beings have to go through this? He told me that it was because he had made the decision to work with people. It didn't have to be this way. He could just go away and live in the forest if he wanted it to stop.

He told me he was feeling a little better and that I should be heading home. It was late and I left.

CHAPTER FOUR

PUBLIC MEDITATIONS

*“The only things that stand between you and the
Infinite ecstasy of existence are thoughts.
When you stop your thoughts you stop the world.
When the world stops, time stops.
When time stops, matter stops.
When matter stops, energy stops.
When energy stops, self-consciousness stops.
When self-consciousness stops there is nothing:
Nothing left to stop, start, begin or to end.
The person who did all of these things has gone away,
Vanished without a trace in the ecstasy of existence.”*

— Rama

CHAPTER FOUR

PUBLIC MEDITATIONS

STAN

It was late, perhaps 11:00 p.m., August 3, 1982. I was sitting in the second row of one of those semi-elegant public meeting rooms at the Miramar Sheraton in Santa Monica, a room that had probably seen more wedding and bar mitzvah receptions than the beach a couple blocks away had grains of sand. Now this room was hosting a spiritual teacher. He called himself Rama. However, he was not from India. He was an American, in fact, a boyish faced former English professor, originally from the East Coast. When most of the Indian teachers I had studied with discovered that I was a lawyer, they would take me aside and somewhat nervously ask me about extending their visa. India was the mother country, they would sheepishly explain, but the bottom line was that the accumulation of American dollars was essential to keep the air conditioning working in the ashram back home. On this score, at least, I knew that tonight would be different.

Tonight would also be different in other respects. This was my second time with Rama. The night before, I saw him for the first time. I had been hearing about him for about six months; now, I was in his presence. A group of us had just applied to join LAKSHMI, the name of the spiritual organization through which Rama conducts his teaching. The application for admission contained a clause, entitled “is there anything else you wish to add.” That’s all I needed. I proceeded to cram my whole life into a cramped handwritten paragraph, pouring out the story of my quest for inner peace. Rama read each of our applications, looking up to acknowledge the person by name as he came to each of us. “You wrote me a whole thesis,” he said when he got to me. This was his diplomatic way of recognizing my penchant for what my mother has called verbal diarrhea ever since I was a little boy

Rama then wanted us to meditate with him for a few moments I was now sitting closer to him than I had sat during the night’s program and during the previous night’s presentation. I closed my eyes, but only halfway, because I had heard that when you meditate with Rama you are “supposed” to see a light show that rivals the bicentennial fireworks over the Potomac River. One, maybe two eternal seconds passed. Hey, I thought, where is my light show? I was just in the process of asking myself if this were another rip-off, when before I could even complete the question mentally, I began feeling my heart fill. Yes, my heart was filling with a sense of inner confidence. Me, spiritually confident? That’s like Woody Allen winning the Mr. America contest. This was really something.

All my life, my major prompting for self-discovery was to overcome my fear of death. I wanted spiritual enlightenment so that I could penetrate the veil between this phase of existence and the next, if there is a next, and thereby obtain some peace of mind in the knowledge that my final destiny is more hopeful than just becoming worm bait. I had spent most of my time in spiritual search quaking in my boots that I would discover that this whole meditation business was a fraud. Then I would have to live out my days with the conviction that the universe was totally pointless. Oh, I’ve had moments of bliss in my meditations before. These moments were actually pretty nice, until my rational mind stepped in to chop them to pieces, that is. The feeling I was now experiencing was right up there with some of the best glimpses I have ever had of a fleeting sensation that there was a larger and more wonderful aspect of

myself than the one with which I was used to dealing. As always, I had to attempt to sabotage the experience. God forbid I should become Enlightened too soon; I'd have nothing to complain about.

So I proceeded to attempt to dredge up my fear of death. But my old nemesis was hiding out and wouldn't even show a trace. I felt tears in my eyes. I felt that liberation from the nightmare of not knowing what I am all about was a possibility. More than anything else, I just plainly and simply felt good. This moment was even. The nagging specter of doubt, for whatever reason, was not intruding. Things were in balance. The tempo of my awareness was satisfying. I was fully cognizant that I was not afflicted with any notion of incompleteness I wasn't even worrying. This couldn't be me. I always worry about something. Yet, it was me all right. I still had my awareness of myself. I felt myself to be totally still, except for a throbbing joy. My consciousness thrilled at this moment of clarity, unencumbered by the limiting tyranny of thought. Then, I became aware of the room again.

Uh Oh. I was coming down now. All of this happened in just a few moments. Yes, here is the chair I was sitting on. Here is the sound of people talking. There is another person sitting next to me. I'm back. I'll probably start to try to kill this experience any second now. The analytic buzz saw is gearing up to do a number on this event just concluded. But, what the hell was that marvelous sensation that had just been flirting with me? And, who is that lanky, curly-haired guy, sitting on a rug up on the table in front of me, anyway? And, why is he always smiling like the cat that just caught the mouse?

PAMELA

The most upsetting experience I have had with Rama, or rather with myself in relation to him, started at a big public meditation. I arrived somewhat emotionally drained from some personal problems that I won't go into. I was in the company of a difficult friend that I wanted to expose to Rama's energy, who really liked Rama very much as it turned out, but that is another story. Anyway, Rama was up against about 300 people, some students who might be expected to be in a good state, and about 200 people who had never seen him before. Now, the Bay area is filled with quite a motley crew of "spiritual seekers" and they were out in force with chips on their shoulders, ready to demolish a new teacher. We eat gurus for breakfast up here. There were some rather tempestuous dialogues for a spiritual gathering, and then Rama wanted us to meditate. He got up and sat on a table in a lotus position but then seemed to decide that we just weren't ready — an understatement. He walked around the stage the way he does when he is preparing to do something outrageous. Then suddenly he turned to the audience.

"Reality," he said, "is not what you think. Watch this." He then held up his right hand and turned it about. The fingers seemed to melt and become fluid light and then the whole hand turned into a glowing and luminous ball.

When he asked us what had happened, I said, "Your whole hand turned into a big glob of light." How poetic! I notice people get really incoherent when they try to describe these events. Other people said things like "You grew extra fingers of light" and "Your hand melted." We meditated then and the evening ended. I didn't think any more about the incident except to notice that I had a lot of new energy and wondered whether it had to do with Rama turning himself into a human torch — kind of like the statue of Liberty, only his hand was the torch. The next day I was on the bus going up to my weekend abode in the Valley and realized that I was quite disturbed by the events of the previous night. This man was really serious! What had I gotten myself into now? Maybe I should get out while the getting was good. I mean, if he could turn his hand into light, he could just go up in a cloud of light if he felt like it. Even worse, I could turn into light if I got Enlightened, perish the thought. Rama is very vehement about not being anything special like an avatar, so theoretically we all had this potential. Horrors. I didn't like it at all. Spiritual crisis on Highway 101!

Well, I knew that I didn't really want to leave Rama, so I started casting around in my head for ideas that would make my own reactions palatable to myself. I remembered the *Bhagavad Gita*. Krishna is

showing Arjuna who he, Krishna, really is. He changes his form and shows Arjuna “the whole world.” Arjuna more or less says “Just show me your regular face, Krishna, I can’t handle all this.” Well, when I read this I thought, “If I ever saw such things, I would say go ahead, show me the world.” Ha, ha. Now here was Rama turning into a human light bulb for my education and what was I doing? Whining. “Rama, please show me your regular face.” Well, this cheered me up a lot since Arjuna was a great warrior and even he had a few problems with this kind of stuff.

Conclusion: When it comes to having my view of reality challenged, I don't exactly react with great joy. Or as Rama has said, “Resistance? Does Fort Knox have walls?”

TODD

On an impulse about a year ago last July, I drove down to Long Beach, California, to visit an old friend. She, like myself, had been in and out of many “new age” type groups (and some old age ones as well). You might say we considered ourselves seekers but not as yet finders. As we talked she handed me a small newspaper she had picked up somewhere. It was called *Self Discovery*, and had a picture of Rama on the back, with an invitation to meditate with him in one of the auditoriums at UCLA. The ad said something about Rama going into a supraconscious state called Samadhi. It said that meditating with him would be beneficial, as his Samadhi would heighten everyone's meditative experience. Well, that intrigued me because I thought only Indians went into Samadhi, but Rama was clearly a westerner. The feature article discussed why more women don't attain enlightenment. I'd never heard any teacher of spiritual knowledge address that point and had wondered why, knowing that women are the majority of active members in churches and other religious groups. We decided to go to the meditations, but frankly, I didn't have great expectations. I thought I'd seen it all before.

Many times I have attended the discourses of Indian and Oriental teachers and pondered the significance of their culture and customs for cosmic meaning. I have touched the feet of many orange-robed saints — and even wore a beard and tried to raise my kundalini by difficult postures and hyperventilation. I made pilgrimages to Japan, and for years turned my brains inside out trying to learn the Japanese language, which, I was assured, was the only way to find what I sought. Along the way I met spiritualists who did Tarot cards, Astral charts, and past life readings. It was a great adventure and some fun, but I didn't find what I wanted. This is the background upon which I based my expectations of seeing Rama.

I attended two of his meditations. At the first one he arrived casually dressed and carried a briefcase. He looked rather inconspicuous, and approached the front of the auditorium as any professor at a university would do. There was no entourage, no bowing, bugle-blowing, tambourine-banging ceremony! It wasn't a heart-stopping moment. He took off his tennis shoes, perched on the table up front and was soon fiddling with a cassette player and sipping from a can of orange soda. After he talked to us for a while, we began a meditation. He reached over and turned on the cassette. It was electronic music (Tomita or Tangerine Dream, I don't remember exactly), and it was wild stuff. We meditated with eyes open and this was also a first for me. Interesting, I hadn't seen it all!

After each of a series of short meditations — they lasted about ten minutes — were discussions about people's experiences and many questions which Rama answered quite freely. His answers evoked a great deal of laughter and really hit home. I heard, for the first time, teachings of the 20th century: the parable of the freeway, the parable of the bus, and life in the fast lane, to mention a few. I didn't have any of the remarkable visual or spiritual experiences many of the others had, but I was surprised to find myself in a calm, focused state during the meditation. The power behind the words was the thing; I was familiar with many of the ideas but now the ring of truth made the words come alive for me.

The second week the meditation followed much the same for-mat and, although the content was quite different, it was just as much fun. Rama spoke of having a great deal of fun with the process of self

discovery. He talked about the value of laughter, enjoying life and just being yourself. Finally, all those who had attended his public meditations and were interested in studying with him were invited to his home in La Jolla, California for a dinner and meditation. I went.

His home was a very warm, large, rambling house with a beautiful view on a cliff overlooking the Pacific. After a meditation and a lot of questions and answers, we ate and ate and ate. Rama had prepared the dinner — and the dessert, a chocolate concoction, was definitely not of this world.

Rama confirmed my first impressions when he told us plainly that he was an Illumined, Enlightened person. He said that although he was progressing very rapidly, he had not yet fully finished recycling to levels attained in past lifetimes. Rama was very clear about his level of attainment. He didn't allow ceremony or “guru-worship,” and didn't like talk of Avatars. “At last,” I thought, “here is an Enlightened teacher who speaks my language (he was an English professor), wears tennis shoes very neatly, has an outrageous sense of humor, and says 'just be yourself.' No robes, no shaved heads, beads or translators speaking broken English!” Quite a contrast to what I had experienced before.

I believe that westerners who take on customs from other cultures and other times do so because they think that being American or of occidental birth is not good enough or spiritual enough to admit them through the portals of higher consciousness. From my first contact with Rama it became very clear to me that “it ain't necessarily so.” I'm doubly fortunate: I have a teacher who will guide me to be myself in America, and he's a great cook as well.

RICCARDO

It was the Spring of '82 and it was a very busy time. That Tuesday at 2:30 p.m. I swiftly sneaked out of my office, which is located on the fourth floor of Slichter Hall at UCLA. Looking like an international spy, and casting quick glances over my shoulders to make sure that the corridor was clear, I ran toward the stairs. I had to meet my friends at 3:00 p.m. That night there was an Intensive in San Diego and I didn't want to miss it or get there late. I had been attending all of Rama's public lectures in Los Angeles and San Diego and I had been to one in San Francisco. It is hard to understand what all this means if you don't know the kind of person I am. In this life I have had great difficulty finding much excitement in those things that excite most people. I never cared about soccer (which is one of the prime concerns of an Italian male), I hated politics, and I always thought that smoking and drinking were pastimes for losers who were too dumb to find more interesting things to do. I couldn't help feeling out of place and I often wondered who was wrong, me or the rest of the world.

With Rama things had been different right from the beginning. Finally I had found something really exciting to do and it was very comforting to find people who shared my enthusiasm. So, there I was, driving with my friends along Highway 5, trying to reach San Diego early enough so that I could grab a seat in the first row, right under Rama's nose. I couldn't stay away from the man who had chosen to devote his entire life to being a spiritual teacher and who was trying his best to transform the turnip I was into something as sublime and inspired as a spiritual seeker.

We arrived early enough to get a good seat in the second row, near the center aisle. Rama arrived and, after some preliminary words, we started meditating. At first he kept his eyes closed. I immediately felt that the night was going to be “hot.” The night before I had attended the Intensive in Los Angeles and I was already in a pretty high state. Tonight I somehow felt the need to express my love and gratitude to Rama in some other way than sitting motionless in front of him and staring into his eyes. I often thought that I must have looked like a boiled fish.

Then, Rama opened his eyes and started looking at the people in the first row, just in front of me. My heart started beating very fast and I experienced a strange feeling of emptiness in my stomach. When he finally looked at me, I felt that an enormous amount of energy was poured into my being. I felt like a balloon being inflated at tremendous speed, soon near its bursting point. I stopped breathing as a voice

inside myself started screaming, “Enough! Stop it!” He kept pouring all that good light into me. I heard another voice saying: “Go for it! I want more. More! More!” And more kept coming. “Oh God,” I thought, “I’m really going for it!”

Then, I tried to still my thoughts and let go completely. The meditation hall disappeared, immersed in golden light. All I could see was the upper part of Rama’s body, glowing with a very bright golden light. There seemed to be a bright tunnel of light connecting the two of us.

Suddenly, I sprang up from my seat and ran toward Rama. I grabbed some of the flowers that had been arranged around his seat and threw them at him. He grabbed them and threw them back to me. I grabbed more flowers, threw them and he grabbed them and threw them back. I caught them in midair and sent them back. Flowers started flying back and forth along the tunnel of light that was running between the two of us. We played like children, our eyes still locked onto each other’s.

This seemed to last for a very long time. Then, Rama’s eyes shifted from me to my neighbor and, my head still buzzing as if I had stuck it into a beehive, I became gradually aware that I was still sitting in the meditation hall, probably still looking like a boiled fish. “Wow,” I thought as soon as I could formulate a coherent thought, “wasn’t that something!”

ALEX

As it a public meditation in Los Angeles, one woman asked Rama what he thought about a certain, very large, spiritual book.

Rama: It has a nice cover. (She laughs) I suppose it’s filled with information, but then so is the *L.A. Times*.

Woman: Well, can you tell me how much truth there is in the book?

Rama: I see, you want me to assess the truth-per-pound. Really, everything contains elements of truth, you just have to find what is true and right for you at the time. There may be a book you read ten years ago which inspired you very much, but if you read that book today you might not like it at all, because you’ve outgrown it. What counts is what’s good for you at the time. If you find truth in the book, then go for it.

Of course, if you did buy the book, and you were walking down the street with it when someone tried to mug you, it’s big enough that you could hit them over the head with it, or drop it on them and get away. That would be truth in action.

ELLIOTT

Last August I took my mother to one of Rama’s public meditations. The next day I asked her how she liked it, what she thought.

“It was very interesting,” she began, “and that sure was a good-looking group of people who came to see him. I don’t know about his spiritual qualifications, but his verbal skills are excellent. And he has quite a sense of humor.”

My mother, who used to work in an employment agency, is telling me about his “verbal skills.” She’d probably like to get him a job if he had an accounting background! I thought, based on my experiences with Rama, that maybe she wasn’t saying everything; so I asked, “Like *how* was it interesting? Did you feel anything? See anything? Have any kind of unusual experience?”

“No. Nothing happened spiritual or anything. It was ... interesting.”

I was rather disappointed that my mom could sit in all that energy and not feel or see anything. I looked at my brother, who is two years older than I am (he is 22), and who also has meditated with Rama

before, shrugged my shoulders and gave a “well-that's-the-way-it-goes” look. I started to walk out of the kitchen towards the living room when my mother, looking at the sink, said “One thing did happen, though, that I wasn't going to tell; at one point during the meditation Rama turned into an Indian. His face narrowed and his hair became long, and turned white. I was going to say something during the meditation, but I thought everyone would think I was nuts. I wasn't going to tell you. But I saw him, distinctly, turn into an Indian.” She made a motion with her hands and described how his face narrowed and his hair became longer, and described how it turned white.

I looked at my brother, smiled, nodded my head to signify “Yeah, I thought so,” and said to my mom, “Wow, Mom, that's neat! I see those things all the time.”

She seemed content to just leave it at that — Rama turned into an Indian. Not wanting to push it, I didn't bring up anything more about the experience. I joked to my brother, softly, “You know, nothing spiritual or anything.” I asked Mom if she'd like to go to the meditation which was being held that night, but she said no, that she was thinking about going to the Music Center to see “Hello Dolly.” I told her I was glad she could make it to one, and asked her if she would buy some milk when she went to the store. “Sure,” she said, and that was that.

COLLEEN

Rama has said that his students will never be too advanced to attend his public meditation series. I have found these meditations to be quite transforming and was grateful for the opportunity to attend another one. So I was there in Berkeley with the rest of the San Francisco Center last July, 1982.

This was the second night of the series, and I had just returned from Muir Woods where our Center had taken a hike with Rama. I had never been with Rama more than once a week before, and already I was experiencing a difference in my daily meditations.

When Rama entered the room, his body seemed not entirely solid, somehow less defined, less dense. I was puzzling about this, when he said to the audience that he had been walking with some of his students in Muir Woods that afternoon, and that we would have to forgive him because he wasn't very much in the body now.

Soon we were meditating. As I watched him and felt myself go more deeply into the energy, Rama began to fade. Then he became partially transparent. As the meditation continued, his chest area disappeared completely and I realized I could see the curtains which were hanging behind him through his chest.

This was one of the clearest experiences of subtle-physical vision that I have had.

CRAIG

At the end of the meditation period, a rather unkempt young man raised his hand and was acknowledged by Rama.

“About ten years ago I was camping in the mountains of Oregon,” he haltingly began. “Around two or three in the morning I woke up and saw this weird creature staring at me through the opening of the tent. It looked like something from out of a U.F.O.” As he spoke the audience became uneasy. You could almost feel their mocking thoughts. It was actually a bit odd because several moments before many people had been sharing their own experiences of the meditation period. Some had seen the room filled with different colored lights. Others had seen Rama's form take different shapes. Still others reported seeing Rama's form levitating slightly above the table on which he was sitting at the front of the university lecture hall.

The man continued, “I told a few people about it but no one would believe me. I guess I was crazy

because I was put in a hospital for a while.”

While the man was talking, Rama sat there cross-legged on the table taking it all in. “What you saw,” he replied, “were Astral beings. In other words, you were becoming aware of another plane of reality. That being wasn't on this physical plane, yet it was quite real. You should be a little more careful about who you tell these things to, because most people don't want to recognize these things, and will probably think you are crazy.”

The man's tension eased. He sat back in his chair with a smile slowly spreading across his face.

At the next meeting of the newly formed San Francisco Center, Rama spent a few moments discussing the incident with us. “Everyone thought that man was crazy, but I didn't,” he said. “That man came and his life was made a little brighter. His experience made the whole public meditation series worthwhile.”

HARRY

In the spring of 1982 a friend telephoned me and said, “Harry, there is a fellow giving a talk and meditation next Thursday at the University of California, Berkeley. The poster lists his past lives, such as 'Zen Master: 1200-1263.' The guy is either genuine, a great comic or both. Do you want to go see him?”

My internal fleeting response was “This may be the one.” A sense of rightness about going followed. “Sure, Rob. I'll meet you Thursday for dinner beforehand.” Anticipation was my sidekick during the week.

More than a year ago, I had left a spiritual community and still felt like a failure for quitting the teacher and the teaching I was with for three years. Having no hope, since all my attempts at Self Realization appeared fruitless, I had adopted a secular life.

When the meeting started, I immediately felt good about Rama. His good humor and perspective, which gave his answers personal meaning to the questioner and universal meaning for each present, was delightful. During the meditations I felt quite tense, but did achieve some relaxation. I decided to attend the three Thursday meetings that followed.

Driving home after the meeting, Rob told me about the visual changes he experienced in the room. “I saw a golden light, bright spots of light and Rama's body become quite formless,” he said. I had seen none of this.

For the second meeting, we were packed into a small lecture hall with very little ventilation. I was relaxed and comfortable during the meditation.

Without any volition on my part, I felt the presence of my former teacher and her face appeared on the screen of my mind. A wordless dialogue ensued. By that I mean we communicated with an understanding beyond the verbal level, from heart to heart. I expressed the sense of failure and loss I had been carrying for a year. While communicating this, I was experiencing being washed completely clean of all residual guilt from that teacher and all past failed attempts at spirituality. There was no sense of asking for release; I knew I had been. She understood and wished me well.

I was left in peace and joy. My body relaxed. I was free to become Rama's student.

I shared the meditation with Rama and the group. Rama said in response, “That makes my trip here from Los Angeles tonight worthwhile. You should never feel any guilt or failure in leaving a teacher. When it no longer fits, it is time to move on.” I saw that my quest so far was not a failure, merely preparation for this teacher.

MADELEINE

I wasn't sure if I would still have a job tomorrow, but what else could I do? Every time I had looked into Brenda's eyes I could see her pain, and hear her inner cry, and suddenly my job seemed unimportant. But tonight, as we stood in line waiting for this “moment” to occur, the only thing I could see in her eyes was her fear and her skepticism, and suddenly I wondered if I had done the right thing. Was she really ready for *this*? Oh well, if she wasn't, there was always the unemployment line.

As we stood in line waiting for the doors to open, I thought back to the first time we met. A friend of mine had told me about a job opening with this large media company that was opening up a division in cable. Since I had been involved in other areas of media over the past eight years, cable seemed like a good new avenue to explore. I remember walking through the big wooden doors of their suite in Century City at 8:30 on a Wednesday morning in May. Brenda was the first person I saw. I had a feeling that she was the person I was to see, and I liked her on the spot. She invited me through the plush outer waiting room, through a series of offices, to hers.

She was a woman in her late thirties, with short frosted hair and a business suit on. She had that east coast air about her. There was an innocence and humility coupled with her professionalism that was really unique to see in the media world of today. I sensed that I could be myself with her, that I didn't have to put on any acts that seemed like such a prerequisite in TV.

We talked for quite awhile about the east coast where we were both from, and about business, but the real conversation going on seemed to be an inner dialogue. There seemed to be a real thirst for knowledge and a spiritual need that seemed so deep it was piercing through the verbal conversation. She let me know that she sensed she really wanted to be around me, and the next day there were flowers on my doorstep at home, welcoming me aboard.

The line moving in front of me forced me out of my thoughts. Oh no, we were going into the ballroom now. I could feel her judging the people in line as we proceeded into the room. As we walked to some seats in the third row, I really questioned my judgment in bringing her. After all, I had only worked for her for three months and I was pretty pushy about this whole thing. No. Behind that solid wall of success was a longing that went deeper than any corporate structure.

Rama soon came into the room and started meditating, using a piece of musical accompaniment called “Equinox,” which coincidentally was Brenda's favorite piece. “Ah, a good sign,” I thought. The evening flew by quickly, with meditation, questions and answers, and a brief lecture by Rama. It was difficult to know how she was taking to the whole thing, but I gathered it had some impact on her, because at one point I saw tears rolling down her face that seemed to be coming from a very deep part of her soul.

Rama drew the meditation to a close, and this was where I saw the impact of what had occurred. I offered to take her up and introduce her to him before he left. She said she wanted to do that. Since he was taking applications for new students, we had to wait until he was through with that process. As we stood in the back of the room, I tried to casually find out whether I would see my next paycheck or not. She seemed to really like him, although she wouldn't comment directly. There was still that business air of hers lingering in the conversation. However, she described her experience that evening as seeing very bright gold light everywhere, and particularly around him. “I saw it the strongest around him, emanating from his solar plexus region and from his hands,” she commented with some amazement in her voice. “He's really special,” she elaborated.

When the last student had applied for membership, Rama invited us up to speak to him, and I introduced them. What occurred in the next few moments was very moving for me. As the two sat and chatted, Rama looked very deeply into Brenda's eyes for what seemed an eternity. Everything just seemed to stop in the room and she returned the gaze. I could feel his love and genuine concern touch her heart. It was almost visible as energy, it was so strong. I watched as the professional, non-stop workaholic let go to her deeper self as he poured light into her.

Suddenly, she looked naked to me; there was no meeting to schedule *right now*, there was no plane to catch *right now*, there was no account to save *right now* — there was only *right now* for her. And that moment seemed so special. She was just herself. There was no role to play, except for that of who she really was under all those layers of work, *Work, Work!* It was as if she was a giant raft and Rama had just pulled the plug and let all the air out until it returned to its original form. And somehow I knew that those few moments had transformed Brenda's life, as she caught a glimpse of who she really was and the depth of her being. In those few moments, she seemed to experience the level of love in her being that was longing to come out, and the deep concern for people that was tucked away behind a corporate report that needed doing. All the little tucked-away upsets, pains, and angers, seemed so insignificant to her now. The happiness of her real nature seemed to be overriding them.

In that special moment, in which I watched my boss let go a little, I wished that everyone could have experienced what she had, so they could know how much deeper life is than the everyday worries that seem to keep us so occupied.

Rama invited Brenda to some additional meetings and she graciously accepted. When we walked out to the car there was no role to play. There was no boss. There was no employee. There were only two people who experienced something that most people couldn't fathom. There were only two people who loved deeply and wanted to help others. There were only two people who had gone very deeply into their souls tonight. There were only two People — and kind of empty at that. I guess I'll have my job tomorrow!

CHAPTER FIVE

***UNEXPECTED
ENCOUNTERS***

*“The stars meditate constantly.
They burn their very substance to give
Light to others.
This is constant and conscious meditation.”*

— Rama

CHAPTER FIVE

UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTERS

LINDA

In April of 1981, I experienced Rama for the first time at a public lecture he was giving at the University of California at San Diego. He was young, around thirty, and dressed casually in campus attire. He spoke intellectually, like a college professor. That is, until we meditated.

Rama sat crosslegged on a table at the front of the room. He closed his eyes for a few minutes. Then he slowly opened them and moved his gaze around the room, focusing on each person in the audience for a moment or two. When his eyes found me, I saw a bright white light radiating from them. I felt a powerful and penetrating energy course through my being. Then he turned his eyes to look at someone else and the energy stopped.

Thirteen months later in July of 1982, some friends invited me to a private meditation given by Rama. Attendance was taken at the door. I sat down wondering if I would see the light and feel the energy I felt in my previous encounter with him.

Rama walked into the room, took off his shoes and sat on the table. He gave his talk in a rather serious and uninvolved manner, with doses of humor interspersed throughout. After his lecture, he said, "Let's meditate." He proceeded to close his eyes and sit quietly for awhile. As I began meditating, I kept watching Rama and he seemed to blur in and out of focus. His physical body changed into many sizes and shapes. Sometimes it disappeared completely and turned into a wall of light.

I had no idea how long this psychedelic-like experience went on. I lost all sense of time and place. I found little difference in my perception whether my eyes were open or closed.

I could feel what I can only describe as a strong vibratory energy moving through me. I opened my eyes, experiencing my whole being vibrating with light. It seemed to come from where Rama was sitting. I continued to be suffused by waves of light moving through me and all about me.

Rama's face became visible and I saw him close his eyes. I did the same. With my eyes closed, I found a powerful and peaceful euphoria. After the meditation ended, my visual field settled down and I could once again see people in an auditorium. The blissful consciousness remained.

The meeting was coming to an end. Rama said, "Whoever is interested in studying with me can fill out an application outside in the hallway. This will be the last time I accept new students until November." I looked at Ron, my husband, sitting next to me and saw fear come into his eyes. He knew what I was going to say. I felt drawn to apply.

I had not come with the intention of becoming a student. It sure didn't logically make much sense. In order to study with Rama I would have to drive to Los Angeles each week.

I knew this was a major commitment. I walked out into the hallway and picked up a pamphlet entitled *Studying with Rama*. The page I opened to addressed the question of whether or not to become a student of Rama's. It read, "If I am supposed to be your teacher, you will not be able to avoid applying." I sighed.

I walked over and picked up an application. I found Ron and told him what I had decided. I returned

to the auditorium to finish filling out the application. My consciousness was flooded with the awareness of just how much this would change my life.

Rama came into the room, sat down and opened the folders that had been handed to him. There were about twenty of us sitting in front of him. He went through the applications one by one, calling out our names and saying hello. I experienced him differently than I had earlier. His voice was kind and gentle and his manner was light and easy. He talked a little about how he thought the ride to Los Angeles and the people in the Los Angeles center would be good for us. Then he said goodnight.

My heart was joyous and my head was still spinning as I walked outside. Standing outside my car, trying to solve everything in that moment, I was fumbling with my keys. I heard a voice say something about a wine red Porsche, but it didn't register. The voice came again and I realized that Rama was standing next to me in the parking lot. He was looking at my Porsche and asking, "Is this your wine red Porsche?"

I turned and looked at him and said, "Yes."

He proceeded to point across the parking lot and announce, "I have one too, except it's not a convertible."

He seemed like a little kid. We continued to make light conversation about our cars for a few moments, then he walked on.

I wasn't quite sure how to connect the Rama I had experienced that evening with the person I was talking to in the parking lot, so I didn't even try. I just let go.

MATTHEW

I am in my mid-thirties. My wife is ten years younger with a strong Christian background.

I guess I knew, when we became students of Rama's, that our lives were going to change dramatically and I thought I was Prepared for anything. I was wrong. My wife was rapidly becoming independent and, not being able to handle it, I clung to her for dear life, choking her with my insecurities. She suggested a temporary separation. I was crushed but knew she was right. Nonetheless, I became angry and overwhelmed by a feeling of rejection and even though Rama had nothing to do with our marital differences, a resentment towards him began to well up inside me.

Rama was doing a public workshop at the convention center in San Francisco and I was home alone going through the pains of our inevitable separation. Then, as if guided by some invisible force, I found myself on the afternoon flight to San Francisco. I made my way to the convention center and took my place, among pleasant looking strangers, in the meditation hall.

Rama arrived and there I was, wearing my, "I'm here, all the way from Los Angeles. I'm miserable; please notice me" suit, so, naturally, he never looked my way during the entire evening.

By the time we meditated I was more relaxed and quieter within. The weight of my problem seemed lighter and I sat back and was able to enjoy the rest of the evening. When the meeting ended, I just sat there until the room was nearly empty and then left the meditation hall, feeling disoriented and a bit lonely. I had neither car nor place to stay and I began to walk through the now quiet streets with no idea of where I was or where I was going. I don't know how long I walked or how far, but I found myself at a large hotel. There, I was informed that the only room available was a parlor, which is little more than a closet with a bed, pay T.V. and phone; a cocoon in which to curl up. After ordering food from room service and James Bond from T.V., I fell into a restless sleep full of angry dreams directed at Rama. I awoke a mess, with more angry thoughts. I spent the morning watching game shows, trying to distract myself until my two o'clock flight back to Los Angeles. At eleven o'clock I packed my bag, took the elevator to the main floor, and paid the cashier. I turned around and there was Rama standing almost face to face with me. He said, "O.K. Let's talk. Tell me what's going on."

I just kept babbling over and over again, “Rama, Rama.” I was stunned, even while I knew that this meeting was what I had hoped for and was what had pulled me to San Francisco.

We walked to a spot in the center of the lobby, leaned against a wall and talked. We spoke of love, marriage, relationships and attachments. He told me some things about his own past, relative to my situation, and spoke to me more like an old friend than a spiritual teacher. He reminded me that my wife and I would have come to this crossroad even if we had not stepped upon the spiritual path with him. I knew that he was right. He said that he couldn't tell us what to do, but said that if I was going to attach myself to anything, it should be to light.

I heard myself talking and realized that when I am with him, nothing I say seems to be worth saying ... once I've said it. He smiled at me and said, “O.K.” We just stood there looking at each other for a moment and I felt as though all the anguish had vanished. His seemingly miraculous appearance reminded me, once again, that the whole spiritual process is real and that Rama was with me all the time. When he said goodbye, I just kept saying “Thank you” as I watched him ride down the escalator. I stood there staring, riveted to the spot. Then my senses returned and I ran down the escalator ... he was gone! Vanished ... as suddenly as he had appeared.

I danced back up to the main lobby and called my wife. She answered with, “Hi, you just spoke to Rama, didn't you,” and told me that she had been meditating and could feel the meeting. Nothing could surprise me any more! I related some of the details of the meeting and she told me she was getting high just listening to me.

I left the hotel, bought a three-scoop ice-cream cone, sat down and lost myself in the transitory pleasure of that cold, smooth cream. I glanced up at the clock. It was exactly twelve o'clock.

Rama suggests that we meditate at noon because the sun reminds us of the ever-present eternal. I looked towards the sun and smiled.

CARMEN

I wasn't in the best physical shape. I'm still not, but it's a little better now. For weeks I'd been trying to convince myself to start running at the beach. I always found something 'urgent' to do whenever the thought arose. One day, however, I couldn't find a good excuse ... The sky was crystal blue and the afternoon sun was on its descent from intense yellow glare towards golden luminosity. Dressed in a pair of baggy army pants and a ragged-out faded red sweatshirt, I was trying my best to jog along the beach at La Jolla Shores on this fateful summer day in 1981. I was running barefoot trying to stay one step ahead of the waves, like an overgrown sandpiper. My pants were soaked to the knees because I needed a little practice at this. A headband across my forehead kept the windblown tufts of frizz and curls out of my eyes. I definitely did not look like a seasoned California jogger.

So I'm running by the waves at an incredibly slow pace and I decide to stop and walk after I'd gone about 500 yards because I figured that I was out of breath. No sooner did I stop than I heard Rama's voice say to me inwardly, “Why are you stopping?”

“Because — I'm out of breath!” I said with conviction.

“No you're not!”

I thought about it for a minute and I realized that I really wasn't out of breath, so I resumed my snail-paced run. I went a little further and again I stopped.

“Now what's wrong?” Rama's voice inquired.

“Uh ... well ... uh ... let's see ... my legs are tired!! Yes, that's it!”

“Your legs aren't tired — give me a break!”

“No, really, they are...” I pleaded. But I had to admit that I was just trying to find an excuse not to

run. I kept going.

Finally I had to stop again. Before the voice could ask, I said, "I'm getting a stabbing pain in my side; I've got to stop."

"You're really into heavy avoidance, aren't you?"

"Okay, okay! It's true! I give up, I'll keep going!"

Just then a swift-footed Rama in blue running shorts came up from behind and ran past me on my right. A rush of energy from the shock of unexpectedly seeing my Spiritual Teacher ran through me.

"My God!" I thought, "He really was talking to me!!" I was so thrilled and exhilarated by the whole transaction, not to mention the energy he boosted me with as he ran by, that I ran on boldly and effortlessly. I realized that the aches and pains and complaints were all illusions created by my mind in an attempt to foil something which was good for me.

I ran on and on, thoroughly enjoying each stride I took and each breath of fresh air which stretched and strengthened my long-forgotten lungs. I turned around after some time and began heading south, back to the car. I was so absorbed in the fun I was having running that it didn't occur to me that Rama might still be on the beach. I began to experience an incredible sense of joy and exuberance. My smile started beaming on its own and I could hardly hold back this tremendous urge to laugh and shout and jump around like a kid. This feeling kept building and building until I could contain myself no longer. I took a flying leap into the air and let out a zealous "WHOOOOOO!" Just then Rama breezed by me again from behind. I thought I was gonna die — I was so embarrassed. He just kept going unaffected; not acknowledging me outwardly, although inwardly he had just given me one heck of a zap!

Of course, after that I was running on the thin air; my subtle body felt like it had literally been lifted three feet above the ground ... and I've enjoyed running ever since.

MATTHEW

Rama arrived at our weekly center meeting, sat down, looked us over briefly, smiled and said, "O.K. What's the problem? There are too many smiling faces out there. I know something's up. Talk to me."

Fifty or more hands went up.

He fielded personal questions for about an hour and, avoiding generalizations, answered each person specifically as if he had known them intimately all their lives. It was a particularly moving experience for me since ours is a spiritual center and Rama does not usually address personal problems.

We meditated. I closed my eyes and expressed my gratitude to Rama. When I opened my eyes and focused on him, there was a golden light all around him and a ball of blue light which seemed to come from the area of his chest. That blue light would expand towards us until it disappeared and then it would be replaced by another just like it and that light got progressively brighter as Rama's form faded. There was a stillness within me.

After the meditation Rama suggested that we not focus on this world and our own self-importance so much and that we needed to be more creative and to have more fun with our lives. He asked us to surprise ourselves by doing the unexpected ... break our patterns ... create some excitement ... live on the edge.

It seemed as though the evening had hardly begun, when it was over. Rama left immediately after the meeting and I stayed to talk with some other students, remaining at the center for about half an hour. When I finally started the long drive home, one of my own problems took over my consciousness. Realizing that I was getting nowhere, I began to meditate, projecting myself to where I could feel Rama's presence. Inwardly, I said, "Rama, I wish I could talk with you."

At that moment a car stopped short in front of me and there, in the glare of the street lights, I saw that

it was him. It was as though I had wished it and the wish had come true, or it was a dream with me the dreamer and Rama, the dream.

His red Porsche turned into a gas station and I found myself turning into the next driveway. I pulled in; he pulled out. The station was closed. He drove into traffic, heading south; I made a U-turn and drove east for several miles towards the freeway, feeling that just seeing him or dreaming him was enough.

Just before the freeway entrance, I stopped at a market for a drink and a cookie to power me for the long trip home. I left the store, so absorbed in eating my cookie, that I was oblivious to the car outside the entrance. There he was!!! I stopped short, not believing my eyes. As I approached his car, hesitantly, he asked, "What's up?" and flashed me one of his twinkle-in-the-eyes smiles. As soon as he asked the question, I knew that it was my heart's cry that was being answered and that he was there to communicate to me the deep connection that we share.

Although he did respond to my question about a change in my living arrangements in a practical, matter-of-fact way, all the time we talked I felt that he was tugging at my inner being, communicating to me who I am and, most of all, who he is. We talked about other matters. He said that we'd be doing some traveling together and asked, "Can you feel that?" As I said I did, I recalled that just a few weeks earlier Rama had said that, in the near future, he would be traveling extensively, and right then, I just knew that I would be with him. I cannot say for how long we talked because I had no sense of time, but I recall feeling overwhelmed and then out of my mouth, with more passion than I have ever communicated to anyone before, came the words, "Rama, I love you."

He responded with, "I love you, too," and there was a magical moment when we just looked at each other and I had a hint, a glimpse of who this being was, there in front of me. We said goodnight. Then he slid into the Porsche and drove away.

DENISE

I used to live a very short walk from the beach. One blustery, cold, foggy afternoon I felt the call of the tempestuous sea and had to go out to greet it.

I scampered down the beach barefoot, my hair and skirt flying in the wind. I was playing with the waves and generally delighting in the ocean. I had started out running, but this did not express my exuberance, so I began dancing and skipping, arms flung skyward. Soon I was taking great frenzied leaps in and out of the water. I was pondering whether to go in further when I thought I heard someone call my name, "Denise." I discounted it, thinking it was just a very loud thought. Once again, someone called a little more insistently, "Denise," and I recognized Rama's voice. About fifteen feet up the beach, my teacher was walking slowly out of the fog towards me.

I covered my eyes with my hands and tried to find a place to put my head where it would not be seen. I actually was not the least bit embarrassed. It was, rather, a strategic maneuver to give me time to think of something to say.

Rama smiled and said, "Don't be embarrassed. I used to do things like that when I was a student — dancing around my room in circles and such." He gave me the feeling that we were equals I felt a lot of camaraderie with him. If he had been eccentric, then there was hope for me. Underneath this was a sharing of the joy of existence which was the reason for dancing.

I was still unable to think of anything to say and it was beginning to get awkward. Rama waved his hands, shooing me off, and said, "Go continue your crazy dancing."

I felt very happy.

At our Lakshmi New Year's Party I was presented with the "Caught With Her Pants Down" award as a result of this incident.

BRAD

I was working at a gas station on a warm July afternoon. While I went about my job I frequently thought of Rama.

Over the course of the past nine months I had attended several of his public workshops. I now thought of Rama every day. All the routine events of my life seemed very insignificant in comparison to the times I had spent with him. As I walked about collecting customers' money and washing windshields, I sometimes wondered what ultimate significance underlay my preoccupation with Rama.

A small European car pulled up to the full service lane. I didn't recognize the woman who was driving or the man sitting next to her. The driver asked for a fill-up. I started pumping the gas, then carefully washed her windshield. I asked her if she would like her oil checked, and she said no. After the gas was finished, I told her how much the gas cost. This was a routine that I went through dozens of times every day.

As I leaned over to take the money the driver was handing me, I glanced first at her and then at her passenger and said, "Thanks a lot. Have a nice day." I meant this with some sincerity, even though I said it to practically all the customers. Then I recognized for the first time who the passenger was. It was Rama.

My glance locked into eye contact with him. In the brief couple of seconds that I looked at Rama, I was frozen on the spot. I felt a rush of energy surge through my body. Rama's eyes seemed to emit a glowing white light that passed into my body. Then the driver started up the car and they drove away.

My whole outlook changed in that brief moment that I had met Rama's gaze. All of the negative thoughts and the weariness that I picked up during the day were gone. I felt like I was glowing. I also felt embarrassed that I had not recognized Rama when he had been only a few feet away from me for at least five minutes.

During the next few days I reflected on that briefest of encounters, reliving it in my mind over and over. I knew that eternity was being kind to me by bringing someone like Rama across my path. I also felt a great warmth and gratitude for Rama for just being there at an unexpected moment and blessing me with his light and energy. There was no longer any doubt in my mind that someday, when I had the courage and conviction to change, I would ask to be Rama's student.

BRAD

One Thursday in March I received a letter informing me that I had been accepted by Rama to be his student. I was invited to attend the Lakshmi center meeting on the next Sunday. To my chagrin, I remembered that I had promised my boss that would work that Sunday night. I telephoned a guy named Jeff with whom I worked and asked him to work in my place that day, but he couldn't because his sister was going to visit him for the day. When Sunday afternoon rolled around I was prepared to work, before leaving my house I meditated. It was the most thought-free, peaceful meditation of my life. I tried to rid myself of disappointment at not being able to attend the center meeting, and determined to go to the next week's meeting.

When I arrived at work I was greeted by Jeff. "I decided to come to work after all," he said. "My sister and I don't get along too well." I thanked him profusely and promised to do him any favor he wanted. Before he had a chance to change his mind, I hopped into my car and sped away.

It was four in the afternoon, and the meeting wouldn't start until seven, so I decided to drive to the beach to walk for a couple of hours. It was an immaculate afternoon, with no clouds in the sky. The temperature was a mild seventy degrees. I parked at nearby Torrey Pines beach and walked south along some high, majestic cliffs. As I walked I fell into a meditative state I watched the seagulls flying above the cliffs, and the people on the beach enjoying the day. The water glistened with jewels of light, and the

cliffs glowed in reddish and orange colors below the deep blue sky. Everything was magic.

After walking nearly a mile, I saw up ahead a group of about two dozen people sitting on the sand. They faced somebody who was sitting next to the cliff. From the erect postures they held while they sat, and from the fact that nobody was moving or talking, I could tell that they were meditating. It wasn't until I was about fifty yards away that I recognized it was Rama and some of his students.

It felt like I had entered a web of energy. When I recognized Rama this energy surged through me in an overpowering wave. I slowly walked even with the group, in back of the students and facing Rama, and stood there entranced. Rama was turning his gaze to each of the students in turn. His mouth formed a deeply satisfied smile and many of the students were smiling also. I sensed that Rama was projecting a golden light throughout the immediate area.

After a couple of minutes of standing there in meditation I became self-conscious. I knew that I should either sit down or move down the beach. I wanted to sit down more than anything, but I didn't know if that would be proper. I hadn't attended my first meeting yet and I didn't want to start off on the wrong foot by barging in where I wasn't invited. As I slowly continued down the beach I felt a force — like a rope tied to my back — trying to pull me back. Each step I walked took more and more effort as the force that pulled me grew stronger.

Finally, I leaned against the cliff a little ways down the beach, far enough away that I was not hovering over the group, but close enough that I absorbed the meditation. I noticed that other people who walked past would glance over at the group, but none of them showed any outward signs of feeling the intensity of the meditation.

Ten minutes later the group rose and Rama led them up the beach. They walked up a trail that wound its way up the cliffs into Torrey Pines State Park. Most of the students were smiling, and occasionally they would giggle. Hardly a word was spoken. Finally they all drifted out of sight.

I sat there in a daze for a few more minutes. The whole world seemed like part of a dream. I felt like I had stepped through a doorway that opened to a vantage point far above the world. At the same time I felt intimately close with the beach and everything around it.

I wondered what in the world was in store for me as a student of Rama's.

CHAPTER SIX

CENTER MEETINGS

“Pedestals were invented by a wise man who perceived the need in human consciousness to cast people down. This wise man realized that it would be impossible to cast people down unless you had put them up on something first. So he invented the pedestal, which is now employed on a regular basis. You put people on it so you can cast them down later. Indeed, he was a wise man.”

— Rama

CHAPTER SIX

CENTER MEETINGS

MATTHEW

It was our regular Wednesday night meeting in Los Angeles and also the last Wednesday before the New Year.

There were about 125 students present. Rama sat in his usual place on the stage and said that this would be a special meeting because he was going to give darshan. I had been a student for a very short time and did not understand what this darshan was about. Usually at our meetings Rama would talk with us, answer questions and we would meditate together. This night he told us to just sit up straight and not to try, but to keep our minds as still as possible. He closed his eyes and began to meditate while I just sat there as quietly as I could. Before long there were beautiful gold and purple colors all around him and they kept getting brighter. I had already become accustomed to this manifestation and, in my short time as a student, was taking it for granted.

Rama opened his eyes and began to meditate on each student individually, on some for just a moment, on others for several minutes. While he did this I kept my attention focused on him and on all the light which surrounded him; at one moment he would elongate to twice his usual size and then, as if letting air out of a balloon, he would return to normal. Suddenly he was looking directly at me.

Everything and everyone in the room disappeared in blackness and a tunnel seemed to open up between Rama and myself. A spectrum of energized colors was shooting through the tunnel from him to me, at first slowly and then gradually getting faster and faster. It seemed as though they were bounding off me and shooting back to him so that they were coming and going simultaneously at tremendous speeds. All at once I could see my physical self at the other end of the tunnel where Rama had been seated on his couch. Then the focus of my perceptions shifted and I found myself sitting on the couch, looking back at my physical self on the chair. My physical self dissolved and Rama appeared seated there in my place. The energy was rushing even faster now and I saw Rama's form disappear, and I was looking at an empty chair. Then I found myself back in my chair, looking at the couch, and there was nobody there. I closed my eyes. It was as if we had merged into one being with no separate identities. When I opened my eyes again, Rama was moving his gaze from me to another student. I no longer needed an explanation of darshan.

DEBORAH

We had all been doing rather poorly; we'd been raucous and inattentive at all the meetings. But for some reason this week we were saints.

We hold the Los Angeles meditations in a Women's Club. It is a large hall and we set up chairs to face a proscenium stage. Rama enters the hall from a door to our right. He then crosses between the stage and us, opens a door to the left of the stage, mounts the stairs and sits on the stage to talk to us and meditate with us.

On this night, instead of the usual good-hearted but raucous talk, conversation had quieted. Someone had turned the lights down and we were all being intently spiritual and meditative. I think a majority of us had our hands neatly folded in our laps.

Rama entered. You could hear the proverbial pin drop. He didn't look at us or say hello but walked quietly and exactly across the room to the stage door entrance. Then he whipped open the door and yelled to the empty stairs, "Honey! I'm home!" We all practically fell out of our chairs screaming with laughter that probably lasted a full five minutes. Once again, in his totally American style he had managed to crack our spiritual pretense.

RICHARD

It happened during one of my evening meditations. I had been with the Center about eight or ten weeks and was rather pleased with the progress I was making. It was already dark and rather than use a candle or any light I decided to leave the room in darkness. I closed my eyes and settled in to relax. I sat on a sofa facing a wall and a closed door that I focused on.

I opened my eyes and right in the middle of the door was a large flaming red ball with fuzzy edges. It glowed brightly with a great intensity. It took me by surprise and I closed my eyes immediately, not believing I had seen what I thought I had seen. I opened them again and, sure enough, there was the red ball shining as brightly as ever. I closed my eyes once again.

My heart began to pound and a feeling of fear came over me. I wondered to myself what kind of experience I was having and what was going on. I opened and shut my eyes several times but the ball did not go away.

It was then I decided to brave it all and confront this thing. Prying my eyelids open, I forced myself to look right at it. It was definitely very real, in the sense that it was there and I could see its pulsating and undulating movement. Gaining more courage, I started to examine it more closely when suddenly it receded as if going into a smaller and smaller tunnel. Finally just a pinpoint of light remained before it disappeared completely.

I closed my eyes and opened them again several times hoping it would come back, but it didn't. Needless to say, that was the end of my meditations for the evening. It did shake me up.

At the next Center meeting I was going to share my meditation experience and then thought better of it, for no particular reason. I hadn't been sharing and didn't feel I wanted to start at that time. But during the break I found myself facing Rama over a table and quite spontaneously shared the experience with him. When I finished with the question, "I wonder what it could have been?" Rama looked at me for a long moment and then gently said, "They don't like to be stared at." With that he walked away, leaving me with a very silly grin on my face.

CARL

I saw Rama disappear. At the time, I was sitting with about one hundred other meditation students in a meeting room in a San Francisco church. A few moments earlier, we had finished a twenty-minute meditation. I was feeling easy and happy as I usually do after meditating with Rama.

He rose from the folding table he had been sitting on and walked to the rear of the dais. He stood in front of a full length beige curtain and said, "Watch this."

I saw what can best be described as a cloud start to form around his head. The cloud was translucent, or at least nonopaque, and it seemed to obscure his head. Gradually the cloud descended, enveloping more and more of his torso until his whole body was invisible. It is difficult to describe exactly what I saw, because the words don't seem to fit the experience with a high degree of precision. On the one hand

the cloud seemed to cover him and obscure my view of his body. On the other hand he became transparent and I could see the curtain where his body had been previously.

Rama remained invisible as long as I kept my gaze relaxed. When I focused and directed my gaze with intent he reappeared. I found that I could go in and out of the experience at will.

I am trained as a scientist, and my first thought was that eye fatigue or some trick of the lighting was causing the illusion that he had disappeared. This notion (hope?) was shortlived; almost everyone else in the room saw him disappear too. On top of that he had not told us that he was planning to disappear.

I've thought about this a lot in recent days. When I saw the disappearance, I felt that I had no problem accepting it as a fact. "Oh, I saw Rama disappear. I'm broadminded; I can accept non-ordinary phenomena. After all, I read all the Castaneda books, and I believed them. Now I'm seeing it in person."

But there's more to it than that. I don't think I really did accept it totally. I placed the experience in a compartment labeled "non-ordinary reality." I still go on believing that I am here in my body and the rest of the world is out there. When something happens out there, I perceive it. But here is my dilemma. I could make him appear and disappear at will. Couple that with the fact that most of the others saw him disappear and my notions about the nature of reality come under suspicion. As I write this I feel my stomach contract with fear.

CINDY

A vision of Rama emerged from a patch of blindness —

Several months after I began to study with Rama, I decided to move out of the house where I lived with advocates of another spiritual teacher. My only concern was that, being a freelance writer with an unstable income, it seemed risky to leave my low-rent housing.

The impetus to move came via an offer to help a friend's aunt at her Mexican medical clinic. I would receive free room and board in return for my labor.

Since Rama had recommended the health services as one of several good means of developing self-giving, I felt the work would provide spiritual growth. And I was relieved to forget writing for a while.

I wrote Rama a note informing him of my plans. One Wednesday, I packed up my Volkswagen bug and headed south to Baja California. I would attend the San Diego center meetings held by Rama.

It rained as I crossed the border. The Tijuana streets were rivers of mud. After several days of rural life 30 miles into Baja, I was surprised to note that I wasn't giving much of myself. I had happened upon a slow time in the clinic. I began to think there was probably some other place in Mexico where I could be of service

On Saturday, I drove back over the border (the sun was shining) to attend a combined San Diego/Los Angeles center meeting at UCSD. That night, Rama spoke on the student-teacher relationship. He said that many of his students viewed him as a casual pal, but that the texts on self-realization emphasize the importance of an inner link with the teacher, a connection based on spiritual insight and love.

I asked Rama a question related to his talk, which he answered. As I digested his response, he continued, "I don't usually do this for my students, but sometimes when I see someone making a big mistake with their life, I'll say something."

Oh oh. I stared at Rama, transfixed. I had nowhere to run.

"You're wasting your time," he said to me. The punch packed the force of Muhammad Ali ten years ago.

"Cindy wrote me a letter," he explained to the group, "and said she was going to a medical clinic in Mexico to learn self-giving. When I read that I thought, 'She doesn't know the least thing about self-

giving. She has no understanding of what it means.' “

Back to me — “For you, doing menial work in a Mexican clinic has nothing to do with self-giving. You're a writer. You have talent. You're intelligent. You can help people with your writing.”

Silence, tears welled up in my eyes. Not because the ego surgery had taken place in front of others. But because Rama was right, if wrapping bandages wasn't self-giving, I was confounded as to what the heck it was. And he was pushing me right back to writing.

Occasionally, during the remainder of the meeting, Rama looked my way with compassion.

I spent that night with a friend in San Diego. She suggested I write a 'good news' column for newspapers. The idea sounded saleable. I drove back to Mexico, packed my belongings and two days later returned to Del Mar, California. I headed straight for the cliffs that overlook the ocean and sat to meditate on a grassy spot set back from the jogging trail.

Rama suggests that his students meditate at dusk because he sends out a special energy at that time. The sun was just beginning to set when I closed my eyes and imagined Rama seated quietly in his home and transmitting something — a force — to all of us.

I continued to meditate with my eyes open. The ocean became more still as I gazed upon it. My awareness began to merge peacefully with the water and absorb its blue-gold-pink iridescence.

I began to see something taking shape over the water. The faint silhouette of a person, perhaps a hundred feet in height, appeared. He sat, crosslegged, his hands folded in his lap. His head was turned slightly to the side. It was Rama, as real as if I had met him on the street.

My mind was quiet, with no preconceptions. With a subtle inbreath, I saw Rama absorb infinity — this entire multi-galactic creation — and contain it. At the same time, infinity absorbed and contained him. With a faint outbreath, he exhaled infiniteness and released it, while, simultaneously, he was exhaled and released by infinity.

The process, biological and interactive, was like the respiration of a plant. An absorption and emanation of infinity.

How did I know that Rama's respiration encompassed infinite-ness, and that not a potato bug was left out? Viewing Rama, I experienced infiniteness inside myself. Observing him, I understood the literalness of giving up your self to gain everything. I witnessed the words in the Vedas: “I am That, Thou art That, All This is nothing but That (infinite awareness).” Right.

At the next San Diego center meeting, I told Rama what I had seen.

“It's true,” he answered. “Some days I look everywhere for Rama, but I can't find him. I look. I really do. All I can see is eternity.”

The next day, I began to write a good-news column. It never sold. Several weeks later I found a public relations job in Los Angeles that tapped all of my writing skills.

MARSHA

The following story is true, whether I believe it or not. I was at a center meeting in Los Angeles recently with my husband. We are both students at Rama's San Francisco center. We had come south for a clinical chemistry convention in Anaheim, and to experience Rama in Los Angeles, his home stomping ground. I had heard a lot of talk about the wild and woolly L.A. center from other students, and I was anxious to see for myself. I arrived as an observer, but I did not leave as one.

The center lived up to all the advance billings. When we arrived the room was electric with energy. People were talking excitedly; several small children ran between the rows of chairs; plans for upcoming field trips were being hatched in small groups; people called to each other from across the room; smiles

and laughter filled the hall. Quite a contrast, I thought, to the quiet, devotional feeling at the San Francisco center meetings. I found myself feeling mildly uncomfortable.

Rama arrived about 8:20. The room became quiet as he entwined his legs in a half-lotus posture on the sofa in the front of the room. A feeling of expectancy replaced the laughter and conversation.

There were probably 200 students present that night. I was seated near the center aisle, about halfway back, with a good view of Rama. He began, as he often does, by closing his eyes and moving quickly and deeply into meditation. The lights in the hall were turned off, but the stage area where Rama was seated was well lit from the rear. I, too, closed my eyes for a few minutes and tried to relax. The Intensity of the energy in the room made it difficult for me to settle in.

When I opened my eyes, the light on stage had changed. It had not been golden when I closed my eyes a few moments before. Now, as I watched, the pale gold light became richer and richer in hue until it seemed as if I was seeing Rama and the rest of the stage through a fine mist of gold flecks. The color was reminiscent of a golden delicious apple at the peak of the season. The light seemed to have a life of its own. It began to recede from the back portion of the stage and to concentrate more and more densely on the seated figure of Rama. A golden glow formed around his body; the light hugged him. He opened his eyes and looked at me.

What I experienced next is very difficult to recount. Even in retrospect I find it hard to believe that I saw what I saw and sensed what I sensed. What I saw was a gilded human figure. The face was no longer Rama's face; the body was no longer his body. I was looking at a golden statue of a young god. The eyes had become lifeless, the jaw immobile, the body still. The golden light had become gold metal, fixed and hard and eternal.

I felt that I had been lifted out of time. As long as I gazed at the statue, I was suspended outside ordinary reality. Where was I, anyway? And what had caused this total alteration in my perception? Was I glimpsing eternity?

When my husband and I left the center later that evening, I was still absorbed in the experience I had had an hour before. I could barely bring myself to talk, but I knew that if I didn't verbalize what had happened in the room the experience would be lost to me. I could already begin to feel myself retreating from it, rationalizing it, "putting it into perspective," making it small and manageable. I had to tell my husband for my own sake, so I did.

ANDREW

I think that the most intense emotional experience that I have had with Rama was the time that he gave one of his students a spiritual name at a center meeting. Not many of us have spiritual names, but it is customary for the teacher to give the student a name after working with him for a certain time. Watching the actual 'presentation' was something that I will always remember.

I had been a member of Lakshmi for about six months and we were still meeting in La Jolla. We were using a large auditorium which held about 300 people. The design of the room was very good, with the floor slanting upwards away from the central stage area. Rama had his usual afghan-covered table to sit on, and it was surrounded by the fresh flowers his students had brought that evening.

Our meetings usually consist of meditation, discussion, and a final meditation. At the end of this meeting, however, things went differently. Rama stopped the final meditation a bit short and began to tell us about spiritual names. "Only one of my students has a spiritual name," he began, obviously only partially in the physical. "When a student has reached a level of specific development they receive a new name. The teacher doesn't really give the student a name, the Infinite does. The teacher only acts as an instrument." Rama asked for a chair. After a chair was brought, he motioned for one of his newer students (or so I thought) to come to sit down. The student came up, smiling as if knowing he was about to get

zapped but good.

The 'new' student was a large man with a beard. He wore woodsy-looking clothing and almost seemed out of place in the meditation hall. He looked like a lumberjack. He sat down in the chair as Rama moved in front of him.

“We have been together a long time, through many lifetimes,” Rama said. Rama's gaze was misty, as though he was remembering some long-ago joyous occasion. The moment appeared to be an affirmation of a commitment and connection that extended far back in time. Rama stood in front of his student. He put his right hand on his forehead, and his left hand on his chest. Suddenly the room was ablaze with light and love. I could feel it everywhere. I could tell that others were affected as well. I started to cry. It seemed more beautiful than anything could be. I thought, “This is what Me is all about, this is what everyone longs for, dreams of. Yet how many could even dream of the profound love between a student and their spiritual teacher?” Rama removed his hands from his student and moved behind him. He placed his hands on his student's shoulders, now with more the feeling of a loving father, without so much of the awesome power. “His new name is 'Lakshmana.' You can read about him in the Ramayana. He was a great warrior. You should all call him Lakshmana.”

After Rama gave Lakshmana his new name, the meeting ended. No one said very much since we had been so affected by what we had just experienced. It was strange to me. What I had just witnessed seemed so simple, yet it was so powerful. So few people ever witness anything like that even once in their entire life. I felt lucky that night to be a part of Lakshmi.

DON

Before joining the center my knowledge of spirituality and enlightenment was limited. I had read a few books, but never considered myself to be a spiritual seeker. Applying to be a student of Rama's and being accepted was a most pleasing turn in my life.

I had been a student of Rama's for a couple of months, long enough to feel somewhat comfortable with the setting and the people in the center. Rama's students are entitled to attend weekly center meetings, which were then held at Rama's house on Sunday evenings. Meetings always started when Rama entered, wading through the students that cluttered up his living room. He would slowly make his way to his chair in the corner. Once there he would light a candle and possibly turn the stereo off. That done, he would proceed to explain different aspects of living a spiritual life. The talks touched upon many topics, and all were flavored with generous amounts of humor.

It was at such a center meeting in the fall of '81 that the following occurred. An hour had elapsed since the start of the meeting. Rama said it was time to meditate. We sat up straight and focused on him.

Rama said, “It's easier to transmit the light of the superconscious to someone if their eyes are open. Also, it's very easy to perceive this light when an enlightened person meditates with you.”

Rama closed his eyes and started the meditation. I was sitting near the south wall of the room. After a few minutes, Rama opened his eyes just a little and started to move his gaze from person to person. Sometimes he would fix his gaze on someone longer than another, depending on each individual's need. As he worked his way over to the area where I was sitting I tried to clear my mind or at least keep the really stupid thoughts to a minimum, which I seemed to have some luck with this time. So as Rama's gaze fell upon me, I was surprised to hear myself say inwardly, “Burn me.”

“Oh how silly,” I thought. Rama smiled and raised his eyebrows up. “He heard me.” Now I really felt stupid. Then the palms of my hands started to tingle and smooth electricity rushed up my arms. The same energy entered through the top of my head and cruised down my back. I felt a noticeable heat, like an internal sauna. I had no control over these things, and I didn't want any. I felt ecstatic.

At this point my mind went into overdrive: “Of all the ridiculous things to say! ... Burn me! ... Then

he does it! ... Wait till I tell my sister ... My mom ... My brother ... I don't believe it, I do but I don't ... Oh, shutup!! ... No, not you, Rama — me, I meant me! ...” Rama kept on smiling. My mind kept on whirling. It didn't matter.

Over the months my mind has calmed down a bit. But my wonder at the whole process remains.

DEBORAH

One night Rama lectured on the path of jnana yoga, a very difficult and advanced path. In it the seeker attains to liberation by constantly discriminating between the real and the unreal, between the transitory and the eternal.

For some reason, and without knowing anything about jnana, I was intrigued by it. It is analagous to the way I feel when I listen to a Spanish language radio station; though I don't speak or understand Spanish, when I listen I have the impression that I understand. After the lecture and meditation on jnana yoga, I felt singularly strange. Often, while meditating with Rama I see colors — gold or purple light. I often see Rama change form or the room move. This time I saw none of that. I only saw things more clearly and with a great, great precision. I was awed but emotionless. It seemed difficult to function, not because I felt overtaxed by functioning but simply because I didn't care. To carry on in this world was like being asked to carry on one's life in a black and white line drawing.

It was as though I was looking at everything through a telescopic sight. The angle of vision was the same as usual and objects were the same distance from my 'eyes.' And yet I was looking from very far away. The 'thingness' of things in the phenomenal world was revealed to me. The richness of that world became shallow, and, in a way, dry. I could not apprehend the world from which I was looking. I don't even think that it was a world.

I felt alien. More alien than I had ever felt. Actually, it was less that I was alien than that everything and everyone else was alien. I found it a bit amusing.

DEBORAH

On certain nights Rama becomes possessed with the soul of a stand-up comic. He'll often look down or around the room — rarely at us. His voice changes and his timing takes on an even finer comic precision than usual. Rama has said that he only wanted two things from his life: liberation and to be really funny. Now he says he wants a third: to bring large numbers of people to liberation in this life. Well, two out of three ain't bad. On one special night Rama described an experience of his: “This weekend I went to Mount Palomar. I actually got three hours alone where I didn't have to do anything or meet with anybody, so I took off in my car for Mt. Palomar. I was listening to KROQ (the Los Angeles New Wave station.) I like New Wave. It's jnana. No, 'love me baby.' It's more like 'screw off.' There's none of that mushy emotion in it. I like America. It's interesting. Though some of it is terribly ugly.

“So, I'm turning the radio dial and I'm driving. I'm totally out of the body. I'm feeling existence, feeling the vibrations of this and all other worlds. I realize I'm totally out of my mind. I like to listen to the lyrics of the songs on the radio. I mean that's poetry. That's the poetry of modern America. I like country-Western songs. That's human life. Heartache and misery.

“I get to Mount Palomar and I go into samadhi. I'm nothing. I don't exist. And yet I have to come back 'cause I have a meeting back in San Diego. And I'm seeing the birds and the trees and everything is so beautiful and I'm totally enraptured with the beauty. There's light everywhere. But I'm late for this meeting.

“So I get in my car and I'm going back down the hill, back to San Diego. And I'm still back on Mount Palomar, I'm still back there in samadhi. And I'm setting some kind of land speed record in my car — I'm

taking the turns down the hill really fast and there are waves of light shooting through me and I'm in all the other worlds at the same time. You have to realize that I pick up all the vibrations. Every time a car passes me I see into the inner beings and past lives of all the people in it.

“I get to Escondido, which is some place you should never be anyway. I think, 'This is America. Pink neon hotels.' I'm not in America, but I'm in America. I stop at a Jojo's. This is always the best way to bring yourself down, Jojo's is great for that. But I'm totally out, you see, I'm still in samadhi back on Mount Palomar. I walk into Jojo's. I'm looking at everybody in the coffee shop and I can see their whole beings — all their pain and their misery and their futures. LSD is nothing compared to these states. I order coffee. I'm standing at the counter and I'm getting into the wrappers on the Trident gum. Wow! It's beautiful! I'm totally gone.

“I go to the phone to call home and tell someone at the house that I'll be late for the meeting. There's someone in front of me and I have to wait and they're putting out awful energy and I'm just waiting there. I call the house and of course no one answers the phone. Very Zen. “I hear, 'This is Rama. I'm not at home right now but if you'll wait for the beep you can leave a message.' I decide to leave a message but what will I say to myself?

“You see, I'm still up on Mount Palomar, still in samadhi. I'm totally lost. A while ago I decided there was no such thing as lost because you're someplace, right? So I just drive. Here I was driving through Escondido. Looking at life. I'm in a place where the High School prom really MATTERS! I mean, you tune into life. A thought had been going through my mind — here I am in America. A self-realized person and here I am in my car in suburbia. I keep thinking, I could go anywhere and just knock on somebody's door and they'd open it and I'd just glow.

“So when the telephone answering machine message ends and the thing beeps I say, 'Samadhi is loose in America. Samadhi is loose in America.' And I hang up.”

DEBORAH

It seemed odd that one particular week the subject of Zen kept coming up. A friend gave me a book of Zen koans, with answers. The back cover announced it as an 'underground classic.' I thought she had given it to me as a joke because something in me knew that the 'answers' to koans were not like that; not right or wrong regardless of time or place or the intent behind the answer. Another friend told me that week that she'd 'sat Zen' and that there was only one correct answer to each koan. I knew she was wrong but figured she'd had more experience than I.

It was that week, too, that Rama began to do Zen exercises with us. He began by describing his break-up with his last girlfriend, Susan. He finally saw that his world love had made it impossible for him to maintain an individual love. He said that his girlfriend and he had gone to an Indian restaurant in New York called “Nirvana.” All the buttons in the elevator had numbers except the top one which was labeled, “Nirvana.” The koan was, “If you press that button will you reach nirvana?” I began to tremble as I often do when something affects me deeply. I remembered. I knew that Rama was doing a contemporary but absolutely correct and pure form of Zen. I knew he was judging the answers correctly. But how did I know? I had never, in this life, studied Zen. And I really didn't believe in reincarnation.

Reincarnation was, to me, a fun idea, a game like astrology. I liked to imagine that I had known certain people before I was romantic about it. Unlike many people, I didn't think I had been kings or queens, but rather great warriors and heroes, great revolutionaries and fighters for justice. I imagined I was part of the anti-colonial uprisings in Africa. I have peasant ankles — I must have been many, many peasants. Past lives were simply an amusement.

When Rama had said that a great percentage of his students had studied with him in other lives I was sure I had not. Rama had given me a tough time when I applied for admission; I felt as though I'd just made it by the skin of my teeth. I was sure that unlike my friends I was a standby, an orphan.

I wasn't doing well with the koans. My answers were superficial and uncomprehending. But I was deeply, deeply moved, tears streaming down my cheeks and my body trembling. I remembered. I remembered having studied Zen.

Still, I couldn't believe it and I was afraid to ask Rama. I didn't want to find out that I had imagined it all; it would be worse than not knowing. But I asked anyway.

"This Zen game is very familiar," I said to him.

"Oh yes. You've had many Japanese incarnations. You've played this game many times before."

My God, I thought, maybe I'm not crazy. Or at least not about this particular thing. I had to ask.

"With you?"

"Yes."

I was totally elated. I was one of his past life students. The bond I felt when I first saw him wasn't because I was just a maniac. I had gone wild with my burning to study with Rama. This was why! I'm 'in,' I thought. I'm one of the people who has a special connection with him. His attitude changed. I don't remember what he said to me but he was responding to my silly feeling of being 'in.'

When I went home everything in me had changed. I had experienced that reincarnation was true. Maybe other things Rama had said, things antithetical to my rational mind, were also true. I felt that something had clicked into place.

I felt clean and centered and that it was time to change. I had held on a long time to my feminist, butch looks. I knew I had to be able to look straight and feminine. I had to buy dresses, I had to be able to fit in. It was time. I must be able to choose how I appeared to people rather than having them be able to type me. I needed to be able to be incognito.

I needed to stop mothering and counseling and trying to make everyone understand me and like me. I had to stop believing that my great wisdom was so important. I had to begin to work on my own incredible indulgences.

Most of all something in me accepted what I could not accept.

The next week I had a long talk with a friend in the center who had been sitting near Rama and I when Rama told me I had been his student. He heard Rama say, "You are too much in the ego. It's time to grow up now, Deborah." I know I listened carefully to Rama and I could swear that on an outer level he'd not said that. And yet, when I had gotten home I had responded, inwardly, exactly as though I had heard him. Had I simply blocked out hearing Rama's outer voice, or had my friend heard his inner one? It didn't seem to matter; the line was blurring between the inner and outer connections with Rama. Both my friend and I were learning to listen with our subtle senses.

ROY

I've been meditating with Rama for about five months. I'm an accountant and a film student. I'm 26 years old. A few weeks ago, I had my most amazing spiritual experience to date. It took place at one of our weekly center gatherings. The epiphany came near the end of the final meditation of the evening. Rama had been blanketing the room with energy, first staring left, then right. Occasionally he would settle on a particular individual for a period of time. He settled on a good friend of mine for about a minute. His eyes then settled on me.

This type of meeting had occurred before. I would try to maintain a high level of meditation by sheer willpower and as long as I could keep it up, Rama would continue his energy-laden gaze in my direction. When I would let up, his eyes would move on.

This time I didn't let up. The experience kept getting more and more intense. Wave upon wave of

light poured in my direction until the entire room glowed bright gold. Only the bare traces of Rama's features rippled in the wall of golden light. I began to focus intently on the heart chakra in the middle of my chest. His face, what I could still see of it, immediately broke out into a smile.

As his gaze continued, I felt I was no longer particularly attached to my body. I was about a foot higher and a half a foot off to the left. Suddenly, for a beautiful moment, I felt my being fill the entire meditation hall! In that moment I was free. Joyous. Blissed out. I felt a love that goes beyond words. Beyond anything I've ever experienced.

Rama's features reacted that instant as if he had been successful at completing a very difficult task. He then made a slight closing bow and concluded the meditation. The episode in standard time had gone on for at least five minutes. In eternal time, who knows!

As he closed the meditation, my field of awareness began to quickly contract. All I could think was that later on there would be no way to remember exactly how that moment felt. With each passing second, I would forget.

That moment gave me a truer perception of the nature of the study I am engaged in at Lakshmi. It is a study of consciousness. It transcends words. It transcends thoughts. It is truly fascinating. Who knows where it will lead next!

PAUL

All center meetings are good, but some are even better than others.

In the fall of 1981, I was fortunate enough to attend a meeting that went beyond all description. This account of that meeting cannot convey the experience any more than I can tell you what a strawberry tastes like. However, I will try.

The meeting started as most do, with a discussion and a question and answer period. As the meditation began, I felt as though it was going to be one of those in which the "invisible barrier," that often diminishes my experiences, would not be present. I was right.

The meditation progressed, and soon Rama was looking in my direction. Suddenly, the entire room disappeared, with the exception of a corridor of light that stretched between us. I felt as though I was physically pulsating, and there were constant strobe-like flashes of light.

The phenomena were strictly secondary to what was going on within me. I felt the energy that was being directed towards me building up in the same way that water fills a glass. At times, the experience was so strong that I felt compelled to close my eyes and back off a bit. But I did not. This was going to be one meditation to which I would give my best even if I blew a fuse in the process.

After this had gone on for either a long time, some time, or no time at all, a massive smile broke out on Rama's face and my own.

Then, something snapped. I cannot tell you exactly what occurred, but something definitely snapped. The feeling was one of expansion and release. It was somewhat like walking out into the fresh air after being locked up in a small, dark room. Looking back on that evening, I feel that somewhere within me, a knot permanently untied. I do not know what it was, but I can definitely say that whatever it was, it is not there any longer.

At this point in the meditation, perhaps because Rama felt that I had done the best I could, or had blown a fuse, he moved on and focused his attention elsewhere.

After the meditation ended, I was walking around in what must have appeared to have been a disoriented state. Robert came up to me and, apparently noticing my condition, asked me what was going on. I made a somewhat feeble attempt to tell him, but the only thing I could say was, "something snapped." Within a minute or so, I was a bit more grounded, and was able to give about a twenty-word

description of the experience.

Robert asked me if I was scared. I answered, "No it's just different."

SCOTT

One question runs through my mind. What can I write that will explain why I have focused my life on the spiritual study presented by Rama? With each repetition of the question, all of the answers that I am accustomed to giving slowly drop away. Perhaps the best that I can do is to say that we have a good time, and hope that whoever is listening can hear the reason in my voice.

And we do indeed have a good time. Periodically we produce our own version of Saturday Night Live. Last Saturday about 400 people from the San Diego, Los Angeles and San Francisco centers met for an evening of entertainment and meditation at the Santa Monica Sheraton Hotel. When Rama arrived, he started with his Johnny Carson — 'Well, we got a really great show for you tonight,' monologue. He outlined the night's events and told some Zen jokes which no one understood.

For the first act, so to speak, we meditated to some original synthesizer pieces performed by Phil, one of the musicians in the center. As my perception moved to a psychic plane, I saw Rama become a ball of white light shaped like an egg sitting on the table in the front of the room. All too soon the meditation was over, and it was time for the second act, a presentation of plays that I was a part of.

Usually you don't realize how high you've gone in a meditation unless you have to get up quickly and start doing something else. There was a funny moment when I was wondering whether I would be able to get up to the stage and remember my lines, let alone perform. But, once we got started, it wasn't any problem. In the final play, I played a Zen teacher who was having lunch with the sixth patriarch of Zen Buddhism. We exchanged meaningless Zen phrases in order to determine who would pick up the check. After probing the problem of birth and death and the non-existence of motion, we had each made a point, and had consequently reached a stalemate. The impasse was finally resolved when Hui, the sixth patriarch, pawned the check off on the narrator.

After our plays, there was a twenty-minute break. Before everyone had returned to their seats, Rama went up to the stage and began speaking through the microphone the way you usually hear someone speak at large gatherings — their mouth too close to the microphone. "Keep those contributions coming in. Once again, that number was.... I'm sure those of you on the West Coast are really going to love our next act. I'd like to introduce the Dancing Bags." Tap dancing music started playing through the speakers. One of the guys came out onto the stage in the usual black cane and hat outfit. The only thing that was unusual was that he was wearing a grocery bag with the eyes cut out over his head. He didn't know how to tap dance, either. He did a short Fred Astaire routine with his cane, and then two more guys came out wearing shorts with bags over their heads. The two new Bags did choreographed routines in the background as the main Bag continued his dance. The absurdity of the whole thing made it outrageously funny.

After the Bags, there were more Zen plays. Rounding out the night's entertainment were two singing acts. One of the women, Jackie, played guitar and sang a song that she had written. She was very good, or as Rama put it, "she was oozing with talent." After Jackie's performance, Rama went up to the stage and gave a spiel about the next act.

"Truth comes in many different forms. The next performer is obviously untalented as a singer, but there is truth in what he does. I met him over in Singapore where I was picking up some Seiko watches. He was singing in a nightclub where his one claim to fame was his rendition of a Bob Marley song. I saw something special in him. I told him about our meditation center back in the States and asked him if he'd like to return there with us. I gave him a watch, and he came. So here he is...." Jerry, who had obviously never lived in Singapore, walked onto the stage and sang his Bob Marley song. Rama had been joking about the Singapore bit, but the rest of what he said was true.

Before the night ended we meditated once more. Almost immediately, the whole room filled with a beautiful golden light. Soon the room became the scene of the most incredible fireworks show that I had ever seen. Explosions of gold and blue light were going off all over. At times there seemed to be bolts of lightning hovering around Rama. Near the end of the meditation I felt very lucid. My body no longer felt solid. I felt as though someone's hand could have moved right through me. It wasn't a bad way to feel.

We went home that night, and met the next day in the Anza Borrego Desert for a field trip to a place of power. We do have a good time.

CHRIS

In two days, I will be twenty years old. I have been studying with Rama for the last two of those years. Throughout the course of this time, I have continually changed, and in retrospect I believe that every five to six months I have become an entirely new person. Most of this progress has been gradual, the accumulation of weeks of meditations with Rama. But there was one occasion when I jumped a level in one evening. A new person emerged in the course of a few hours, one winter's evening in San Diego.

It was the night of the Kali festival, a celebration we gave honoring the goddess of transformation. Sitting in the university campus auditorium, I could feel Rama's presence before he arrived. The room was electric with intensity and joy. When Rama arrived I felt that he was in a state of very high consciousness. His body was absolutely glowing. When speaking, he hardly opened his eyes, and when he was looking out at us, it seemed to me that he could not really see us. Not really.

Various groups of center members put on a series of spiritual plays — some silly and some moving. Rama afterwards commented on how fine the night was — the plays, the happiness of everyone present, and the night itself. He was speaking to us from the front of the room, where he was seated in an informal, at-home manner at a small student desk, his legs outstretched in front of him. He started telling us hysterically funny incidents from his life. The laughter in the room was clean, honest, and very loud. Rama half-opened his eyes every so often and smiled at us. Then he would continue his stories, making us laugh more and more. The energy in the room was at an all-time high. My body was gently vibrating and occasionally I could not feel it at all. It seemed as though the entire room was being melted in joy and power. I did not feel like a person during those moments. Rama kept joking. Then he paused for a moment and told us a secret. “This is what they meant when they spoke of Ramakrishna being drunken with ecstasy. Right now I'm just slipping in and out of nirvikalpa samadhi.” Some time later he opened his eyes, came back to us, and made us laugh again with his silly stories.

Hours after the festival ended, when I was alone in my room, I realized that I was a different person, although I was not sure what I had become. My body was actually luminous for awhile. Over the course of the following days, the energy gradually dissipated, but never completely. My being changed. After that evening I was able to meditate on a much higher level and hold light for longer periods of time. I was never again the same.

PHIL

I have been a student of Rama's for about a year and a half. I have been a musician for virtually all of my twenty-four years, having started piano lessons when I was five years old. Just before I met Rama I had begun to feel that my potential for making music was not being fully exploited. I felt that an important part of my being was lying dormant and was not being used in a productive way. One of the first things I felt upon meeting Rama was that he could awaken this deeper self, that I couldn't seem to get in touch with. Since beginning my study with Rama, I have seen gradual yet steady progress in the development of my deeper self, my intuitive side, and my music has taken on a whole new depth

and meaning. As my desire to compose and create has grown stronger, I have become much more prolific as a composer. The enjoyment I derive from the process of making music grows all of the time.

One evening not too long ago, Rama approached me at one of the weekly Center meetings in Los Angeles and invited me to take part in a project. He was planning a special evening for us that would include entertainment to be supplied by some of his students. There were to be plays, music, and comedy, all part of what would be kind of a spiritual Tonight Show. Rama wanted me to play synthesizer music during the evening's meditations. He told me, "You supply the music, and I'll supply the meditation. It should be fun." This sounded like an interesting idea to me. Rama has a yen for synthesizer music, and he often plays tapes of synthesized music during meditations. But since I had been around he had never had any live music at a meditation. I was very pleased and excited that he wanted to work with me in this way.

I began to think about suitable material to play for the upcoming "performance," but I was very busy at the time with studio recording work, and it was difficult to make time to work on this project. Rama had suggested that I make a tape of the music I was planning to play so that he could screen it before the performance. I had every intention of doing this, but things were so hectic in my life that ten days from the date of the program I hadn't even started recording the tape. As a matter of fact, the idea of making a tape had slipped my mind completely. Apparently Rama had a sense of what was going on, and at the Center meeting a week before the performance he greeted me by saying, "What's happening with the music? We've got a gig coining up, you know." I told him that I wasn't quite sure what to prepare, and that I was glad we were talking about it. He then said, "I like synthesizers, so bring your Jupiter (Rama's favorite synthesizer is the Jupiter, and he had recommended it to me when I was synthesizer-shopping a few months ago). You can play classical music if you like, or anything for that matter, as long as it has a high vibration. I want you to try and stay away from rock music." Then he continued, "I had hoped that you would make me a tape of what you planned to play, so that I could select which music would work best. We could avoid some very embarrassing moments that way. But we still have a week and a half before the gig. Make me a tape this week and bring it to the next Center meeting. I'll listen to it before the performance and let you know what I think, O.K.? Good, thank you." We said goodbye and Rama went on to other business. I left to go home.

Our conversation had a powerful impact on me. That night as I drove home, I realized clearly the pattern of my life. I have a tendency to wait until just before a deadline to get to work, and as a result, my preparation is always rushed and a bit haphazard. I have always gotten by with these sloppy work habits in school, music, and virtually every part of my life. In a way, I was attempting to get by again on this particular project. I had conveniently forgotten about the tape I was supposed to make and figured subconsciously that it wouldn't make any difference. But Rama was having none of this from me. I felt that he was using this project to force me to get my act together. While we were talking, it didn't seem like anything extraordinary was happening, we were just people having a conversation. But afterwards, I began to realize the implications of what he was communicating below the surface, and I was blown away. All of a sudden I was embarrassed and disgusted with myself for allowing my habit of procrastination to go on for so many years. I resolved to get to work immediately. I was never so productive as I was in that following week. I recorded the tape for Rama, ran all over town buying electronic equipment for the performance, hardly slept at all (but felt great anyway), and still had just enough time to take care of my usual worldly obligations.

The week flew by and the big night was upon us. I arrived at the hall (the Miramar Sheraton Hotel in Santa Monica, California) about two hours early to set up my equipment and rehearse to get a sound level on the music. Some of the other students were rehearsing the plays that were to be performed that evening, and there was a lot of hustling and bustling about to get everything ready before the people started to arrive. During this rehearsal period I could feel the energy level in the room rising gradually. Soon, students from Rama's Centers in San Francisco, San Diego and Los Angeles began to arrive, and after a while the room was filled with 425 excited spiritual seekers. When I was finished with my

preparations, I sat down with some other students and talked casually, meditating from time to time. Usually before performing a concert, I find that I experience a certain degree of nervousness and excitement. On this night I was excited, but in a different way. I wasn't nervous, but rather calm and collected, although I was undoubtedly stoned out of my mind being with Rama (and 425 other students).

Rama took the stage after a few minutes and talked for about a half hour, discussing the things we would be studying in the coming months, the desert trip we were taking the following day, and generally preparing us for the ensuing evening. While he talked I got really high, and felt extremely clear, with few thoughts in my mind. I saw the room fill with golden light as Rama spoke, and had almost forgotten that I was going to play in a few minutes. Then Rama finished his talk and introduced me to his students as a studio musician who would be playing during the meditations that evening. I walked to the front of the room and took my position behind the keyboards. He looked over at me and motioned for me to begin. As I began to play, I was amazed at the degree of clarity I was experiencing in my mind. I guess being in the presence of so much light and luminosity brought a tremendous level of clarity to the music (and everything else). The sounds from the synthesizers were jumping out at me as if I had never heard them before. I felt a wonderful sense of discovery as I played, and I found myself inundated by a flood of spontaneous, original ideas. Soon I found myself experimenting with some new concepts that I had not rehearsed. They were such logical ideas that I just found myself playing them automatically. I realized I was in a flow of inspiration. I was in another world for a time; everyone in the room disappeared and it was just me, my keyboards and the music. I felt that instead of creating the music I was merely a channel for the music to flow through. The clearer I became, the purer the music became. After about twenty minutes, I finished playing and looked up at Rama who was absorbed in samadhi as usual. He came out of samadhi, looked over at me and smiled, and then began to introduce the first play of the evening. I got up and returned to my seat in the audience.

Later on that evening, after all the other entertainers were finished, Rama had me play for another meditation. This time I got up to play with no preconceived ideas of what I was going to do. I just began playing and once again found myself in a flow. While I played I had the strange sensation of being out of my body. I would be playing in my usual manner when suddenly I would have the sensation of watching someone else's hands on the keyboard. I seemed to be looking in from another world, a world where everything sounded absolutely crystal clear. I heard myself creating effects in the music that I have never been able to achieve as well as I did that night. The most beautiful part of it all was that there was practically no effort involved on my part. The music seemed to flow and evolve of its own free will, while I casually observed it taking place. I played for about twenty minutes, and when I finished I looked up and noticed that Rama was in samadhi again. I had been so engrossed in the music that when I finished playing I noticed my body was in a state of excitation, with my heart pounding away at a quick rate. Then I saw Rama turn and focus on me. Almost immediately an extreme sense of calm enveloped my being, and I felt my heartbeat ease and slow down becoming much less intense. The room became thick with golden light, especially around Rama, who seemed to be in a constant state of dissolution. Soon after that, Rama bade everyone good night, and as I got up from my seat, I had to wipe the tears from my face that I hadn't felt until that moment.

HARUO

It was one afternoon in late February of this year that I saw the color poster announcing Rama's public meditation workshops near a busy intersection of downtown Berkeley, close to UC Campus, where students of various nationalities could be seen walking hurriedly across the streets. The poster listed Rama's past incarnations in Japan, Tibet and India together with place and dates of the workshops. I felt a certain affinity to him, though I had never heard of Rama before. I mentioned his public meditations to a couple of friends. We attended the workshops, and on the night of the Intensive, we filled out the applications to study with him. For some reason, it seemed a very natural thing to do.

Like most spiritual seekers, I have attended numerous lectures and Intensives which were given by different teachers, but I have never given serious thought to studying with any of them. Perhaps I was waiting for the right teacher.

My first impression of the public meditation workshop at the Moscone Center was that of clean, contemporary atmosphere. Everything seemed right — the electronic music for meditation, just a hint of incense, no extraneous trappings. Then, there was the unpretentious presence of Rama. There was an aura of beauty and refinement; I didn't know then that Lakshmi, the name of Rama's spiritual organization, is also the Goddess of Beauty.

Like most San Francisco members, I attended my first center meeting in the middle of May. It has been just over three months since I started to meditate with Rama. Therefore, my experiences are limited, but at the same time extraordinary, in the sense that so many things could be experienced during such a short time. Before studying with Rama, I had never had any visual experiences such as seeing light, auras, etc. So when people mentioned seeing the room suddenly fill with golden light, or Rama disappearing, I said to myself, "That sort of thing is not for me. I have no latent ability for such things." And, nothing special happened for several meetings. But, something did begin to happen. At the public workshop on UC campus — it was July 23, 1982 - for the first time, I saw Rama disappear and reappear many times. For a brief second, the whole stage disappeared also. It was unbelievable. Then a week later at the center meeting in San Francisco, Rama's face disappeared and changed into a sort of light emanation. At later meetings, I saw various colors swirling around Mm and his body become semi-transparent. I could see the vertical lines of the drapery through his body. My meditation began to undergo some changes. During my morning meditation recently, the field of vision behind my closed eyes changed into a gold color. Doughnut-shaped rings appeared and disappeared several times, then there was just golden sky; the meditation was incredibly easy. At other times, there was a bright purple background with golden doughnuts. I have no idea what these rings mean, but certainly Rama's vortex of energy/consciousness seems to be stirring up something within me.

But more than anything else, more than any kind of extraordinary experiences, I appreciate my good fortune to be in the presence of an enlightened teacher. Though I am still a rather cautious student, I feel that to be with Rama is to be in the presence of living dharma. When I first heard him say, "I love flowers because they are beautiful, and they die," I was deeply moved. It was said so casually. I thought only a Self Realized being could say it so naturally. Was he saying, "See the radiance and beauty of the Infinite shining through everything, but at the same time be conscious of the transitory nature of all things — Nirvana is Samsara! Get it?"

At the beginning, I wrote that perhaps I was waiting for the right teacher to come. The truth seems to be, a teacher was waiting for the right students to come to him. I remember him saying recently, "You will never know how hard I worked to bring you here"

WAYNE

At a weekly meeting, early in the development of the San Francisco Center, the topic of spiritual teachers was more than a hot issue, to say the least.

Some students insisted on bringing up the names of different spiritual teachers in a pro and con debate. Rama was severely against it. He said this practice wasn't healthy and that each teacher served a purpose on the spiritual path.

One student continued to query. He asked Rama what he thought about Avatars.

Rama responded, "I don't believe in Avatars. If you look to someone who you believe has all the answers, then you start to think you don't have to do the work yourself. You put the Avatar or All-Knowing Teacher up on a pedestal, just out of your reach. Then, when you don't get what you want, you smash the pedestal and blame the teacher."

Evidently, the same student still wasn't quite satisfied, because he then asked Rama if he believed in Divine Manifestations.

To my surprise, Rama retorted, "Yes. I believe in Divine Manifestations."

Then, with his eyes fixed directly on the student, Rama added, "And I'm looking at one right now."

He paused momentarily, letting us digest his poignant response. Then, he continued.

"Do you understand what I am saying? I see everyone as a Divine Manifestation. No one is more so than another, as far as I'm concerned.

"You all have these strange ideas about Avatars and Divine Manifestations. And all these concepts have to go, even God. Eventually, you have to let go of all your belief systems and become focused only on awareness itself."

In the beginning, it was hard for me to remain interested in all the conceptual talk about Avatars and Divine Manifestations, when I had a very real teacher sitting right in front of me.

By the end of the meeting, I felt as though Rama took a blowtorch to every dogmatic attachment that existed in the room. I was so uplifted and invigorated, I didn't even mind the singed eyebrows.

STEVE

The meditation ended.

"You disappeared," called an astonished voice from the back of the room. The statement, directed toward Rama, carried a hint of inquiry, as if the person making it knew what he had seen, but still sought confirmation. "Yep," Rama replied, "How many of you saw that?" I raised my hand along with a number of other people. "Quite a few," he said, "not bad."

Not bad, indeed.

* * *

Even before it started, this center meeting felt different to me. My name is Steve. I am thirty years old and have been a student in Rama's San Diego Center since May of 1982.

The time for Rama to arrive drew near. Students found their seats and waited for him.

He soon came in through a side door. Someone dimmed the overhead lights. Tangerine Dream's latest album blared loud, kinetic music from the cassette player onstage. I prepared a scenario of events in my mind as Rama walked up onto the stage. First, he would turn off the music, then settle onto the sofa, probably chat with us awhile and prepare us for the meditation. That was the usual course of events. But not tonight. Tonight was a night for changes. Letting the music play on, he walked to the front of the stage, stood there with his arms folded and looked out at us. Without any of the normal build-up, he took us directly into meditation. We quickly entered into a high state of consciousness.

A bright, golden light emanated from Rama. He performed several mudras, various hand positions which channel energy, and sent the light flowing through the room in time with the music.

The room started to feel hot and stuffy. I found it uncomfortable until I realized that the heat was the tactile counterpart of the light. I was uncomfortable because it was dissolving me. What does it feel like to dissolve? Imagine, if you will, that you are made up of numerous children's building blocks. The blocks, assembled in patterns and carefully balanced, form your concept of 'you.' Now imagine that someone aims a laser beam at you and disintegrates some of the blocks. The ones that are hit are completely destroyed. Their destruction, in turn, leaves vacant spots, so the remaining blocks shift positions and fall into places to fill these voids. Very few of the blocks are left in their original places. This is what it felt like happened to me as the light burned away parts of my 'self.'

Still deep in meditation, Rama walked to the middle of the stage. As I watched, his head assumed

different forms, then disappeared altogether. I couldn't believe it. I could see his body, but not his head. While my mind worked to ignore what I was seeing, Rama moved to the back of the stage and stood facing us.

I knew intuitively that something extraordinary was about to happen. It did. Rama vanished! His whole body disappeared this time. One moment I could see him clearly, the next moment he was gone. There was only the blank wall where he had been. I blinked. No change. A tremor of shock jolted my body. I gasped at the impact of what I was seeing. I shut my eyes, unwilling to face the evidence before me, but when I re-opened them, he was still gone.

He soon reappeared in the same spot, dissolved again, came back, then dissolved once more. By the time he had returned for the third time, I was satisfied that I was actually seeing him disappear; that my eyes were not deceiving me. A sense of excited awe mingled with calm acceptance within me. Awe, because I was seeing something which shook the foundations of my belief system; acceptance, because I knew I was finally seeing something on the physical plane that I had already accepted inwardly as real.

In months of meditating with Rama and feeling him transform my daily life, I had come to believe him capable of anything. Seeing him disappear helped to crystallize that belief. It also made and is making it easier to accept the less tangible aspects of his guidance. In these months, I have seen how easily spiritual faith is trampled by daily life. As my trust in Rama grows, it must withstand pressure from all sides. Well-meaning friends joust with it. My own fears, my rational mind and my expectations of life all throw stumbling blocks in front of it. Sometimes, when the doubts are strongest, I just have to stop and say to myself, "What in the world am I doing? Is this for real?"

Seeing Rama disappear has given me a powerful weapon to use when these doubts arise. I can look back on the experience and say, "Yes, there is more to reality than I was led to believe. Even if I can't see what's out there, I can see there is something, something worth striving to perceive. Although it's beyond my comprehension, I do have something tangible now, something to spur me on." Although unrequited faith has a certain beauty, it's important to see it confirmed. This experience substantiated my faith in Rama.

It also helped to talk with other students after the meditation. Many had seen what I saw. But, I know that even without that confirmation, and even if no one else had spoken up first, that without hesitation I would have been able to say, "I saw you disappear."

DEBBY

Some meditations with Rama are so powerful that I find it difficult to integrate the experience into my conscious mind. One such meditation was on August 17, 1982 at our Tuesday night center meeting for the San Diego students. Rama walked into the meditation hall without saying a word, put on some electronic music and dimmed the lights in the room. All I could see was Rama standing on the stage. It was the beginning of a mystical experience.

The first thing that I perceived coming from Rama was a tremendous amount of gold light filling the entire room. Rama walked backwards, extending his arms out in front of himself at full length and turning his hands around in slow motion. As I watched Rama, the room dissolved into waves of light. I could go back and forth between seeing the form of the room and its dissolution, right before my very eyes! While I was watching Rama, I realized he wasn't walking backwards, he was actually levitating. "Whoa! I feel like I'm going up too."

When Rama reached the wall behind him, he walked right through it. I couldn't believe what I was seeing, so I looked again, but he wasn't there. Once Rama reappeared, I could not deny the experience. It had quite an impact on me. As Rama walked towards the front of the stage, he stopped about halfway and lifted his arms above his head and brought his hands together. He stayed in that position for a minute or two and then, as he was lowering his arms, I watched his head completely disappear.

Later Rama asked for our comments about our experience during the meditation. I raised my hand and said, "Rama, when you brought your arms down from above your head, I saw your head disappear."

Rama said, "Yes, like this," and he demonstrated it again. "Wasn't that neat?" he asked with a grin.

"Yes," I said, "but I can't believe it." I began to relay more of my experience, but Rama interrupted.

"Wait! Stop! What do you mean you don't believe it?"

I was so excited that I skipped over his question and continued to describe my experience. "I saw the room explode into light and it was beautiful," I said.

Rama agreed, "Yes, it is beautiful; the world is beautiful." That meeting was a very special one for me, because for the time I was able to consciously accept the reality of my experience. I could really feel a part of my being out in the cosmos amongst thousands of beautiful, glittering stars.

DANNY

I entered the meditation hall and there it was, the L.A. Center. I had just moved to Malibu, but had been attending both the L.A. and San Diego center meetings for some time due to a series of remarkable circumstances. The Infinite was kind. During the weeks I had attended both meetings I had naturally formed impressions and opinions about the two centers. I was especially interested in the L.A. Center, as I would soon be a member. The San Diego Center was closing.

Anywhere that Rama is meditating is my kind of place, but I must say that I greatly preferred the San Diego meetings. This is what you might expect, as most of my friends were there and I felt comfortable in their company. The San Diego Center, however, was in the "doghouse" spiritually during the last weeks of its existence. At one of the last meetings Rama really laid into us for lack of response and energy. No matter, as far as I was concerned I had one of the finest meditations I can remember that night. All of those last meetings were wonderful for me.

The L.A. meetings were never quite so good for me. Maybe it was my prejudgment that kept me from relaxing. It was my opinion, after going to both meetings for some time, that the L.A. center was like a nightclub compared to the San Diego center. The meetings were loud with people talking, sexual vibrations flew around like howitzer shells, and people didn't dress as nicely. All in all, it was much more casual than the San Diego meetings. But hey, the Los Angeles folks weren't getting reprimanded for being lackadaisical. Obviously both centers had their good and bad points, and rather than get caught up in the social scene at either of the meetings, I knew it would be best to be neither attracted nor repulsed and just keep my eyes on the light and Rama. Alas I am not enlightened, and my biased opinions often came out in scandalous reproofs against the L.A. Center. Not good.

Then came the last center meeting of the second trimester of 1982, on September 1st. It was an L.A. meeting. In many ways it turned out to be one of the most wonderful I've ever attended. That same day I had moved into a house in Malibu. I was now officially in the L.A. Center. As fate would have it, it was the night Rama would put my opinions and judgments about the L.A. Center, and the study in general, to rest. He would do so with a smile and a lot of love.

I had no sooner entered the meditation hall when, wouldn't you know it, a woman, actually a young girl, walked by me in a wet pair of shorts and an equally wet T-shirt. I supposed she had just been swimming at a nearby beach. "Welcome to the L.A. Center," I said to myself as I sat down. She sat next to me.

After revealing many wonderful things to us in his talk, it was time for Rama to meditate with us. When he came around the room with his eyes, Rama stopped on me for some time. Inwardly I was thinking, "What a drag that every time you come to meditate on me, my mind seems more full of thoughts than ever." But then I remembered something he had said earlier in his talk, and I said to myself, "This has nothing to do with what's really happening." As I had the thought, Rama smiled in that special way

that only happens when he's meditating. I wondered why.

Then I saw her, over to my left. "Oh great," I thought, "just what I need, lower thoughts while Rama's meditating on me. Wonderful!" Then it came to me, lightly and happily, that none of that stuff had anything to do with what was really going on, either. Before I even had a chance to think of feeling guilty about low vibes, high vibes, or any vibes at all, I said inwardly, "Yeah, that's got nothing to do with it." Instantly Rama not only smiled very exaggeratedly, but he lifted his eyebrows up and down like Groucho Marx and shook his head up and down a few times.

There we were, smiling. Two happy critters, soaring high above all the judgments and thoughts. As soon as the meditation was over Rama said, "We had a nice dialogue."

ROSEMARY

Rama is a rare integration of spiritual liberation and humanness. Although he is a "traditional" teacher, his appearance and personality defy traditional concepts of a spiritual master; no turban or beard or ceremony or ritual. He looks, in fact, quite ordinary. But there is an energy, a vibrancy, about him which is easy to detect. He is tall and walks rather loose-jointedly, like one who is carefree and spontaneous. He has the demeanor of an athlete but not the physique! His legs are long, perhaps too long, thin, yet muscular, and his weight fluctuates rapidly. The physical paradox of Rama is that he can seem to be both very strong and not strong simultaneously. He has said that he is not very strong physically but that his inner strength is tremendous.

Rama has noted, and rightly so, that a great deal of strength is required on the part of a student who studies with him. From this vehicle of the Infinite comes such a powerful energy and transforming force that one must be prepared for and willing to endure the most exquisite pains of inner upheaval, destruction and rebirth.

Fortunately Rama is blessed with a childlike playfulness and a sense of humor. He insists that we enjoy ourselves, laugh and have fun while everything we have ever known dissolves before our eyes. As a new student this seemed impossible to me. My natural inclination was to be serious. But Rama's joy at bringing us to oneness with God eventually wipes away any grimness or sadness.

It is his enjoyment of life on Earth while attaining full self realization that attracts me to him as my spiritual teacher. This integration is what makes it possible for him to succeed as a teacher in the Western world. No monastic isolation or Tibetan retreat for him! He thrives in the midst of American practicality and sophistication.

An example of this integration can be seen during meditations with Rama. He arrives at a session in jogging shorts and jacket removes his shoes in the Oriental tradition, attaches a miniature microphone to his collar, comfortably slips into a full lotus position, and meditates to the electronic-synthesizer music of Jean-Michel Jarre's *Oxygene* or *Equinoxe*. Surrounded by things from his students — flowers or perhaps a funny stuffed bird — he may speak of Bhakti Yoga, the path of love. Or he may speak of Karma Yoga, the path of self-giving. Or he may speak of mysticism or Shakespeare or freeway driving or computers. Or he may spend an hour or so talking about his favorite movies. A science fiction and horror movie buff, Rama discusses movies he would like his students to see, i.e. *E.T.*, *Poltergeist*, *Blade Runner*, etc. He seems equally fascinated by Ramakrishna and by modern technology.

Yet there is no final, firm description anyone could give of Rama. He will appear differently from hour to hour, day to day, student to student. He is fluid and ever-changing, like Eternity. One hour he may be the professor, Dr. Lenz, discussing the truth and beauty of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. The next hour his appearance and voice may change to one more intense and serious. He will say, "I'm a very strict spiritual teacher. I'm very old school in my ways. There is enlightenment and there is ignorance and there is nothing in between." Then again he will become childlike and clownish and a student will ask an irrelevant question. He'll laugh, "Ah c'mon, gimme a break!" Or he may meditate, entering *Nirvikalpa*

Samadhi with a toy frog resting on his knee. The unexpected should always be expected.

During intense meditation, Rama transforms in countless ways, frequently becoming a reflection of the perceiver. I have seen him take on the physical appearance of a boy, a man, a girl, a woman, a soldier in military uniform, an old Oriental master.

Often he leaves these sessions in great physical pain. None of us can ever fully understand the extent of his sacrifice so that we might also become fully Self Realized. There is no jealousy or egotism about him. He wants us to receive everything he has received. Such self-giving is the ultimate gift. "I am perfectly willing to be the slave of Eternity," he says happily.

On one or two occasions he has spoken in a deep, powerful voice with a force so explosive that the very room quaked and lightning-like flashes burst all around him. In those moments my whole being trembled with the knowledge of the presence of God.

However he may appear or sound, however changeable he may be, one thing is clear to me about Rama: he is an integration of Godliness and humanness. And he carries the message to the world that what he has received can be received by all who are willing to work for it.

LISA

Shortly before Rama arrives at center meetings, the lights in the room are dimmed, though the stage lights are left on, the tape player is started, and we begin to meditate with the music.

Usually, when Rama arrives, he bounces up the stairs to the stage, smiles, says hello or some other cryptic statement, and busies himself with settling onto his chair and getting organized.

Tuesday, July 17, was different.

Rama walked heavily up the stairs, turned off the lights on the stage, and walked straight through a door at the back of the stage. Shortly after the tape player stopped, he emerged, walked to the front of the stage, put a new tape in the player, stood straight in the center front of the stage, with his arms crossed over his chest, and silently scanned his students. He never uttered a word.

The tape began to play. It was a Tangerine Dream tape. The music was electronic, resonant, and penetrating. There did not, at first, seem to be a tune. There did not even seem to be notes -- just resounding, varied-pitched vibrations. They echoed through the room, making the air shiver.

Rama moved to a spot several feet behind the couch. Standing silently, he began to move his arms. Sometimes he would hold them in front of himself, turning his hands. Other times he would raise both arms straight above his head with the palms facing towards us. His body began to disintegrate. There seemed to be only individual particles filling the space where his body had been.

He came forward. He again began to move his arms. Then he stopped and just stood quietly for a moment or two. The music shimmered. Suddenly, he turned, walked to the back of the stage, stopped beside the piano, and disappeared. There was not even an outline of his form. Nothing. He was gone completely. But the stage and everything on it glowed.

Out of nowhere, he was there again. He came forward again, stopping at center stage. He stood, motionless. His head became like a TV screen. Various soft-hued colors flickered across it. Many different faces replaced his — sometimes old, sometimes oriental, sometimes bearded. His head lost its boundaries as it began to flow, assuming different shapes.

Repeatedly, his head would become encircled with a misty light, usually lavender in color. It would swirl around his head, then pulsate back through the room, enveloping us.

He raised his right arm with the elbow bent and fingers outstretched. He slowly swept it once to the left, then back to the right. It seemed to become elongated to twice its normal length and began to glow a brilliant yellow white. His fingers, too, elongated, becoming gleaming tentacles of light.

All at once, the room melted into solid blackness. There was no room. There were no students. There was no me. There was only an awareness of an almost tactile blackness. At the center was a brilliant sphere of light.

Some time later, the room returned to normal. Rama turned off the cassette player, sat down on his chair and said, "There is no time."

JESSICA

I am meditating. The room is thick with gold light. The people sitting in front of me appear as dark shapes outlined in gold. The silence is deep. Rama is scanning the room as he usually does, meditating on first one person and then another. As he approaches me, I can feel the energy level increasing. It is so intense that, had my eyes been closed, I would still have known that he was looking in my direction. The instant that he focuses on me, the gold intensifies and a misty white light fills the room. All sights and sounds fade until I am aware only of his presence and mine. As Rama directs his energy towards me, I feel my heart opening, and I am overwhelmed by a tremendous feeling of love for him. I am totally swept up in the experience. Nothing else exists. I watch as he takes on many different forms. I see males and females, both young and old, of many different cultures. One face is particularly compelling. It is that of an Indian (Hindu) and although I have never seen it before, it seems somehow familiar. I have the feeling that I am with my master in a previous life. My heart is full to the point of bursting. Tears are streaming down my face. I am conscious only of the desire to serve.

LOUIS

At first glance you'd think he was nobody special, and, if you were to ask him, he'd say you were right. But if you were around him, say in the same room with him, for any length of time, your opinion would change dramatically. For he has a certain magnetism that draws you closer, a force, subtle at first, that piques your interest initially and later becomes so compelling that you are helpless and you fall in love. Although he admits he is a rare commodity in this world — how many people know that they and God are not separate? — his beauty is that he considers himself "no more important than a flower." This, to me, is what makes Rama so intriguing.

At first I couldn't stand to be near Rama. I went to a few meetings and, arriving early, would sit near the front of the room. Inevitably, I would walk out of the meeting dazed and disoriented not knowing what had happened. My head felt as if it had been crammed full of cotton, and, as I made my way back to my car I couldn't think straight. I couldn't think at all.

Rama would tell us, "If this isn't fun for you, if your whole being isn't thrilled by this experience, then you shouldn't be here. You should leave. I offer a program for the serious student, one who is interested in attaining enlightenment in this lifetime. If you don't feel totally committed, then you shouldn't waste your time because the process won't work for you. You should move on. There are many other good teachers out there. Go to one of them."

I never considered leaving, and soon I discovered the key to spiritual growth. It was so simple. Rama is a source of tremendous light — "the stuff," he says, "the universe is made of." I was like a seedling directly exposed to the sun. I was getting burned, or as Rama would say, "being over-amped." Rama had fully bloomed and I hadn't yet sprouted. Rama told us, "My story is all over, yours is just beginning." I needed a place, for a while, that was cool and dark — a place to germinate. So I buried myself in the crowd at the back of the room and waited. As the months went by, I crept closer to the front until, after several months, I could sit a few rows from the front with no ill effects.

Many of these early meetings were in a small auditorium that held about 200 people. I remember one

Sunday evening in particular. I came to the weekly meeting a little early and saw an empty seat in the front row. After considering taking a seat farther back I thought to myself, “What the hell,” and, casting all caution aside, took the front seat.

Rama spent much of the evening trying, again, to convince people to leave. He liked people to feel good about leaving, so he provided many reasons why they should go. He called this being “a full service spiritual organization.” He didn't want lukewarm people — they would dilute the atmosphere and hold back the progress of the serious student. He spent about an hour and a half going over and over every possible reason why we shouldn't come back. Then, having exhausted himself and us with the issue, right before our last meditation, Rama said, “I am going to give you a gift.”

The lights were dimmed and Rama started meditating while sitting on a table at the front of the room. He sat up straight in his lotus posture, closed his eyes, rested his palms face up on his knees for a few seconds and then fit them together, one on top of the other, resting in his lap. At this point he was gone. He was in a different world and, if you were sensitive enough, you could sometimes feel and even see that world.

That night, I sat up straight in my wooden chair and watched Rama. As always, I kept my eyes open because it was easier for Rama to transfer transcendental light, called shakti, that way. My breathing slowed down and became shallow. I ignored my thoughts, and soon my mind became still. I basked in the light. My hands felt hot, and I could feel my ring as my fingers expanded due to the increased blood in them. I heard a high-pitched tone in my head which lasted several minutes.

Then my consciousness shifted, and I could sense the meditation deepening as Rama's body appeared to slide first to the left and then to the right. It was as if he were sitting on a skateboard and someone was tilting the room back and forth. The scene reminded me of a reflection in a lake. Someone had thrown a stone in the lake causing waves to spread out, disturbing the reflection. Everything became filmy; nothing was solid anymore. Rama's body was soon surrounded by a beautiful white light, so brilliant at times that his physical form was entirely obliterated from view.

Toward the end of the meditation, a beautiful bolt of light about three feet high and an inch wide appeared in the front of the room near the blackboard. It was like a rod of light that had bundles of concentrated light every few inches. I was stunned at first and thought that maybe I was seeing things, hallucinating. But no, out of the corner of my eye I saw the person next to me turn his head. His mouth dropped open as he looked at it. If I was crazy, I wasn't the only one.

It was as if someone had unzipped a pouch in thin air and dropped a string of white Christmas lights through the opening. It shimmered and glowed for about ten seconds and then vanished as suddenly as it had appeared. I felt a thrill run up and down my spine, and a deep gratitude enveloped me for having been able to witness such a sight. It wasn't just a light; I felt it was alive. It was never discussed or even mentioned. I think about it now and then and wonder if I'll ever see it again. It was a beautiful gift, one that I'll never forget.

JAMES

It was a warm, balmy evening and as I approached the meeting room for the night's talk and meditation, I couldn't help but feel a special lightness and clarity in the air. The moon shimmered behind the many eucalyptus trees, and the smell of mock orange seemed to linger, stronger than usual, throughout the campus grounds. It had been a busy day at the clinic, and my thoughts were starting to wind down. Being the director of a large, holistic medical center is not without its constant challenges and, at times, the task can seem almost overwhelming. And yet, whenever I work hard toward a meaningful purpose, I feel more alive, more deserving of joy and peace. I was glad to be feeling that way tonight. I had seen Rama two times before and I knew that meeting such a teacher was a rare gift. I wanted to be as alert as possible.

I entered the room and sat down in the center toward the front. The previous times I had selected a seat in the back. Before long I was meditating on my own, preparing myself for the evening. Most of my thoughts were ignored. A few were persistent.

“How can someone so young be so spiritually evolved?” my mind asked itself.

“Maybe it's not the first time for him,” I replied in silence.

“That's true ... he does seem familiar. He doesn't look familiar, but he feels familiar. Somehow I trust him without fully knowing why.”

“But that can of diet orange pop that he drinks ... it's definitely not standard yogi food. Not to mention the music ...” I mindlessly added.

“Maybe he's the teacher I was told I would meet in my early thirties.”

“These thoughts don't matter,” I concluded.

I began to watch the space between the thoughts and soon a stillness entered me while the friendly chatter of the other students and visitors continued. The room was charged with an unspoken anticipation and everyone looked up as Rama casually entered the room. Light. Friendly. Playful. He seemed so unconcerned about how he was received. Having spent several years in the Zen and Yogic traditions, I found his manner refreshing. He slowly sat down amidst the colorful flowers and the modern stereo recorder. He delicately fumbled with a collection of cassette tapes as if to put us all at ease with his humanness.

Suddenly his image changed. I saw him as a much older man cloaked in a traditional Tibetan robe. The spiritual authority he commanded, but didn't seem inclined to display, became more apparent to me. I wondered if others saw him in such a way.

After a brief and informal talk, we began to meditate. The university lecture hall was quickly transformed into a place of radiant light and my heart opened naturally. I felt no hesitation surrendering to the timelessness that now pervaded the room. More and more I knew I had come home. Following the meditation and a short talk, Rama began to discuss the difference between Enlightenment, Self Realization, and Liberation. He talked of how when one merges in Nirvana, the one who enters never really returns. As he continued to talk of the many sides of enlightenment, the only real question that I've ever truly had began to rise within me. It was a question that I had asked before but no answer had yet satisfied me. It was a question that I had carried with me for a long time.

My thoughts danced between his words. “It's true that Liberation is the culmination of Life's journey,” I said to myself. ‘And yet what of the Bodhisattva's Vow? The other masters say that they will continue to return to Earth as long as the last mosquito is still in bondage. Is the individual separate from the many? Can a liberated being turn away from the suffering of others, illusion though it is?’ Such thoughts passed through my mind as if they were their own master.

I focused again on Rama. A childlike simplicity seemed to blend so effortlessly with a deep wisdom. I knew I had to ask him. My heart began to beat faster and I began to feel waves of Light passing through my body. My breathing was both deep and shallow at the same time.

“Why am I getting so excited?” I asked myself.

“Aside from a thank-you, it's the first time you've talked to him,” my mind returned.

“But it's more than that.”

“Well, maybe you're just afraid to get an answer ... maybe that's it. I've used this uncertainty as a way to not fully commit myself ... maybe I don't want to know.”

Now Rama started to look right at me as he talked. My heart beat quicker and my palms revealed some moisture.

“How can one question be so important?” I asked of myself. “Why make such an issue of it?” My

mind ignored these inquiries and continued the internal dialogue.

“But isn't it true that liberation occurs individual by individual? Others have been liberated without having to return. Yes, but the most evolved seem to return. Yes, but perhaps it's just such a vow to help liberate all other beings that is the ultimate excuse to avoid merging with the Eternal. Perhaps there is no one separate to save.”

“Enough of this! Just ask him the question!” I demanded.

Immediately there was a break in his discussion and my hand raised without a delay. He turned to me and smiled as if he expected the question, as if he knew of my crazy dialogue with myself.

“Rama?”

“Yes?”

“How can we integrate liberation with the Bodhisattva's Vow?”

He paused and allowed the question to linger. He knew how to capture the most out of this experience for me. He appeared to reflect for a few more minutes. He looked at me, paused again, and then got ready to talk. I was ready to hear his response.

“This is an important question. I've gone around with it for awhile and this is my answer to myself. I have chosen to let the Infinite decide for me. I couldn't possibly make such a choice on my own. If I come back ... I come back; if I don't, I don't”

“Yes, to give up the choice ... any other way would be a trap,” I concluded in agreement.

“In this way Liberation can take place without any hindrance,” he added. He looked directly at me and asked if I understood. My heart continued to open, my mind was now uncluttered, and deep within the problem disappeared. With deep gratitude and with tears in my eyes, I nodded that I did understand. We looked at each other for a timeless moment and I knew from where the answer had come.

“Let the Infinite decide,” echoed throughout my being for the rest of the evening.

Walking back to my car I felt released from some lifelong concern to figure out existence. “Let the Infinite decide for you.” My mind was clear and empty. The campus sprinklers had left tiny pools of water on the lawns and the light from the moon reflected in these pools giving the night many twinkling eyes — eyes that far away and yet kind and warm.

CINDY

During a center meeting, a student asked Rama a question — “Why does fear arise during meditation?”

“Because,” Rama answered, “you're seeking power when you should be seeking love and light.” One dozen words, they burnt.

“Some people like a wild ride, a rush during meditation,” Rama continued.

(“Yes, but wasn't that right?” my inner dialogue began.)

“Real light is charming and light,” he said. “It does not have an occult rush.”

(Had I ever known real light?)

“You become what you focus on. If you focus on power, you become power. Power is the occult. Politics is a very occult realm.”

(If politics was occult, what about my field of work, the entertainment industry, which was filled with power and control-seekers?)

“Power is the great test of a person,” Rama stated. “With the occult, you'll get the power to fulfil your desires but that only occurs if you have desires.”

(Desires — I thought they were my birthright. I thought you manipulated people and circumstances until you got what you wanted.)

Rama added that the path he teaches is “a certain attitude toward life — gentleness, honesty and endurance. It does not appeal to many because it does not have that heavy surge.”

(Was I really Rama's student?)

Fact: I had recently moved into a new apartment overlooking the ocean. I had named the ocean “power” and taken wild, scary mental rides through its currents of tremendous force. I thought that was spiritual.

It was occult. Mea culpa.

I recalled an image from my meditation. It was of a life from the deep past when I knew Rama and his friend, Neil. We sat silently near a fire in a dense, mystical atmosphere that doesn't exist now. I was a hoary woman trained in wielding the powers of nature, and Neil and Rama had traveled to meet me. Neil regarded me fearfully, but Rama was neither afraid nor terribly interested. He perceived my limitation, which was egotism. He gazed off into space. He was as beyond my grasp as a handful of air.

During the center meeting, I placed this image in context, realizing that power had been my focus for life after life. The point was clear: Eons ago, Rama had made a step which I had not made, Then and now, I tried to control, while Rama had let go — and become infinite.

I suddenly realized why happiness was not among my circle of close acquaintances. It was the rush. The rush had deceived me. With it, I had sought power over others, over nature, over meditation. But happiness was not found on the rush channel.

“Something within you must release that occult orientation,” Rama said. “The change must come from within.”

As I sat in the meeting hall, I resolved to change.

As soon as I was alone, driving back home, I reached inside myself and grabbed me by the gut. 'Fool,' I hissed, 'throw out the power grabber.'

I reasoned with the witch within. What had a power-orientation gotten me? Enslavement. Seeking to acquire earthly power in its many forms had thrown me off the spiritual path for countless lifetimes.

'I swear to become new,' I thought. 'But how?'

I planned a ceremony of change. I built up to it like a murderer. It took place two nights later on my balcony overlooking the sea. First, I renamed the ocean “love.” Second, I told myself, 'From now on, you are focusing on the heart chakra, experiencing love and light, however mellow, and that's it.'

I began to meditate and continued for hour after hour, focusing with absolute intensity and force on the opening of my heart chakra. 'Subtle,' I repeatedly told myself. 'Don't look for the rush. This is subtle and gentle.'

I was desperate to change. I meditated on through the night, praying to Lakshmi, to Rama and to Ramakrishna to help me alter the direction of my spiritual path once and for all, even if it meant going back to the very beginning.

'Think,' I demanded. 'You have a great teacher. Now get the right angle on your spiritual path while he is here, teaching.'

I went to bed in a frenzy, an agony of new heart-love feelings.

In the early morning, I was awakened by an ecstatic bubbling sensation all over my body. My awareness was tugged way out of my body to the farthest reaches of space.

Ever since that night, I have readjusted my meditation over and over again away from power-seeking and toward the heart center.

PETER**January, 1982: During a Center Meeting.**

I had been meditating with Rama as usual when, before my astonished eyes, his face and body became like the purest, most dazzling molten gold. Golden-white light streamed from him in all directions like the most brilliant star-fire — so bright that the room and all else vanished from my sight. It was like gazing at the midday sun in all its glory. A beautiful rainbow shaped like a graceful lotus-flower surrounded his golden form with the purest, most delicate of rainbow colors; colors like those adorning the most perfect of sunrises. Feelings of joy rose in me upon seeing a Self Realized being in the beauty of his perfection, and I shook myself and gazed in awe, in disbelief, that such beauty could exist.

PETER

There were about a hundred or so of us present on this evening, one of our weekly meetings with Rama. The meditation hall is built like a small theater and contains a stage with a piano on it — a typical clubhouse structure. Rama came out onto the stage, turned out the lights to almost total darkness, and began to blast us with mystical power without saying a word. I felt my awareness instantly shift levels; it was as if I were rising out of my body, up and away from my physical surroundings. Accompanying this feeling was an observation that the room was filling with light — a bright, swirling mist — and that there was no difference between myself and this light. I was seeing on two different levels: the physical plane, and a dimension where our normal physical reality does not exist; where I was but a point of consciousness that witnessed passing events. I then felt us being transported to the desert. Rama often takes us there to perform acts of power and to effect transformations in our beings with the incredible power that is stored there. My physical awareness faded in and out. I could see trees, rocks and other scenery amid the brightness, mostly around Rama's form. Transparent, glowing images dissolved and changed form when Rama moved his hands in certain mudras, or hand gestures. These worlds, other realities, were in constant motion and flowing all around us, each different in a subtle way; they were like slowly passing frames on a multidimensional filmstrip. Seeing them I experienced a floating lightness, an intense warmth and euphoria, and an awareness that we were all dissolving in a vortex of immense power. I felt overwhelmed and powerless to move amid the swirling energy.

Then Rama walked upstage and simply vanished. My body contracted with fright. As he walked in front of the piano, Rama's body became transparent for an instant — I could see the piano through him. He stood still for a moment, dissolving and fading in and out of my vision. The atmosphere seemed almost thick with power. As he walked back downstage and sat down to discuss the experience with us, I relaxed. After describing my experience to him a question rose to my mind.

“My old way of life isn't working any more and I haven't learned the new way yet. What am I doing wrong?”

“You're not doing anything wrong,” he replied. “You're being too heavy. Your mind is telling you you're not happy. You're being a wimp, (laughter) Why not lighten up a little and have some fun?”

He spoke seriously, but there was great warmth and tenderness in his voice. I started to smile.

“Do you know what life is like?” he asked.

I shook my head, smiling. “Life is like a tomato! (laughter) Did you know that a tomato is a fruit?”

“Yes. They also were once believed to be poisonous.”

“That's right, but they can't fool me. It's obvious that a tomato is a vegetable!”

I was laughing now.

“Sometimes I feel like I'm a prisoner in this body,” I said. “Sometimes I just want to dissolve and be free.”

“Yes, but you shouldn't worry about all that stuff. I never did. I just went for the love and service to others. Do you remember that line in Blade Runner?”

Blade Runner was a current movie out then, starring Harrison Ford.

“Wake up! It's time to die!” “I said.

“No, that was just a flashy line. What was the main line?”

The main line was one said by Gaff — a usually silent character in the film who witnessed and clarified the action in various ways — to our hero Harrison Ford at several key points in the film, referring to Ford's hopeless love affair with a beautiful android whose lifespan was destined to end shortly. The line captures the inevitability of our own death and underlines the need to live each moment to the fullest while the breath of life is still within us. Rama was stressing the point that we don't have time to fret about our lives and indulge in lower forms of consciousness while the precious moments are slipping away. I quoted the line for him.

“Too bad she won't live. But then again, who does?” “

“Right. Do you know what life is like?”

I was really laughing now; the meditation was working and joy was bubbling up from deep inside.

“I think I indulge in myself too much,” I said.

He nodded vigorously with a broad grin.

“Maybe I should stop?”

Again the nod and the grin.

During the conversation, and from the very beginning, he had not stopped meditating on us; it was all power and dissolution. The evening had been incredible. There was a deeper connection between us because some kind of block in me had dissolved. Rama was very frank with me — he's always honest with all of us — and that is a sign of his deep caring. Such honesty sometimes hurts a bit, but to me it has a great beauty. He's the best friend I have.

CLAIRE

It was late. Rama had bid us goodnight but remained on stage after the center meeting to answer individual questions. A number of us lingered, unwilling to leave the light, hoping for a few extra moments, for something unexpected, for anything. Through the afterglow of meditation we were attentive in a razor-sharp way, catching every nuance of spiritual phrase or witty aside.

I whispered to Esmond, my husband, urging him to go forward and ask for advice on a problem which was disturbing us both. It was a problem for which I had inwardly been asking Rama's help. From a seat in the front row I watched Esmond wait for an opening and make his approach. Tired as he probably was, Rama readied himself to give his all to yet another seeker. Esmond perched on the narrow raised lip of the stage, which is a highly uncomfortable place to sit. He stayed there during the whole conversation.

Rama leaned forward. Though his ear was given to Esmond, he faced me and began to smile. What does one do? Startled, I smiled back. Rama's smile deepened with piercing sweetness. I hoped fellow students were noticing and would be able to con-firm and describe it to me later. I was surprised and excited, heart pounding wildly; and all the while I tried to keep clear, open, to absorb every instant. I didn't breathe.

Esmond talked. Rama listened. Around me everything was hushed. And the Smile deepened further. My teacher's eyes never wavered. Nor did mine — impossible. I sank into the Smile and knew: his pure compassion. All the hurt of this lifetime was understood, all the tears over all the years, the recent raw

grief of losing my son — everything was understood. I was totally loved in a soothing yet powerful way, gentle, profound. I know, the Smile told me. It's been terribly hard. Really rough. You tried, you did the best you could. I know all about it. Poor, poor being. Now you're here, you're with me, and everything will be all right.

Though outwardly I appeared to be calm, my hands pressed tightly together, the thumb of one digging into the wrist of the other. My body leaned toward the Smile as though pulled physically, but it was my inner being that leaned, was pulled, began to dissolve.

The great love shining through was not of this world. Then Rama turned and spoke to Esmond, answering his question.

I discovered that, incredibly, nobody had seemed to notice. Over the next few days I asked my keenly attentive companions their impressions of the Smile. They shrugged — they had seen nothing unusual. Was it a time out of time? Had it really happened? If it had, how to live with its overwhelming splendor in the flat light of ordinary reality?

Months have passed, and such questions have dropped away. The experience was like the morning sun spangling the snow of a high mountain meadow where no one has walked. In memory it still dazzles and comforts me.

LEE

Soon after the San Francisco center was formed I had my first remarkable experience meditating with Rama. I had been sitting with my eyes closed for about ten minutes when suddenly I felt a kind of joyous sunburst in my solar plexus. A fraction of a second later there was a great explosion of blue-white light inside my head. Brilliant pinpoints of light in all the colors of the rainbow cascaded upward, downward and outward into the rest of my body and filled my being with ecstasy. Before my rational mind could react my head recoiled, my eyes popped open, and I found Rama staring at me. A small voice inside my head said to him in amazement, “You did that!” He continued to gaze steadily as if acknowledging this unspoken message, and then moved on to others in the audience.

One evening a few weeks ago I arrived at the center meeting in San Francisco with an odd expectancy. I had had unusual meditations that day. I could describe it as a peak day. I felt open inside, expanded, ready for anything. For most of the evening Rama spoke of the recent trip to the desert, organizational details of the center, future plans and so forth. I tuned the words out, trusting that I would absorb what I needed to know. I put most of my energy into opening my spirit to Rama in meditation. I felt as if I was practically glowing with affection. As he talked, I had the impression that he began to look at me more often. I wondered if he had seen what I was trying to do. I was sitting in an aisle seat toward the back of the room. Occasionally he would squint his eyes while looking at me. I wondered if I was being studied. I began to work on getting out of the way, or setting aside my ideas about myself so that I could sit there in a body as empty of personal history as I could make it. I wanted to make room in myself for Rama's being to enter and instruct my own. I began to experience a pleasant spinning motion, waves of joy and freedom. An opening, clearing sensation ascended from the base of my spine through my entire body, and I felt as if an intricate connection of some kind was developing between Rama and me. At times I saw his body make a small adjustment to one side or the other, and mine would mirror it as if our beings were locked together. Suddenly he stood up, made a statement to the audience, fixed his eyes on mine and began to stride down the aisle. He was still talking to the audience but his eyes were on me. As he approach-I felt something like a wave of energy moving ahead of him pushing against me, growing stronger as he came closer. I began to see and feel this happening in slow motion, or to put it another way, between each step he took I became aware of a tremendous number of microevents happening at great speed. I became aware of many things simultaneously. I had to keep very alert, very intense, not to miss any of it, so that his energy would pass through me and I could allow myself to resonate with it instead of

scrambling it or rejecting it. This energy seemed like much more than I had ever had thrown at me. There was a glitter in Rama's eyes and a land of taunting, mischievous smile at the corners of his mouth. I felt that I had been caught, recognized seen, maybe even appreciated. He was coming down the aisle to get a closer look, to throw it at me at close range, to let me know what I was getting into, to test me and see if I really meant what I'd been doing. Joy and excitement welled up in my chest and I wanted to throw back my head and laugh but I did not dare disturb my concentration. I was watching a warrior approach, preparing to challenge me, but I felt his humor also. Rama is well over six feet tall, but from my sitting position on the aisle he seemed to loom even taller as he came near. Within my being somewhere I heard or felt him saying, "You think you're ready for this? Are you sure? Do you know what you're getting into?" As he drew close I had to concentrate intensely just to keep my eyes locked on his. Inwardly I was accepting the challenge. "Yes!" my spirit was yelling. "I'm ready!" As he passed my chair my head snapped back as if caught in the net of his energy field, and our eye contact broke. Later, as we meditated, the experience of connection with him deepened and I began to cry softly. I perceived that I had been invited to become something beyond anything I had yet achieved.

ALEX

At a Los Angeles Center meeting, July, 1982:

Rama: I would now like to talk about the main thing that all Spiritual Teachers say and have said, and that can be summed up in two words: It's OK. That's the main thing that I or any other Spiritual Teacher has to teach you, that it's OK. Some teachers have said it just to their students: "It's OK. For everyone else out in the world it may be horrible, but for you — it's OK." From my point of view, everything is holy, and there's nothing that isn't God, so it's OK.

Picture a spiritual seeker, who has spent years and years seeking the truth, and finally he goes to the Himalayas, to seek the Enlightened soul. He climbs all the way up the mountain, and finally he finds the wise man. The old guy is sitting there meditating, totally zonked out, trying to decide who to bet on in the third race.

The spiritual seeker bends down at the wise man's feet, and says, "O wise man, O enlightened soul, tell me, what is the meaning of life?" The old guy sort of opens one eye, looks at this person, and then tries to ignore him, hoping he might go away. But the seeker asks again, "What is the meaning of life?" Finally the old guy opens his eyes, looks at the seeker, and replies, "It's OK." Then he closes his eyes again.

The seeker looks at the old guy, and asks himself, "Did he say 'It's OK?'" "Realizing that this was his answer, he begins to climb down the mountain. But after a few minutes he starts to get angry, thinking that he had come such a long distance for such a simplistic answer. Finally, he climbs back up the mountain, confronts the wise man, and says, "What do you mean, 'It's OK?'"

This time the old guy looks at the seeker very seriously, and contemplates the question very deeply. He knows that if he gives the right answer he might become famous and have books written about him. Finally he says, "It's all right. It's not so bad. It could be worse."

Buddha, Jesus and Krishna have all said the same thing. All that exists is eternity, shining and perfect, so don't worry about it. It's OK. And actually it's quite a bit better than that.

CHAPTER SEVEN

NONPHYSICAL EXPERIENCES

“Oh God — may we be as perfect as you like.

May we wait for you as you will.

May we deviate from Truth as you direct.

May we never want unless you want.

May we never be unless you are there.

May there never be an end and a beginning —

May we remember you until we are forgotten.”

— Rama

CHAPTER SEVEN

NONPHYSICAL EXPERIENCES

SUZANNE

Sitting here, thinking about Rama and the various experiences I've had since I've encountered him, one particular instance stands out in my mind. It occurred one morning after a Public Meditation held in Los Angeles. I woke up early — it was barely light — yet I was wide awake ... I sat up, leaned over, looked at the clock — quarter after six ... Quarter After Six ... Oh God ... “Now what am I going to do?” I thought with a huge sigh, and from across the room I hear, “Well, why don't we meditate?”

And there he was ... Rama. Now he wasn't there in the solid physical sense of his body being there in the room — it was more like a Light assuming his physical form ... but it was definitely him He was sitting there beaming and twinkling.

Thinking to myself, “I must still be dreaming,” I rubbed my eyes, shook my head and looked again. He was still there, smiling at me, nodding his head ... “Want to meditate?”

Completely disoriented, I stuttered, stammered, hemmed, hawed, and came out with “Well, aaahh, I think maybe I should take a bath first...”

He looked at me, grinned, and said, “That's a good idea ... why don't you take a bath.”

So in I stumbled, took my bath, and wondered about the whole scene I had just experienced. I shook it off as my imagination, dried off, and came out into the living room only to find him still sitting there. Hmmm ...

“Well, so ... are you ready to meditate?”

“AAHHHhhhhh ... welll ... hmmm ... I ... ahhhh ... think that I should straighten up my apartment.”

He gave me this look like, “Ahah, I know what you're doing,” but said, “That's a good idea, why don't you straighten up your apartment?” So, straighten I did. Only having three small rooms, it doesn't take much time, but I was stretching it this day Finally I was all through.

Patently, Rama looked at me, “Well, are you ready to meditate?”

Still not believing this could really be happening, and sure that if I put it off long enough he'd tire of me and these games I'm playing with myself, I said to him, “Oh ... I really think I should write a letter to my sister first.”

Rama looked at me. I mean *he looked* at me. It was like a mirror. I could see exactly what I was doing; couldn't understand *why* I was doing what I was doing when I always enjoyed meditating and realized he wasn't going to leave until I *did* meditate with him ... yet he still said, “That's a good idea ... why don't you write a letter to your sister?”

Inwardly squirming under his gaze, and my folly, I relented sheepishly, saying that perhaps I could write her later and that we could meditate first. “Oh, Good!!!” He settled himself, I settled myself, and we meditated together.

When I opened my eyes, the whole room was filled with a strong but soft white light. He looked at me, smiled “bye,” and disappeared. Thoughts of Rama and what had happened stayed with me all day and night.

The following morning like an alarm, quarter after six, Booingggg ... my eyes opened. I was wide awake ... hmmm ... I peeked over to the hassock ... Yep, there he was ... Beautiful Light ... grinning away, “Want to meditate?”

With a smile and a shake of my head, “yes,” I sat up, got into a comfortable meditative position, and in I went. This happened a third day as well, until the fourth day I woke up and my first thoughts were to meditate. This was how Rama got me to start meditating each morning on a regular basis.

LAURA

I punched in the tape *Equinoxe* by Jean-Michel Jarre. It was about 8:30 p.m., we were going between 75 and 80 miles per hour. The music was so loud it filled the car.

By now we were halfway to San Francisco. It was dark and desolate outside. Within the car, we sat in silence, speeding up Route 5, attempting to break last week's record of seven hours and ten minutes from San Diego to San Francisco. We were absorbed in the music. It was Wednesday night during the Spring Meditation Series of 1982. Each Wednesday afternoon during this period from the beginning of March through the end of April, a friend and I would make the journey by car up to San Francisco. We would pack up all the clothes, Tab, coffee and cassette tapes we would need for the journey and then head on over to the Del Mar Castle, where Rama was living at the time. We would pack the car with boxes of tickets, brochures, books to sell and various other things that we would need for the public meditation the following night.

I was a college student at UCSD and had taken the quarter off to work more intensively for the center, helping mainly with the public meditations. I usually drove up with Francine, who was waitressing at the time. She was able to get the time off work and was up for adventure.

Though the drive was physically the same, it felt new and different each week. Driving up that straight, long, flat, empty highway in the darkness pulled us out of our everyday Me and World. There was nothing familiar to grasp onto, nothing constant or real. We felt we were setting off on a journey through other Worlds and realities. We knew we would come back different, in some way we would change. At 8:00 p.m. Rama would start the Los Angeles Center meeting. Knowing this, we would focus on him inwardly and try to feel the energy and light he was putting out for the meditation.

As we tried to connect with him, our consciousness rose and the air within the car began to shimmer with light. Everything sparkled, the car was filled with a soft, glowing light. I looked over at Francine, her aura was bright and her eyes twinkled with joy. We looked at each other and laughed lightly in realization of what we saw. As I refocused on the road, I saw swirls of energy moving outside. It was as if you could see the molecules in the air, moving and spinning. Nothing outside looked solid.

The low hills, off to the left side of the car, had a thick aura or halo of white light over them. Then the hills began to waver, like a flimsy piece of rubber in the wind. They also began to dissolve. It looked like the molecules that composed the hills were loosening up, moving around rapidly and gradually becoming transparent.

I asked Francine what she was experiencing, and she repeated in detail just what I had seen. It was as if Rama was right there with us, putting on a tremendous light show, when in fact he was over three hundred miles away. The strength of our inner connection with him had enabled us to see these manifestations. Physical distance was irrelevant, on a subtle plane we were really together.

As the night grew later, I began to see different forms of light on the road. One time, I saw a large globe of light ahead of us. It filled the entire road. As we approached, it grew brighter and a moment

before we drove through it, it exploded into a shower of sparks and lines of light and color. It was like seeing fireworks explode on the Fourth of July.

Other times, we drove through patches of fog or mist that radiated beautiful pastel yellow or green colors. As we zipped through them, I felt a cool breeze blow through my body and a calmness overtake me. As we drove further, my feelings became more intensified. I could feel energy surging through my body and direct lines of power rushing up my spine. The energy felt like a mixture of electricity and adrenalin. My body was tingling I felt very light. I felt I was floating.

My stomach also felt light, as if it was rising up to my chest. This floating sensation grew into a strong pull which centered around my navel. I felt there was a cord connected to it that was being pulled with great force. As my attention centered on my navel, I saw red lights in the sky ahead of us. It looked like red crackling lightning, then suddenly the whole dark sky took on a red glow. This was amazing. Francine and I looked at each other; neither of us was about to describe what we had seen.

Immediately we broke out the Tab and Francine rummaged through the back seat, searching for some cookies or anything to eat. As we drank our Tab and munched on crackers, we chatted about mundane and insignificant things, trying to avoid mentioning anything awesome and powerful.

We were driving through a valley with high hills on either side of us. My attention was drawn upwards towards the sky. I saw lines of white light stretching over the valley in a lattice pattern. The lines reached from the hilltops on one side to the hilltops on the other side. I felt we were in a tunnel of light. Everything within the valley glowed and sparkled, above us the latticework of light seemed to shield us from the rest of the world.

As we rounded a turn in the road, we came upon the outskirts of Oakland. The lines of light faded and the neon lights of the city grew brighter. I was disoriented. The city seemed far less real than the sights and visions we had experienced out on the open highway.

KEN

Not long after I became a student of Rama's I had an interesting series of dreams, which culminated in my traveling to his house and speaking with him there while dreaming. The first dream occurred just one or two days after going to the desert with Rama. I was in my room and I had just finished meditating for over an hour. I got sleepy and lay down on my bed where I slipped into a sort of half-awake, half-asleep state. I was wearing a sweatsuit which quickly became too hot, so I pulled it off. A short while later I was fully awake and to my surprise I was still wearing the sweatsuit. I figured that I had been dreaming when I took it off, though I thought I had been awake at the time.

The next day I determined to try to dream again, only this time I would be ready when it happened and then I could try to get to Rama's house. At that time, he had a Dreaming Club within the center. To get into it you had to consciously travel to his house and speak to Rama while dreaming, and later confirm with him that it was a true dreaming experience. I meditated again, and then I laid down and waited, ready this time. A short while later my whole body became semi-paralyzed and numb, like when your arm falls asleep, but not so unpleasant. After a few seconds, I realized that I was dreaming and I got up. I left my room and went downstairs. I intended to leave my father's house where I lived and walk the two and a half miles to Rama's house so I could talk with him and get into the Dreaming Club. Everything appeared just as it usually did when I was "awake" until I left the house. At that point everything became unfamiliar, more like a regular dream. I wandered around some strange town for a while and then I woke up, back in my room.

That evening I told a friend of mine who had been with Rama for quite a while about these dreams. He told me that in dreaming you can fly to wherever it is that you want to go. You just think of the destination and fly.

So the next day, I once again meditated at the same time as on the previous two days, and laid down to wait. Once again the strange, exhilarating tingling came over me as I went into the dream. I got up and walked to the door of my room, ready to repeat my attempt of walking to Rama's house which I had tried the day before. Then I heard my father's voice calling from somewhere downstairs. For some reason I thought it was best not to go that way, so I went to my window with the intention of climbing out and walking to Rama's house. I opened the window. At that moment I remembered what my friend had told me the evening before about flying. I was a little apprehensive about jumping out the window, but I decided that a little faith was necessary at that point. So I thought: "Oh well, what the hell," and then I did a forward roll out the window and took off. I thought about Rama's house and headed off in that direction. I looked down and saw the familiar yards of the neighboring homes, just as they always looked. But then, after flying for only a few seconds, I suddenly found myself sitting in Rama's house, directly in front of him. He spoke to me very briefly. He told me that I had made it, and then he said that he would be giving me some tasks to do. He had a serious expression on his face as he spoke to me. The last thing he told me was that I had to always remember that he was not just an ordinary human, no matter how much of an ordinary human he appeared to be. Shortly thereafter, I woke up in my room.

JOHN

People who know me would tell you that I am not a pillar of devotion. Nevertheless, the Infinite has seen fit to place me close to Rama. Sometimes, I seem to forget who he is, and what I'm dealing with. Sri Ramakrishna reminded me one day.

I had been reading the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, an account of the great Indian saint of the nineteenth century. Suddenly, a devotional chord was struck inside me by the intensity of Ramakrishna's devotion to Kali, the powerful aspect of the Divine Mother in Hinduism. He would literally roll on the ground, crying like a child for a vision of his beloved Kali. If he could do it, I could too. I vowed to meditate with great intensity until I got a vision of Ramakrishna.

My opportunity came when I accompanied some friends to the temple of the Vedanta Society in Hollywood. The Vedanta Society was founded by Ramakrishna's students and is a testimony to his teachings. I decided that while my friends attended to business in the temple bookstore, I would meditate in the temple until my vision of Ramakrishna was granted.

I sat down and began to meditate with great devotion. The meditation was quite strong and seemed to be progressing well. Then I heard a voice, which seemed to be coming from inside me. It said quite simply, "What are you seeking me for in this form, you fool. You have me in Rama." At once I realized that Ramakrishna was not just the person, just as Rama is not just the person. They, and all other Self Realized beings, are one and the same. They are the dream of the opposite self.

I told Rama about my experience that night. He laughed.

JOHN

The San Diego Center was still our base of operations, and the Los Angeles Center was only about six months old when we set out to prepare our Spring 1982 public series. A great deal of effort and planning goes into all phases of a public series, and as this was to be our largest yet, we decided to get more people involved in its setup. The planning of poster routes in Los Angeles was one of the biggest tasks we faced, and it was also the first time that a large number of our L.A. students had volunteered to help.

Five of us from San Diego drove up one Thursday morning armed with an arsenal of Los Angeles area maps and phone books. We were to meet with about a dozen members of our L.A. center at a house

belonging to one of them in the Palms district. No one in our car knew what to expect of these new folks from L.A., but we knew the job had to be done.

By ten o'clock that evening, the house resembled a Wall Street office at boom time. Different people were busily working on phone books or maps, while others compiled lists, and yet others fixed food or coffee for all. The harmony between everyone there was unlike anything I'd experienced in many years of this type of activity. A few of us remarked to each other that Rama must certainly have been putting an inner force of energy and consciousness on this meeting. Even though he was not with us physically, his presence was easily felt. Any doubt of this for me was cleared up very shortly.

At about 11:30, I felt myself spontaneously entering into a meditative state. As I looked around the room, I saw everyone connected by a beautiful luminous golden light, the same light I see when Rama meditates. While they continued to work, the light wove around the entire room. Suddenly it was not a room with twenty individuals working separately, but a unit of golden light. I saw everyone in that room as being one. Our work and unity of purpose in performing it became clear to me in a wash of golden light. The vision faded after several minutes, but it left me no doubt that Rama had been there. It showed me the beauty of working together for light and in light.

PETER

Studying with Rama can be difficult and demanding. He requires me to constantly extend myself and all the powers that I have. The rewards are unbelievably magnificent. The Light which streams from him changes me each time we meditate together. One day especially, I was pushed beyond the realm of conscious control by his power, even though he was not physically present at the time.

It happened quickly. While I was reading, studying for an exam, I felt Rama's powerful presence fill the room. I put down my book and began to meditate. I had hardly begun when his force merged with my awareness and I lost all but a tiny part of my personal consciousness. There was no thought in my mind: I was in an experiential dimension that seemed to be beyond the mental plane, filled with light, formless and vibrant. Rama brought me to a point which I can only describe as a precipice. The little sliver of consciousness that was me was being invited to dissolve in that world of light, being pushed towards it, in fact. I remember feeling that if I jumped, I — my conscious ego or personality — would dissolve and might not return. Something in me began to fight against it' some little mousy, frightened part of me wouldn't let me go and pulled me back into this world. With a start I jumped to my feet. It was over.

Or was it? I was trembling. Confronted with immense power, with dissolution, my concept of free will vanished with my security, leaving me floating not-so-gently down the stream. I felt I didn't have personal choice any more — didn't control my own life — but at least I was going downstream now! I was amazed to find that my perception and conception of reality had completely changed.

LESLIE

It was 9:30 p.m. and once again I found myself still at work.... At the time, I was working as an office manager in a health clinic in San Diego. Many hours were spent there managing and maintaining a very busy office. One of my jobs as office manager was to fill in the cracks, and one particular week was full of them. A receptionist had suddenly quit, and being understaffed created chaos everywhere. In this situation, I put on a receptionist's hat in addition to my usual managerial hats. Aside from being short a receptionist, we were also without an administrator, who had left the clinic a month prior to this. Someone had to find a receptionist and at that point it was up to me. The week was crazy. I felt as if I were a clown in a three-ring circus, laughing and joking, trying to keep the crowd happy while juggling many hats. In the past I always got through it by grin-rung and giving it to God, but this time I let it get the best of me. By the end of the week, my smile had worn thin and my ability to juggle had left

me. I was exhausted, worn out. I asked myself, "Is there going to be an end to this crazy situation?" When I realized it was the end of the day, I stopped thinking and gave up trying to understand my state of existence. It was time to meditate.

There was a room in the clinic which I used frequently for meditation. I wrapped up my work, gathered my things and entered into the large, round soundproofed room. I sat down and before meditating, reflected on Rama, my spiritual teacher. Just the thought of his liberated being helped me refocus and erase the world from my thoughts. My spirit was filled with gratitude and I began to meditate....

I opened my eyes, not knowing how much time had passed, and left the room. Driving home, I passed the local theatre which was playing a film a friend had recommended. It was just starting, so I bought a ticket, passed the popcorn because I didn't want to miss any more of the film, and found a seat in the front row. Before me on the screen were two men, gladiators in a pit, bloody, barbaric and near death. Similar scenes continued as I watched with my mouth open, wondering what I was doing at such a film. My week had been crazy enough, I wasn't sure if I needed to engage in any more personal torture. But I continued to sit, hoping my friend's recommendation would not fail me.

The main character, a barbarian, learned to read and speak and became a great warrior. When he was young he witnessed his father's death by a wicked ruler. Gaining much skill and cunning-ness in countless battles, he set out to find this treacherous ruler who took his father's life. The film proceeded with scenes of violence, romance and adventure. I found myself becoming absorbed and noticed I was enjoying the battle scenes, rooting for another head to be chopped off! Was I losing it? Surely my week had been crazy, but this crazy? I tried not to think about it and became completely absorbed.

The film ended and I sat in a meditative state as the theatre emptied. I felt different. I looked around the room and watched people leave; they all seemed foreign. I felt disoriented. In some ways, the world in the film was not much different from the world I was in. The barbaric ways people treated each other, the games and hatred were just more sophisticated and buried. I wandered out to my car and drove towards the beach. I became disgusted with the world and people and began to shout to God while in my car, "Why has it not changed? Why am I trying to be so good when it doesn't seem to make any difference?" Continuing to shout, I stepped out of my car and ran towards the sand. I fell to my knees and yelled to the ocean, hoping it would listen, like an old friend. My frustration and confusion continued to build. Thoughts of death and escaping filled my mind. I felt completely crazed, still shouting, when suddenly the force of a thousand trains hit my forehead, throwing my body against the sand. My body was being split into a hundred pieces, like the sand. I was spinning. It was like falling in a dream, moving so fast you lose all control. I could not move and asked for it to stop. The force continued until every fiber of my being had completely surrendered. It stopped and I heard Rama's voice say, "Be not of this world, it is finite and will only make you unhappy. Focus your awareness on eternity, become light."

I felt as if I had been woken up, woken up from a dream I had been in all my life. These words were the truth. Every part of my being could feel it as I surrendered and listened. I sat up and looked around, expecting to see Rama standing next to me. There was sand, sky and ocean but no physical sign of my teacher. Then I realized what had happened. The power and truth of the experience had changed me. I heard and felt something I could not deny. Rama was real, more real than the sand beneath me, eternal and infinite. I sat in awe of the fact that what I had just heard meant change, but I had no choice. The change meant freedom and happiness, something I could no longer live without. I felt relieved, knowing I had found truth. I got in my car and drove home.

BRUCE

After a center meeting, my carpool partner and I start chatting outside the car. A center meeting is what we call our weekly group meditations with Rama. We are both feeling clear and

energetic after the meditations. It is a cool night, with “a few high clouds lit by a half moon. There is little traffic on this dead-end street. Even though both of us must be up early the next day we feel like talking. We discuss the meditations, and the fact that this evening was the end of a cycle. Rama left for Los Angeles, his new place of residence, after the meeting. We feel that this is a bit of a loss since we won't be seeing quite as much of him as we might like.

Tonight Rama had wanted to take us to the beach and give us a gift. The gift I think was to be a powerful meditation. However, before we left, Rama said he felt that we would be hassled if the group went to the beach he had in mind. So we stayed in our usual location. Too bad.

During a lull in the conversation we both look at the moon. Suddenly, I feel my body jerk. It is like a chill running through me. At the same time, I perceive, as in a dream, a tremendous flash of reddish light coming from some place very far away. This light enters into my being and I feel it enter into all persons. I remain still, just feeling the change in my awareness. It is as if I had just had a good meditation. My thoughts are still, I feel love and gratitude. My friend looks over at me and we both laugh. This, we guess, is the reason neither of us wanted to leave. I feel this was Rama's gift to us, his students, and also to you.

MARTIN

It was early afternoon, just after lunch, and the pleasantness of the day made the flow back into work difficult. I was assembling and cutting the lumber for a wall I was building, when a scene of a center meeting came to mind. Rama was announcing an upcoming field trip.

Rama said, “This Sunday there will be a trip to the desert and I would like you all to come.”

I said aloud, “*Oh Christ,*” and thought to myself, not this Sunday, please. Rama asked, “What's the matter?” looking perplexed at my outburst.

I said, “There's a 'Marx Brothers' film festival this Sunday and I really wanted to go.”

Rama leapt up from his meditation seat and ran towards me. With a look of great enthusiasm on his face he exclaimed, “A 'Marx Brothers' film festival?!?!?!?”

I said, “Yes,” taken aback at his reaction.

Turning back to the group, Rama said, “Well, group, the desert trip this Sunday, as of this moment, is postponed.” He then ended the center meeting and came over to talk with me.

Rama said, “Martin, I didn't know you liked the Marx Brothers, they're one of my favorites.” He then asked at which theater it was playing and at what time. Then Rama said, “I will see you this Sunday evening, Martin. I'm looking forward to it.”

At this point the thought was fading away. I had ceased working, trying to stifle my laughter for I was not alone and didn't want to make explanations. I resumed my work, chuckling from time to time at what had happened.

After a while I was aware that my work had taken on a certain ease like never before. I had the distinct feeling that I was disconnected from my body and was watching myself work. I felt that my body would continue to work whether or not I gave the work any thought or put any kind of mental effort into it. With each cut of the saw and each blow of the hammer on the wood, small objects burst out from the point of contact, scattering off into oblivion. Needless to say my work had taken on a new fascination. It had become very entertaining.

A couple of hours into the afternoon, Rama came to mind again. The mood was very different though, very serene and peaceful. I felt, and in a different way saw, Rama in everything around me. He was the wood and nails and tools being used. He was myself, my boss, the people on the street, the birds, the trees, the sky, and the sun. I was filled with joy at seeing this, and felt a love within me and without me that I'd never known before.

BILL

For a week now, I'd wanted to send flowers to Rama, so naturally I lost the name and phone number of the florist.

I searched the house a couple of times, but no luck. Today I said, "I'll do it today, come hell or high water."

At work I had the names of a couple of Center members. Still no luck, no one at home. I began to get panicky.

"Gotta meeting at two," I said to myself. "Better do something quick. Let's see, Rama lives in Los Angeles."

Sure enough, directory assistance had a Los Angeles Florist. I dialed and decided to play it safe. Suppose this is the wrong one, and they've never heard of him?

"Have you ever delivered flowers to a fellow by the name of Rama?" I asked. "Also known as Dr. Frederick Lenz. I have no idea where he lives." At the other end, a muffled voice turned away from the phone.

"Has anyone been up to Rama's yet?" More talk, then back to me. "We can't do it today. How about tomorrow? Oh wait, I guess we can." We dickered over flowers for a few minutes. Whatever they were, we decided on something peach colored.

About two hours later I was at the computer terminal. All of a sudden, a thought popped into my head.

"Rama — I wonder what he's up to? Oh my gosh, he's gotten my flowers. He's meditating on me! It really works!"

As luck would have it, my officemate was out. I stopped dead in my tracks, so to speak, and began meditating like crazy. My body became alive with energy. I was engulfed. After a while, I turned back to the terminal, but that didn't work. Rama hadn't given up on me yet.

"What happens if someone comes in and sees me like this?" I wondered. Then I stopped worrying and surrendered to the experience. Eventually I opened my eyes, gazing at a picture of Rama on the wall. Everything I could see was filled with little exploding sparkles.

"After a good meditation," he had once said, "everything you look at will seem to sparkle." Well, there it was, everything was just sparkling away.

Just before all this happened my officemate had walked out leaving me alone in the room. Immediately after, unexpected visitors began arriving, and my phone resumed ringing. It was as if, in the middle of the day, Dharma had put my normal business routine on "hold." Flowers had definitely been a good idea.

DEBORAH

I felt that my edge had been blunted. My meditations were so boring that I quit a couple mid-way. I didn't feel love or gratitude or caring. I called a friend and she picked up that part of me was angry at Rama. She challenged me to do something about it, to push myself out of my dull space.

When I began to dig a little into my feelings, I sensed, once again, my inner connection to Rama. I began to talk inwardly to him and I wrote the answers I "heard."

Me: I think I'm angry with you lately.

Rama: Yes, I know.

Me: I don't know why.

Rama: Yes, you do.

Me: I don't trust you. I'm afraid you don't like me any more.

Rama: What do you mean I don't like you any more?

Me: I don't know.

Rama: I don't like you or not like you. I love all my students but at the same time I don't care at all. You must understand, what I do is not because of what I feel. What I feel as a human being has nothing to do with it. I only do what's right. I can't do anything else.

Me: My God, I feel frustrated when you say that.

Rama: That's because you want me to respond to you as a human. You want to be able to manipulate me the way you manipulate other people.

Me: I'm into power.

Rama: Right.

Me: I enjoy the idea of being able to hurt people.

Rama: I know. But the dharma is not subject to your ability to manipulate or to hurt.

Me: I don't like that.

Rama: I know you don't.

Me: Rama

Rama: Yes? There is a moment of silence.

Rama: You see, right then you were hoping that by reaching out to me, by loving me you could make the dharma go your way. You think that by loving you can control eternity.

Me: Yes.

Rama: You can't. That's one of the great mysteries. No matter what you do or feel or say, eternity is what it is. You are not the doer. You have no control.

Me: I can't bear that. I just can't.

Rama: You must. You were afraid to ask me what your biggest obstacle is. That's it. You must accept that ultimately you have no control whatsoever. Eternity acts in us and through us all. You need to surrender.

Me: Oh, shit. I can't do that one. I can't. I've spent my whole life thinking that if I work hard enough, if I'm honest enough, if I'm righteous enough, things will be the way they are supposed to be. As I see the way they're supposed to be.

Rama: Which isn't necessarily the way they're supposed to be. It may be, though.

He laughs.

Me: How can you laugh about this?

Rama: What else can you do?

I start to cry.

Rama: Come on. Don't be so dramatic. It's not that bad. Really.

Me: I hate being a jerk.

Rama: Awww. You think anybody else likes it?

Me: How do I learn to surrender?

Rama: You just do. You learn, little by little. You meditate, you try to become pure and humble.

Me: You say that to all the questions.

Rama: What can I do? It's the truth. I can't say anything else. Remember, surrender is humility. It's a lack of humility that—

Me: Yeah, yeah.

Rama: Work on it. Have fun with it! Humility's fun!

Me: No, it's not. It's fun to be special.

Rama: Trust me. It's much more fun not to be.

Me: So that's why I began to feel bad soon after writing you my last letter? I was trying to manipulate you?

Rama: Well, yes, but that's only part of it. I understood the other part, too.

He looks at me. I melt. I had written a very gushing Bhakti letter.

Me: Rama....

Rama: No. That's enough now.

* * *

Though I was surprised by much of what he “said” to me, my mind still could not accept that I had spoken telepathically to him. Even the language and the rhythms of speech seemed like his. Still, it could simply have been my knowledge of the way he talks that made my own answers sound like his.

What could not be denied was the truth of what “he” “said.” Clearly Rama had shaped my inner being and maybe there was a shrinking difference between his inner being and my own. I had also found that it was not my way to push aside my problems; they could be catalysts for new discoveries.

DEBORAH

It was impossible for people not to notice the profound changes that occurred in me after I began to study with Rama. I was surprised, sometimes, that people could even recognize my face. I looked in the mirror; there had been a total metamorphosis. My face was softer, much more open, and there was a magical pleasure in it. There were photographs of me smiling. I had never allowed pictures to be taken of me smiling. Even as a child, photos show me looking sensitive but rarely happy. I was too tough, too serious, too anxious to convince the world that I understood its pain. Suddenly, when asked even casually how I was, I responded, “Great, fantastic, better than I could have imagined.” People asked me about my changes; one night I wrote this in response:

* * *

You ask what I'm doing.

I asked you that and you answered with a new job, old problems with your lover, a new therapist.

What am I doing?

I don't know. What I know is that what came before seems now like a quiet dying.

It's the dissolution of this dry, powdery shell called by my name.

The jigsaw pieces part and the dryness turns loamy. Then there is only laughing like the earth. Like that moist earth in the central valley of California that could give you anything to eat. Anything.

I feel so exposed and so vulnerable. This love is almost embarrassing. I let down daily into the perfumed ooze of this embarrassing love.

This is what I've always wanted. An absolute, unconditional, endless love without judgment, penalty or threat. But a love that knows I can be perfect, knows I can do right. Knows it, demands and accepts nothing less.

Love always worked on mutual threat; you show me a little of you, I show you a little of me and then I can hurt you just as much as you can hurt me. Weapons parity.

Ah, leave all that! Leave it! But the ego fights. It wants to hold on like the couple dressed up like dice on *Let's Make A Deal* and they've won some formica bedroom dresser and Monty is offering them the door and everyone's yelling, "The door! The door!" but they won't take it 'cause they've already got the dresser and they could end up with a chicken on roller skates and when they blow the Chevette and the trip to Puerto Vallarta they come home and realize that they have a nice, old, oak dresser.

This love is like the first night of L.A. summer when you don't bother to take your jacket with you and there was just one of those perversely gorgeous sunsets that the smog makes and you get up on the freeway and the sky's that blue that's real dark but it still has some taste in it and you're even with the tips of the palms and there's that crisp little sliver of moon and that star placed just perfect. And the car's going fast and the window's rolled down and that hot dry wind is blowin' through you and there's some old Motown on the radio and you turn it up loud and start yellin':

Summer's here and the time is right

For dancin' in the street

You look around and in the next car somebody's smilin' at you and bouncin' with the same beat and for that moment you love 'em. You love 'em like your first love.

How blue the sky has become. How green the banana tree is in front of my window. How it folds me into its green arms, what sweet wisdom it whispers with its big flat leaf against big flat leaf. How still and alive the night has become.

Here again in the silence and privacy of my heart — this touch.

I don't understand it.

KURT

It was after dark, getting close to ten p.m. I was meditating sitting crosslegged on the floor. The moon was illuminating the room slightly along with the bougainvillea and patio outside my window. I was wondering what enlightenment might be, when a large book appeared in front of me. It was made of light, but so was I, or at least my legs and hands appeared to be. It was very large. When opened, it spread from knee to knee, and was maybe a foot and a half tall. I saw myself leaf through the pages, each one was a separate, finite, boxed-in reality. As I neared the end, the last few pages were radiating white light very strongly. On the last page I could see all the preceding pages. I set the book aside and let myself be absorbed in the light and unhindered vision.

I realized that all the finite realities were only mental projections. Enlightenment was a total absence of thought and ideas, just pure awareness. Strange book, I wonder how it would sell in paperback.

NATALIE

They call me Natalie. I am almost 12 years old. On April 27, 1982 I became a student of Rama's.

One time I had an experience when I was not a student yet. However, I knew about Rama through my mom, my sister and the public meditations.

I had a dream with Rama in it. It started out when Rama became very, very sick and he decided to stay with us. My mom and I took very good care of him. I gave him some healing treatments, and he became better in no time.

In the dream Rama flew up in the sky every day. His arms were his wings. When he needed to, he would flap his arms, but he usually soared with the wind.

Then one day, he took me for a ride to pay me back for the healing treatments, and before I knew it, I was off my feet and in the sky with Rama holding me. Soon afterwards, he left me off and said, "Good-bye."

ED

During the year and a half I have been a student of Rama's, I have had many wonderful experiences and meditations. But the experience that seemed to take me the highest occurred just last week. On Saturday evening, September 4, there was a center meeting in preparation for a trip to the Anza Borrego Desert on September 5. The meeting ended about midnight. We stopped for a bite to eat at a local Santa Monica restaurant. I go home about 3:00 a.m. I was still feeling very high from the meditation. My heart seemed to be beating rapidly. The excitement within me didn't let me get much sleep that night.

I got up early the next morning, showered and sat down to meditate. The excited feeling was even stronger now. It felt very physical. My body felt like it wanted to run around the block a couple of times. But instead, I meditated. After about thirty minutes something different was happening. The excess physical energy seemed to be redirecting itself and was bringing me into a higher level of consciousness.

The meditation had changed from average to extraordinary. It was like I had switched to hyperspace. Words started rapidly flowing through me, expressing truths — truths I have heard Rama speak. It was like Rama was talking but the words were coming through me. I was experiencing hundreds of thoughts in rapid succession, and at the same time was feeling their meanings. It was as if there was no time. Then I suddenly felt that I wanted to capture the thoughts. I wanted to write them down. But realizing that if I indulged too much the flow might stop, I just sat back and experienced. It was great, for once I didn't indulge to the point of turning off. I was watching instead. I felt as if I was on the brink. Whole new worlds were about to open. Then I came back from "hyperspace."

Sitting there writing notes right after the meditation, the feelings started coming back. It was like I had moved backward in time and was meditating again. The truths I had heard while meditating were comprehensible only while I was in that state. Now, I could not write down any of the words. The feelings that came to me while I tried to make the notes were profound. This I remember well, and I feel compelled to write about them in the present tense, because sitting here even now the illusion of time seems to fade away.

This is how it felt to me. I feel my whole body tingling. I close my eyes and see waves of blue and violet flowing toward me. They seem to go right on through me. An elating feeling of gratitude is now sweeping over me. My ears are ringing. Now my bodily sensations have left. I thank Eternity for where I am now, wherever I am. What must it be like to go higher and dissolve in Eternity? Many of the feelings are beyond words. I am in love with life. The tingling feeling comes again in my body and head! I feel gratitude again, love for Rama, and thanks. I feel fluid now. I feel fluid like water. I feel I could get up on a stage and act! Good heavens, where are my old limitations? This is not the old self talking! This can work, no it will work! Tears of gratitude come over me.

There is a Lakshmi bookmark signed by Rama propped up against the vase of flowers on the table in front of me. I bend over to blow out the candle. The bookmark falls forward. The writing on the back is easy to read. "Thank you, Ed." What more can I say? And how can I possibly thank Rama enough?

JACKIE

I'd been in the center for about two and a half months. The center meetings were now the highlight of my week. I would listen closely to the things that Rama would say and watch how my life changed to support me. I was working in a restaurant, and I used to feel totally drained after one and a half hours of being on the job. I wasn't working hard physically, I was just walking around being a hostess. I began see a connection between certain situations in the restaurant and my tiredness. The restaurant serves a dessert, a huge sundae called an orgy. It has an erect banana in the middle of it with whipped cream coming off the top of the banana and two half peaches at its base. It is served on the occasion of a woman's birthday. The waiter calls for the attention of the whole restaurant and announces that on the count of three the woman will bite off the head of the banana. If she doesn't, everyone pounds the tables and the waiter slowly counts over again, giving her a second chance. I used to watch the energy in the restaurant when this would happen. People would crowd around to watch the trial she would go through. Would she laugh or feel humiliated? Would she have the toughness to slough off her embarrassment in front of everyone? It was like an accident, but an emotional accident with people crowding around to look at the blood. I would notice that after the incident my body felt exhausted. My eyes would sting, and I would start yawning a lot.

Remembering that Rama had said that men's sexist thoughts drain women's energy, I decided to experiment. One time, in the middle of the incident, I walked across the room and into the ladies room. I was alone there. I just sat and did an "AUM," and my energy returned. It amazed me, it made me realize that my tiredness wasn't just me, it wasn't the result of a lack of sleep or not enough vitamins. This awareness was freeing; I now had choices. I could remove myself from the scene and get my energy back.

At one center meeting, Rama talked about women's ability to attain enlightenment. He said that it was actually easier for us, that we have more power to do so, but because men have always known and resented this fact, few women in the history of humanity have ever attained enlightenment. He explained that this oppression is enforced sexually by men during the sex act itself and by their sexual thoughts towards women, whether they consciously have good intentions or not. He further explained that though women are actually stronger than men, we are also more sensitive and therefore more easily damaged by negativity.

At this point I could feel the women in the center meeting stirring. I could almost hear our minds ticking. A hand went up and a woman asked how, if she was already in a relationship with a man, she could stop the energy drain from continuing. Rama listed a few obvious options like asking the person to stop his negative behavior, but the option that intrigued me was for her to inwardly cut the psychic, emotional "cord" that existed between her and the man in question, for her to inwardly break the connection.

My relationship with the manager at the restaurant came to mind. Up to this point I had observed that he was moody. Like most bosses, he would take it out on his employees. However, I considered him to be different in that he had done the EST training and was involved in other forms of self discovery. I guess I wanted to believe that he was an aware male who respected others and shared the same ideals of love and integrity that I did.

In the week that followed, one night I again had the opportunity to experiment with the new information I had gotten from Rama. The restaurant was slow as I came on my shift and punched my card into the time clock. I decided to eat some dinner at the far end of the bar and went through the usual procedure of getting another hostess to cover me in case business picked up.

I am sitting at the bar eating and all of a sudden my stomach feels funny. I look up just in time to see the manager coming at me from across the room. I can feel his resentment, I can feel it in my gut. I am his mother, his sister, his past girlfriends, his ex-wife; his face is changing and dissolving into other male faces. His anger and my fear feel hundreds and thousands of years old. I know exactly the tone of voice he is going to use and what he is going to say. He is going to reprimand me for eating my dinner now

even though he personally invited me to do exactly this last week. Words and reasons don't matter though; he is angry and he is going to unload his anger.

All of this is happening and Rama pops into my head. I remember what he said at the last center meeting, and I find myself seeing a “cord” of light going from my boss' navel to mine. Next I am imagining a huge pair of scissors cutting the cord. Now I just watch what happens.

By the time my manager reached me, he had changed totally. His tone of voice was respectful and in a very responsible way he explained that he had recently changed his policy and would like his employees to eat before they punched in. He looked as amazed as I was. It was like the script had suddenly been changed. Was I literally cutting negativity out of my life?

I did begin to notice that in general I had more energy than I'd had in years. I felt more power, more joy and enthusiasm. I had the energy to express what was inspiring me. I felt like my true self — the familiar me I used to be when I was little, the me who would hang upside down in a tree and laugh loudly, the me who used to have a contest with herself to see how many spins she could make in her ballet class.

Yet even with my new energy and awareness I would still feel drained after a couple of hours at the restaurant. I wondered if I should quit or if I would eventually get clear enough not to allow it to happen. I decided to leave it up to divine guidance

Two days later the manager called and asked me if I would like to be put on call since I had been switching around my schedule so much. I heard myself thankfully say yes. The next thing I knew it was three weeks later and I still had not called in. I remembered Rama saying once that traveling the short path with him can be disconcerting because it causes you to change your life quickly and constantly. He said you suddenly find yourself unable to do the things you used to do, not because they are wrong necessarily, but because without your even knowing it, you have become much more sensitive, and what used to work for you no longer does.

I realized that even though the restaurant was a great training ground and spiritual classroom, I could choose another school, one that was perhaps not so draining. The next day I called up my manager and officially quit.

MIKE

What do I do with a guy that offers me liberation with one hand and a stand-up comedy act with the other? “I'm not against group sex,” he says, “as long as it's a spiritual group. Setting his diet Tab down so he can do something else with his hands, he introduces, to his Saturday Night Live audience of 422 students, two singer-students, the first of whom “is dripping” with talent, the second of whom he “found in Singapore while he was buying Seiko watches to resell in another market.” Seriously, he asks us to listen to the second singer because there is something, something there. We listened. The first was a wonder of talent. The second, a wonder of courage and sincerity. My heart opened again at the depth of the lesson.

I don't feel any need to defend or criticize Rama. He is completely beyond that level. He is an ancient child inviting me to realize my dreams, inviting me to come play in the infinite sandbox of our imagination

These meetings come to me now like a ruby glowing in a fog bank. I see myself sitting at 12:00 noon on the veranda overlooking the blackberry patch because Rama says he focuses on the luminosity of all his students each day at this hour. I had been reading Castaneda's books and, as don Juan told Carlos it would, the world stopped for me, it opened. I went far, far away. There was no time. When there was a when again, I felt refreshed, illuminated with deeply subtle energy. It could not have been more than 15 minutes, yet I was not the same person; I knew I was radically different. I believe Rama's focus had everything to do with this.

I remember when I was walking blindly through the labor of my own doubts, a fellow student and I were listening to the cassette of Rama's on absorption. We relaxed more and more as the cassette continued and Rama in some systematically inspired way collapsed all of the crutches I was leaning on; "don't work hard at spirituality, be absorbed ... don't hide behind some role or profession, be absorbed ... don't hold on to guilt for doing or not doing something, be absorbed ... realize that the one who wants to become liberated must totally disappear to become liberated, be absorbed" (the quotes are from my memory). My friend and I looked down into each others' eyes and we knew that he was what he said he was, and that we were blessed to be with him in this way. And we were absorbed.

Once, during a Saturday Night Live, a group of woman-students were on stage doing some soft-shoe routine and a set-up question was asked them from the audience: "How can I become enlightened?" Their response was a united, squeaky-voiced, over the back fence, effeminate limp-wristed, "Oh, you can't be serious!" When I got the double meaning that seriousness is an obstacle to liberation, I almost fell off my chair. Again, the timing was right and again it was the invisible drama of the receiving of consciousness that annihilates the inner prisons.

What can I say about this guy? I can't see any way for me to escape. To have incredible fun while dying, to receive innumerable gifts and there is no one home to claim them, to play with someone who is not there because he is always here.

CHRISTINE

I had known Rama about a year when this episode occurred. Prior to meeting Rama I had not studied meditation formally in this lifetime. However, at the time I was pursuing a career in the realm of Dance; Ballet, Modern and Dance Therapy, both as a performing artist and as a teacher. I had also studied and taught Hatha Yoga for some years.

On Wednesday evenings following the public meditations at the center, we would have meetings of the "Dreaming Club." Rama would give us tasks to focus on in our dreaming, and each week we would report our progress. To join the club you had to have had a conversation with Rama in the dream time. This week's assignment was to meet Rama in another dimension, an expansive desert-like environment and to receive an ancient symbol. We were required to draw the symbol.

On waking one morning, I remembered a vortex of swirling colored light, projecting off in all directions, as spokes in a wheel. At one point there was a garden of flowers more vibrant in color and more fragrant than ever experienced in this world. There were delicate butterflies and melodic songbirds fluttering and flying gaily at another offshoot of light. A further projection revealed a world of astral beings. Faeries danced in a circle, gowns flowing and wings shining. A white Pegasus horse stood in majestic radiance among the group. Underlying the vortex of light from which these projections emanated was an open hand. This spectacle was all the work of the Infinite.

At the dreaming club meeting, many people presented what appeared to be ancient, metaphysical symbols. I was fascinated and quite impressed by my friends' experiences. My account of the fanciful realm of fairies and Pegasus horses, apart from being off-topic, seemed somehow lacking in depth and sophistication. I shyly presented my vision of the Disneylike "fantasy world."

"It's not fantasy. It is reality," Rama said emphatically.

I left with this statement ringing in my ears.

* * *

When I arrived home I was strangely excited in spite of an element of doubt at the credibility of my vision.

As I lay in bed, I found it hard to fall asleep. The room seemed thickly charged with energy. Suddenly, from somewhere far away, I tuned into the sound of music. It seemed like trumpets, cymbals

and chimes resonating in festive melody. Only in retrospect did this celestial heralding have significance to me.

It was a windy spring evening and I had my window open. The next thing I knew, the curtains blew wide apart and what seemed to be a glittering array of light entered my room. It was a wispy, delicate, playful type of energy. I blinked and rubbed my eyes to gain perspective. “What is going on here? I’m too old to be seeing fairies.” I was getting warmer, feeling a wave of apprehension.

The fairies swirled around me in a radiating sphere of soft sparkling light. I closed my eyes again, thinking that perhaps they would disappear, I felt a warm wave of energy brush my face and hair. Were they performing an ethereal dance for me? I seemed to perceive a rhythmical quality to the energy. Then in a form of light, I felt the presence of the white winged stallion, the Pegasus horse. What was imagination and what was real? I don’t know. All I know is that I felt like a child reunited with some long lost friends.

Why did they come? It seemed that their visit was to show me that they are “real,” as Rama had told me, and not fantasy. Quite wide awake and alert at this point, I attempted to overcome my nervousness and adopting the attitude of a child, welcomed them. I asked them inwardly if some superior being was responsible for all this. I sensed there was more significance to this experience than I was aware of. The answer came in a flash Mahalakshmi. Her name appeared to my mind with emphatic clarity. Lakshmi is the patron goddess of our center, the Indian goddess of beauty and prosperity.

Suddenly, a powerful wind blew the curtains open wide, and opened my door. A more potent force entered as I saw the light, glittering energy filter out. This new energy field was smoother, deeper and all-encompassing. It felt like the infinite ocean rolling in, while the previous energy field could be compared to a rain of shimmering gold dust.

This force emanated power and purpose and evoked an attitude of awe and respect. It was Lakshmi, who was to be revered and honored. I felt deep gratitude and simultaneously fear, due to the profundity of the experience.

Her form appeared to me in shadow outline. Suddenly something snapped and I was looking into her eyes. They were deep, dark, almond-shaped pools. The intense power emanating from them was at first overwhelming. As I calmed myself, I “saw” deeper into these absorptive chasms. I perceived in them great love and compassion, the power and beauty of nature, the refinement of art. But most of all I saw “Truth.” Such a perception is beyond emotion, beyond definition. It was an experience of total clarity and perfect awareness. It was very still and silent; a timeless moment of completion.

I waited breathlessly for her to reveal the purpose of her visit. Her message seemed to be psychically transmitted through the wind. “Allow the luminous and fanciful astral worlds to run through you as a vehicle to the happiness of others,” she communicated. “Above all, do not doubt your experiences. They are real. They are your predilection and you must accept the course of your destiny.” These worlds came from a realm of consciousness beyond my level of awareness. I could not rationalize that I was making it all up. In fact, I was not thinking at all through this segment of the experience. It seemed like I was riding a magic carpet, totally immersed in the experience, it was out of my control.

Her being was strong and radiant as she encouraged my involvement in the realm of ballet.

“The Arts can be utilized as a tool in developing the art of 'seeing' into alternate planes of reality. The precision inherent in an artistic discipline can also refine the instrument of consciousness for the transmission of light,” she whispered.

I asked her inwardly to talk to me about Rama and the center.

Her reply seemed to be transmitted in the warm breeze. “Yours is a true spiritual community. It would be correct, if you so choose, to perceive it as your real home in this life. If you decide to make such a commitment, you should believe fully in all things engaged in there. Rama is to be highly appreciated, as he is the instrument through which rapid spiritual progress is made possible. It is his teaching and concern

that is educating and nurturing your inner being. And with proper attention to his words, the bud of your consciousness may blossom into a flower of great beauty. As long as you choose to study here you must never lose sight of this.”

On that note, I lost all sense of consciousness. It seemed she gently put me to sleep, as if by a wave of soft glitter from a magic wand.

PATTY

Our center meeting that evening was very mystical and powerful. The awareness levels between the members present seem to flow together with so much intensity that it allowed the whole center to make a great leap in spiritual transformation. Rama used many of his powers, the siddhas, that he uses in the desert. During the meditation, I saw him elevating from where he sat and moving from side to side, changing form and sending out waves of light and energy. He then stood and raised his arms high in the air. He grew in height and then started to shrink in size. Soon the whole room disappeared. At one point, he walked to the back of the stage. He vanished as though he blended into the wall. When he came back onto the stage, the whole center reacted in complete amazement. By the end of the meeting, I had forgotten that I was in a women's club in Los Angeles. The events and the power of the meditation were very similar to those I had experienced in the desert.

When I got home, I grabbed a blanket and stayed downstairs to meditate for awhile. I didn't want the experience to end. I lit a candle and reflected on the evening. I sat and meditated in silence. Although I didn't remember, I must have blown out the candle. Then the journey began.

I clearly remember Rama coming behind me and placing his hand on the back of my head. Instantaneously, my body fell limp. I gently fell to the floor, comfortably resting on my stomach. Although my body was numb, I was very alive and perfectly awake. I was completely immersed in a very bright white light and lost all sense of this physical world. Very gently, at the base of my back, I began to feel warm, soothing explosions of energy that were similar to electrical shocks. However, instead of pain, I experienced laughter and ecstatic bliss. As though Rama was working with each vertebrae, he slowly worked the kundalini up the center of my being. Over and over I felt bursts of energy. As the procession continued, there was a perfect sequence in which the white light shifted to different shades and densities of gold. As my body became increasingly heavy, my consciousness emerged into light. The image I normally conceived of myself dissolved. I became light itself. The intensity of feelings and brightness of the light continued to increase. When it reached the top of my head, the energy peaked and I was set free. I left my body and looked down upon it. It lay there still and peaceful. The expression on my face reflected happiness and pure innocence.

Time and timelessness passed. With a sudden jerk I came back. I found myself lying on my couch wrapped in a quilt. I was amazed. Nothing before had ever seemed so clear and perfect. During those moments of traveling through worlds of light and tranquility, my consciousness was perfectly awake and aware, being like a child, living in the moment, laughing and playing in the inner worlds with my friend Rama.

CHAPTER EIGHT

JOURNEYS

*“Whenever you make a mistake remember
That you are God.
God doesn't make mistakes.
God only has experiences.”*

— Rama

CHAPTER EIGHT

JOURNEYS

GERRY

After the San Francisco center meeting a few weeks ago, I was flying back to Los Angeles with Rama. As usual, we were flying on Pacific Express, a neat little airline with about seven or eight small jets. The people who work for this airline are all relatively young and happy and like their jobs. The fares are also the cheapest available. Since they are such a small airline, their terminal was located in some basement of San Francisco International. The waiting room is old, its carpet torn. But no one minds because they will not be there long.

That night we were waiting for our flight in the waiting room. Only a few other people were in the room. Among them were a young lady and her daughter. We happened to sit down across from them, so that we faced them about four feet away. The lady was pretty, with big eyes and a tired smile. She wore blue jeans. She was very friendly and just started talking to us. She said she was going to Stockton. For some reason, it just seemed strange that anyone would be going to Stockton in the middle of the night. Rama asked her if she knew anyone there. "No," she said, "I'm just going there to pick up my car." "Where will you go when you get your car?" Rama asked. "I'm going to drive to Utah. That's where we are going to live." So she was flying to nowhere to pick up a car so she could drive to nowhere, with her daughter, in the middle of the night. I got the impression she once had a husband or someone she lived with but that it was over long ago. I felt she had been on her own with her daughter for a year or two. It didn't bother her. She was doing alright.

Rama said to me, "Open up some of that candy." We had bought a bag full of candy before checking in for the flight. Rama had flown on this airline a few times before and said that they always forgot the in-flight snacks. So I gave him some chocolate. We had stopped talking to the lady for the time being. Her daughter had been wandering around the room, in her own world. But when she saw us eating, she was across the room in a second.

"What are you eating?" she said.

"Some chocolate raisins," Rama said.

We tried to ignore her. Her mother told her to stop bothering us. But after a few seconds, "What are you eating?"

"They're raisins," Rama said. "Want some?"

"Okay." She was cute enough that you didn't mind. Her mom told her not to take too much. After I let her have a few peanut M&M's, she kept trying to see into the bag of candy. Rama asked her what her name was. She held up three fingers.

"Not how old are you. What's your name?"

She looked at her mom. "Tell them your name, dear."

"Pam," she said. "What's your name?"

"Rama."

“Ama-ama?”

“Forget it. I have another name. You can call me Doctor Lenz.”

“Doc?”

“'Doc' is good. Call me Doc.”

“Are you a doctor?”

“No, actually I'm a teacher. Want some more raisins?”

Pam took the raisins and wandered off somewhere, to see what anyone else was eating, I suppose. We talked with her mom about nothing in particular for a while. We discussed the center meeting between the two of us a little bit before Pam came back. She went straight to Rama to see what he was eating now. He gave her some peanut-butter crackers. Pam climbed up on the empty seat next him.

“My mommy loves me very much.”

“That's good,” Rama said.

“Can I have another cracker, Doc?”

“Sure. Here.”

“I love my mommy, too. And my daddy.”

“That's very nice.”

“Do you love me, Doc?”

“Sure. I love you.”

“I love you too, Doc. What's he eating?”

I was eating some malted milk balls. “Want some?” I said. She held out her hand, I gave her a couple. I thought Rama might be getting tired of this little three-year-old hovering around after food. But he didn't seem to mind.

“I really love you, Doc.”

“That's good, dear.”

“Do you love me?”

“Sure. Want some more candy?”

“Okay. I love you so much, Doc.”

She put her arms around his neck and hugged him. She started giving him little kisses on the cheek. She had a real tight hold on his neck. He turned to me. “It's the light,” he said. “She's in love with the light.” He just let her hang there around his neck. I had thought she loved him because of the candy. But I realized she wasn't just saying it to get fed, she really did love him. She saw, or felt, something in him that I have only glimpsed from time to time. And she responded with love.

“Are you going to stay here, Doc?”

“No, I have to leave in a few minutes to fly to Los Angeles.”

“I wish you would stay.” She gave him another kiss. “I love you.”

This went on for about five more minutes. Then the announcement came that it was time for our flight to board.

“Are you going now?” Pam asked.

“Yes, we have to go now. Goodbye.”

We said goodbye and good luck to her mother and headed out the door.

“Goodbye, Doc.”

“Goodbye, Pam.”

On the way to the plane I said, “That was really something. Wasn't it?”

Rama said, “Usually I don't like little kids too much. But she was all right. She just fell in love with light.”

I asked him if he thought it would make any difference in that little girl's life, to have had such an encounter with someone who was Self Realized. I thought that maybe when she was grown she might remember what had happened and it might somehow change her life for the better.

“No,” said Rama. “It won't make any difference.”

“None at all?” I asked.

“None at all.”

We were going up the stairs to the door of the jet. From there, we could see into the window of the waiting room. Pam was standing on a chair next to the window, waving goodbye. Rama waved back to her. She kept waving. Rama waved goodbye to her again. “You should wave to her, Gerry,” he said.

And so I waved to her.

JOHN

Late one Thursday night as I flew back from San Francisco with Rama, he treated me to one of the most delightful mystical displays I've ever seen. We had just finished our Summer '82 public series, and all of us who had been involved were tired, but still very much on the go. That night when we boarded the plane, Rama and I spent a few moments scanning our fellow passengers to see if the usual assortment of unusual characters who make the late night flight from San Francisco to Los Angeles were on board. Our scanning done, we entered the world of the Sony Walkperson and began listening to side two of *Magnetic Fields* by Jean Michel Jarre. The plane took off shortly thereafter, and we continued listening as the flight attendants circulated among the passengers and took orders for drinks. Soon the music had ended and Rama turned the tape over to side one. As we listened, we were both struck by a particular section of the music that connects the first section of side one with the second. It features some electronically enhanced voices and laughter which we listened to three times in a row.

As the second section started, Rama began moving his right hand along to the music. It was as if his hand was dancing to the music. All of a sudden, I saw beautifully colored lights hovering in front of us. It seemed as though they were being projected on an invisible screen somewhere between the rows of seats. My consciousness turned away from the airplane and people in it as I became totally enraptured with the lights.

While the music played, Rama projected more lights with his hand movements in ever-changing patterns. They were exquisite, following the motion in the music perfectly. The lights looked like fine stained-glass with the sun streaming through it. The patterns of motion were like a 1960's Light Show, or swirling computer animation. Some of the colors were familiar, while others did not appear to be of this Earth. They were beautiful. At this point, I had become completely unaware of being in an airplane cruising at 25,000 feet.

The light show continued for several minutes, although by this point my sense of time had also shifted considerably. Rama then at quite still and began to meditate. As he did, I felt waves of psychic energy and light sweeping over me. My awareness shifted again, and I found myself in the world of the music. The best description I can give of this is that we had either “become” the notes of the music we were listening to, or we had actually entered the world that the music had existed in before its composition. Each note that was played seemed to be a part of us. The life of the music was totally intertwined with the life of Rama and me, the listeners.

Suddenly, I found myself conscious once again of the goings-on I aboard the plane. The flight attendants were progressing with their beverage service, and were both standing close to Rama and me. To my great surprise and delight, Rama began using the two of them in the show he was putting on for me. He pointed his right hand towards the flight attendant closest to us and she instantly became covered with luminous sparkles. She was totally radiant as she served drinks to our fellow passengers. I came to realize that all the phenomena must have been visible only to me, because no one began dropping their drinks as this radiantly resplendent woman served them.

Meanwhile, the other attendant began walking towards the flight cabin. As I focused on her, I witnessed something I didn't deem possible. She only had about twenty feet to walk, but suddenly the dimension shifted and it appeared she had two hundred yards to go. I noticed that Rama had been pointing his hand at her throughout this vision. She continued walking down this elongated aisle and eventually reached the door of the cabin. As she walked, the aisle had become golden and luminous, while everything else in the plane darkened in contrast.

We then were served our beverages and complimentary dry-roasted hickory flavored smoked almonds. I assumed that the show would end here. Fat chance. The music was in its last minutes as Rama began pointing his hand towards my clear plastic cup of Tab. The chemicals in Tab could not have been responsible for what I saw happen to it. The Tab became multi-colored with the colors swirling in ever-changing patterns. Once again, I would suggest a comparison to a light show. Then, Rama raised his hand and the cup began to levitate. As it did this I also saw it disappear and reappear many times. Rama was obviously having a ball, and I couldn't help but be touched by the joy of it.

He then picked up the almonds and placed them flat in his right palm. I began to feel a pulling sensation in my navel area. He clapped his left hand down over the almonds, and when he lifted it up they had completely disappeared. This was no magician's sleight of hand because my body could sense the energy that was manifesting as he did this. After about a minute he clapped his hands again, and the almonds were back in his right palm. I felt the tension in my navel go away, and I took the almonds from his hands, opened the package, and ate them.

The music ended, and we began to discuss what had just happened. To my amazement, this had all happened in about fifteen minutes, but it seemed, and still seems, totally eternal. The flight lasted another fifteen minutes, and when we landed, Rama said I looked like I'd had a "close encounter" I got off the plane, went to a bathroom, and looked in the mirror. He was right. I looked like a different person. I was glowing with a soft luminosity, and

I had the biggest, most serene smile I'd ever seen myself with.

Samadhi was loose on the late night flight, and it was a joy to behold.

JOHN

In flying to San Francisco and back over the last few months, we met a very nice flight attendant named Gina. Our acquaintance with Gina began one night when she and Rama engaged in a discussion of new wave music. Over the weeks we got to know her a little better. Rama gave her books he'd written and tapes that he'd made, and she showed us pictures from her Hawaiian vacation. We looked forward to seeing her each week on the flight back to Los Angeles. Somehow she had become a part of our lives.

The flights continued, but Gina was rescheduled to another route. Being unattached, we learned to live with this, but we always hoped that she might turn up as our flight attendant. She had a clarity of consciousness that was rare, and she seemed to accept and respect our meditative lifestyles with ease. Nevertheless, we didn't see her for a few months.

On our last San Francisco trip before a two-week vacation, the night seemed fraught with omens and

significance. Rama always says that beginnings and endings are the two most important times, and this was the ending of our summer trimester. Therefore, it seemed somewhat natural that, as we boarded the plane for our return to L.A., Gina was aboard as our flight attendant. Rama said that this was clearly a good omen.

We took our seats and began listening to electronic music on our Sony Walkperson. The flight began and Gina went about her business of attending to the passengers. When she was done she came over to us. We were still listening to our music.

She crouched in the aisle next to Rama and I took my headphones off and gave them to her. She had asked what we were listening to. She had never heard electronic music before and seemed interested. Rama had kept his headphones on and hadn't said anything, although he was watching the proceedings.

As Gina got into the music, I noticed Rama begin to meditate on her. She was looking at the floor in front of me and didn't seem to notice. It was obvious to me that Rama was sending huge amounts of light and kundalini energy to Gina. I suddenly saw her become luminous. She was surrounded by a sheet of white light. I could inwardly tell that her consciousness was being greatly elevated through Rama's efforts. She didn't seem outwardly aware of what was happening to her, though it did strike me that she seemed unwilling to move and resume her normal duties. In fact, she knelt motionless for about five minutes as Rama projected energy through her.

Finally, she got up and gave me the headphones back. She looked like a different person. She was smiling and had a definite glow about her. As she walked away Rama asked if I'd seen what he'd done. I said I had, and asked him what effect it would have on her. He smiled and said she would feel good for a few days. He then said, "She's been good to us, so I wanted to do something nice for her."

He certainly did.

LAURA

After the San Francisco and Berkeley public meditations, I would drive Rama back to the Hyatt Regency, where he would spend the night before flying back to San Diego the next day. Often, I would go in with him to have dinner or to go up to the bar at the top of the hotel, to have a Perrier and look at the view. At the public meditations, Rama would expend an incredible amount of energy. He would meditate on each person attending and merge his consciousness with theirs. As he brought light and energy into their being, he would take into himself a lot of their negative energy, problems and doubts. By the time he left the meditation he would be in a lot of physical pain from this exhausting exchange of energies. He had found that eating or involving himself in some vigorous exercise such as running was a good way to dissipate this type of energy and the pain associated with it. This would also bring his consciousness down enough to enable him to function in the physical world. Because he would not return to the hotel until midnight, the option of going out for a run was ruled out.

I remember one night we went to the bar at the top of the hotel, The bar was circular and constantly rotating. As it moved you could view the city's buildings and lights below, then your attention was drawn to the bay. You saw the wide, dark expanse with the lights from Oakland twinkling on the other side, off in the distance. By this time of night the bar was very quiet and almost empty. It was designed and furnished in an elegant, slick, modernistic style. We were led to a table against the curved outer glass wall of the building. We sat in silence for a few moments absorbing the stillness of the environment. I felt the world going on around me, but my consciousness was not focused on it. I looked at Rama, and all I could see was bright golden light exploding in all directions. I could not even see his physical form. I looked around at the other people in the bar, they appeared to be shadows in comparison. Then Rama began to speak. "I felt that a few of the people at the meditation tonight were students of mine, from my past lives in Tibet."

Throughout the Spring Public Meditation Series 1982, Rama had stressed the importance of finding

students from his past lives.

“I feel it is very important to gather as many of them as is possible before 1985. The world is entering another dark age. After 1985, the Maya will be so thick that it will be difficult to advance spiritually without a strong foundation. One of my purposes is to bring as many of my students from past lives and new students from this life to Enlightenment as possible in this incarnation. To do this, I need to find them quickly, then renew our connection and spiritual practice. This will be my last incarnation in this particular world. When I leave the earth I will return to the world I originally came from. I would like as many of my students as possible to join me there to continue their spiritual practice. But there are only two ways to do this. They must either enter into samadhi or strengthen their fields of attention to such a degree that they can catapult themselves into this other reality. This is why it is so important to find these past life students now. They need enough time to gather their power together and strengthen their fields of attention so they can leave this world when the right time comes.”

Once, a few years before, Rama had spoken to a few of us about the world he came from. He said that he and a number of other spiritually advanced souls had taken incarnation on Earth to try to bring Light to spiritual seekers. He said that he had spent many lifetimes here working for the Enlightenment of others as a Spiritual Teacher. But now the Earth was headed into a long dark age and it would be much easier to make spiritual progress in other worlds.

Rama said he hoped to have enough time in this life to meet his former students from Japan, Tibet, India and other places and awaken them to their true identities. Then, at a later time, they would be able to leave the cycle of their earthbound incarnations and join him in another reality.

He said this was our last chance, that we had attempted this feat of power long ago and had failed. He said that we must not let ourselves fail again.

LAURA

One cold, foggy, late afternoon at the end of December 1980, Rama took Mark, Jan and me to the Del Mar beach.

The fog was so thick you could not see twenty feet ahead. The beach seemed deserted. The only sound was that of the waves crashing on the shore, sometimes softly, other times roughly. Nothing seemed real or constant, even the waves broke at strange intervals. The beach I knew so well looked totally unfamiliar to me. I felt very open and receptive and the air felt very ancient and mystical. I knew that we had entered into another reality or plane of existence. We walked down the beach in silence, scanning with our subtle vision. We were fog gazing. Rama had taught how to fog gaze before. He said the fog was a powerful elemental (like the wind and the sunlight) that could be used to see and enter into other realities. The advanced mystic could manipulate the fog and other elementals in various ways to change levels of awareness. As we continued, Rama told us to practice our fog gazing.

I looked up at the cliffs above the beach, and there I saw ancient Indian warriors on the run. They were not American Indians, they were far more ancient, and were wise and powerful. They radiated light and power, yet they were also very calm and controlled. As my attention shifted back down to the beach, I saw different forms or beings of light. I had the sense they were scanning us, as in turn, we scanned them.

I felt acceptance and detachment as we moved down the beach. I no longer felt I was a person, I could not feel my body walking or my mind thinking. I was being absorbed into this ancient world of fog and warriors. As I walked further, I saw a large orb of white light in front of me. It must have had a fifteen-foot diameter. As I approached it, it dissolved and reappeared further down the beach. I walked further, and again as I approached it, it dissolved and reappeared still further down the beach. This happened a few more times; it was becoming almost comic. Then suddenly it exploded into a shower of light. We moved on, I felt the air thickening, now there were many subtle and astral beings around us. I knew we, in a sense, were completely alone in this timeless and boundless world.

At this point, Rama stopped and told us to sit down on some large rocks in the sand. We sat, about six feet apart, facing the ocean. It was quite strange hearing the waves pounding, yet not being able to see them. Rama walked into the fog. We could not see him. A moment or two later he walked back out, about fifteen feet away from us. He was different in appearance and feeling. He was now pure power, and he felt and looked like one of the ancient warriors on the cliffs above. He stood before us, awesome and powerful. He began manipulating energy in different ways. His body began to shrink, then grow to tremendous heights. He raised his arms and his subtle body flew into the fog above us. A shower of energy rushed down onto us while lines of power pushed up through my spine. His body turned gold, then it changed into a doorway or a keyhole. It became an absence. I felt myself drawn into it and through it into other realities. I felt myself spinning, floating, turning in various directions, then expanding and contracting. Then gradually, I found myself back on the beach in a peaceful, calm, yet very electric state. Rama then stood in front of each of us and meditated on us. I felt myself merge with him. The level of energy in my being began to rise intensely, I knew he was dissolving my human form. I felt that I had no boundaries. My mind was not able to conceive of myself as a fixed being in a solid body.

Rama told us to try to dream ourselves back to this place on the beach, back to this reality. He said that these moments were eternal and powerful, that we could enter back into them in our dreams. We then walked back up the beach in silence. My whole being was tingling with energy. Both Mark and Jan were glowing brightly, they did not appear to be solid. They both looked like masses of swirling energy. Rama was completely golden, there was no form to him. He was clear energy and power. As I continued down the beach, I saw different civilizations on the cliff. Buildings, temples, whole cities, some populated, some vacant, appeared before me. I saw more warriors on the cliffs; they had a certain depth and knowledge that struck me. As we reached the stairs that led us from the beach up to our car, I noticed it was dark. We had been there for a few hours, yet it seemed no time had passed. At the same time, I knew an eternity had passed. Everything was unfamiliar to me, it was as if I was seeing this place for the first time. We stood beside Rama, I felt his energy, I scanned Jan and Mark. I realized at that moment that we were not of this world of men and women. We were different. We were neither better nor worse, yet our energy and radiance were not the same as the people of this world.

CATHY

One clear, moonlit night, early in the spring of 1981, I went on an adventure with two of my wildest friends, Rama and Mark. We were housemates at the time, and the three of us seemed to wind up together at certain auspicious moments. On this particular evening we found ourselves buzzing — Rama said the power was up. He suggested a trip to Torrey Pines; it would be an excellent opportunity for the two of us to learn to “see.” We rode down together in his little Le Car, and parked at the beach. The three of us walked about half a mile along the beach below the cliffs. The air seemed alive to me — it literally sparkled, and I felt my head spinning and my palms tingling. I was a little nervous — I had no idea what to expect, but I acted very calm, just as if this happened every day. We stopped at a point where a big flat rock extended into the water. We climbed up onto it and walked to the end where the waves were crashing against it. Rama walked away from Mark and me and turned and meditated on us for a minute. He said that he had opened our third eyes and we could now see what he had to show us. Mark and I looked at each other. We were ready for anything.

Rama pointed towards the cliffs behind us and said, “Watch this.” He raised both his hands and I saw the sky above the cliffs rapidly fill with light. Light spilled over the edge of the cliff, and began pouring down the side in rivers. The silhouette that was previously fixed against the sky now started rippling and undulating in waves.

When the cliff began to return to its original state I looked back at Rama and he was lowering his arms. Then he pointed up to the stars in the sky and I saw lines of light shooting out from his fingertips. They connected with each star, and between the stars, creating a glowing network of lines. The lines

connected with the ocean and the cliffs, and with the three of us standing on the rock. Everything was connected by these lines. When Rama lowered his arms they were less visible, but I saw them still there.

By this time, I realized I was definitely not in my normal state of awareness. Looking around, I saw the whole beach was charged with light, and I could hardly feel my body. I felt very inspired and was really enjoying myself.

We walked back and sat down at the foot of the cliff. Rama pointed out to sea. He asked us to look out at the horizon for a while. We stared across the water. At first I saw nothing, but after a minute or so I realized there were giant waves of colored light rolling towards us one after the other. They were like large clouds, low on the water, but they behaved like waves. There was a bit of a wind blowing and they seemed to be blown along by it.

I looked over at Mark. He was gazing out to sea with half-closed eyes. I wondered if he felt the intensity as I did. My stomach was tight, and my third eye — the area between my eyebrows — was tingling.

The waves of energy were passing right through us and into the cliff. They seemed to get more and more visible. I started to see forms, like ghosts, moving through the air around us.

I asked Rama about the forms. Although they lacked clear definition, they appeared to be in various shapes and sizes.

He said that they were non-physical beings that existed in other dimensional planes that most human beings are normally unaware of. We could see them because he had temporarily opened our psychic vision. Rama said that Torrey Pines was a place of power that acted as a gateway between these worlds. Many of the beings travel between planes, and he said that Torrey Pines was like a busy airport with interdimensional traffic constantly coming in and out.

This was a little hard to believe, but I couldn't doubt my own eyes. These forms were not my imagination. I tried blinking several times, and rubbing my eyes, but I could still see those luminous forms appearing and disappearing around us. Mark pointed out some particularly large shapes which were standing on top of the cliffs. I looked up and saw them too. They looked like old Indians and stood there like they owned the place, said they were guardians of the doorway between the worlds.

At this point, Rama said we'd had enough for one night, and standing up, he walked to the water's edge. He turned and faced us, and as we watched he began to disappear. I totally forgot about anything else. He was standing there, the moon directly above, and the next thing I knew I could see right through him to the water. This only lasted for a few seconds, and then his face appeared, smiling. All I could think of was the Cheshire Cat in "Alice in Wonderland." I still couldn't see his body and then his face appeared again. Next, his arms appeared — still no body — and then his legs. I could tell he was having fun. He completely disappeared again and then he was all there, grinning.

He stretched his arms out to the sides and I saw him turn into a large bird. It was all gold, and shining like the sun, and it grew larger and larger until it filled the whole sky. Then I noticed four luminous balls of light moving toward us in the sky. I focused my attention on them, and saw them more clearly as giant fiery pinwheels which were throwing out thousands of colored sparks. I became totally entranced. They seemed to be performing an intricate dance, lines of golden light like delicate dewy spider's webs formed and reformed from one end of the sky to the other. The stars left their positions and traveled between the lines, and the moon sent out rings of light like waves after a pebble has been thrown into a pool. I lost all awareness of being at the beach.

I don't know how long this lasted. All sense of time had disappeared. Eventually, I looked down at Rama and he was just standing on the beach with his hands clasped behind his back. I couldn't tell if his eyes were open or closed, but it didn't matter. I thought perhaps he was in samadhi, an advanced form of meditation. He stood like that for a while, and then slowly started moving again. He walked over to us and asked what we saw. These were the first words he had spoken since he had walked to the water's edge. It seemed strange to hear him talk.

We both described what we saw. Rama said that we were seeing fairly accurately that night. He said he had done more that we did not catch, but that our seeing would improve in time.

My mind felt very peaceful, and walking back to the car I could hardly feel my body. As we drove away I took a long look behind us. The beach was glowing with light, and looked very different than it had when we arrived.

CAROLYN

After a lecture at the University of Humanistic Studies, in San Diego, Rama announced a surprise meditation at Torrey Pines Beach for his students. It was March 20, 1982 — the Spring Solstice — a very special day on which it is easy to enter “doorways” into other worlds.

Torrey Pines Beach in La Jolla is one of my favorite spots in California. A small stretch of beach separates the cliffs from the ocean. Besides being beautiful, it is a power spot (a spot where it is possible to perceive and enter into other worlds).

I arrived at the beach a little before our 10 o'clock meeting time. It was a beautiful night — crystal clear. The sky was black, dotted with stars. The cliffs were black masses surrounded by an electric-white aura. All was still except for the sound of the waves crashing against the beach. The wind blew gently. A few yards down the beach I came upon our meeting spot. I sat down on the sand facing the ocean, with my back towards the cliffs. I tried to calm my mind. I could feel Rama meditating on us, even though he wasn't physically present. It felt as though all the turmoil I had been experiencing from the week before was being washed away.

Rama arrived in silence. He stood about 50 feet from us with his back towards the ocean, facing us. For a moment he looked like one of the majestic Indians of the cliffs. A feeling of happiness flooded me. I felt as though I were a child again. I could see Rama's form spinning as if he were dancing on the air. He would bob back and forth in front of us, then he would spin over the water. I heard the command, “Watch!” come from Rama, and he continued spinning around. This time he started to grow very large, like a giant, and then he shrunk down to a very small size. He raised his arms so that they were even with his shoulders, and I could see him burning, as though he were a flaming torch. Rama looked like a skilled dancer executing every movement with precision, and at the same time he also looked like a child who wanted to show his friends some neat tricks. He completed a few more motions with his hands. As he did this he looked like a piece of Saran wrap. I could actually see the ocean right through my teacher! He took a few steps towards us, and he began to meditate on us individually. I could see beams of white light and what looked like a fishnet of light all around us.

Moments later an eerie whistle that cut through the stillness of the night came from Rama. My back straightened up with a jerk, and I felt a presence on both sides of Rama. I couldn't quite perceive what was happening, but I felt as though I were a child who had been caught reaching into a cookie jar. I felt a tremendous sense of excitement. I later learned that the whistle that I heard was the whistle that Rama uses to summon his allies. And the presences on both his sides were these allies in the form of a door and a coyote.

I had a sense that other people were beginning to feel as restless as I felt. Rama had us lie on our backs and look up at the sky. As I was gazing at the sky, all the stars disappeared except for one exceptionally bright one, and then a circle of stars appeared around it. I remembered Rama saying on previous trips that when he does this he is actually taking us to other worlds. As I looked out of the corner of my eye, I could see that we were surrounded by a blanket of white light. My enthusiasm started to fade. I was beginning to feel a little overwhelmed. At this point, Rama had us gather in a circle around him. The wind had picked up a little and it was difficult to hear what he said, but I did hear, “It's very important to talk about your experiences.” From the past, I knew that it was very easy to dismiss your experiences as imaginary. As people started telling their experiences, I could “see” through their eyes

what I had not seen with my own. My roommate said that she had seen Rama in flames. One of the other students said that her favorite part was when she saw the ocean through Rama. These were all things that I had seen too. Before I realized what I was doing, I found myself standing up, but it was too late to back out. As one part of me was telling my experiences the other part of me was silently shrieking. A large part of me didn't accept what was happening at all. The inner battle continued long after I sat down again. Replacing my enthusiasm was a demand to know just what was happening. I looked up at the stars, and they were the same constellations I had seen as a child. The waves still crashed against the beach. The wind still blew, and the night went on.

PETER

One evening Rama took us to the beach at Torrey Pines for a sunset meditation. We walked in along the beach for perhaps a half mile, and then sat at the base of the cliffs facing our Teacher.

“These cliffs are hollow,” said Rama. “Beings live inside of them. They are constantly sending out waves of energy. That is why this called a place of power.”

I looked up at the towering cliffs in silent wonder. I could feel the energy tingling through me. Never before had the world looked lovely. The sea was a mirror of turquoise in the twilight. A dolphin breached behind Rama standing on the shoreline.

“Watch me,” he said. I gazed upon his form which glowed faintly in the dim light. His body began to expand, growing slowly larger and taller. Then he began to shrink, his body growing smaller and smaller until he was only a few feet tall. He then assumed his normal height, a little over six feet. I continued gazing at him. His body began to slowly fade away, and for a moment he vanished completely. There was nothing there....

CLAIRE

Dignity is not my strong suit: after half a century I still talk to trees and wrestle my dog the best two out of three.

I guess it isn't surprising that on Super Bowl Sunday I find myself in Disneyland standing in line for Space Mountain with a scary-excited feeling in the pit of my stomach. The reason I'm here, however, is not my refusal to take grey hair seriously. The reason is back behind me in the line. When I turn to look at Rama, he grins — a sure sign he's having fun like a little kid. And I guess he has brought us here so that we can play like children again, and recapture that innocence and purity in such a 'grody' world. The ride is wild — racing, tilting sideways, climbing and plunging in the warm darkness. I scream. I love/hate it fiercely. Out in the sunlight once more, Rama strides past with his loose, lanky, open-toed walk and disappears with the air of one on an important secret mission. Purpose soon discovered: french fries and a shake. Then he passes the word he'll meet us later in Fantasyland. We take a couple of rides suitable for six-year-olds and enjoy every moment. We ride through Small World and come out laughing into the dusk, debating whether to return to Space Mountain or seek a pizza. Then we look over and see many of our fellow students sitting motionless and straight on a long bench. Rama is there in the midst of the still figures.

It takes us a moment to settle in down the line, to shake the hyperactive, giddy mood we've been in and shift to deep, receptive peace. Deborah, on my left side, is briefly restless. My husband, Esmond, on my right, might be feeling that this is a most unusual, un-British thing to do. Hundreds of people must pass this spot every hour. How to meditate casually? I realize Rama is now standing in front of each student, gazing into his/her eyes for two or three full minutes, then moving on to the next.

Godalmighty, it really is a public meditation! My heart races faster than on Space Mountain. He's

coming down the row, slowly but surely. I try to prepare, to clear myself, but I am still aware of the stream of people strolling by, of “It's a Small World After All” coming over the loudspeaker system, and of the occasional loud bong of the giant clock. Rama is two people away. Then one. He's with Esmond. Esmond is vibrating ever so slightly, like a tuning fork. Deborah on the other side is breathing deeply, the way she does when she's trying not to breathe.

Clear. Be clear. No thought. Don't blow it this time.

A fond little smile to Esmond then there he is, our teacher, radiance in human form, standing no more than three feet away, and he zaps me. Blazing. Direct. I stay clear. For once, my 'monkey mind' is stunned to silence. I am not aware of any sound or of time passing, nor am I conscious that I am a human being who breathes. There is an increasing sense of emptiness. I become hollow. He is filling that hollow with light until we merge.

He ends with another fond little smile and moves on. Slowly the joy begins to rise like laughter and fizzles in my veins, and I close my eyes tightly to try and contain it, to keep all the light sealed in, to keep the ecstasy from leaking out or spilling over.

I begin to wonder what would happen if a security guard came along. But what could he do? We're not hurting anyone, and you certainly couldn't say that the two hundred or more souls Rama has just switched on are causing a disturbance by just sitting here and glowing.

It's getting really dark and he hasn't reached the end yet. In the background now, a perfect touch — a young woman with a baby in her arms and pink balloons bobbing in the air on the end of a string moves to the music, dancing the baby, dancing the balloons, dancing to celebrate our extraordinary state of grace. This time is pure magic. Please may it never end!

Then a security guard does come, clanking his keys with purpose. Rama is around the curve, out of sight. The guard motions to us to get up and disperse. We smile at each other like sleepers waking from a beautiful dream. Laura remains seated, a statue. Sue's eyes look bloodshot. K.C. unleashes one of those new, wide smiles of hers. Riccardo is tense with rapture.

Time to go, the park is closing. The walk back is like being in the desert — Rama's tall figure up front, our curly-headed leader with the fluid, easy stride, setting a fast pace for us. On Main Street, the lights in the trees as we pass are thousands of real stars. The magic goes on. We are one many-souled self, one community, breathing and meditating and playing and walking together, a small, small world after all, and there is no way to say how lucky we are.

DIANE

I was at Disneyland with Rama and about 100 other students of his. It was my first trip to Disneyland with Rama.

I had been hearing about the trips for a year and a half and I was very curious how a spiritual teacher could bring his teaching to an amusement park. The whole idea was so preposterous. We were standing outside the Haunted House and I was feeling somewhat bewildered by the crowds and noise. I kept wondering when the 'spiritual' part was to begin.

Suddenly, I found myself walking beside Rama. It didn't seem appropriate to talk, so we walked in silence for a minute or so. It seemed as if he were sending me some new kind of energy without speaking. I began to notice a gold tingly feeling all over my body. The feeling went the whole length of my body. My body practically sizzled with light, as if every atom of my being were lit up. I noticed myself smiling, but it was not an ordinary smile. It felt more like a full body smile. It was like a Cheshire cat smile with the edges of the smile running right off my face. I felt as if I were drunk with light.

The rest of the night I couldn't get that smile off my face. It had a life of its own. I felt the joy and delight of a child in the wonderland of life. I abandoned myself to the rides, even raced ahead of the roller

coaster. This was a new me — totally free and absorbed in the experience of life.

I saw Disneyland and my spiritual teacher with new eyes.

DEBORAH

Rama had announced that we were taking a field trip to Disneyland.

I never liked Disneyland. I never liked the idea of it. It's so smarmy and cloying and American.
I wasn't going to go.

But Rama had told us that if we'd ever been there before we could expect it to be different with him. It was.

I not only had a wonderful time, a delightful, high, childlike, lovely, fantastic time, but I also felt clear (illusion #86), serene and energized later.

I discovered that what is great about Disneyland is that it is just like the 'real' world except that it is clearly marked 'illusion.' That the Disneyland world is an illusory one, a constructed one, is completely apparent. It is a purposeful world; you pay, you dive into the illusions and you come out the other side.

The 'real' world is the same — brought to you by Disney or God or The Bank of America or whomever, but no one admits it's an illusion. It seems so real. Which it is, of course, just like the rides. There is tremendous honesty in just how cloying and smarmy Disneyland is. So it makes sense that Disney was into little fairies, and a slightly kinky eroticism, and torture and light and color and death. The mix, in fact, between light and death, seems about the same inside or outside the Mouse Kingdom.

I felt I learned from the rides. I learned that the way through Space Mountain is not ever to pull back, not for a moment, but to urge on, faster and faster, darker and sleeker, into movement. Make it more mysterious, less knowable. Never let yourself see the track. Thrill that there is none. The dolls' faces looked like people's do at times: some exact and with clear intent, others blurry and trite.

I am learning, from Rama, a repertoire of ways of seeing. Before the trip with him I had looked at Disneyland the way I looked at the rest of the world — through my own deep desire that things be the way I think they *should* be. That day I felt I was able to see with a vision unimpeded by my emotions. What I saw was complex; it was not simply joy or innocence. But I enjoyed the clarity with which I was able to see complexity.

SANDY

As a rule, merry-go-rounds don't turn me on, but this was a delightful exception. It was a lovely August evening, and about three hundred other students and I had come to play in Disneyland with Rama. My friends and I had just come out of Space Mountain, and we went to find Rama in Fantasyland. When we got there we found him in line to go on the carousel. Oh boy. I didn't want to ride it myself, but I did want to watch him ride it. He chose a horse on the outside edge, and seemed to be able to ignore the spectacle of three hundred smiling adults crowding around watching him. After about four revolutions on the wheel of horses he closed his eyes. Samadhi was loose in Disneyland. I closed my eyes too, and tried to merge my consciousness with his. Wow. I felt myself spinning around on the carousel with him. I actually felt like another ring of horses had been added to the ride and I was on one. Then I saw and felt the merry-go-round and the ring of students around it become a golden set of concentric circles spiraling up into the night sky. This was better than watching fireworks. We were fireworks! Really beautiful. I didn't want to come back, but the ride ended, and it was time to go on to new things.

JAN

Rama called me at approximately 10:00 p.m. and asked me to come to his house in an hour, for it was a night of power and we were going on an adventure.

Upon my arrival at Rama's house I met up with Marcie, Laura and Mark, who were going on the adventure too. The five of us drove up to the east side of Mount Palomar, a favorite place of power.

We parked the car and walked down the road a bit, feeling for the *right* place to stop. We halted when we reached a ledge next to the road. The drop appeared to be straight down, about 100 feet, into a fog-filled valley.

Rama told us that it was an important night for all of us. Power had brought us together to have a unique experience. He said he would demonstrate some of the powers that had recently returned to him. Rama asked that we observe everything closely, and not allow our thoughts to distract our attention.

First, Rama pointed to a nearby bush and told us to watch it carefully. He began to meditate on the bush. I saw the bush begin to glow. Gradually it became inundated with light so that I could no longer see its shape. The bush dissolved, and was a golden cloud of light. I was no longer able to concentrate intensely on the bush. I felt as if my body and personality were falling away. I felt devoid of emotion. Slowly the bush began to re-form. But it was somehow different. I felt different, too. Rama told us that what we saw happen to the bush is what happens to us when he meditates on us. We are flooded with light, and it dissolves and restructures our beings. The bush had reformed, but I had not, yet

We looked into the valley. The fog was very thick. We were the cloud line, and it appeared that below us there was no valley at all. Rama began to do some breathing techniques. I felt smooth, clear sense of power coming from him. As I looked into valley, I noticed that the fog was lifting rapidly. Within moments there wasn't a trace of fog left!

Rama asked us to look down the road a hundred yards or so. He told us to watch that area, and the sky immediately above it. I looked up into the sky, and within moments I saw a glowing form appear. It was dancing! I could see the form very clearly. The arms were lifted about six inches from its sides, and it was spinning and dancing joyfully. It was an incredible sight. The form in the sky seemed to be in an intoxicated state of ecstasy. I experienced an overwhelming sense of joy. I was sure that the form was a projection of Rama's subtle body. It *felt* like him. I blinked my eyes, and slightly shook my head. But the form was still up there in the sky, dancing with total abandon.

Rama began to meditate on us. He had become formless, I could see through his body. When he meditated on me I felt him pass through me. Part of him stayed with me. I felt part of myself was in him, too. I looked at Rama and saw my presence in him. Just then I noticed it — a huge shadow was standing behind Rama, was equal in height and proportion to about three Ramas. It was solid power. It looked down at us. I felt it look into me. My body froze. My eyes were fixed on this enormous, awesome shadow, and I knew it was real. I was not hallucinating. As suddenly as it had appeared, the being vanished. I was relieved. It had been too intense for me.

Rama was now meditating on Mark. He asked us to watch. As I turned around I realized that Mark was standing slightly apart from the rest of us. There was a presence, or actually an absence, behind Mark. I had seen this "thing" before. It resembled a door-way. It was about 8-9 feet tall, and 4 feet wide. Rama seemed to pushing Mark into that emptiness. Mark began to slowly disappear, his right side first. I could barely see him. Only a sliver of him remained in this reality. Part of him was willing to go through the doorway, but a very small, yet strong part of him was resisting. His resistance was too strong. I felt him spring back into this world. His body began to assume its original form.

Rama suggested that we all look at our surroundings and memorize particular landmarks: the bush that had been inundated with light, the valley which had been emptied of fog, and so on. He said that we should try to come here in dreaming. This was a place of power for us, and visiting it in our dreams would reinforce the events of the evening. He wanted us to remember what we had seen and felt.

We thanked the mountain for our experiences, and walked to the car. On the way home we discussed what we had seen. I was happy to learn that others had seen the fog lift, the form dance, and Mark disappear. Talking about our experiences solidified them within my mind. I didn't want to return home. I looked at each person in the car, and noticed how different we all were. Everyone was less solid, and had a more fluid personality. We were glowing.

We zipped down the highway, back to the world as we had known it. But how could it ever be the same? I had witnessed amazing acts of power that night, things I didn't think could be done in this world. But I had seen them, and now I had to look at life differently. A magical realm had been opened to me, and I realized with joy and a sense of freedom that I could never return to the world of humankind.

MARK

You get a kind of an exalted feeling standing on a mountain at night, but that feeling was overshadowed by an experience I had with my spiritual benefactor, Rama, one night on a mountain in San Diego County. We were on Palomar Mountain, less than a mile from its summit, with three other of Rama's students, Marcie, Laura and Jan. The air was brisk and smelled of orange blossoms and of the desert. The stars almost filled the sky and the moon was nowhere to be seen. Rama said that he had two 'friends' he wanted to introduce to us. Although these friends were extremely powerful, we should not be afraid of them, he said.

Rama then turned away and proceeded down the road until he was completely hidden by a sharp curve. At first I was pretty fidgety, even though the others stood perfectly still. I was cold and a little hungry. I wondered if there were any good Mexican restaurants where we could stop later, on the way back to the coast. Just then I was jolted out of my deliberations. Something was heading our way, and it sure as hell wasn't Rama.

Whatever it was, it glowed and looked translucent; I thought that I could see right through it. It was walking very slowly, but not like people walk. It slid on one foot awhile, then shifted its weight to the other side, and slid some more. It was outrageously short. It stopped about fifteen feet away and I tried to make out its features. I thought I saw an old bald man with fat lips. It turned back and glided down the road. I was certain my eyes were playing tricks on me.

None of us moved or talked until Rama returned, about five minutes later. He asked each of us to recount what we had seen.

During our stories, Rama simply nodded his head, as if our perceptions were already old hat.

"You mean, you didn't see the door?" Rama asked.

"What door?" I asked, matter-of-factly. After what we had just seen, a door wasn't going to throw me for a loop. Despite my traditional academic background as an English major and Computer Science minor, I had come to accept that when I was with Rama, any number of things were likely to occur. Sometimes I would see gold light everywhere. Other times, a mountain would undulate and then totally disappear. At that moment, I really wanted to see that door.

I told Rama that I thought I saw a flash of white light earlier, over by the bushes. He had me point to which bushes I meant. "That was the door all right," he said.

I scanned the bushes and suddenly I saw the white flash again. It looked like the sun reflecting in a mirror that is pointed at your face. Immediately I felt an exquisite sense of peace and well being.

The door moved closer to us, pivoting on one side, leaning over, then pivoting on the other side. It looked about my height. I told Rama I really liked the door. For a minute there, as we stood watching this white door hover over the bushes forty feet away, I experienced a real sense of eternity. It felt pretty good.

"It's good that you like the door," Rama said, "because one day, you will pass through it, into the

beyond.”

LORRAINE

One night, Rama invited me to the movies. I drove over to his house to meet him around 7:00. As I drove up to his closed gate and rang the bell, I had the impression that I was coming to the Mad Hatter's House for a crazy tea party. A funny voice came out of the box, “Hallow! Hallow!” I answered, and the gate began to pull open. I coasted down the driveway and pulled up to his house. My consciousness went through some very quick transmutations as I got within a closer radius, and a crazy wild joy welled up for the occasion. I rang the doorbell, and the Mad Hatter came to the door.

* * *

We saw Woody Allen's *A Midsummer's Night Sex Comedy*. It was humorous, and Allen had delved a bit into psychic phenomena and the unseen, which added a special touch. Leaving the theatre, we were in a light consciousness, and joked about life on earth. In the lobby of the theatre, he turned to me and said:

“The past few days, I have been existing in the outer fringes of consciousness. The worlds that I go to are formless, infinitely beautiful and perfect. There is absolutely no relation between these realities and this world we live in. When I get into these outer regions of consciousness, this world, as we know it, dissolves. I feel no need to come back to all this. I could very easily stay there and simply let this physical body fall away.”

“No, No, Rama, you don't want to do that,” I said to him as we were leaving the theatre. The light mood offset the rather serious content of the conversation, and we ended up laughing.

We walked out to the parking lot and its funny yellow lights lent a surreal glow to the scene. We spotted his burgundy Porsche in the distance and made our way over to it. As we reached the car, Rama said:

“When I find myself coming back to this world, I realize it's because of love. Love is the strongest force in the Universe. You can travel to all the multifarious realities — infinite planes of awareness — merge with them and become one. Yet, if love is lacking, it will all remain flat. If love is lacking in your consciousness, your awareness will be dry. You will be empty. If you love enough, you can do anything.”

We drove away, and were quiet for awhile. My whole being felt like it was stretched across the starry night sky. As Rama gunned the Porsche down the remote and twisty mountain road, I felt more like I was flying above the car than seated inside. I sensed all sorts of different energies flashing by as we whipped around the curves which were knit into the side of the canyon unfolding below us. Through the window, I saw the suggestion of a sign, “VIEW POINT,” blur past my vision. Rama pulled the steering wheel sharply to the left, and then stopped still at the canyon overlook.

The night was clear and mild. Through the sunroof the stars were brightly twinkling. Rama raised his hands to the night sky, and I watched the whole sky come alive and fill with golden sparkles; the entire sky was like an impressionistic painting, sparkling with points of dark and light. Strands of gold light joined the stars in a cosmic network. As light flowed everywhere, I felt myself melting into the scene, and there seemed to be no difference between the stars and myself.

Rama turned the key in the ignition, shifted into reverse, and we continued our journey through the night. As I gazed out the window, all the hills and the sky were glowing with a very beautiful light. The world had transformed into a land of light, or maybe I was just seeing it more clearly now. I didn't try to figure it out, though, I just watched as the hills and scenery once again began to whip by the car. I glanced over at Rama, his eyes were glued to the road, yet he was not in or of this world. I flashed on a famous line from Shakespeare's *Tempest*:

“We are such stuff as dreams are made of

And our little life is rounded with a sleep.”

As we exited onto the Pacific Coast Highway, he slowed the Porsche to a sedate 55 mph, and we re-entered the flow of life, just in time for the midnight meditation which had been planned for that evening.

GEORGE

It's been almost three years now since I first met Rama. During all this time, I have attended numerous lectures, center meetings, and field trips. I've also had many opportunities to spend time with Rama while seeing movies, eating in restaurants, shopping, and house cleaning. However, in all this time I had never been alone with Rama, until one day he took me for a ride in his Porsche.

“George, do you want to go to the meeting tonight?” Rama asked me one Saturday afternoon, while I was vacuuming a carpet in his house. There was a meditation and dinner meeting taking place that evening at a location 45 minutes driving distance from Rama's house.

“Yeah!” I said, nodding my head repeatedly.

“Well then, do you want to ride with me?” Rama asked again in a casual tone.

“OK!” I said, trying to sound casual also.

“Let's see ... it's now 4 o'clock. Why don't you meet me back here at 6. That'll give you plenty of time between now and then.”

I quickly nodded my head again and, as Rama walked away, bent back down to continue vacuuming the carpet. “This is going to be an interesting evening,” I thought, “I've never ridden with Rama in his Porsche before.”

I arrived at Rama's house at 6 o'clock, feeling a bit nervous. It was like being on a date for the first time. Marcie, a lady who had studied with Rama for many years, answered the door and invited me into the living room. “You can wait here if you want. Rama will be ready in a few minutes,” she said. I “Thanks,” I replied, and took a seat on a couch facing the fireplace. The living room was decorated with many flowers and Tibetan paintings. Picking up a book of photographs of Tibet, I started to leaf through it. A few moments later, Rama strode down the stairs. He was wearing white pants and a loose white shirt.

“Hi,” Rama greeted me as he passed by the couch. “Hi,” I said, putting down the book.

“George, will you wait for me in the garage while I close up the house?” I quickly nodded and headed toward the door.

The Porsche was parked in the middle of the garage. It was dark red and had the shiny gloss of recent wax. 911SC, that's what the back of the car said. I liked this traditional hatchback shape: definitely in a class by itself.

Rama appeared through the side garage door with a roll of paper towels and Windex in his hands. “You can get in the car first if you want,” he said while wiping the windshield with a piece of paper towel. I got into the car. Leaning back on the seat, a small green object on the dashboard caught my attention. The green object had a pair of half-dozing eyes and a crescent moon smile. It was a rubber frog.

“Have you met my friend?” Rama had gotten into the car now and was warming up the engine. Turning the frog around so that the pair of half-opened eyes stared out at me, he gave me a curious smile. “That's pretty neat,” I giggled. By this time I was much more relaxed, so I sat up a bit and buckled the seat belt. “George, you've never ridden in this car before, have you?” He put on a pair of light sunglasses and opened up a can of diet orange soda. “No!” I said, sounding kind of excited, “This is my first time.” Nodding his head in acknowledgement, Rama produced a crazed smile and stepped on the accelerator.

We drove on a small residential street for a while, then, as we were about to turn onto a main road, I suddenly saw Neil, an old friend of Rama's, driving to the left of us. When we reached the red stop light,

Rama rolled down his window and shouted something through the window to Neil. Neil smiled and laughed. I couldn't understand what they were saying to each other, but I waved back to Neil as we drove away from him.

Once we turned onto the main road, Rama suddenly hit the accelerator and the Porsche took off like a flash. I remember that it felt very steady inside the car. One would hardly believe that we had picked up the speed from 0 to 60 in six seconds, but that's what Rama said.

"There're a lot of police cars around here," I glanced at Rama. The road that we traveled was famed for its high police car population.

"I know. Isn't it ridiculous?" Rama replied, after slowing the car down considerably.

We passed some scattered houses and restaurants. There were also long stretches of beach to our right. Occasionally, we passed pedestrians dressed in beach clothing and carrying surf boards as they walked along the road.

"John's supposed to work security tonight at a party in one of these houses," Rama remarked. John is a good friend of Rama's and he was working security for an entertainment organization.

"That's a pretty tough job, isn't it?" I asked.

"Yeah!" Rama nodded. "You are exposed to a lot of different energies. You have to be strong, and it helps to be tall." I nodded my head in agreement. John's pretty tall.

We kept driving down the main road, traveling in silence. I didn't have much to say and was casually looking for a topic of conversation. I was content, however, to just relax and enjoy the passing scenery.

Suddenly, Rama took a quick glance at me and said, in a straight tone, "You are doing much better, George." He was referring to my spiritual progress.

Surprised by his remark, I was caught speechless.

"Your consciousness is rising again." Taking a sip from the soda, he continued, "You can always tell when I spend time with you." After a short pause, "Of course, if I do not ask a person to ride with me, it does not necessarily mean that the person is not doing well. I can't ask everyone who is doing well to ride with me. It's impractical."

I tried to say something, but was compelled by a feeling to remain silent. I felt that whatever I wanted to say, Rama already knew. I wanted to say that I had no idea how I was doing, that I never had much of an idea about myself. I was in the hands of destiny and was in control of nothing.

"I know," Rama said, softly, "It's difficult to tell how you are doing spiritually. Sometimes when you think that you are not doing well, you are. Sometimes you think that you are doing well, and you aren't."

Sitting in silence, I thought about those times when I wasn't doing well spiritually and the misery I went through. I thought thinking about those times might keep my ego from growing.

The car took a wide swing onto a freeway and I was now in a frame of mind where thoughts were clear and the surrounding images seemed unusually sharp and bright. There was also a constant and gentle heat in my body and a tingling sensation around the center of my chest. I felt free and happy.

"Watch," Rama broke the silence and moved a metal bar located below the steering wheel. It was a cruise control stick, he explained. The speedometer now stayed fixed.

"It's a really neat car." I was fascinated.

"Yes, it is." Rama smiled and sipped his diet soda. Flipping another switch, the top of the car opened and a gust of wind blew in. Rama picked up a cassette tape from his side and slid it into the cassette player. The music was the soundtrack from the movie, *Chariots of Fire*. It's a very soothing piece of synthesized music that Rama has played in group meditations many times.

"I really like the feeling of driving at night alone, all by myself," I said. (Rama turned down the music and leaned forward a bit to hear what I was saying.)

“Yes, that's a really neat feeling.” Leaning back in his seat he smiled. “Especially when you've done your best at what you have to do and then just take off in your car and cruise through eternity.”

The music was on the second song when we turned off the highway. We entered another wide road where there were many huge buildings and rows of telephone poles lined up along the road. The sky was approaching twilight now and the sun, to the right of us, was partially covered by a patch of greyish clouds. It's a very beautiful sunset, I thought.

After traveling between more buildings and phone poles, Rama slowed the Porsche down and carefully turned into a narrow side street.

“Hear that?” Rama looked at me.

I wasn't sure what he meant.

Slowing down the car to a full stop, Rama asked me to listen again. This time I heard it. It was the sizzling sound of the high tension wire high above us.

“Wow!” Nodding my head many times and chuckling, I said, “I used to play around with high voltage devices when I was small.” We both laughed.

The street we were on was unfamiliar to me. It became much wider and was full of palm trees and green grass. “This is a nice road,” I commented, “but, I don't think I'll be able to remember it.”

“That's all right,” Rama replied cheerfully. “I got lost, too, when I first drove this road.”

It was difficult to believe that 45 minutes could have passed so quickly. We were almost there.

Suddenly, slowing down the car, Rama turned to me and said, “I'm really glad that you came, George.”

Dumbfounded and speechless, I was caught by a wave of emotions. The moment had come.

“I don't talk much about it, but you are always in my heart,” Rama said softly. “I really love you,” he said. A jolt ran through my body. There was a silence, and the car came to a halt.

STEPHANIE

One Sunday afternoon in August of 1982, Cathy called me on the phone and asked if I could come over right away to Rama's house to fix a leaking faucet. I said, “Yes, of course.” I was so excited to be able to go over to Rama's house. I had been invited to move to Los Angeles when Rama moved there in April, and I had been given the designation “Staff-In-Training.” I felt very new and I didn't get many chances to go to Rama's house. I was glad that I'd picked up some useful skills. I'd been moving that day and my belongings were all over my new apartment, but I jumped in the shower, meditated a little amidst the chaos and drove over.

I love Rama's house. It has such a feeling of eternity and peace. Time stands still there and my world with its hassles seems far away. Rama was in the Kali room talking to Mark when I arrived. I was shown the leaking faucet. It was a simple job, the nut holding the washer in place was loose. I put it back together, then Cathy asked me to put a hook in the ceiling to hang a toy stuffed bird. As I was going out to my car to get more tools, Rama appeared at the door and invited me to go to a movie that evening with him and the other members of the staff.

I was excited again because I'd only been to a couple of movies with Rama, and it was a unique experience. This also put a time limit on putting up the hook, since we'd have to leave soon. I got it done and as I was cleaning up, Rama breezed through the room and said in the most offhand way over his shoulder, “Would you like to ride in the Porsche?” He was already halfway down the hallway when I called out after him, “Yes, I sure would.”

I couldn't believe it. Me, that close to Rama in the Porsche? I put my tools away and managed to run

into the bathroom to wash my hands and face. By then, Rama was in the Porsche getting ready to pull out. For a split second I agonized over the fact that I was covered with a fine layer of plaster dust. I'd been in such a hurry to get to Rama's house that I'd forgotten to put on deodorant, and I really wasn't dressed for the occasion. Then I got in and it didn't matter.

The Porsche is Rama's toy, and at first he was like a kid, showing another kid his neat toy. He opened the sun roof, the antenna rose like an alien sensor, he fiddled with the radio and then settled for a tape by Jarre. He sped up and looked over at me and grinned, "Pretty neat, huh?" He explained that the green rubber frog on the dashboard looked out the rear window and watched for police. I was caught up in the joy of the Porsche.

We drove in silence for quite a way. He pointed out an interesting rock formation. He looked tired. I tried to still my mind as much as possible so I could be aware of what was happening around me. I wondered what he saw, what he was experiencing, and I realized that I couldn't possibly know. We drove through a tunnel and Rama went whoosh with his hands. The world we entered was not quite Earth. It was more rugged and wild, the colors were clearer and brighter.

I felt much less physical and my mind quieted. I felt very safe and relaxed. There was no feeling of time and the Porsche seemed to be flying through space. I was pretty impressed and I sat back and enjoyed it all. We started to talk about the fall lecture series and about the upcoming Saturday night's plays and the desert trip. Soon we were at the theatre.

He showed me how to park a Porsche, across two spaces so that no one can park next to you and dent your car with their door. We were the first to arrive, but the others appeared shortly thereafter. We got soda and popcorn and sat down. The movie was a cold war cloak-and-dagger spy thriller called *The Soldier*. The soundtrack was by Rama's favorite music group, Tangerine Dream. There was a lot of graphic killing and blood, but the good guys managed to outsmart the bad guys and the day was saved.

Seeing a movie with Rama is different. Part of me is always aware that I'm watching a movie. Part of me watches me watch the movie. When it gets really gross or intense and I start to get lost in the movie, a box of chocolate covered raisins will be passed to me, or the popcorn will drift by, or it will seem funny instead. We talked about the movie on the way home and Rama outlined some things he wanted me to take care of for the Fall lecture series. The return trip seemed to last only a moment, compared to the trip out which was beginningless, endless, and eternal. That part still hasn't ended.

SHARON

My name is Sharon. I have been studying with Rama for about 21/2 years. I used to live in San Diego and am currently living in the San Fernando Valley. In the next few pages I will describe a hike that I went on with Rama and some of his other students in early July of 1982.

We met at 4:30 p.m. in a beautiful park, high in the hills above Malibu. The air was very clear and there was a bright breeze blowing. "We aren't going to walk very far," Rama said as the 25 of us started off. "The real distance of the journey will be covered inwardly." He told us that this was a very powerful place and that we should be psychically aware of changes in the energy.

We walked for twenty minutes or half an hour along a path. It was eroded in some places and quite overgrown in others. We walked up and down the side of a hill that was covered with rocks and live oak trees, and through a field of ripe, waist-high, wheat-type grass. At one point, we came upon a large, cement-lined, crater-shaped, empty hole the size of a diving pool. It looked like something out of an ancient ceremony. After passing this, we were in view of the Pacific Ocean, which shimmered with vivid blues and greens. Rama pointed out a spot to the left of the path, where we were to sit. We sat in three rows facing the ocean and Rama, who stood between two trees with his back to the sun. He suggested that we ask some questions and told us that he was waiting for the energy of the area to change, as it would with the approach of sunset.

We discussed the previous evening's outing to a production of Shakespeare's play, *The Tempest*, in San Diego. The actors had not been very inspired and Rama had added some "special effects." He created sparks from Ariel's fingertips and meditated on the actor who portrayed Prospero, causing tremendous light to shoot from his hands during the conjuring scenes.

A woman who works closely with animals asked Rama if dogs evolve. He said, "No, a dog is already one with God. The dog won't progress per se. The life essence which is within the dog is the same as that which is within a plant, a person or a realized soul. The life force is the same everywhere." I was very inspired by the humility expressed in the answer. I had never considered evolution in those terms.

Another person asked Rama to talk about the winds. He replied that there are many winds and that each one is a manifestation of a different force or luminosity. He discussed one wind in particular. "Before I understood the winds, I used to become depressed in the afternoon. The afternoon wind is the wind of death. If you are seeking liberation, you love it. It means the death of your old self."

Next we discussed what will happen when Rama leaves this planet, this world. He said that he is going to a world where there is nobility and lots of adventure. He said that he will try to bring as many of his students with him as he can, if they really want to go. "Some," he remarked, "may want to go to a more formless world or a world of beauty. There are many different worlds to choose from." He talked a little bit about the relationship between the teacher and the student. "You see, what I'm asking you is to do the unthinkable. I'm using myself as bait, standing out beyond the ocean saying, "Come to me." If you love me enough, you'll do it. You'll walk across the thin air."

There was a pause and Rama said, "Let's meditate." He waited for several minutes while people stretched their legs and changed their positions. He began by telling us to sit up straight and to look at him. Then he seemed to change his mind, instructing us instead to close our eyes. "Concentrate on the ocean. Think about its vastness and about the waves rolling onto the beach. I'm going to do something special. I'm going to come around and touch each one of you on your third eye." (The third eye, which exists in the subtle or spirit body, is located right between the eyebrows and a little bit above. It is an energy center or chakra and isn't physically visible.) "Don't anticipate," he said. "It's really no big deal. Just keep thinking about that ocean." As Rama moved through the rows, I became less aware of my physical surroundings and more aware of pure energy. Then I felt Rama directly behind me and was engulfed in the light that surrounds him. I felt a mild electric shock as he touched my forehead and a powerful wave of energy passed downward from the crown of my head. In an instant, I was permeated by a strong feeling of well being. All tensions disappeared. I hadn't realized that I was tense until I relaxed. I heard Rama exhale sharply about three times and felt suffused with light. My eyes were closed, but still it was like looking into a bright gold spotlight directly in front of my face. I ceased to feel the movement of time. Even as Rama moved on, he felt very close.

As we sat, it seemed that we moved through many celestial worlds full of beauty and light. After about 35 minutes, Rama said, "This was a touch of *E.T.*, a touch of Samadhi."

I understood the path and my part in it much more after this experience.

MARY

On July 18, 1982, 30 of us met at Charmlee Park, an area about four miles up into the mountains of northern Malibu, to attend a mile hike with Rama. It was a very warm, slightly humid afternoon. The sun shone brightly in the azure sky. The park covered a couple of miles and consisted of rolling hills covered with tall, golden grass and wildflowers. There were many dirt paths that led to different vistas of the ocean far below. We walked up the path a short distance and waited at a picnic area for Rama to arrive. There were several picnic tables situated among the trees. We could hear the loud buzzing noise of swarms of flies. Some of us commented that it reminded us of Peter Weir's movie, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. The area seemed to hold an energy all its own — one of a very old,

mystical nature and of a certain stillness.

Rama joined us about 20 minutes later. As we began walking, he said that the park reminded him of the countryside of Scotland. My temperament was very even that day and my mind was quiet. I didn't worry or wonder how to act or think as we walked along close behind Rama. There was a feeling of simplicity and lightness. It was fun to brush my hand across the tall grass as I had done as a child.

As we neared our destination, we stopped briefly to look curiously at a large, circular concrete hole about fifty feet in diameter and perhaps five feet deep. Rama surmised (jokingly?) that the hole must be where the flying saucers land. He looked up at us to see who was laughing and who took him seriously.

Shortly beyond that point, we stopped and seated ourselves to the left of the path. We could see the ocean far below. The waves appeared to be moving very slowly and looked very small. Rama stood facing us. I wondered if he was tired and supposed that he was. He answered questions for quite awhile as he waited for "the power to increase." He explained that we were seated in an energy vortex where different planes of realities intersected.

As time passed, Rama's body became more and more transparent with a white luminescence. There seemed to be no difference between him and the sky. He, in essence, had become the sky. He stopped speaking for a moment and focused his attention on an ant. "If I focus my attention on a small object," he explained, "the rest of my being is free to do other things." He then looked over to his right. "Hmmm." Then to his left. "Hmmm. When I'm doing this, it doesn't necessarily mean I'm contemplating what to do next. Right now, I'm looking at all the beings around us." I had been noticing bright, glittering sparkles of golden light and small, round, blue lights flashing around Rama periodically.

We meditated formally for a short period of time as Rama brought us through different planes of reality. Then, he softly announced that he was going to do something different — that he was going to transfer the kundalini directly to each of us by placing his thumb on our forehead. He asked us to relax and to close our eyes. I quieted my mind as much as possible as I waited. As he blessed the students close by, my heart beat and the energy around me increased in speed and movement. I felt as though I were being filled with a golden liquid as my muscles relaxed.

Rama gently placed his thumb on the center of my forehead just above the eyebrows and rested his fingers on top of my head. I felt very open and receptive as the tingling energy filtered down from head to foot. It was a very loving and intimate moment — quite indescribable. My body felt free, as if it were floating in the golden Light. Upon blessing the last student, he stood back and meditated on each of us.

Rama sauntered back down towards the cars, chewing on a piece of grass and talking lightly to one of the students as we glided behind him. I wondered if the simplicity and wide-eyed innocence of childhood that I was feeling at that time was the way Rama always looked at the world. I hoped I could be like that someday.

NEIL

I spent several days on vacation in Maui with Rama and several other people in the spring of 1982.

Having just completed the spring public series we were very tired and most of us were not in the best of health. Our idea of an exciting vacation at that time was to lie on the beach and drink virgin Pina Colodas during the day and if we felt good enough, dine out in the evening.

The Hyatt Hotel where we all stayed was a fascinating place. It was designed like an oriental garden. Everywhere I walked I was met by statues of the Buddha in varying sizes, shapes and postures, all different and all authentic artwork imported from the Orient. A person couldn't walk ten feet in any direction without being confronted by one.

In addition, there were statues of oriental deities, gem-studded golden tigers, and live swans, penguins

and cockatoos.

In the evenings Rama would take us walking through the hotel courtyard and gardens. We would admire the beauty and watch the people, stopping now and then to sit by a pond amidst the tropical foliage.

We had only two outings planned: one to Haleakala crater and one to Iao Valley to see the Iao Needle. We all thought that the most exciting trip would be to the crater, particularly because it had been the high point of last year's vacation and this time the moon would be full.

It was a two-hour drive to the base of the crater and it took another hour to cover the ten thousand feet to the summit. Those of us who were with Rama on Haleakala crater the year before remembered the fantastic display of power that he gave us and the feeling of being in a place where we had lived thousands of years ago. We had fun there this time and the view from the top was breathtaking, but for some reason the power wasn't what we had expected; the energy, compared to the last visit, seemed flat.

The next day we considered our options. The big event, Haleakala crater, had come and gone and none of us were particularly enthusiastic about going to Iao Valley. It felt anti-climactic. Besides, we were still quite exhausted and a day relaxing at the beach sounded just fine.

But Rama, who had already seen Iao, told us that it was extremely beautiful and convinced us to go. So we all went, not expecting anything more than a pleasant afternoon.

The drive to Iao took only an hour from the hotel. The road ran through the valley and on either side, the mountains were completely covered in a deep, rich green. The sky, the mountains and even the air exuded a feeling of timelessness. It was as if the entire valley had been scooped up by God and placed on Maui one day, thousands of years ago, before the time of Atlantis. The road ended in a parking lot which was right below the Iao Needle. We got out of our cars and walked up many steps to an observation platform. Iao Needle is a sliver of a mountain, tall and thin. It does not have the same green foliage as the surrounding mountains and the top half is mostly bare rock.

"This is the central transmitting station for the benevolent forces of Hawaii," Rama explained. Then he pointed his hand at it and a stream of golden light flowed from his hand to the Needle, creating a ring of golden light around it that shot straight into the sky for hundreds of feet.

Then he turned to me and placed his hand over my face.

"Karate, nothing!" he said, making fun of the sport that I practice. With one burst of power from his hand, I was rendered helpless and I collapsed on the ground.

He helped me up and then did to me what he had just done to Iao Needle. Very soon the world was spinning around me.

"You had better sit down," said Rama.

There was a wooden bench ten feet behind me and I stumbled onto it. The effect of what Rama had done to me was just beginning to hit me. I closed my eyes and began to drift into other worlds.

With a yell loud enough to start an avalanche, Rama ran to me and pressed his thumb on my forehead, right between my eyes. The bolt of energy that he sent through me was so powerful that all of the muscles of my body contracted at once. If there was any sense of self remaining, it vanished at that point. The muscles of my face became frozen; I couldn't move my mouth to say a word. My hands and legs became numb. I floated away from my body and entered a vast swirling vortex of feelings, sounds, impressions and lights. I could feel the mountains around me and the wind within me. Every so often I surfaced enough to hear Rama, who was sitting on the bench next to me, talking.

"This valley is very old," Rama told the others. "It is from the 'Old Cycle,' from the time of Atlantis and before. The forces then were very different, but some of them are still here now."

He placed his thumb on my forehead and sent another bolt of power through me.

"Now I am going to remove his disease," he said. "This is an accumulation of bad energy that he has

taken in over the years.”

Rama grabbed me by the stomach and I had the curious sensation that he was pulling something out of my body. I thought that I could see it even though my eyes were closed. It looked like a grey mass that was about the size of two fists put together. As soon as it was taken out, a physical ache that was always coursing through my body disappeared.

I don't know how much longer I sat there. For a while I didn't even exist. I only recall that Rama told me that I had to stand up because it was time to leave.

My muscles were still numb and frozen. I could hardly open my eyes to see. I pushed myself up from the bench but seriously doubted that I could negotiate the long set of stairs in my condition. However, Rama walked down next to me and I used the energy field surrounding his body to keep my balance.

When I looked at the world and the people around me they shimmered as if I could see the atoms that they were composed of. And for a moment which was eternal I saw through people. It was like a giant hand had torn away the scenery and backdrop of a play, while the performance continued, exposing the actors and technicians waiting in the wings. I could see people's thoughts, their concerns and their motives like they were chunks of matter that were plainly visible.

“That's only one way of seeing,” Rama told me as we walked down the steps.

Rama started singing “Me And My Shadow.” I joined in and we sang and did a little dance all the way down the steps to the cars.

The sun was setting as we drove back to the hotel, and whenever I opened my eyes, what I could see of it was beautiful.

FRANCES

On Maui there is a dormant volcano named Haleakala. It is 10,025 feet above sea level. One day, we drove to the rim, to be with Rama. The drive started at the beach, passed through cane fields, then through the foothills which were covered with trees and brush. As we climbed, the road became a series of switchbacks. The ascent was like taking off in an airliner on an overcast day. We drove right up to and through the cloud layer, where it was like driving in fog. Above the clouds, the sky was blue and clear. The air was pure and cool.

Rama was waiting for us at the parking lot of the crater park. We all climbed about 100 feet up to the rim of the crater. The floor of the crater has an amazing range of colors — reds, oranges, rusts, browns and greens. We sat on the lava rocks that covered the area. Rama pointed to various cones and ridges down in the crater floor. As we watched, he “melted” them. We were all very high and no one spoke.

Two ten-year-old boys came up the trail. They stood near us, throwing rocks over the rim of the crater. You could clearly see the dust fly where the rocks landed down the crater walls. When the boys left, Rama picked up a rock. “Watch,” he said, and he threw the rock. It never landed. It had disappeared in midair.

The sun was setting by now, sulking into the cloud layer as it might appear to sink into the ocean. The sky became a vivid shade of pink-purple, and the sun was a glowing orange ball. These colors reflected on the tops of the clouds. Rama stood facing the sun with his back to us. After a few minutes, he asked Neil what he had seen. Neil said that he had seen Rama running out over the cloud layer. I had seen a white light darting over the clouds.

As it got dark, you could see the lights of homes on the valley floor through breaks in the cloud cover. Rama said it was time to go. We drove back down through the clouds to the floor of the valley.

RUTH-ANNE

It was the last night of the public meditation series for the Fall 1981 season and Christine, Jill, Julie and I decided to stop at Jojo's coffee shop about halfway home. Rama didn't always stop there but this night he appeared with Neil and two other people. He sat at a table across from us about three feet away. The energy in the room began to intensify as soon as he walked in.

He was glowing and about halfway through our meal, Rama started doing something to Neil, causing Neil to laugh uncontrollably. I'm not sure what it was but I could feel a force with tremendous heat entering my being. It was as if whatever he was doing to Neil was having an effect on me. It was so powerful and ecstatic that I was mesmerized by it. At this point I was unable to formulate anything to chat about with the other ladies at the table. It seemed, by the look in their eyes, that they were feeling the intensity too, but they continued to talk as if nothing was happening. Then they began to have difficulty speaking. Christine would say a few words about a skiing resort that didn't make any sense and we would all laugh. We were so high that the only thing we could do effectively was to laugh.

We sat there in a blissful state for about an hour and a half, and kept ordering small things so we could stay at our table. Rama appeared to be going in and out of Samadhi and talking about plans for the New Year as it was about a week before Christmas.

We kept laughing from the intensity of the experience and about every twenty minutes Rama would look over at us and ask us if we were enjoying ourselves. Jill was kicking me under the table because she wanted to leave. Sometimes the energy around Rama gets so intense that a person feels uncomfortable. Jill's attempt to leave was futile. The rest of us were so blissful that we didn't mind sitting there with nothing to say.

Rama continued to talk about how we are always in a hurry to accomplish something and get someplace, failing to enjoy the moment. Then our lives are over and we wonder what it was all for, thinking that maybe there was no place to get to. He indicated that 1982 was going to be a good year spiritually and said we should try to extend the time and enjoy every moment.

At this point the atmosphere at Jojo's was luminous and sparkling. Jill had calmed down and nobody was chatting. We were all absorbed in the Christmas spirit of eternal peace and bliss. Rama got up, wished us a Merry Christmas, and left.

I couldn't feel my body and I wasn't sure that I was going to be able to stand up. When I did stand I was very cautious. Amazingly, I was able to get up, pay the check, and leave like an ordinary patron of Jojo's Coffee Shop.

MARK

Rama and I were sitting in a shopping mall drinking Strawberry Juliuses, when I saw the stores right around us disappear. They literally faded away. Now I had been to this mall countless times before and I never saw anything disappear. But here I was, sitting with my spiritual teacher in San Diego's University Towne Center, watching the entire scene melt away.

Good God, I thought, I must be losing my mind. I rubbed my eyes, thinking that perhaps my contact lenses had slipped behind my eyelids. It occurred to me that my Julius had been poisoned. But no: Rama sat directly across from me at one of those plastic orange tables. I saw him as clear as day.

To complicate matters, Rama was glowing: I saw gold and red light around the top of his head. I wanted to know, was he generating my experience, or what.

I described what I saw to Rama. "No, I'm not doing that," he said. "You're simply seeing what was out there all along, but on a higher level of existence."

Rama went on to say that we are taught as children that the universe is a certain way, that shopping

malls are real. “While that may be true,” he added, “I also know that ultimately, in deep states of meditation, all our descriptions of reality break down. Then the world literally dissolves,” he continued. After a while, Rama and I finished off our Juliuses and walked back to the car. Somehow, that mall in San Diego was never quite the same for me.

RICK

Rama went with a few of his students to a movie in Westwood Village one Friday night. The Village is an area of shops, restaurants and movie theaters on the edge of the UCLA campus. On Friday nights, Westwood is usually jammed with college kids out for a good time. This Friday was not different and Westwood was busy with activity.

Rama and I were walking towards the theater from his car. We reached an intersection in the Village and the traffic light in our direction was red. It was almost time for the movie to start so we decided to jog across the street anyway. Just before we reached the other side of the street, a policeman on a motorcycle came out of nowhere and ordered us to stop at the curb.

Westwood cops seem to write a lot of jaywalking tickets on Friday nights and from his tone of voice, I knew that this one was going to write us tickets.

The cop pulled up next to us and turned off his motorcycle.

“What makes you think the 'Don't Walk' sign doesn't apply to you?” he said to Rama.

“Maybe I'm just stupid,” Rama replied in a friendly, half-joking tone of voice.

“How 'bout you?” the cop asked me.

“Sorry, officer,” I answered.

The policeman looked us over for a second and seemed to size us up.

“You go to school here?” he questioned Rama.

“I have my own school,” Rama said.

Bending down and resting his hands on his knees, Rama brought his face close to the policeman's. He stared directly into the policeman's eyes. The cop looked back at Rama, hesitated, then looked away. He glanced up at me then looked back down at the ground.

“Just wait a few seconds next time, until it's O.K. to walk,” the cop mumbled, then started his motorcycle and sped off.

As we walked away, Rama said, “Did you see?”

I nodded.

Mimicking Darth Vader's voice, Rama said, “Never underestimate the power of the force.”

JOHN

To my knowledge, the closest I've come to dying was on a sunny afternoon during the summer of 1978. That day I went for a swim I almost never returned from. I'm here to write about it only because Rama saved my life. I think it makes for a good story.

Rama was in a Ph.D. Program and I was an undergraduate at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. We lived fairly close to the beach, as does almost everyone on Long Island. I've always loved the beach, and Rama is a great swimmer. Naturally, the summer often found the two of us and our friends at one of Long Island's many beaches.

We frequently swam at one particular beach near the university. It was located at the mouth of a large

inlet that emptied into Long Island Sound. The Sound is the body of water separating Long Island from Connecticut. It is big, and the tidal changes are great. The tidal changes were responsible for a very swift current that ran past the beach on the inlet where we swam. In fact, the current was one of the main reasons we used this beach. It was possible to ride the current and stay close to shore. This was a lot of fun. Venturing further out in the current was risky though, because an outgoing tide would sweep you into the Sound.

We were satisfied with riding the current for several weeks of beachgoing, but another adventure tempted us. Across the inlet's mouth, at a distance of about a quarter mile, was a small peninsula. We always thought of swimming over to it, but never had because of the danger involved. The danger amounted to the fact that unless the swim was made precisely and strongly, the current would sweep you out into the Sound, exhausted and with no land to cling to. The only time to attempt such a swim would be at a peak tide when the current would have lessened enough to consider swimming across it.

It so happened that Rama and I, and two friends, went to this beach one day at just such a peak tide. We quickly decided that this was our chance. Leaving our friends on the shore, the two of us plunged into the water. The point we hoped to reach was about 300 yards down the current from our departure point, so we had to cover the quarter mile across before we were dragged beyond the peninsula and into open water.

We swam from the shore at a brisk pace, and I soon became aware that the current was much greater than I'd anticipated. It would have to be a strong, hard swim or the results would be disastrous. Nevertheless, we continued swimming. I knew Rama was a stronger swimmer than I was, but I had faith I would keep up with him.

My faith began to give way though, about two-thirds of the way across, when I realized I was tiring rapidly and falling behind Rama. I also noticed that at my reduced rate of speed, the current would sweep me into the Sound before I reached the point. I mounted a desperate effort to catch Rama, who looked like he would make it. I failed.

I looked up, utterly exhausted, only to see myself drifting past the point. I noticed Rama had just made it to the tip. As I poked hopelessly for the bottom with my feet, I realized that I was going to die. I had absolutely no strength left, and I was being dragged well beyond land. I was surprisingly calm, and resolved to my fate, although it did seem sad to be dying so young. I looked over at Rama and saw him jump back in the water. In my confused state, it didn't really register that he was coming to save me. I was about seventy-five feet past him, but he reached me in seconds. Despite his own exhaustion, he had come back into the current to save me.

Rama held me up as the two of us floated in the current, waiting for my strength to return. Rama had brought hope with him. I felt we would make it, though the odds were against us. We were well away from land, and there were no boats in sight. Our best chance appeared to be a swim of about three-quarters of a mile into shore. The prospect of this, in my state of exhaustion, was not too pleasant, but Rama assured me my strength would return, and that we'd do it.

At that moment we saw a boat, and miraculously it was heading in our direction. The boat came up to us, and the people on board lifted me to safety. Our friends back at the beach had noticed our problem and had flagged down this boat to help us. To my total amazement Rama stayed in the water and decided to swim for shore. I urged him against this, but he insisted and said he'd see me at the beach.

The boat took me back to our friends and I related the incident to them. Our concern immediately shifted to Rama because he had a long swim still ahead of him. We spent some anxious moments, but Rama soon came walking down the beach to us.

This happened four years ago. As my spiritual teacher, Rama has saved me inwardly numerous times since then when I faltered spiritually. We have often joked about this incident, but ultimately it is the bottom line in spiritual practice: he risked his life to save mine.

CHAPTER NINE

THE LAST INCARNATION

*“Try not to be afraid of death.
Think of death as an old friend who comes to help you
When you are ready to begin a new adventure.
Death comes to all.
Let your body die when its time has come.
Then you can begin your next adventure.”*

— Rama

CHAPTER NINE

THE LAST INCARNATION

COLLEEN

It was late when Atmananda arrived, perhaps 2 a.m. I heard his car engine drone in the distance and watched his headlights come over the hill. I was sitting a quarter mile down the desert gorge with about a hundred others and I had been there a couple of hours. It was a starry night and warm. I had meditated most of the time, finding it easy to move into a timeless space with relatively little thought.

Atmananda strode through the group of waiting students and headed down the gorge. We arose as one and followed him. We walked fast without speaking for a mile or two. He veered off and stopped against the mountainside. We formed a semi-circle around him and I sat down after scanning the ground for scorpions with my flashlight. While waiting for the slower walkers to join us, I took off my canteen and shook the sand out of my shoes.

Atmananda meditated until all were assembled, then he called, "Robert Grant."

A young man stood up and made his way through the seated students.

"Sit down," Atmananda said.

Atmananda placed his hands over Robert's forehead and crown. They seemed frozen in the moment.

"Hanuman." Then, "You have a new name."

Hanuman returned to his seat. Atmananda spoke of him, telling us of his devotion.

"I've never asked for it; I'm not even sure I like it. But I can't ignore it." Pause. "I told him years ago that his name would be Hanuman."

Atmananda began to pace. "I have something to tell you. It's going to come as a shock." He stopped for a moment, turning to face us. "I'm not who you think I am." He continued pacing. Our group was silent, waiting. "Who am I?" No one spoke. "Well, don't all answer at once." A few chuckles.

"I thought you were a man named Atmananda who meditated very well," one student ventured.

Atmananda shook his head, "No."

"I don't care who you are, Atmananda, I'm just glad you're here," another called out.

"Please, no philosophy tonight."

Other students spoke out in the darkness, but no one seemed to have the answer to Atmananda's question.

"A few days ago I stopped drinking Tab and started eating yogurt again. It was then I knew that something was happening." We all laughed. "This morning when I woke up," Atmananda continued, "I looked at my body and there was nothing but light. I wasn't solid anymore. I was just streaming light." He stopped pacing and looked out at us. "My room is filled with golden light all the time now, even when I'm not there. Can you imagine how my friends feel when they come to my room to visit me? I'm not there, but the room is streaming with light." Atmananda laughed.

“Eternity gave me a new name this morning.” He paused, then continued. “For a long time I've wondered who I am. I've been trying to remember and now I have.”

The night was still. The students stopped shifting around. I grew alert. Something was about to happen.

“Who am I?” Atmananda asked again.

“You're Vishnu,” a student right behind me said.

“Yes,” he answered, “that's close.”

“Rama,” a woman next to me said.

“Eternity has named me Rama,” Atmananda said. “Rama most clearly reflects that strand of luminosity of which I am a part.”

There was silence while we felt the impact of his words, then I could hear the name being whispered among the group. A few people began to cry softly.

“We're at the end of the cycle,” Rama told us. “You've all known it since childhood. In the Hindu division of the ages, this is the Kali Yuga, the dark age. At the end of a cycle, Vishnu takes incarnation as a person. Vishnu is that aspect of God that preserves and protects life. When Vishnu leaves, Shiva comes.”

My mind was surprised but I was not. Off and on since childhood I have sensed certain things, but never before I met Atmananda had I found someone who addressed the things that I had known without words. “I'm changing the name of the book you have all been writing to *The Last Incarnation*. It's more appropriate, don't you think? Since this is my last incarnation in this world.”

“Rama?”

“Yes?”

“In the past you told us that in another time we gathered and made a ring of power and tried to make a jump to a different world.”

“That's right. We tried to change our field of attention and move into a different dream. There are different dreams; you don't necessarily have to die to leave this world. This is a dream. There are other dreams.”

“But we didn't make it.”

“That's right. We didn't make it that time.”

“And now you're looking for all your old students because this is your last life here. But what if we don't achieve Realization in this life? Can we go where you're going?”

“You don't have to be enlightened to go there. I'm returning to the world where I first took incarnation. It's much more fun there. We can go on crusades and have adventures. It's not exactly a physical world. And it's much easier to know God there, to become Self Realized, because the Maya isn't as thick. The Maya is very thick here and it's going to get much thicker, much darker here soon. “You all understand Karma? The law of cause and effect? It's a karmic law that you'll return to whatever you love the most. Through the law of attraction you'll be drawn into incarnation by whatever you love the most.”

“But you have to be yourself and love what you love and be who you are. If it's the Dharma, you'll be born where I am. If not, you'll be born wherever that which you love is, and that's appropriate.”

“Rama,” a student called. “Does this mean that when you die all the cataclysms that have been prophesied will come to pass?”

“Oh no, I'm not that important.” Rama looked up at the sky. Then he said, “At the end of a cycle certain changes occur, certain things come into manifestation. The earth has always had upheavals and will continue to. That's no big deal. Earthquakes come, earthquakes go. I have a mission. I've come to

accomplish particular tasks.”

There was silence again. Rama gazed at the stars and raised his hands to the sky. After a bit he turned back towards us.

“Only about a tenth of the powers have returned. More come back every day. Twice last week I walked on water.” He looked at us. “Here, watch.”

Rama raised his arms to shoulder height and stood with his legs apart. A mist seemed to form around his body. He disappeared. All I could see of him were his boots and the stripes on the arms of his jacket. His body was gone.

Though it was dark and the moon had set hours before, I had been able to see him fairly well as he stood talking to us. I was sitting in the front row only a few feet from him. Now he was only a voice in the darkness.

After awhile he reappeared, continuing to tell us about his experience of the spiritual process.

“The molecular structure of my body has changed and keeps changing.” Rama slapped his arm several times. “I’m not solid any more.” He laughed.

Rama had worn shorts. As I looked at his legs I noticed that they seemed to be rippling and the edges were hazy and undefined. A whitish light was emanating from them.

“See the star up there, the bright one off by itself?” We did. “Watch it closely.” Rama pointed his hand at the star. It grew fuzzy, seemed to get bigger and then it was gone. Everyone laughed.

“Gone,” he said. “I’ll bring it back.” As we watched the sky, the star reappeared. “I’ll do it again.” The star disappeared and reappeared several more times.

Rama raised his arms above his head and looked up. “Wind.” The wind came, gusty and balmy, on this October night.

“Rama?”

“Yes.”

“Were you always Vishnu in all the other lives when you were a spiritual teacher, in Tibet and Japan?”

“Yes, but I never remembered in those lives. A few years ago the thought came that I was an incarnation of Vishnu. I treated that thought as I treat all thoughts; I pushed it away and continued to meditate ... until this morning when Eternity gave me my new name.

“I’ve had so many signs over the years, but I never put it together before: there was Lakshmana’s name; the name of the Center, Lakshmi; and now Hanuman.”

“Rama, last week at the public meditation I saw a monkey jump out of your forehead,” a student added. “At the time I didn’t understand what it meant.”

“Then are you the Rama of the *Ramayana*?” another student asked.

“No, I’m not the Rama of the Old Cycle. Eternity has named me Rama because it most clearly reflects the qualities that I express in this incarnation.” Rama paused and looked us over again. “I’ll show you my true form now, the Universal Form. Pay attention.”

For much of the night Rama had been invisible. Only the movement of the jacket stripes and boots were discernible to my eye. I watched the area where his voice was. I wanted to ‘see’ the form if I could. I thought of the section of the *Bhagavad-Gita* where Krishna reveals his true form to Arjuna. What I did see was more of an impression and not very clear. I ‘saw’ Rama disappear completely, boots, stripes and all. Something came that was much bigger and rounder than Rama’s form. Within the parameters of the big roundness I saw what appeared to be dim lights darting about. One student gasped, “You have four arms,” but I didn’t see that.

What I did experience was a feeling within my being, a certainty that he was Rama and that Rama was Vishnu incarnate; that this was our time. The cycle was ending.

Rama became visible again and sat down on his pack. After awhile he told us he had taken us into the Old Cycle, that we were no longer in the same earth cycle that we had been born into or were familiar with. He suggested that we try to feel it. I tried to catch the flavor of this other time. I noticed that the energy moved through my being much more smoothly and with almost no physical sensation. I was resonating with the energy Rama was generating.

“How are you doing out there?” Rama asked. “What are you seeing?”

“It looks like flashlights are going on and off all over the hillside behind you, Rama” Lakshmana said.

“Those are Beings who have come to join us. There's really quite a crowd here with us tonight.”

I had noticed tiny lights flashing for the last hour or so, a few on the hillside, a few right among our group. These flashes of light were quite different than when someone in the group turned on a flashlight and scanned the ground for scorpions.

“I've never seen so much,” a woman whispered.

I was growing uncomfortable and stiff. I shifted around in the sand. My attention was waning.

“Don't let the casualness of my manner fool you,” Rama said. “I joke with you and talk about these things in a light way to make it easier for you to assimilate what's going on. I make fun of myself; it's my Columbo routine. But don't get too relaxed. Right now you are being brought through a stronger vortex of energy than ever before.” I had been looking down, leaning on one knee. Suddenly my head swung up. Rama was gazing at me. He had disappeared again. Where his head had been there was a black hole, darker than the surrounding night. I could feel the intensity of his gaze. My awareness was literally drawn into that spiral of energy. For timeless moments I was that vortex.

The students' questions and Rama's answers went on through the night.

“Rama?”

“Yes, Esmond.”

“What is the purpose of life, if one may ask such a question?”

“Life is its own purpose. Life is Divine play ... Life is for the fun of it,” Rama replied.

Suddenly I was feeling tired. I had not slept for 20 hours and my body began to feel weary. I wondered how much longer we would sit here. At that moment a student spoke up from the rear of our group.

“Rama, I've started to feel very sleepy. I'm having a hard time staying awake.”

“Your body is saturated and it's closing down,” Rama answered. “It's saying, 'I've had enough. No more of this tonight.' It's at this time that a leap in awareness is possible. Sit up straight. Pull your shoulders back. When you think you've gone as far as you can, that's the time to push on. That's when quantum leaps in consciousness are made.”

I heard quite a bit of stirring then. There were apparently more than two of us who were starting to fade.

“I want to make an important point now. It's critical that you understand that I am not special and that what's happening to me is not special. It just is. If you don't understand this very important point, then you'll be taken out by what I've told you and exaggerate its meaning out of all proportion. I am not a special person. I am no more or less important than the sand we're sitting on.

“You may think this is a big deal, but believe me, most people could care less. At their current stage of evolution most people in this world aren't interested in their spiritual unfoldment, and that's just as it should be.” Pause. “All souls don't begin taking incarnation at the same time or in the same world. Most of you have attained far more advanced levels of spiritual development in other incarnations than you are

expressing now. Some of you have had as many lives on other worlds as you have here.” Pause. “I’m just an older cycle soul, that’s all. I’m down the street a couple of blocks. In fact, I’ve been around for many, many cycles.”

Rama was silent for a few moments, then he continued.

“I’m telling you about each stage of my process so that you’ll realize that I’m really not any different than you are. Each stage I have gone through, you’ll go through. And once the final stages begin, there’s nothing you can do about it. The process went beyond my control long ago.

“The people who have known me as Atmananda don’t realize that he’s gone. Atmananda has vanished, never to return. Erased by Eternity forever.” Rama laughed. “And in his place is Rama. A very different being.”

The darkness was becoming gray. The night was ending. Too soon we would leave this place and these moments.

“I want you to understand that I’m not a special person; I’m not different from you. I had a pretty normal childhood. I played baseball. When I was about twelve a sort of return began. I was attracted to the books in my father’s library on Buddhism. I didn’t know why. I read them and didn’t understand a word of it. Then puberty set in and my mind turned to other things.” We all laughed.

“Most people who are going to wake up in this life do so around age 18. They begin to ask themselves who they are, what the purpose of life is, why they are here. It can happen at any age, 30 or 60, but for many it begins around 18 or 19.

“That’s when I became interested in consciousness and meditation and helping people. I sought out the Indian teacher whom I felt to be the best in this country and for 11 years I devoted my life to him and to helping others. Oh, I did other things. I went to school and received my doctorate. I taught college English. I went all over the world giving lectures on meditation for my guru.

“Once my teacher asked his assembled disciples who among them thought they would be God Realized in this lifetime. There I was, surrounded by all these saintly beings. And I used to sneak off to the movies on Friday nights, which was forbidden. I never thought I was special. In fact, I figured I was pretty low vibe.” We couldn’t help laughing with Rama. “There were hundreds of disciples in this auditorium and my teacher asked all who believed they would become Realized in this life to stand up.” Pause. “Everyone in the room stood up except one other student and me. Then I knew I was low vibe.” More laughter.

“But do you see my point? It can happen to anybody. Believe me, if it can happen to me ... it can happen to you. Who I am is really not important. More importantly, who are you?”

“When you start to remember who you are, it will be very much like the stages of my own Realization. It’s an ongoing process. You don’t just wake up one morning and *ZAP!* you’re Enlightened. Every day brings another change, the next step. And it can happen to you. This is what I want you to understand.”

We were silent. His words were riding on a powerful energy and they entered every aspect of my being.

“Who are you?” Rama asked again. “You’re starting to remember. Now, watch this.”

Rama stood up and started doing something very funny. He began walking around the open area in front of us, lifting each leg very high off the ground. As I watched this high-stepping I noticed that his legs seemed very rubbery. Sometimes he’d kick one out to the side or in front and it seemed to grow long and then become short. There was much chuckling while he continued to walk around in this strange way.

Then as I watched I had the impression I was seeing his subtle body rise a few feet above the ground while his physical body pranced across the sand.

“You’re levitating,” someone said.

“You're several feet off the ground now,” someone else added.

Then his subtle body assumed the lotus posture and floated in mid-air. His physical body seemed to be elongating and rippling in unusual ways.

“Whew,” Rama sighed. “That's tiring.” Finally he stopped and sat back down on his pack.

It was first light. I could see Rama again. A few birds began to chirp. I looked up. The stars were gone.

“The desert's waking up. It's time to go,” Rama said.

We walked back in a long string of one's and two's and three's. No one spoke. It was light now. It seemed to take a long time to walk back to the place where we had originally gathered.

The sunrise was glorious. A crimson band stretched across the horizon. Streaks of red and gold extended through the cloud-filled sky. A pink hue spread over the mountains and the desert floor. I stopped from time to time just to watch the changing panorama of colored light as it ushered in the day. I wasn't tired any more.

When we reached the gathering spot, we formed a large circle. Rama stood at its center and slowly rotated, looking at each one of us. He made three revolutions, gradually turning faster and faster. When he stopped, he addressed us a last time.

“Try not to forget tonight. Try not to forget who I am ... If you allow yourself to forget who I am, then you'll never remember who you are.”

TIM

I am sitting in the desert and I am very afraid. It is quite dark tonight, with mists obscuring the stars. The moon set long ago. The winds are blowing down the gorge, creating little sand-dances that nibble at the edges of your fears when you see them in the corners of your vision. There are crawly things underfoot and the occasional high whistles of bats overhead. But these are not the reasons I am afraid. My spiritual teacher, Atmananda, with whom I have been studying for the last year, is telling us that he woke up this morning and decided to change his name to Rama. I have a cold, cold feeling in my stomach and feel like running away into the safety of the night.

He is explaining that the name Atmananda was given to him by his previous spiritual teacher, and although it's a fine name, it just hasn't been feeling right lately. After all, he has gone through some profound changes since leaving that teacher. We are talking, you must realize, about the guy who can pull off things like disappearing, levitating, walking on air, filling a room with golden Light, and being on friendly enough terms with celestial beings like Lakshmi and Kali to have them drop by and visit on desert trips like this one. So if he has decided that there is a more suitable name for himself, I'm all for it. It's just that the choice of the name and all it connotes has freaked me right out.

He tells us about waking up this morning and seeing Light streaming off his body in a totally new way, realizing that the time had come to face what he had been avoiding for quite a while. That is, accepting who he really is. He is walking around, joking with us and being a comedian, but I have been around long enough to know that when he starts being too funny and light-hearted, chances are that something heavy is about to go down. That's when I start to get the heebie-jeebies.

He tells us that he's sorry that he has to disappoint us, but the person we have conceived of as Atmananda is gone. He asks the 100 or so of us for our ideas of whom we have considered him to be. People offer their ideas, you know, things like “a Self Realized teacher,” “a human being who can disappear and manifest Light,” things like that. I have my own ideas, especially since the last desert trip, but I'm being quiet about them because they are too weird. You see, on that last trip he talked for awhile about the trouble it took for him to find us all again in this incarnation, and suggested, almost in passing,

that we go home and look up the myth of Lakshmi.

Taking his advice, I discovered that Lakshmi was indeed a Hindu goddess, and that her myth was quite fascinating. Lakshmi is the consort of Vishnu, one of the three primal deities of the Hindu pantheon. She is the personification of love and faithfulness, so much so that she vowed to incarnate every time Vishnu did, just to be his wife. So when Vishnu incarnated as Parasurama, Lakshmi was born as Dharani, the earth. During his incarnation as Rama, she was the faithful Sita, and joined Rama in his fourteen-year banishment in the forest. When he was Krishna, she was incarnated twice, first as the gopi maiden Radha, and then as his wife Rukmini.

This was obviously the part that was relevant to what Atmananda was speaking about in the desert — students of a spiritual teacher reincarnating en masse at the time and place of the teacher's next incarnation to continue their studies, the vehicle for all of this being love. But the more I read, the more fascinating the myth became, because I found that according to most accounts, there have been nine incarnations of Vishnu so far, with only one more to go. The tenth incarnation will be the last, bringing with it the ending of this cycle of human development.

Now this started me wondering, because Atmananda has said often that this will be *his* last incarnation in this world, that he will return after his death to the world he originally came from. So, almost as a lark, I have been playing ever since with the notion that this crazy guy I'm studying with is really Kalki or whatever the name for the last incarnation of Vishnu is supposed to be. Just toying with the idea, you understand, trying it on for size — it's not the sort of thing one wishes to take seriously. But it has been so much fun noticing all the parallels, like naming his organization Lakshmi and one of his closest students Lakshmana. Lakshmana was the brother of Rama, one of the more well-known incarnations of Vishnu.

I'm mainly keeping all this to myself, having fun with the parallels, toying with the idea of writing it all up as a kind of jive modernization of the Hindu pantheon, along the lines of Roger Zelazny's *Lord of Light* or Gore Vidal's *Kalki*. So when he mentions that he's changing the title of this book we've been writing from *Samadhi Is Loose In America* to *The Last Incarnation*, it has quite a different impact on me than on most of the folks around me.

I know in an intuitive flash what is coming, and it is something that I simply do not wish to hear. I start to shake, and it's not that cold out here. Being the student of a crazy guy who claims to remember his past lives and can do fun things with Light is one thing; being the student of a Hindu god-consciousness here to usher in the Last Days is quite another. I want to shout, "Wait! I know I've been toying with this idea, but it was just for fun! I didn't really mean it — tell me you're not going to say what I think you are." I want this scene to go away, but it doesn't.

He talks and hints some more, and then finally has us guess what his new name is. After several tries, a fellow from San Francisco finally gets it — Rama. Some of the younger students look like they're thinking, "Gee, that's a nice name. Go for it." Others are trying it out on their tongues to see how it will sound. I look around hopefully, but no one's face seems to have the same freaked out look that I feel on mine. Has no one read the myths? Don't they know what this guy has just laid on them?

Atmananda, or Rama, explains it a little for everyone. Just who Rama was, and now is. How, although he feels that he is indeed the last incarnation of Vishnu, he doesn't think that he's the same conscious entity that lived and breathed as the historical Rama. It is more like he is the reincarnation or embodiment of that particular octave of celestial Light which was once before incarnated as Rama. A new version of the same field of energy. He tells us that he is being honest with us about this change, as he has with all the others we've seen him go through over the years, because it is relevant to changes we will have to go through.

He tries to impress upon us that he really is surprised by all this, that he had no earthly idea who he was. He's saying how he should have figured something before, but that it's just as much a surprise to him as it is to us. I think that he's doing it this way to hammer home the point to us that this is the way it

works. No matter who incarnates, from God-energy to slug-energy, you all get hit by the same Maya and forget who you are beneath the amnesia factor. The implication is that since neither he nor we have managed to figure out who he is so far, then how do we know that we aren't just as special. Several people ask questions. The first one calls him Atmananda, and he says, "The name is Rama, by the way." He doesn't have to say it twice. Everyone else calls him Rama the rest of the night. I am appalled that no one else seems as weirded out by this as I am. They just adopt the new name as if it's the most natural thing in the world. Classic spiritual doublethink. By next month, half of the people in the Center will have forgotten that they once knew and revered a gentleman known as Atmananda.

Atmananda/Rama is up there saying how he realizes that it will cause some confusion, just changing his name like this, especially among the public, but there you jolly well are, aren't you. He feels that he has to go with the truth. Besides, he's intrigued with the advertising possibilities. "For a limited time only, at the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium, Rama — The Last Incarnation of Vishnu."

I think, "Oh shit," and start thinking of how I'm going to explain this to the squads from the Moral Majority who come to round us up and throw us to the Oakland Raiders in the Coliseum. I see myself trying to explain manifestations of Light to some 400-pound bruiser who is interested only in eating my liver raw, just to see how one of the godless tastes. The image at least makes me laugh.

The rest of the night goes on like this, my consciousness vascillating between fear and wonder. Atmananda/Rama will demonstrate some power like invisibility and I will see it and say, "Neat," and feel better about the whole thing. Then the next minute he will do something else like say he's going to make a star disappear. But I'm not seeing anything happening this time, and it's making me more than a little uneasy. Because if it really isn't happening, then the possibility becomes stronger that I'm sitting out here in the desert in the middle of the night with a crazy person.

But I'm seeing enough to make me realize that even if old Rama here is a crazy, he's not your *normal* crazy. Normal crazies usually talk about walking on air, but can't pull it off, and I've been watching this guy in front of me grow to about 15 feet tall and then dance lightly on a layer of white light, several inches above the sand. So it finally sinks in that what I am most afraid of is not that he is changing his name to Rama because he's gone a little funny in the head, but because he's really Rama!!!

Why would that be frightening? Well, for one thing, if this curly-haired dude currently turning into a large bird in front of me and radiating a dazzling golden Light is really the last incarnation of Vishnu, then it follows that he isn't here in this time and place by accident, and that the world is in deep shit. The myths make it really clear that Vishnu is bringing The End next time around.

But the truly terrifying thing is that if Atmananda is really Rama, then who am I? It is one thing to believe that I am the sometimes serious, sometimes flaky student of an entertaining but minor spiritual teacher from California. It is quite another to conceive of myself as one of only a hundred beings sitting around in the desert, listening to someone who hails from Brahmhaloka. I'm not sure I can live up to that vision of myself.

If what the guy has been saying is true, and this all took him by surprise, then what surprises are in store for me? Am I ready for them? Will I be strong enough? What will I do if tomorrow I wake up and find that I am not only not who I thought I was, but that this new Tim has a larger role to play in the dance of creation than he had previously believed? What if that new role demands that I change my name? Will I be happy as Jatayu or whatever? Can I handle it? Who will "I" be at that point? Am I ready to watch the selves that I have come to know and love over the years dissolve into mist and become lost in Eternity? Am I ready to live all that I can be?

I sit in the center of a vortex of Light and watch these questions dance through my mind. With each question one more Cherished Notion of who I am is scorched to bleached bones by the blinding Light of Eternity and crumbles to dust. I watch personality after personality wither and die in the radiance emanating from this man I once called Atmananda. And with each wave of Light, a little less of me is left. I think I'm in serious trouble.

What it all comes down to is that this morning I thought I knew who Atmananda was, and I was wrong. And I have the funny feeling that when the sun rises tomorrow morning, I'm not going to know who I am, either.

A breath of wind blows by. It is warm, but I tremble anyway. I am sitting in the desert and I am very afraid.

MARIA

It was dark and windy the night of our journey to the desert. Fall had set in. Banks of clouds were chasing through the sky. The moon was hiding out somewhere behind a cloud. Only the stars shone as brightly as ever. We were sitting on the sand during one of our meditation breaks. Robert was standing next to Atmananda in the middle of the half-circle we formed. In the dark the two of them looked like faint shadows. Robert was receiving his spiritual name. Straining to penetrate the darkness with my eyes I saw Atmananda put his hand on Robert's forehead. He gave him the name Hanuman.

Robert was not the only one to receive a new name that night. After the little ceremony was over we were waiting for Atmananda to begin his play with the desert forces. Instead he just stood there silently. Suddenly his voice came out of the dark: "I have to disappoint you," he said. "I am not who you think I am."

There was great puzzlement in the audience. He went on: "I don't really know how to tell you this. It's like breaking up with an old girlfriend, and I have never been good at that." By now he had us all keyed up. I wondered what he was up to this time. Atmananda loves to surprise us with unexpected news, constantly unsettling people like myself who cling to old ways. Somehow I felt that what he was about to reveal to us went beyond his normal change of plans. My heart began to pound.

He continued:

"You think I am a person, but I am not, although I used to think so too. I took myself for a spiritual seeker, for an English professor. During the years I spent meditating I felt my identities fade away one after the other. I was fighting the process tooth and nail, just like all of you are doing now, but in vain. I couldn't stop the dissolution of myself, and I finally had to realize that I was no longer a person.

"After many years of studying with a spiritual teacher I was given the name of Atmananda. It is a beautiful name which means 'Bliss of the Soul,' or the 'Soul's Ecstasy.' I was very happy with that name until I began to feel that the being named Atmananda was dissolving.

"I didn't understand what was happening. I felt the powers from my past lives come back to me with unbelievable speed. I became enlightened, then self realized. The process hasn't stopped. I have no control over it.

"Time and again I asked myself who I was. As I watched myself being transformed into a vortex of energy, I kept wondering who all this was happening to. Here I was, this ridiculous being, cycling rapidly through a process that has traditionally taken spiritual teachers many years.

"Then this morning I suddenly knew who I was. I woke up surrounded by a field of luminosity; a river of light was streaming through me. I suddenly understood. It was all so simple."

Needless to say, by this time we were bursting with curiosity.

"Before I tell you who I am," Atmananda went on, "I want to hear from you who you think I am."

Silence. Then a hesitant voice from the dark: "I thought you were a doorway to eternity."

"You are a spiritual teacher," somebody else said.

"Doorway to eternity, spiritual teacher! Come on, none of this philosophy, please. Any other suggestions?" Again, puzzled silence. The tension became unbearable.

“You are Rama,” someone said calmly.

“Yes, I am Rama.”

The revelation was overwhelming. “Rama is an incarnation of Vishnu,” Atmananda/Rama explained. “In a way I was aware of it even before I consciously accepted my destiny. I named our center Lakshmi after the consort of Vishnu. I gave the name of Lakshmana (who was Rama's brother) and of Hanuman to two of my students. This morning it became clear to me why I had done this.”

Reactions among the students varied from hysterical laughter to dead silence. After all, one doesn't get news like this every day. The fact that your teacher is somehow associated with a Hindu god can be quite a shock. Atmananda/Rama (I hadn't made the full transition yet from one name to the other) foresaw the perilous turn our consciousness was about to take. He eased the growing tension with a few jokes. Then he became serious.

“I want you to be very clear about what I just told you. I am not the Rama who was alive many years ago. Rather I am an incarnation of that type of energy which in Hindu mythology is associated with Vishnu. Gods and goddesses are not what people think they are. Their names are terms with which we try to convey a certain experience, a state of consciousness.

“You have to understand that everything is Light. Human beings are Light. There are different types or aspects of Light. Rama is one particular aspect — a very flashy one.

“You, too, are Light. Do you understand? This is why I am sharing all of this with you. What I just told you doesn't really concern me so much as it concerns you. I am a reflection of your Self, nothing more or less. I am your dream. Look at me and remember who you are. If you keep forgetting it, all we are doing together is a waste of time. Watch me; I will help you understand.”

Rama lifted his arms to the sky. Light was emanating from them. He was growing very tall. “You are gliding above the ground,” one of the students exclaimed. At first I could barely see him. Then it suddenly looked as if his body exploded into light. From then on I saw him dissolve again and again, his body giving way to rays and swirls of light.

For a moment I was fighting the feeling of Atmananda dissolving and of Rama being born. Just as I was getting used to Atmananda, was he no longer to exist? Rama as a figure in Hindu mythology didn't mean much to me. The sound of the name, however, was somehow familiar. As I listened to it being repeated over and over again by students asking questions, I calmly accepted my teacher's new identity. I began to feel the name. It was old, clear, and strong. Although short and simple, it carried the vibrations of infinity. It was the right name.

When we walked out of the desert in the early morning, the sun was rising and the world began to shine. We formed a circle at the entrance to the desert. Rama was standing in the middle. For a short moment he looked like Atmananda again. As he meditated on us I realized that he was Rama. Atmananda was gone. I looked at the other students. We all had changed that night, and I felt that we would never be the same again.

MAGGIE

Atmananda was pacing back and forth in front of us with his hands clasped behind his back. “I don't quite know how to tell you this. It's going to be very disillusioning for you.”

It was a warm and tranquil night in the desert, with just a sliver of a moon barely visible above us.

“This is exactly like breaking up with an old girlfriend,” he said after a pause. “I was never very good at that, either.” We laughed tentatively, not sure of what was coming.

He had been “hot” for weeks — white hot. The atmosphere around him was charged — the way the air gets in the last moments before an electrical storm finally “breaks.” The center meditations had

become progressively more powerful and, when the public series started in San Francisco, close to 200 people had to be turned away. Many of them had stayed outside the closed doors just to be near the energy. Something was definitely “in the air” — our teacher seemed to be changing in front of our eyes.

Of course, we were changing too. From week to week I could see how dramatic the changes were: dead eyes became animated; grey faces turned pink. Our painfully earnest spirituality was being gently transformed into a less self-conscious, more buoyant embrace of life.

We waited in the darkness to hear what he had to say.

“The fact is, I'm not who you think I am.”

Who did I think he was? Frankly, I hadn't the foggiest notion. In meditations I'd seen him with a hat like Krishna's; a crown of thorns; an Indian headdress; the head of an eagle; a woman; an Asian ... sometimes he had no head at all. He could be Ichabod Crane for all I knew.

He was talking about his past — about how he had never thought that he was extraordinary. He said he had sometimes prayed to find out who he was; and said he had awakened that very morning to see celestial light streaming off his body. Suddenly, finally, he knew who he was. The pieces of the puzzle fit together at last.

He had named our community Lakshmi. He had named his dearest friend Lakshmana. Years ago he had told a devoted student that one day his name would be Hanuman.

Now the missing piece, his identity, was no longer obscured. His name was 'Rama,' an incarnation of Vishnu.

“This is my last incarnation ... this cycle is ending. You've all known it since childhood.” (With that, every cell in my body stood up and shouted, “Yes, I've always known!”) “Watch, I'll show you my universal form.”

I felt like I was racing down a slick, high slide at breakneck speed, but was watching it happen in slow motion. The sand, sky and mountains all started breathing, undulating, and then merging. They became a white curtain that suddenly turned black and erupted into thousands of forms. There were gargoyles, people, hieroglyphs, monsters, primitive Mexican symbols, and more. It was an awesome image of fecundity — of life birthing life — of power heavy with its own fertility.

“Only a tenth of the powers have returned. Last week I walked on water. It was fun.” He pointed to a bright solitary star above us. “Watch,” he said. The star disappeared and we all laughed.

Questions arose in all of us. “Did Lakshmi reincarnate too?”

“Isn't that who all of you are?”

“How should we relate to you now?”

“Just be yourselves, I always think that's the best.”

“Rama, is this process like the peeling of an onion? Are each of us beings of light, covered by many filters which prevent the light from coming through? When the filters are removed, one by one, will more and more light stream through?”

“That's right.”

“And in your case, Rama, is there a core to the onion which you will reach after all of the filters are gone, or is there no core?”

“There is no core. Just undifferentiated reality, Nirvana. Because you see, in Nirvana, there is no Rama, no onion, nothing at all. Everything goes away. There is only eternity. That's why it's so important for all of you to grasp what I'm saying. Because this will also happen to you.”

Some people were quite emotional about the name change. Maybe it's because I'm ignorant about Indian mythology, but it didn't affect me that much. I'm like a deaf and blind man sitting next to a campfire in the middle of winter. Maybe I don't know it's called *fire*, but I certainly feel its warmth. As far

as I'm concerned, he could call himself anything from 'Scooter' to 'The King of the Cosmos' and it wouldn't make any difference.

A small voice said, "Rama? There are so many advanced seekers in our center. Why is it that I'm here?" I understood exactly what she meant. He had told us who he was; that we were in the most powerful energy field we had ever been exposed to; that we were returning to the "old cycle;" and that a hundred incarnations were passing in a single night.

In an almost husky voice, Rama answered, "What do you think I've been trying to explain to you all night? I never felt special. I never thought this would happen to me. Don't you understand? What's happening to me is happening to all of you."

That's when the lightning hit. I finally understood the light in once-dead eyes, the pink glow, the incipient happiness. He had stripped away the layers to reveal his essence and, in so doing, had shown us ourselves.

Hours later we stood in a circle around him. The sunrise was a rich rose color, giving the sand a pink cast. As he rotated, looking at us, one by one, it looked like an indigo ink was streaming from his feet to the outer edges of the circle. It looked somewhat like infrared photography and I gasped out loud, wondering if he sees things that way all the time.

Sunrises are like death — the celebration of an ending and a beginning. This particular sunrise was a special celebration — the ending of Atmananda and the beginning of Rama; the death of the people who had walked into the desert with Atmananda and the birth of the people who were walking out with Rama. Our whole community was about to undergo another radical change. Many souls were already sensing the light and would join us in the coming months. In a way, they were already with us, standing in our circle on the indigo sand. We stood, surrounded by pink mountains, with the fat red ball of the sun heralding the end of night and the beginning of day — the day we stood poised on the threshold of our last incarnation.

EPILOGUE

*“I am not important.
Today I am here and tomorrow I will be gone.
This is my freedom.
I am not important.”*

— Rama

EPILOGUE

GERRY

On May 1st of this year, I moved from San Diego to Malibu. I moved because I had been invited to by my spiritual teacher, Rama. I withdrew from my classes at UCSD, where I was about a year away from completing my Computer Science degree. I found an apartment in Malibu and scratched together every cent I had to make the security deposit. The rent would be double what I was paying in San Diego. I called my parents and friends in San Diego. Their reactions ranged from “you stupid idiot” to “you’ll be back in six months.” I packed what I could in my Volkswagen and drove to my landlady’s office to return the apartment keys. She was keeping the \$300.00 security deposit because I was moving out under a lease. Then I drove down to the beach to say goodbye to San Diego.

The particular spot I went to was on a cliff overlooking the ocean. It was about a hundred feet high. I had come to this spot often over the years, at times when I was sad, or to watch the sun set, or to think. Sometimes I came to watch the waves. I went surfing at this spot regularly and knew the waves quite well. I knew how they broke left and right, how they broke at low tide and high tide. I knew how they broke on a big swell, how there was always this inside section that looked like a ton of bricks coming down on you. It would peel faster and faster and you’d swear you’d never make it, it was too fast, but if you shifted all your weight forward and just stayed with it you could make it every time....

I looked out over the ocean. The afternoon onshore wind made the sea a little choppy, but there were no whitecaps. It was about an hour until sunset. I said out loud to the ocean. “Now I have come to say thank you, and to say goodbye.” But for awhile I just watched the scenery: the ocean, the birds, the surfers, the waves, as I had done so many times before.

Then I said, “Thank you, ocean, for always being here. I have come to you when I was sad and when I was happy, when I was in love and when I was out of love. You have seen me at my best, and at my worst. Once I even wanted to kill myself, but I came here instead. And when I found my teacher and felt more alive than ever, I came here to share my joy with you. You have seen my storms, and you have seen my calms, and you have always been here. For that I thank you.”

I looked up into the clear sky and said, “Thank you for this life you have given me. Thank you for every tear. I have cried a lot in my life. And thank you for my laughter, for I have also laughed a lot. Thank you for those I have loved, and for those I have not loved. Thank you for my good qualities and my faults, my successes, my failures, my dreams and my reality. For the day and the night. For the ocean, the sky and the mountains. For the stars, for surfing and for music. For giving me a teacher. For putting me in this wonderful world, for making me a human being. I am sincerely grateful for all these things. I would not change the slightest detail, for I see it has always been perfect. And so I thank you for my life.”

And for a while I just watched the scenery. The sun was close to the horizon now. A group of about twenty seagulls flew by below me. The wind had calmed to a slight breeze from the west. A few surfers were still in the water, catching the last waves before dark.

My whole life had been in San Diego. I was born there, went to grammar school and high school there. Even when I was overseas in the Navy I knew I would be coming back. I had met

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the woman I married there. I was going to college there. I had met my spiritual teacher there. Now he was leaving and I was going with him. Now it was time to say goodbye.

I had said goodbye to every person I could remember in my life. Faces long forgotten came to mind and I wished them all well. I said goodbye to my parents, my ex-wife, to the women I had loved, to my best friends, my childhood friends, my high school and Navy friends. I said goodbye to people I had known for only a few hours or met for a moment in passing. I said goodbye and wished them well. And I felt true love for all of them.

I said goodbye to San Diego and to all the places I had lived there, all the experiences I had there. I said goodbye to my life and to everyone and everything in it. Then I said goodbye to myself and to all the different people I had been over the years.

I watched the sun go down and said goodbye to it and to the day. I said goodbye to this place I had come to so often, and to the waves I knew so well. I said goodbye to the moment and got up to leave.

There were still two surfers in the water, though it was almost too dark to see. One of them was paddling hard to catch a wave. He stood up as it broke just behind him. He slid to the base of the wave and snapped into a sharp left turn. As the wall of water formed in front of him, he moved forward on his board to gain speed.

I turned around and walked toward my car.

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“He raised his arms. Huge beams of light extended out of his hands and he moved them through the sky. Once again, his body disappeared and there was nothing left but two brilliant focal points of light.”