

A photograph of a man standing in a room. He is wearing a blue and white horizontally striped short-sleeved shirt and dark trousers. He is standing with his hands on his hips. The background is slightly blurred, showing a doorway and a patterned rug.

Robert Broughton
Sofa Enlightenment

Edward Viesel Media



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Sofa Enlightenment

How I Traveled the Spiritual Circus
and Ended Up Finding Peace

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This sample booklet contains the introduction, three full chapters and a synopsis of the remaining chapters of Robert Broughton's *Sofa Enlightenment*.

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Sofa Enlightenment

Editor's note

This sample booklet contains the introduction, three full chapters and a synopsis of the remaining chapters of Robert Broughton's *Sofa Enlightenment - How I Traveled the Spiritual Circus and Ended Up Finding Peace*. The full manuscript is as yet unpublished. Robert would be glad to discuss any offer for publication. The editor of this booklet, who is a trained and experienced translator, would also be glad to publish a German-language translation of the book. A German sample translation can soon be found at: www.edwardviesel.eu/0047.html. Please do not hesitate to contact me.

Bad Belzig, Germany, March 2013

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Introduction

There's a mystery beyond the mind. This may touch you or it may not. However, I have a story to tell and now is the time to tell it. At this time of writing I am in my fifth decade and have mostly followed the road less traveled. That journey has held many frightening, chaotic, poignant and, at times, bizarre twists and turns which ultimately led to inner peace and a great love for my fellow travelers. It also took me from my home in Australia all over the world in search of myself.

The Dalai Lama once said: "Without great risk, there can be no great success." This is the story of one man's journey to enlightenment in the material world. My greatest success was in overcoming myself. Breaking free of the matrix of conditioned thought that I had falsely believed to be "me." In the process I would walk through the valley of insanity without the knowledge or comfort of knowing there would be light at the end of it. Once this journey is undertaken, there is no path back and safety becomes the first casualty. But I jump ahead. There can be no understanding of the ending until you know the beginning.

What follows is my story. I have written it with a warts-and-all honesty which may offend or shame some, but I have been totally truthful about my life in the hope that my experiences may help you with your journey.

There are many places I could begin this story but I have chosen the time in my life when I had my first glimpses of both the beauty and the terror that formed the deeper hidden recesses of my mind. Abraham Maslow was the first psychologist to study people who were well rather than those who were ill. He saw a common experience among "well" people, which he called "peak experiences."

The first such peak experience I had was when I was 18 years old. Throughout most of my puberty I carried a large emotional burden, feeling I was unattractive to women. I was intelligent yet lacked the social fluidity that many of my peers, some of whom I regarded sometimes as almost moronic, seemed to have with girls.

In my first year at work, after leaving high school, a friend chanced to tell me one day that a particularly attractive girl in our neighborhood had a crush on me. He told me this whilst we were traveling on a train into the city. It was a beautiful spring morning and, suddenly, the invisible burden I had carried for so long vanished in an instant. I was ugly no longer. This girl had cast her spell and transformed me into someone who was transcendently beautiful. All because

she believed it to be so, and in her belief I found refuge. Till the day I die I will never forget the joy of this moment.

As I alighted from the train I started on my usual twenty-minute walk through the park that led to my place of employment. The rays of the early morning sun held me in awe. I was transfixed by the clearness of the sky and the vivid colors of the many flowers I normally barely noticed. All my senses were heightened and my body felt as light as a feather. I seemed to be walking three feet off the ground in a sea of bliss. All objects around me, the trees, grass, even the normally drab city buildings, seemed suffused with a golden glow.

This altered state lasted the entire morning. Later on in the afternoon, I fell back into my normal state of consciousness, which was that of an average confused teenager. Such experiences confer a taste of what lies beyond the so called “normal” everyday consciousness. A gap is created in the thought stream and you briefly become aware of the Divine.

This experience sharply contrasted to one I’d had at age ten. This was my first confrontation with the awareness of my own mortality. One night, as I lay in bed, the usual random thoughts that would play around in my head suddenly came to a dead end and one thought stuck in my mind: “One day you’re going to die!” I was overtaken by an immense fear and I ran screaming into my parents’ bedroom. “I don’t want to die! I don’t want to die!” I yelled, sobbing all the while. I climbed into bed between them and after some gentle reassuring fell asleep. The next night, however, the same morbid thoughts returned, and it was some time before I fell asleep. Experiences such as this are repressed by the subconscious. If I’d had the good fortune of having an enlightened master as a parent, this experience could have been a window into the absolute. To have been able to embrace the fear of mortality at so young an age may well have had striking consequences. Ramana Maharshi, India’s greatest modern sage, was catapulted into enlightenment at age sixteen by being able to remain fully aware while confronting the dread of mortality.

It was to be many years before I would be able to put these early experiences into a meaningful context. However, the seeds for the journey of my adult life had been sown.

#1 - John, Paul, George, Ringo and I

The first-person narrator, born around 1950, is growing up in Sydney in the early 1960s. He finds it difficult to interact with other people and has a low self-esteem. After watching a rock music show on television he decides to buy an electric guitar and become a musician. He is sure this will make it easier for him to be respected by other people. After hearing a song by the Beatles in 1964 his mission is clear: He wants to be a rock star.

#2 - Sex, School and Work

The narrator has his first girlfriend. He is happy to start with, but soon becomes frustrated with the restrictions and the mutual silence that surrounds their relationship. He fails to graduate from high school and accepts a civilian clerical job with the Navy. But the job is too depressing for him, so he goes back to school. A fight with his father ends with him being beaten up; something “breaks” inside of him. But, being an up-and-coming rock musician, he is now socially accepted and has a certain status. A relationship with a girl three years younger is more mature in a sexual sense but not emotionally. The narrator gets his first taste of depression after the relationship ends.

#3 - Getting High

School is not for him, the narrator decides. He leaves school again and starts work as a purchasing trainee. Around that time the first disco opens in Sydney, and the narrator begins a life of rock music, casual relationships, sex, and smoking marijuana. A move to a shared house in 1967 finally provides him with a full-fledged hippie lifestyle. He also starts selling drugs. That year his father dies.

#4 - Adventures in the Drug Trade

The narrator leaves his office job and decides to go ever deeper into drug dealing. He flies to India via Hong Kong. In Hong Kong he has a seedy experience with a prostitute in a hotel. Smuggling marijuana from India nearly goes wrong a couple of times, and for the first time he has to deal with hardened criminals,

not hippie part-time dealers. In 1974, after years of hippiedom and a few close shaves while drug dealing, he receives a letter from his friend Rob, who quit smoking dope to do Transcendental Meditation (TM) in London. The narrator is by now experiencing attacks of extreme paranoia, and he soon decides he can't go on like this. On the spur of the moment he goes to a travel agent and within hours is taking his seat on a Sydney to London flight.

The Maharishi, My Mother and I

Landing at London Heathrow, I was met by two people, Jim and Celie, who explained that Rob had been called in to work and was sorry he couldn't be there. Even though it was March and the English winter was over, I was shocked at how cold it was. As I shivered, I noticed Rob's friends were dressed in light summery clothes. This was my first taste of English weather and my blood was too thin. As soon as I had collected my bags, I pulled out a heavy jacket. As we headed back to Jim's house, I took in my first glimpses of London, which didn't actually seem to be "swinging" quite like it was in the Sixties. In winter the city can be quite dreary and, as I was to discover after three years of living there, somewhat depressing.

Somehow, I was hoping to see evidence of "flower power" with beautiful ladies walking the streets clad in bell bottom jeans, arm in arm with John Lennon look-alikes with long hair, beards and the kind of small round sunglasses he was famous for. Alas, this was nineteen seventy-four and punk and disco music were beginning to dominate the airwaves and the culture. The suburban streets of London displayed a mixture of serious, business-suited men, seemingly hurrying to their next meeting, housewives bent over in shop windows looking for the next bargain, and many disaffected looking young people who were obviously "on the dole." Thrown into this soup were groups of people of varying colors: black Jamaicans and brown Pakistanis predominated, along with lesser numbers of Middle Easterners and Chinese.

I settled in for my first night in Jim's and Celie's house and arose the next morning to take my first stroll around the streets of East Finchley, a north London suburb. I received a pleasant surprise when I turned a corner and came face to face with Ray Davies, one of my musical heroes and the leader of The Kinks, a band famous for their brand of music that blended rock, folk and the dance-hall melodies of the nineteen thirties. Obviously accustomed to people gazing at him in awe, Ray smiled, said hello and kept walking. I'd been told by musician friends in Sydney that occurrences like this were quite common in London, but I still hadn't expected it to happen. My spirits were lifted a little, and I felt that maybe London still had some "swing" left.

It was great to see Rob again, and he told me how he'd begun meditating. Going to work one day, he'd noticed a poster in an Underground subway advertising a talk on Transcendental Meditation, a movement founded by

Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. He'd gone along not knowing what to expect and had decided to take the initial instruction course. Shortly after, he had had an epiphany. Apparently this was common amongst new initiates. He explained the whole thing over breakfast one morning. We later referred to that conversation as "Breakfast at Epiphanies."

I was initially resistant to his proselytizing and merely listened politely. Sometimes Rob's Indian friend Farouk, an avid meditation practitioner, would come around to our house and I'd have the two of them working on me. As these efforts produced no results, they decided to trick me into attending a lecture. Farouk invited us to his apartment one evening for a delicious Indian meal he had specially prepared for the occasion. After we'd eaten he suggested we take a stroll in the evening air. After about fifteen minutes of walking, we came to a local library and Rob said, "Let's go in and have a listen to this talk tonight." I sat in a chair and along with about a dozen other people was introduced to the wonders of Transcendental Meditation, dubbed "TM" by Maharishi's Western marketing experts. At the end of the talk it was suggested that anyone interested in actually learning the practice come along to the TM center the following Friday.

I was at a very low point in my life. I thought that meditation might provide me with a life raft to get me away from the lifestyle of rock music and drugs that I'd embraced in Sydney, so I signed up for initiation that weekend. I felt that I didn't have much of a choice. It seemed strange that I was asked to bring flowers, fruit and handkerchiefs, but I was primed and ready.

I showed up at the North London TM center and was introduced to my teacher, Susannah, an American with a big sunny smile. She led the way into a small upstairs room thick with incense and asked me to stand next to her while she conducted a Hindu ceremony called a Puja.

This lasted about five minutes and then she began to softly intone a single syllable I'd never heard before and motioned for me to join in. As I began to do this I immediately began to experience a trance-like state with no other thoughts aside from this mantra going over and over, clearing my mind. Then it too seemed to disappear and I felt myself to be in a state of mental suspension and my body began to relax deeply. About fifteen minutes went by and suddenly a thought bounced in, "Ah, now I've got it!" The instant I had this thought, my meditative state receded.

Within a few weeks I was counting myself a freshly minted disciple of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. I'd seen him before, in newspapers, when the Beatles went with him to India. Some sort of cosmic psychotherapist, I had guessed. I

went with Rob to see him speak at the Royal Albert Hall and sadly the place was only about a third full.

After all, this was the middle of the seventies; the Beatles were long gone and Maharishi was no longer the curry of the month, although he still possessed a sense of humor and giggled like a small child. “Twenty minutes twice a day, and all your worldly problems will vanish,” he exclaimed.

A drowning man will clutch at a flower and I had indeed been drowning in a sea of confusion, misinformation, lack of direction and downright despair. Shortly after starting my twenty minutes twice a day, I got my first karmic payoff. I met Linda, a beautiful English rose with a quirky sense of humor, who dropped in to see Jim and Celie one day. Somehow, I knew the minute we met we were destined to make wonderful music together. “Linda, can you sing?” I asked her one day. “Yes darling, but not in tune.”

Maharishi was going to be my savior but he wasn’t personally available, so I was hoping Linda could fill the gap. My fertile imagination now fastened onto hopes of a new relationship, but Linda already had a boyfriend. Jim and Celie quickly saw my interest and told me to forget it. Maybe they had a point. It might be tricky, having a girlfriend and being a devout practitioner of meditation. What would I do if she called up when I was meditating? Simple, really. Put myself on hold and accept the call. I had to face it, I was hooked. This girl was everything I’d ever dreamed of, everything I’d ever wanted. I began to eagerly anticipate Linda’s every visit to our house and we slowly built a friendship. I was mercilessly teased by Rob and Farouk, and certainly it seemed at this point that my love was destined for the unrequited basket. Then one day, out of the blue, Celie took me aside for some juicy gossip. “Guess what? Look, don’t say anything to anyone, but Linda and Tim are breaking up.”

It seemed the wheels of karma were spinning in my direction after all. A few weeks later, Tim moved out and Linda was left to carry the rent of their two-bedroom apartment. One day, she called to ask would I like to move into her spare room. Jim, Celie, and indeed the whole gang, had been working on my behalf. We began living together, just as roommates, but the die had been cast. It was quite a challenge to live in close proximity to someone I had a huge crush on and be privy to the comings and goings of the various suitors she now inevitably attracted.

Some nights we took long walks through the leafy suburbs of North London – Belsize Park, St. John’s Wood and Primrose Hill. One fateful night, as we sat on a grassy knoll overlooking the city, I put my arm around her and we kissed, at first softly, then with growing passion. She pulled away, looked at me quizzically, and

after a quick rumination asked, “Your place or mine?” We fell back on the grass laughing, and it seemed I’d won the object of my desire. I had to fight the urge to run, hand in hand, back to our apartment, but I held this in check and did my best to appear nonchalant and easy-going about it all.

As soon as we got home she said, “Let’s take a shower.” I felt clumsy and awkward as I hadn’t done this with a woman for years. She was very understanding and patiently led me through the ritual. We then retired to her bed and began to make love. To finally hold, caress and kiss her was a wonderful thing, but too wonderful it seemed. Moments after entering her I reached my peak and lay back spent and humiliated on the bed. I had not made love to a woman for some time, and then to have a creature as beautiful and sensual as Linda was too much. She told me it was okay and not to worry, but I sensed her disappointment. We both fell asleep and in the morning, when I awoke, she was already up and dressed and told me, “You can sleep in as long as you like, but I have things to do today.” A few moments later she was gone and I lay in bed pondering the previous evening. I was disappointed that the sex hadn’t been great but elated because I now felt that we were together, a couple at last. We were with each other. I got up, showered, had breakfast and then went over to see Rob.

The first thing I said to him was, “Guess what happened?” He shot back instantly, “You made it with Linda.” I guess he could tell from the ear-to-ear grin I was sporting. We had a pleasant afternoon wandering around the city markets, and then I caught the tube home to find Linda in the kitchen preparing dinner for herself.

I had fully expected she would come over to me, throw herself into my arms and we would resume making love again. However, this was not about to happen. She began chatting and made no reference to the previous night. I soon realized that my preconceived ideas of how a woman would behave after she’d been seduced were shattered forever.

It had been years since I’d had any meaningful connection with a woman, and I was at sea emotionally. The reality was that one night of passion did not guarantee falling in love. I now knew that in order to make this relationship work I had to start using more of the consciousness that Maharishi was talking about. Until now, I had known the theory of Maharishi’s teaching; now I needed to put it into practice.

I was curious as to what would happen next and decided to retract and play the waiting game. For a whole week there seemed to be nothing more between us than the friendship we’d had before we’d made love and I found myself

drinking from love's bittersweet cup.

One Friday night Linda asked me to go with her to a party some friends of hers were having and I clung to the hope that her flame for me was not entirely extinguished. That evening after we came home from partying we made love passionately once again and fell asleep in each other's arms. The next morning our lovemaking deepened.

We moved effortlessly from aggressive, unbridled passion to tenderness to lying back in each other's arms and laughing. For the first time we began to talk openly about our feelings. I had desperately wanted Linda and now I had her. She made it clear, however, that she liked me very much but didn't love me. I was disappointed to hear this but continued on in the hope that love would bloom.

As all our circle of friends were now doing TM, Linda soon joined the fold and like me derived great benefit from it. Meditating was very therapeutic and tremendously helpful in keeping our emotions more balanced than they would have been otherwise.

Gradually I began to realize something quite extraordinary. I'd expected that at each stage of our courtship something would miraculously click into place that would make my life okay. Still, at every turn, the inner peace I sought eluded me. Every level of deepening involvement came with its own particular high, but once these highs wore off I was drawn to seeking more, like a junkie. After a few more weeks of going out together to parties, friends' houses, movies, TM gatherings and having sex, Linda confessed she was falling in love with me. I had finally gotten what I had craved, and yet, even as rich as my life now was, something was still missing and I couldn't quite put my finger on it. Even our sex life took strange turns. One night while we were making love, Linda told me she occasionally had fantasies of being raped. This both shocked and excited me and we began to playfully toy with the idea. I pinned her down on the bed, laughing and said, "Now I'm going to force you to have sex with me."

She attempted to break free and I suddenly realized I was enjoying this play a little too much. We'd discovered unnerving levels of aggression within us and decided then and there that this was not something to be toyed with. Still searching for inner peace, I plunged more deeply into my involvement with Maharishi's vision of a better world through TM. Like most "Children of the Sixties" I wanted the world to be a better place, and Maharishi's grand vision became a very exciting prospect. Before I encountered him, I had all but given up on a brighter future for mankind. His plan was to spread the word by training twenty-five thousand teachers, who would spread across the globe to bring

about an age of enlightenment.

This kind of idealism was hard to resist, so I signed on for the crusade and soon began the first phase of teacher training. This involved a lot of field work, mainly giving introductory lectures and helping out at my local center. All this, of course, was a huge shift from the lifestyle that I'd only recently left behind. In the space of one year I'd gone from a denim clad, dope-dealing rock musician to a squeaky clean, suit-wearing purveyor of world peace. In the classical Hindu tradition Maharishi came from, a change like this would take many years and begin at an early age.

World peace was an urgent matter and so teachers were being rolled out like Model T Fords. Having done my preparatory work, I was ready to take the final phase of my training. This was to be an intensive three-month residential course in Avoriaz, a ski village in the French Alps.

Linda and I were now well into our relationship, and the topics of marriage, children, mortgages and careers began to come up. Whenever she would broach these, I would realize I had a large question mark hanging over them. Now that I had Linda, the woman of my dreams, the future did not miraculously fall into place as easily as I'd thought it would.

A dark, unpalatable question was bubbling just below the surface: What if Maharishi's grand vision failed? Where would I go from there? I had decided to take the "road less traveled" and not get a career, wife, mortgage and three kids. For my father, inner peace meant sitting at home at night, reading the newspaper and sipping a beer. If it had only been one or two beers a night he might have achieved some peace. But on some nights many beers were consumed, and if my mother complained she was likely to find herself lying on the floor with a bloody nose. In this way, the common suburban notion of a peaceful life became something I had begun to hate. Stories like mine were everywhere in the working-class jungle I grew up in.

So I firmly set my sights on completing teacher training, and relegated this question to the "too hard" basket. As the time grew nearer for me to leave for the French Alps, I began looking forward to the three-month break Linda and I would have from each other. A couple of weeks before my departure I moved into a spare room at a friend's house. Linda's insistence on wanting to map out a future that I couldn't see sometimes had me bursting into fits of anger for which I would be deeply remorseful afterwards. I needed to be as calm and collected as possible before I undertook teacher training and so decided that this separation would be worthwhile for both of us. The day came for my flight to Geneva, and we parted good friends, though unsure of where we would be when I came back.

The course was a large one with several hundred participants from all over the world. The TM movement had rented almost all the hotels in town. As it was summer they had gotten a package deal and so for the next three months the town morphed into TM City.

By now I was beginning to feel a lot of love and devotion for Maharishi and this assuaged some of my “what if” thinking. It was to be much later in my life before I’d clearly see through these old patterns. The heart connection with my new Indian master was real but, try as I may, the notion of surrendering all individuality did not sit easily. This kind of surrender was not advertised when one initially learned TM. At first, all you needed to do was to learn a meditation technique and practice it; later on, some advanced courses were offered. But the concept of Maharishi as a guru was something that one had to pick up on gradually. Surrendering to a guru had always been an acceptable part of Indian spiritual life, but for the baby boomers of the West, bent on self-fulfillment and pursuing an individualistic lifestyle, it was a bitter pill to swallow.

My difficulty in mastering the art of surrender became exacerbated as I tried to get a handle on the inner workings of the TM movement, an organization that seemed tinged with fascism. All teachers were expected to adhere to a certain code of dress, speech and behavior that made many of us want to simply get this course over and done with so that we could go back and “do our own thing” in our own countries. The course leaders acted at times like “thought police,” making sure everyone toed the party line. One such leader was a certain John Gray, a Texan who became very much interested in psychology and who after years of being the celibate right hand man to Maharishi finally succumbed to the pleasures of the flesh and gave the world the book *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*.

As in any fascist society worth its salt, news of my “radical” views, which I’d only voiced to a trusted few, reached the ears of Mr. Gray and I was summoned to a private meeting with him. This was a chilling experience as he would not get to the point, but simply asked me a series of mundane questions such as “How are things going for you here?” while his laser-like gaze sized me up. I was tempted to inquire whether he had a background in the CIA, but I was learning to play the game and kept my mouth shut.

John Gray was a slightly built young man of around thirty, but his quiet manner belied the power Maharishi had bestowed upon him. Wherever Maharishi was, John was, at his side or nearby. He was not a very noticeable man until he was given the task of determining people’s loyalty. I saw many people's eyes light up with fear when they were told, “John Gray wants to talk to you.”

John, despite his looks and age, was a master politician.

There was an exhilarating camaraderie amongst most of the participants on the course, with many mirthful moments. Some of the names brought gales of laughter, such as one Italian American from Brooklyn called Ernest Sica.

I was not the only one who had become a blue-suited mystic via Woodstock. As Maharishi's star had risen, he had come under the sway of public relations experts who had convinced him to shed the flower power, hippie image of TM and replace it with something more "suited" to the mainstream. The movement had suddenly gained a uniform: a dark blue suit with white shirt and red tie. This was not to be strictly adhered to and some variations were allowed, unless of course you desired to be one of the "inner circle", in which case it was "suggested" that you follow the strict dress code.

Climbing from the wreckage of the Sixties it was wonderful to feel a sense of higher purpose and hope again and to have something positive to channel our lives into. Our daily routine consisted mainly of "rounding," which was a series of twenty-minute meditation periods, interspersed with sets of yoga postures. As we got deeper into the course, the number of "rounds" increased. The term "rounds" of course fit perfectly with the somewhat military atmosphere.

We were also taught the basics of Maharishi's philosophy and how to present TM lectures to people. Learning the initiation ceremony, with its string of Sanskrit words, was the final hurdle. This was no easy task as it had to be done word perfect. When the final days of the course approached, tensions ran high as everyone filed in and out of the testing rooms. Jubilation would erupt each time someone came out beaming with a thumbs up.

Even the steps of checking people's meditation after initiation, which clearly had come from Maharishi due to the idiosyncratic English, were to be learned word for word. Therefore, when somebody came out of their first meditation we did not ask them, "Was it good?", but were instructed to ask, "It was good?" At first these quirks concerned me, but eventually I decided to let go and surrender to the whole process. At the end of the three months, the big day came when we would officially be pronounced teachers by none other than Maharishi himself, in person.

He flew in by helicopter and gave us our set of mantras we were to use for initiations. His presence certainly was uplifting after three months of hard work and intense meditation. Now I was one of his teachers, appointed to help him carry out his world plan. His ideals were lofty, but nevertheless they gave me the sense of purpose that had been lacking in my life. During these three months I had been corresponding with Linda, and our letters were warm and affectionate.

She was the only woman I'd ever lived with, and although difficulties lay ahead I was still invested in making this important relationship work.

On the day I got back to London I flew into Gatwick Airport, took the tube to Archway and a taxi to Linda's house, as we'd decided to try living together once more. When I rang the doorbell, she opened the door and we threw our arms around each other, embracing long and hard. We went upstairs, immediately undressed and began making love. Our passion was wild and so intense that it was obvious that our relationship was far from finished. The next few days were a "love in," spent mostly in bed.

By the end of the week, it was time to get back to work saving the world and I reported for duty at the TM headquarters in central London. I was told that there were no openings for teachers at my local center in Northwest London, but there was the possibility of a posting in the south of England in the coastal city of Plymouth.

Teaching TM full-time was a dream most of us aspired to, yet few were able to achieve. The days of people lining up outside the centers for initiation were gone after the Beatles had bid adieu to Maharishi. He was no longer the flavor of the month for the world media and his message was a tough sell. The idealism of new teachers was quickly tempered by the fact that they would have to summon great reserves of faith in order to continue in a day job that many had previously looked to TM to escape. For anyone who was not independently wealthy, teaching TM would be a labor of love. Half the initiation fee went to support the international movement, and as each center was trying to support a number of teachers there was little left to go around.

As people faced this dilemma, a new caste emerged: the Enlightenment Beggar. Occasionally well-to-do people would embrace TM, and if one was lucky enough to have been the person who initiated and guided them on their first steps on the spiritual path, the initiator might become the beneficiary of a kind of "patronage." TM teachers generally had little money because a large part of their initiation fees had to be given to the movement. Wealthy new initiates sometimes offered to assist their teachers financially, and if the teacher was skillful this resource could be counted on for many years.

Enlightenment beggars had to possess good social skills and great faith, of course. I viewed such people as gifted con artists, but could not help admiring their tenacity. I counted myself among the majority whose faith could not overcome the inherent insecurity of such a life.

After some weeks, the initial euphoria Linda and I were experiencing was beginning to fade. Inexorably, our lives were going in different directions.

Within a few months the gulf became too wide to bridge. Had it not been for TM we may well have saddled ourselves with marriage, mortgage and children before our awakening, and eventually plunged into the nightmare of divorce. We parted on friendly terms, and I've never seen her since; a very different ending from my previous two relationships. More kudos for meditation, which left no doubt as to the radical shift taking place in my inner landscape.

Now that our relationship was over there was nothing stopping me accepting the posting to Plymouth. It seemed a group of meditators down there were ready to offer incentives, including the use of an apartment, to attract a teacher. I would be able to use this to live in and to run some of my teaching activities from. My hopes of being a full-time teacher reignited and I was ready to throw myself into the fire. A Canadian teacher named Ben had been running this center for some time before my appearance and had taught TM to many of the locals. He was trying to support a wife as well as himself but finally left after receiving a lucrative offer from IBM to repair computers.

On arriving in Plymouth, I encountered my first test. The apartment was underneath a large house owned by Ken and Mary, a middle-aged couple. They had been initiated into TM, but Ken had quickly become disinterested. He was a well-to-do businessman and had been running a car dealership for some years. However, just prior to my arrival he'd suffered a severe nervous breakdown and was in a terrible condition, needing Mary's constant attention.

He was not at all enthused by Mary's idea to have a male TM teacher living in their downstairs apartment. Nevertheless, he reluctantly went along, and I had to deal with his antagonism toward me on a daily basis. Despite this I plunged into the task of keeping the center going, which meant organizing public lectures, newspaper articles, radio talks, weekend meetings and, on two occasions, weekend residence courses.

After an initial slow response people began coming for initiation, and I became friendly with many of the meditators. Among this group of loyal locals were a number of attractive women, and being single and not unavailable I was getting set to face my next test. This was dealing with sexuality responsibly within the spiritual milieu, and, having had little training in this regard, I was soon at sea. As Maharishi's representative I was there to bring his teachings to these people, but it was soon obvious that a number of women were attracted to me.

Some of them would hang around talking long after the evening session had finished, and one afternoon one woman dropped by, offering to take me for a drive to see some of the local sights. Eager to show me some of the beautiful countryside outside Plymouth, she drove to a remote area. She stopped the car

by the side of the road and we sat talking for some time.

She was a married woman and it was not entirely appropriate for us to be in this situation. As we sat quietly talking I suddenly noticed it was becoming difficult for her to look at me and her face was quite flushed. I laid my hand lightly on her shoulder and a great shudder went through her body. She then turned, threw her arms around me and surrendered to her passion. We did not actually make love that day but the next week she came to the center and we consummated our lust. This was not the best way to introduce myself to this community, and immediately she left I was consumed with guilt. It was not long before she declared her undying love and I was faced with the prospect of bringing her down to earth. The next time she came round I suggested we take a long walk, and I explained that this was as far as the situation would go. This wasn't love, it was little more than a rather large crush, exacerbated by an unfulfilling marriage, a fact she had earlier disclosed.

She obviously wanted to feel alive again, lusted after again, and have the rush of being in love again. I was the handy object for all these feelings. It was no surprise she had turned to meditation, and now the floodgates were opening. After learning TM she'd become an avid proselytizer and brought many of her female friends along.

When her crush remained unrequited, her passion cooled and she stopped coming to meetings. When I phoned her to find out what the problem was, she was very curt and said she was simply too busy to come anymore. After a couple of more affairs, my support began to dwindle. Being sexually promiscuous was touted as a virtue in the macho culture I had grown up in, but with my journey into conscious living well under way this was a dysfunctional habit that needed serious attention.

Rumors were rife as to my extracurricular activities and Ken seized the opportunity to pressure Mary into revoking the use of the apartment. In his delicate condition the coming and going of all these people was also a nuisance to him. With great reluctance I realized that the situation was not working out and made plans to leave. My existence in Plymouth had depended on having the group's support and the living quarters that came with it. Once I had alienated part of the group, life in the city suddenly felt very lonely. I decided that my time was up.

I called all the people together, thanked them for their support and participation, and revealed that I had decided to take a sabbatical. Some were disappointed, others obviously relieved, and I repaired to London to work out a new plan of action. It was now late autumn and the prospect of another bitterly

cold English winter did not appeal to me.

Some of my colleagues from the teacher training course in France were now back in Australia and were writing to me about the various teaching opportunities at the Sydney TM center. After considerable thought I realized it was time to go home.

The long plane flight gave me plenty of time for reflection and I was grateful to be coming back in far better condition than when I left. I'd been away five years and a powerful inner change had been wrought, allowing me to view my culture in a much different light. Occasionally I would run into someone from my checkered past and hear stories of the demise of those who had not heeded the call for change. I began living with my mother in the new condo she'd bought after my father's death, made contact with the people at the Sydney TM headquarters and arranged to begin working there.

It was now nineteen seventy-eight and Maharishi had inaugurated a new plan to have teachers congregate in various cities around the world and attempt to get one percent of the population initiated. This was another of Maharishi's bold visions, the concept being that with one percent of the city meditating, a phase transition would occur. Such a change would raise the consciousness of everyone in the city, and the quality of life would increase dramatically. Crime would drop, people's health would improve, and they would become generally happier. We decided to run this program in the city of Adelaide, and so a large group of teachers congregated there and began working out a strategy.

We divided the city into various sectors, allocating a number of teachers to each area. My friend Rob, who was now also back in Australia, myself and a couple of others were given the area of Elizabeth, a new suburb to the north of the city. We found a house to rent and began giving lectures.

And then one day the whole experience of meditation changed dramatically. After five years of practice I was familiar with a certain calm and inner stillness, but now the process seemed to come alive inside me. and it seemed I was no longer doing it, it was doing me. I began to experience a completely different awareness of my body. Long held knots of tension in my face, neck and scalp began to loosen. Simultaneously I began to have an extraordinary amount of sexual energy stirring in my body.

This was not a welcome development as I was already grappling with this area of my life. My hope had been that sexuality would diminish as I became more conscious, but no, it was getting stronger. Despite the clean-cut image of the teachers in the TM movement, many of them were quite promiscuous. Many were, like me, only a few short years out of hippiedom. Free love, though not

openly on the agenda, was certainly a strong undercurrent. One teacher who was particularly masterful in this arena eventually became a leading voice in the Australian porn industry.

I did my best to “play the game” with the ladies who were around, but I found I could not relax in doing so. Unlike some other teachers I did not see that my sexual exploits were giving me any happiness. As a result I found myself masturbating sometimes five or six times a day to let off steam, a huge jump from my normal rate. My knowledge about all things sexual was just not deep enough at the time. Some years later, in the Osho Ashram in India, I would find the key to this.

Despite our best efforts, the money coming in was not enough to support us and I was facing the specter of getting a regular job once again. But working in a boring job in order to make enough money to work was a concept that held no great appeal to me. I arranged an appointment with the woman who was head of the TM movement in Australia and attempted to explain my strange sexual experiences and to seek her counsel regarding my financial situation. She asked if there was anything she could do to help, but I sensed a mixed message. She appeared distinctly uncomfortable and shifted awkwardly in her chair.

Her words were saying she was willing to help, yet her body language plainly stated that she wanted as little to do with this situation as possible. Any experience involving even the remotest possibility of mental instability sent shock waves through the organization. The generic term for it was “unstressing,” which I believe had originated around the time the Beatles were with Maharishi in India. Although this may sound like someone relaxing after a tight schedule, “unstressing” actually referred to the startling psychological effects sometimes generated by intense periods of meditation. This usually happened during TM retreats. Deep meditation had the effect of opening up the subconscious mind rapidly, and many hitherto unseen demons would surface and bring about very emotional and sometimes disturbing behavior in people.

There were many second-hand stories floating around concerning people who, having been told to meditate as much as they could, locked themselves in their room and became virtual recluses. This was something that monks usually did only after years of preparation. Rumor had it that it was not uncommon for people who did this to become completely unglued and wind up in mental hospitals. During their stay with Maharishi, the Beatles wrote a song about this. “Dear Prudence” urges Mia Farrow’s sister Prudence, who was meditating so hard at the time she hardly left her cottage, to “come out and play”, to “open up” her eyes and to “see the sunny skies.” In how far there was truth in these

rumors was hard to say, but the fact that we were instructed to limit people to two twenty-minute periods a day seemed to suddenly make sense.

Feeling that our leader was not entirely fearless in these matters, I told her there was nothing she could do and left the room. At that moment I knew I was finished with TM. My quest for enlightenment had entered a realm these people were not familiar with, and I was ready to explore other avenues. I reluctantly told my friends I would be leaving Adelaide and embarking on a quest to find the true meaning of my experiences.

I returned to Sydney to be greeted with the news that my mother was dying of cancer. This was not a total surprise as she'd had a mastectomy some five years before. Her five year remission period had all but passed, when unfortunately the disease had sprung up again. My sisters and I got word through the doctor that our mother had only a short time to live. I remained in Sydney to comfort her as much as I could. It was to be only a few weeks before she'd enter the hospital.

One day she took me aside and confided, "You know, when I go into the hospital I will not be coming out." I sadly nodded in assent. It was no use giving her false hope, we both knew what the situation was. She began to grow ill very quickly and day by day lost a lot of weight.

She'd been a good woman who had lived her life, sometimes fraught with difficulty, with dignity and grace. I was greatly saddened to realize that soon she would no longer be around. Between myself and my sisters, a vigil was kept at her bedside around the clock.

Within weeks she was so weak and thin we all knew the end was very near. One afternoon while I was alone with her in the room I sat there holding her hand and suddenly seeing her so helpless I began to sob uncontrollably. It was never more clear to me how much she had loved me, but also how much love I had withheld from her. I had been born when my mother was forty and had thus given my mother a new lease on life. Her other children were in the last stages of growing up and were moving away. I had always been a prince in her eyes and yet I found her love smothering, so much so that I would pull away. She'd then rein in her overprotective tendencies and I'd start to be myself again. Before long she'd switch back into overkill, and I'd have to withdraw once more.

We'd been playing this strange game for as long as I could remember. Now the time for games was over, and the pain of it hit me full force. I wanted desperately to bridge the gap with her, but it was too late. I would even put up with being smothered to have her love again.

She was now almost completely incoherent and quickly slipping into her final

coma. A few days later my brother-in-law rang me early one morning and said, "It's all over. She's gone." Some of me went with her that day.

I volunteered to handle the funeral arrangements, and on a balmy afternoon we all gathered at the crematorium and said our final goodbyes. This was a turning point in my life. I had simultaneously said goodbye to my mother and to Maharishi and had no idea what lay ahead.

My mother's estate was divided up between me and my sisters. She had little money but owned the condo, so I knew I would be receiving about eighteen thousand dollars, a not inconsiderable sum in nineteen seventy-nine. When the money came through I decided to take a trip to America. I felt I needed some guidance to understand the powerful spiritual experiences I was having, and somewhere I'd read, "If you want to find a guru these days, you don't go to India, you go to California."

#6 - Krishnamurti and a Burmese Nun

With money to spend and no parents to look after, the narrator is now ready to start his spiritual quest in earnest. At the close of the 1970s he reads a book by Krishnamurti that tells him to abandon teachers, methods, techniques and practices. He decides to pay a visit to Krishnamurti's place in California.

Once there, he meets a Burmese woman called Rina, who invites him to a Buddhist retreat in the mountains. Although he finds many teachings on Buddhism too difficult to digest, what he hears about the life of Burmese monks grabs his attention. He decides to become a monk in Burma. Rina thinks this is a good idea and exactly what he is looking for. On the strength of this, he travels to Burma via Bangkok and Rangoon.

#7 - I, a Buddhist Monk

The narrator joins a Buddhist monastery near Meiktila in central Burma. He quickly settles in to the traditional life of a Burmese monk, going to nearby villages begging for food and meditating. But his idealized notion of the life of a monk is shattered. He suddenly realizes that if he remains a monk he will face a life of poverty completely devoid of sex. He finds he cannot stomach it and leaves the monkhood to travel to India, where a more modern spiritual movement has been gaining a foothold with young Western people.

India Calling

For some years I'd been hearing about the Bagwhan Sri Rajneesh ashram in the city of Pune, about a four-hour drive from Bombay. Rajneesh was a guru who'd attracted a large following of Westerners and his teaching was diametrically opposed to the asceticism of Buddhism.

He acknowledged the truth of renunciation but the way to attain this, by his reckoning, was to indulge the senses as often and as freely as you wish. Whatever attachments you had would fall away as long as you were aware of what you were doing, moment to moment. He taught that any kind of denial would ultimately lead to repression and so become a hindrance on the path to enlightenment. I wasn't sure about this, but it was a curious proposition that begged investigation, and it was certainly a long way from the restrictions of the Buddhist doctrine.

I took an overnight train to Pune, and after disembarking asked a cab driver to take me to Bagwhan's ashram. I really had no idea what to expect and as the taxi wound its way through the city I began to feel powerful emotions stirring. These alternated between great excitement and immense fear. The taxi made its way to a suburb of Pune called Koreagon Park, a very wealthy part of town where there were huge estates and beautiful mansions. One such estate had been purchased by Rajneesh's wealthy disciples and now served as the ashram and world headquarters.

As we drove up, I was amazed to see streets filled with people from all over the world, wearing flowing red robes and various other styles of Indian clothing. Three-wheeler golf buggies and bicycles were moving in a constant stream, ferrying people to the main gate. My taxi dropped me outside, and I stood there surveying the scene. I seemed to be standing at the entrance to a medieval castle, with guards posted at huge oak gates to make sure no troublemakers entered. A quick eyeballing up and down and if you passed muster they'd wave you through. In Burma there were carved heads to ward off evil spirits, but this was the real deal. At night the gates were closed and the ashram became its own city. I asked one of the guards where I could get lodging and was told to walk a little further up the road and ask at a large building on the right.

I shouldered my bag, and a short walk later I was at the reception desk of what was obviously a makeshift hotel, explaining that I'd just arrived and needed a

room for a few days. Again I got the once over and was directed to a dormitory upstairs, after of course paying the required fee. I made my way to the dorm, unpacked a few things and made myself at home. After getting the feel of my new surroundings I ventured downstairs and was given a pass to go into the ashram and also a schedule of upcoming daily events.

Back at the ashram gates I got the required nod and entered. I was immediately struck by the beauty of the place. Instead of being austere it seemed light and to generate a vibrancy. There were trees and plants everywhere and in the middle of the courtyard was a gorgeous fountain. Lots of people were milling around. Some were striding purposefully, obviously on important missions, but most seemed happy to be doing pretty much nothing, simply talking quietly or meditating. My Burmese monastery had taken some adjusting to, but this seemed too good to be true.

I sat on the rim that ran around the fountain and took in all the strange new sights. After a few minutes, a beautiful young woman in her early twenties came and sat next to me. She said her name was Andrea and that she was from Holland. In a wonderfully engaging manner she began telling me about her life and the events that had led to her being here. She then asked to hear my story and I gave her a brief outline of my life so far. From those few details she gave me a psychological profile worthy of someone well beyond her years. I found this intriguing and listened with fascination for about twenty minutes. I marveled at how someone so young could have such depth and insight. She then looked me right in the eye, smiled and said, "Do you like everything I've just been telling you?" I told her it was indeed very interesting. Then she said, "Good, that will be twenty dollars, thank you." I sat there blank-faced, enjoying my new friend's sense of humor. My laughter vanished when I realized she was serious. "Surely you're joking?" I asked. She calmly stated, "No, this is how I survive here in Pune. I meet people, talk to them and then ask for a donation." It was now my turn to look her in the eye, "Well, I'm honored to meet such an incredible con artist, but frankly I'm not in the mood to be ripped off today." With that I got up and walked away.

This incident set the tone for my entire stay in Pune with Rajneesh. In the ashram everything was beautiful: the gardens, the people, the clothes they wore, the huge "Buddha Hall" where Rajneesh gave talks, the office buildings as well as everything else. Yet, on another level, everyone was on the make. Worst of all were the children, who thought nothing of accosting strangers and demanding, not asking, for money. On many occasions I had to brush them off like flies only to be met with a tirade of abuse.

I had lunch in one of the restaurants that dotted the perimeter of the ashram and then walked back to my dorm to lay down for a little while. After a short doze, I got up and went to find a bathroom. Someone pointed to a door at the end of the corridor, so I went in and was immediately taken aback. The bathroom was not a small cubicle but a very large space in which about eight toilets had been set up. There were no partitions or screens for any of them. As I stood there trying to figure out how this worked, a man and a woman entered and each of them went to a separate toilet and began doing their thing right in front of me. They seemed totally at ease, and so taking a cue from them I took my place on another toilet and together we all answered the call of nature. By now I was beginning to realize this was spiritual living with a twist. Any preconceived notions I had were about to be shattered.

The following morning I showed up early to get a good seat in the Buddha Hall to hear Bhagwan's daily discourse. This was an exquisitely beautiful place, with a polished marble floor and a large tent-like canopy with no sides. Before being allowed to enter, however, everyone had to be frisked, go through a metal detector and pass the sniff test. Bhagwan apparently had allergy problems and no one was allowed in who was emitting anything like perfume or any kind of body or clothing odor that would upset him in any way. The metal detector prevented anyone coming in with a weapon. Bhagwan's radical philosophy attracted its fair share of detractors, one of whom had stood up one morning and thrown a knife at him.

At the front of the hall was an elevated stage with a chair on it. At the appointed hour a white Rolls-Royce would drive up and Bhagwan would emerge, hands clasped together in the traditional Indian greeting. A ramp had been specially constructed so that when he stepped out of the car he simply glided across the stage to his chair. One of his assistants then handed him a clip board with notes on it, from which he would draw the day's discourse. It was soon apparent he was a compelling, articulate speaker with extraordinary charisma. He seemed to radiate peace and joy and yet there was something in his voice, a certain accented way of pronouncing the letter "S". Any word that ended in an "S" would be drawn out, "sssssssss". It reminded me very much of the hissing of a snake and, although chilling, it was undeniably riveting.

The seated throng listened to the discourse in total silence. You could have heard a pin drop in the hall. We were all warned against making any sound or movement and guards were posted at various places, ready to remove anyone who so much as sneezed or coughed. Naturally this occurred at least a couple of times during each meeting. Strange antics would sometimes ensue. One

morning, about halfway through the discourse, one of Bhagwan's disciples, whom he called "sannyasins," stood up and started yelling at the top of his voice: "I can't take it anymore! I can't take it anymore!" He was quickly pounced on by a number of guards and dragged screaming from the hall.

Some of the ways in which this ashram functioned were no different to the ways of the world. One of the maxims that I quickly had to contend with was "it's not what you know, it's who you know." As a neophyte, it took me a few days to catch on to this. Beautiful young women seemed to move up in the hierarchy very quickly. For the more pedestrian types like myself things moved a little more slowly. As I was no stranger to wheeling and dealing, I soon secured myself a place in another dorm closer to the ashram.

Within the extended community around the ashram a great variety of lifestyles was possible. Some people were living like beggars in small bamboo huts down by the river, whilst the jet set enjoyed the plush, four star Blue Diamond Hotel in town. I had no money concerns as I still had some of my inheritance, but I did make the mistake of telling this to a couple of sannyasins over dinner one night. Their interest in me to this point had been perfunctory. Having heard that I was financially solvent they suddenly began treating me as their new best friend. I played along with this for awhile and then grew tired of it.

One thing I'd noticed about these people was their ability to make you feel connected with them. It was not uncommon to meet someone, spend thirty minutes with them, and achieve a level of intimacy that would take months, maybe even years, to achieve in everyday Western society. After such conversations, we would hug, embrace very warmly and go our separate ways. When I'd see the same person in the ashram the following day they'd look right through me as if we'd never met. These people were very much "of the moment." Unaccustomed to this and initially confused by it, I began gradually to figure it out. These people had learned to drop many of the social games that were barriers to intimacy in our society. Yet they were unable to deal with the vulnerability that this inevitably brought up in them.

It was a rude awakening to realize that these so-called "meaningful" encounters were not contributing to my peace of mind at all. Despite this, I felt there was something to be learned in Pune, so I decided to stay on. Part of Bhagwan's global appeal was the fact that he was the first master to successfully synthesize both Eastern and Western healing modalities. When he spoke he drew from all the modern psychologists, and within the ashram itself there was an extraordinary smorgasbord of psychic delights to be had. On any given day it

was possible to practice Vipassana meditation from the Buddhist tradition, take a workshop in gestalt therapy, do martial arts yoga, massage, and on and on it went.

For all these sessions fees were charged, small by comparison to what one would pay in the West but a large sum of money in Indian terms. This had the effect of precluding most Indians from the workshops. It was obvious that a river of money was cascading into this place. In the words of one Cockney devotee I met, Bhagwan had “a nice little earner.” Just how much money was involved no one will ever know, but the Rolls-Royces, aircraft, real estate and various grand schemes I saw everywhere were evidence of an organization with deep pockets.

None of this was my concern at the time as I had enough to pay my own way and wasn't about to be cajoled or intimidated into giving everything I owned to them, which, if one desperately wanted to be part of the inner circle around Bhagwan, was expected of one.

Bhagwan wanted to free Western society of the guilt that had been foisted upon it for centuries by Christianity. Guilt was also evident to a smaller degree in Eastern religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism and, as a result, his message received a wide audience all over the world. Free sex was advocated, with Bhagwan himself often arranging the couplings.

I decided to experiment with the free sex game and began to spend a portion of each day organizing various dalliances. A chance remark one day about the long lines at the medical clinic brought a response from a woman that gave me pause. She explained that venereal disease was rampant, but because it was easily treatable it was looked upon no more seriously than a common cold.

Occasionally I would glimpse the glorious state of oneness that lay beyond the thinking mind, so I knew that I was more or less on track spiritually, despite the various misgivings I had. “Take what you need and leave the rest,” became my motto. This ashram was a spiritual circus, with thousands of seekers from all over the world doing all they could to shake off the conditioning that modern society had foisted upon them. All manner of cathartic exercises were available to them to free their rigid bodies and minds. Yet to find the freedom so eloquently described by Bhagwan would take a leap of faith and trust that very few were either willing or able to make.

I decided to experience everything I could and signed up for a number of the therapeutic workshops. The first one was called “Early Life Issues,” and it was a ten day intensive. On the first day I entered the room where it was being held I noticed that the walls were padded, an indication that we were in for a quite a show. I felt a mounting anxiety and had a sudden urge to get out of the place as

fast as I could. Realizing I couldn't do this and save face, I stayed and the feeling slowly subsided.

There were about twenty of us in this group – an even split between men and women – as well as three group leaders. The first instruction was to remove all clothing, and as we did this a sound system was turned on and loud music began pulsating through the room. The leaders began dancing wildly and beckoned us to follow. After about fifteen minutes everyone sat down and one leader, a former clinical psychologist from England, asked people to express what they were feeling. As we were all victims of varying degrees of emotional suppression it took a couple of days before people began to freely express themselves. However, once the floodgates were open, there was no holding back. Tears, rage and lust all poured forth in copious quantities. Fortunately many of the group leaders were from extensive psychology backgrounds in the West and were skilled at handling people in these vulnerable states.

We were also encouraged to explore our sexual feelings and to act on them. I'd also heard talk that in the early days of the ashram violence was sometimes acted out and on occasion bones were broken. I was relieved that they had apparently evolved beyond this. The groups were encouraged to develop intimacy by bypassing normally accepted modes of social interaction. Sexual expression was also encouraged, but this was something most people, myself included, had difficulty with. Peeling away inhibitions that had been in place for most of one's life was not child's play.

If the group leaders detected any sexual tension between participants they would encourage them to explore it and live it out, then and there. It was quite common for the entire group to be witnessing all kinds of sexual acts between different people, and at the end of each day we were given "homework" assignments. Group leaders would pair people up who had similar issues to work on and those people would spend the night together. The groups were actually a way of loosening people up and in this way served as a basic introduction to Bhagwan's work. On many occasions I witnessed people curled up on the floor in a fetal position in the midst of tremendous emotional release. A leader would then softly chant "Bhagwan, Bhagwan, Bhagwan" into their ears. On one occasion I was the recipient, but being "force fed" love in this way was not my cup of tea, as I told the English psychologist.

Many people also became workshop junkies and could only be themselves in the context of a workshop. Learning to bring what was learnt in those groups into the broader context of everyday living was a different challenge altogether. The people who seemed to be getting the most out of life at the ashram were

those who'd done group workshops for the first few months and had then moved on to other areas and programs.

Rumors were constantly flying around that Bhagwan was going to leave the ashram and go to another country. Nothing ever seemed to come of it, and eventually I tired of listening. Then in the summer of 1981, after I'd been there for about six months, he suddenly failed to appear one morning for the usual discourse. Later on that day it was announced that Bhagwan had in fact left for America to start a new commune there. This created a great flurry of activity and excitement amongst everyone. People had to quickly make decisions about what to do now that the Great One had departed without so much as a goodbye wave. Some elected to return to where they'd come from, while others frantically tried to find American people to marry so that they could get into the United States and stay.

My choice was to leave Pune and travel to Dharamshala in the foothills of the Himalayas and reconnect with Buddhism. Whilst there were certain aspects of Bhagwan's teachings that I liked and used, I didn't trust his organization. This proved prophetic when a few years later it was torn apart by internal politics and he was kicked out of America. He returned to India, a somewhat bitter and angry man, claiming that the US government had poisoned him.

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#9 - Back to Burmese Solitude

The more modern spiritual organization of Bagwhan having failed him, the narrator decides once again to return to Burma and become a traditional monk. This time he goes to a branch monastery in the countryside where monks practice in strict solitude. He spends a couple of months in a cave during the rain season, doing yoga and meditating. Amongst a lot of boredom he now and again experiences strong feelings of ecstasy, bliss and peace. He increasingly feels that he may be able to accept the lifestyle of a monk who has “nowhere to go and nothing to do.” But he is also restless. His urge is to leave, and after a time he says goodbye to the monastery.

#10 - Temptations in Thailand

The next stop is a large and respected temple in Bangkok. He becomes a monk, together with many other monks from Western countries, in a much more worldly monastery. After a while the abbot instructs the narrator and Brian to start teaching visiting Western tourists about Buddhism. The two men soon attain “rock star monk” status, and many of the young women they teach fall in love with them. Their vow of celibacy is severely tested.

The abbot of the monastery on the island of Ko Samui, a popular tourist destination for Western hippies, invites the narrator and Brian to carry out a ten-day Buddhist retreat. During the retreat, the narrator awakens to the truth that, for him, a monastery is “a nice place to hide” from the outside world. When Denise, a former rock groupie, falls in love with him he leaves the monastery for her. But this relationship quickly turns sour, leaving the narrator feeling extremely confused. Then his money runs out, and he decides to return to Australia.

#11 - Korean Blind Alley

Back in Australia, the narrator takes part in a course offered by the well-known Erhard Seminars Training organization. Other people taking part in the course congratulate him on his ability to speak openly and straight from the heart. This gives him new hope.

After a chance meeting with a Korean monk in Sydney he decides to try to live the life of a monk again. He feels desperately in need of inner peace and wants to

come to terms with his sexuality. He feels time is running out, and he is increasingly restless and agitated. After a short spell in Korea, it becomes clear that being a monk there is not working out for him. He plans to return to Thailand.

#12 - Breaking Down

In order to earn some money to go back to Thailand and reconnect with his past good experience as a monk there, the narrator goes to Taipei, the capital of Taiwan, where he teaches English classes. As soon as he has enough money saved, he travels to Bangkok. But the temple where he was ordained does not take in foreigners anymore as they were too troublesome. An American monk tells him that it is easier to get ordination in Sri Lanka.

By now a note of desperation is creeping into the narrator's spiritual quest. He goes to a poor and run-down monastery in the Sri Lankan countryside where he wants to practice in solitude and make a last big push to find inner peace. But it works out the other way round. He becomes more and more agitated, with sexual dreams and fantasies taking over his life. He believes that maybe his asceticism works as a form of suppression but decides to continue nonetheless. In 1987, the narrator is now 40 years old, he experiences a mental breakdown, running completely naked in the town square of Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka. He is placed in a private clinic in Colombo and after calming down is deported to Australia by the authorities.

#13 - The Bell Jar

In Australia he enters a psychiatric hospital, where he starts to feel better again. His friend Rob invites him to stay at his place in a spare room. He is soon able to accept a simple job in another hospital, wheeling patients around. A job as a part-time salesman for home insulation is the next step in getting to grips with employment. He finds to his amazement that he is very successful in selling people the company's products. His recovery is gaining momentum.

The Slow Climb Out

Uncertainty and anxiety, my ever present companions, still plagued me. Slowly though I was beginning to get an inkling that my struggle was part of a metamorphosis. I reflected back to when I was about twelve years old and remembered a small, skinny encyclopedia salesman with thick glasses and an equally thick Hungarian accent who knocked on our door one night. My father opened the door a crack and pretty soon we had books and brochures spread all over the living room floor. Somehow, we were all entranced by this shy awkward man and his encyclopedias and we bought them that very night, something my father would never normally do.

After much consideration I was ready to become a full-time salesman. Franz, the sales manager who was my new boss, had warned me that the change from part-time to full-time selling was quite a challenge and that many people couldn't manage the uncertainty of "commission only" work. "You're only as good as your last sale," he would say.

I finished my last week at the hospital, and the next Monday ventured out for my first night of full-time selling. One of my appointments was at a lawyer's house in a wealthy new residential development. I sat and chatted with the lawyer and his wife while they had a barbecue on the patio of their house, feeling instinctively that if I simply talked with these people long enough, eventually they would sign up. I ate with them, drank beer, and we gradually bonded. After about two hours I simply said, "Now, let's get this business done." At this point I felt like one of the family. I gave them the price, and with only a moment's hesitation they signed up. This was a large house and I fully expected some price negotiation, but there was no bargaining and the deal was quickly closed. When I got home and worked out my commission I was astounded as it came to four hundred dollars! This was as much as I had made in a whole week at the hospital.

Franz was jubilant when I delivered this contract. As he was going over it the top salesman in the company walked in and Franz said to him, "Have a look at this." This fellow was a Scotsman named Les in his mid-fifties. Franz had told me that Les, now in semi-retirement, had once owned his own factory in Scotland. I feared and envied Les. He was the top money earner in the company, and a couple of times I'd approached him and asked if I could get a few tips on selling.

He always put me off with casual remarks like, “Oh, don’t worry, you’ll get the hang of it.” Les was playing his cards close to his chest and I was certain he had many trade secrets. He seemed to have no interest in being friends with me at all and in this cutthroat atmosphere it is possible he feared me as much as I feared him.

When Les saw the large contract I’d brought in he exclaimed, “Hoots, mon. I’ve never made a commission as big as that myself.” Then he walked out. I eagerly gathered my leads for the next day and set out to close more deals. I got my first rude awakening when I went home that night empty-handed after four bruising presentations. The same thing happened the next night and then the next. Something was drastically wrong and I began to panic. Franz’s self-fulfilling prophecy about what happened to people who went from part-time to full-time was turning out to be true. The rest of the week I didn’t make one sale.

Franz, although initially supportive, now began to eye me warily. Les’s numbers, however, were as impressive as ever. I suddenly became paranoid and accused Franz of giving me leads that were junk whilst feeding the good ones to Les. He simply shook his head and said: “No. All leads are the same. Once you get in the house it’s up to you.”

The next couple of weeks my sales were sporadic and I began to doubt my decision to leave the hospital. Out of curiosity I phoned up a couple of the customers to whom I’d made losing presentations. I waited until a few days had gone by to make these calls. On a number of occasions people told me they had bought from a rival company. There were three or four other companies that were our competitors and one, Cool or Cozy Insulation, seemed to be consistently beating me on price. Also, customers often said they preferred their salesmen.

Franz began to rant and rave against this company and instructed me to disparage them to any customer who was going to get a bid from them. He was clearly worried, seeing them as a real threat. Many nights I’d come home and sit at the dinner table talking to Rob about how I’d lost deals to Cool or Cozy. Rob suggested, “Well, why don’t you go and work for them?” The thought had crossed my mind also, but I resisted, saying: “No. I can’t do that. I can’t be seen to be jumping from one company to another in this industry, it would be bad for me.” I had never been comfortable with change and risk, but now it was obviously time to move beyond these limitations if I did not want to suffer a setback. Still, somehow I was not able to go with the flow that life was suggesting.

So I put off what obviously had to be done for as long as possible. It wasn't much longer before things came to a head between Franz and me. At the end of each week he would point to the figures on the board. Les was selling about six thousand dollars a week worth of product compared to my two thousand. An ultimatum was given: "We can't keep giving you leads if you don't come back with sales." Something was soon going to give. I hung on as long as I could, and then one day the ax fell. Franz called me into his office and said, "I'm sorry, we can't go on with this arrangement." I tried to persuade him not to fire me, to give me another chance, but he was adamant.

I knew immediately what I had to do. I got into my car and thirty minutes later pulled into Cool or Cozy's parking lot. I walked into their offices and asked to see Barry, the manager. He asked me to come into his office and explain my situation. I told him I was a great salesman but needed to be supported by a better company with better prices. After listening to Barry extol the virtues of his company, I understood the rivalry that existed within the industry. It would be a great coup for them to steal a salesman from Franz. Barry shook my hand and said: "You're with us now. Here are your leads for tonight." He handed me three appointments and with a pat on the back wished me luck. The next day I presented Barry with two contracts, and he was over the moon. "Here are some more for this evening. Go out and do it again," he said.

I could now feel the glow of success beginning to envelop me and was ready to rise to the occasion. I was getting another bite at the cherry. The question was, could I sustain this or would it be just another flash in the pan? This time, however, something was different and I began to sell consistently, my paycheck growing week by week.

Whilst there was tremendous competition amongst the salesmen in the company there was also a strong camaraderie, and when someone began to do well he was encouraged by the others. The team spirit was tremendously supportive, and my sales went through the roof. I began to regularly bring home paychecks of two thousand dollars or more, and Rob's eyes began to bulge. One night he said, "Hey, do you think I could try this too?" "Why not? Come down and talk to Barry as soon as you can," I replied. Soon enough Rob was an insulation salesman too, and he quickly proved his mettle. It wasn't long before he was depositing large paychecks each week.

As each day went by, I gained more confidence. I completely forgot about my spiritual seeking and plunged into the material world. My journey now resembled that of Hermann Hesse's "Siddhartha." Hesse read the story of Buddha's life and created Siddhartha, a spiritual seeker who, after years of

intense seeking, abandons his search and becomes a merchant, accumulating vast wealth. Hesse's story ends with Siddhartha eventually abandoning his riches in old age and finding enlightenment by the side of a river.

Like Siddhartha, I was now beginning to find material success, something that had always eluded me. I had set my spiritual quest aside, but the years of mental discipline and endurance required to be a monk were serving me well. I was drawing upon some wellspring within me that enabled me to go from one house to another, night after night, and give the same presentation fresh, as if for the first time. It is extraordinary what can happen when someone first tastes success, something akin to what surfers probably feel when riding a great wave. An abundance of energy suddenly surfaces that was never felt before. I also realized that my Buddhist training had had elements in it that were now helping me to sense and intuit situations.

Rob had gotten into real estate some years earlier and began suggesting that I look around for a property to buy. This seemed like a logical next step, and after some searching I settled on a nice two-bedroom apartment in a complex on a hill overlooking Fremantle. I moved in and set about redecorating with new paint, carpet and furniture. I traded my old Renault in for a Nissan 300ZX sports coupe and rounded the whole picture out with a new wardrobe of clothes and a brand new Fender guitar and amplifier to keep my musical skills intact.

Siddhartha had seduced the beautiful courtesan, Kamala, and so it was appropriate that I would discover Katrina, a very attractive Anglo-Indian woman, working at the hospital. She had been a virgin before starting at the hospital and had fallen madly in love with one of the doctors, who had relieved her of her virginity and then moved on to his next conquest.

Although Katrina had previously already shown a willingness to risk it, I was still surprised on our first date, when in the parking lot of the movie theater, before we'd even bought tickets, she placed her hand on my groin. The foreplay continued during the movie, and back at my place we closed the deal. Katrina's ardor cooled when she realized a white picket fence and children were not on my agenda. I then had to use my newfound sales prowess to coax her into my apartment. After a few months of hoping our relationship would develop into something more permanent she was ready to move on, eventually finding the husband she longed for.

Although I was mastering material abundance, intimate relationships were still a barren landscape to me. Transforming this desert into a paradise of fulfillment was going to take quite some work. After four years of Buddhist monastic life I was very much out of touch with the "normal" mode of

relationship, and I felt the need to go through an intense period of reorientation. But many people I was meeting in my new life were struggling with relationship in their own way. A divorce was becoming a standard part of most people's lives, it seemed.

Despite my uncertainty my metamorphosis was now well underway and a new identity was emerging. The stage appeared to be set for me to rise like a phoenix from the ashes of years of dysfunctional living. Although I was now experiencing the first glimmers of hope I was still scared, scarred and alone. Settling into my new apartment I'd come home in the evening and indulge in time-worn distractions such as TV, magazines or chatting on the phone.

One night I'd gotten home late, and as I sat in my living room I heard a sound from the schoolyard next door. The balcony of my apartment overlooked the school and the sound was like a hammer loudly beating on metal. I went out on the balcony and looked across the floodlit school courtyard. I could now tell the sound was coming from behind one of the classrooms and, realizing someone was probably trying to break in, I decided to go down and investigate. I walked a short way along the street and then down a flight of stairs that brought me into the school and suddenly caught sight of what was going on.

A gang of boys, whose age ranged from about twelve to fifteen, were trying to break open a roller shutter with an iron bar. Hearing me walk across the courtyard they abruptly turned and faced me. The leader was a large boy, almost my own size, and even though he couldn't have been more than fifteen or sixteen he called out to the others, "Let's take him!" They began running towards me and I quickly turned and ran as fast as I could back to my apartment building. They hadn't seen where I'd gone and within seconds I was watching them, unnoticed, from my balcony. The whole gang then piled into two cars and screamed away.

I phoned the police immediately and within minutes they were on the scene. I told them what had happened and then went back home. As I sat on my sofa thinking everything over I realized how foolish I'd been in going to investigate. It gave me a shock to suddenly realize that somewhere in my subconscious I may have been attracted to the possibility of violent confrontation. It was a great lesson to see how I had unwittingly created a potentially dangerous situation for myself. It seemed there were still traces of my old self-destructive tendency that had not yet been fully released.

As the months rolled by, I maintained impressive sales figures. Continuing at this rate would see me paying off my mortgage in two years. I was beginning to think like a true capitalist. By now I'd abandoned all notions of traditional

spirituality.

One night though, an experience occurred that completely redefined my notion of reality. On this particular evening I decided not to indulge in the usual distractions. Instead I sat quietly on my sofa not doing anything at all, only being aware of my breathing, my body, various sensations and sounds. As I sat quietly, I was suddenly aware of a stillness and quietness that I couldn't localize as being either within me or outside of me. I sensed a great presence and became very attentive to it. My attention shifted from my thoughts, which now began to recede to the periphery of my consciousness. Simultaneously, I realized that my body was beginning to relax without me doing anything. I was riveted by the serenity and beauty and felt quite content to sit and just let it be. I sat fully immersed in this state for about an hour. I then got up, went into my bedroom, lay down and went to sleep.

When I woke up in the morning, the experience had vanished and I set about my daily activities as usual. However, I couldn't help but reflect on what had happened the previous night. That evening when I returned home I sat on the sofa again and waited. Sure enough, after a few minutes, the same thing began to happen. Again the same stillness and extraordinary feeling of non-localized presence. I sat for about an hour, but this time got up and decided to take a walk outside. I noticed that when I got up, the experience began to recede. When I returned from my walk I tried to figure out what exactly was happening, but then stopped and laughed. Thinking about it would only get in the way.

This was the grace I'd been seeking all these years. It simply "was" and it was futile to try to contain it within the reference of my mind. It was outside of that. After searching for this experience and having it constantly elude me I'd abandoned all hope of finding it, and "it" was now finding me. Now, each night when I'd come home, the same spontaneous arising of grace would occur. Soon it began happening during my activity as well. Sometimes when I'd be driving my car, sometimes even in the midst of closing a deal, this "presence" would envelop me. Whenever the grace receded I would be plunged back into the static of thinking and the pain that accompanied it.

The mountain of pain I'd been dealing with was beginning to be blasted away, and again I asked myself, "Why is this happening now when I am not looking anymore?" After so many years of struggling hard to find it, I saw the answer. Spiritual seeking is futile. It's a form of ego attachment. You must drop it before your true nature is revealed. It now seemed that any attempt at meditation was a waste of time and effort. This raised an interesting question. If anyone asked me about meditation, what would I tell them? Don't bother doing it? Again it

became clear to me that the process of seeking, and then of abandoning seeking, was absolutely necessary. It certainly was in my case.

A radical transformation of my consciousness was now occurring spontaneously, and it probably would not have happened had there been no intention on my part. I also saw the necessity of crisis in my life. A transformation of consciousness does not happen to the mass of humanity. Usually people seek their contentment and fulfillment through material acquisitions and relationships with other people. I understood the natural order of these things, but they were no help in bringing a person into the state of grace.

Another insight I gained was how much I'd avoided the world of people and things, even whilst being in it. I remembered reading a book by the American Guru Bubba Free John in nineteen eighty, in which he suggested posing the following question to oneself: "Are you avoiding relationship?" At the time it struck a deep chord in me and now I saw why. Instead of turning and running I now accepted each challenging situation as it came along and plunged myself into it. Really connecting with people in everyday life had given my life a new kind of presence and vibrancy. But I also gave myself time, usually a few hours each day, when I'd just sit quietly doing nothing. When my mind was active, questions would arise: Where was I going? Who was I? In stillness and quietness these issues simply weren't there and had no relevance whatsoever.

The Cool or Cozy insulation company decided to open a branch in the city of Adelaide, which is on the southern coast of Australia, about five hundred miles west of Melbourne. Another salesman and I were recruited to head up the new branch, and as employees we were also offered the chance to invest in this new venture. I bought sixteen and a half percent of the company for thirty-two thousand dollars. The plan was that this new venture would make me wealthy and free of any financial concerns for the rest of my life.

Arriving in Adelaide I soon discovered we'd seriously underestimated the size of the market. Also, a deep recession was now beginning to bite very deeply into the Australian economy. Everywhere throughout Adelaide there were office buildings with "For Rent" signs on them, and I had to work much harder to maintain my sterling sales figures. My daily immersion in spontaneous meditation was invaluable to me at the time.

I had turned a corner, a very important corner, but there was still much work to be done. When not experiencing the divinity of meditation, my mind would often return with full force. In those times I was severely tested. After years of success it now seemed possible that failure could happen. I sometimes felt panic

rising up but was always able to bring new vigor to my work. Without fail, within a day or two, I'd find myself blessed again. I now began to have great trust in the future although I couldn't see exactly where it was taking me. My daily immersion in pure being assured me that everything was as it should be.

#15 - Reflection Time

In the early 1990s, the narrator is invited by his old friend Greg to come to Burma “for a holiday.” He goes to stay at Greg's monastery. There he notices that living as a monk is not really that different from normal life: “It is not monasteries and robes that make a monk, it is an alchemy that takes place in the heart,” he concludes. His wish is now to live in a spiritual community.

#16 - Living in the Heart

While returning from Burma, the narrator comes across the book *Enlightenment Is a Secret* published in 1991 by Andrew Cohen. He contacts Andrew Cohen's organization in California and is invited to their place. He travels to California and stays at a bed and breakfast. But he is soon put off by the way the people around Cohen behave towards him.

By chance he hears about a New Age spiritual commune in Northern California called Harbin Hot Springs. He goes there to live and work for room and board in the retreat and healing center. At the commune he finds a way to live “in the heart instead of in the head” and fully integrates into the community for a stretch of time. There he experiences a life with “nowhere to run, nowhere to hide.” It is “a great crucible for divine alchemy.”