Inner networking

In a vivid portrayal of the meaning of a personal search, one dancer in the Boston contact improvisation group called River darts from point to point, frantically asking which way to go, raving her need for external direction until she reaches a guide who says simply, "Go inside." The dancer folds down upon herself and that section of the dance is over.

Searching

Go inside. It is a message that has been received by millions of people in the late twentieth century.

Inner growth, personal change, evolution, transformation. Coming to grips with yourself, changing, growing. Running, practicing yoga and t'ai chi, meditating, sitting, chanting. Consulting astrology, numerology, and the *I Ching.* Reading the Seth material, and the Don Juan books. Alan Watts and Ram Dass. Therapy:
rolfing, psychodrama, Gestalt, psychosynthesis, bioenergetics, T-groups. A weekend workshop.

What psychologist Abraham Maslow simply called our "human potential" became the nametag for a movement without precedent in recent human history.

Something dramatic and unpredicted spilled out of the social upheavals of the 1960s. The quest for collective social change merged with the yearning for individual personal change.

While many critics regard this transition as a leap toward narcissism, self-absorption, and delusion (including journalists such as Tom Wolfe, who wrote the quintessential article with that theme, "The Me Decade and the Third Great Awakening," in an August 1976 issue of *New York* magazine), others, particularly

those who took the leap themselves, find that the difference between collective social work and individual personal work is illusory. If we truly do want to create a different society, one based on humane, equitable, loving principles, we have to also explore, alter, and reconfigure that part of the planet that we at once know best and least: ourselves.

So it was that, in the past several decades in the US and more recently in Europe, Asia and even in Soviet bloc countries, many became personal seekers and spiritual aspirants, embarked on a search for meaning. Even the born-again millions reflect this same impulse.

Whereas, once, the dominant intellectual perception was that if one really faced "true reality" one would see how awful things really are, a lighter, more optimistic outlook came to those who were willing to put pessimism aside. If we know from our own experience that we can mature beyond jealousy, allow hurts to dissipate, and convert anger into constructive action, then we can believe the same to be true of others.

This subtle but profound shift away from existential ennui, the dominant philosophical stance of the past several decades, and from the loneliness that had paralyzed so many in the twentieth century, was reflected in how people spent their time. Weekends at resorts were traded for weekends at retreats. Evening seminars replaced going to the movies. Individual alienation gave way to a sense of belonging. Words like meditation soon became modified by even more obscure terms such as transcendental, and practices like TM (Transcendental Meditation) became spiritual-fulfillment fast-food.

Many apparently new ideas were mixed with very old disciplines, as people sampled from a plentiful menu. Emphases changed: t'ai chi and yoga replaced weight-lifting and sit-ups; the "health food" movement put the concept of dieting in new perspective. Theories abounded, some complementary, some contradictory: our emotions, many said, are locked in our muscles, others said between our muscles, while still others said in our organs, while yet others said not in our bodies at all but, rather, in our minds, which merely reflect the sad state of our bodies. Meditate with a mantra (a special word or sound), meditate without a mantra. Watch the breath, hold the breath, breathe in, breathe out. Relax

the back, hold the spine straight. Imagine a brilliant light in your mind, empty your mind of thought.

Out of this *melange* of insights, theories, and conjectures arose centers and movements and disciplines too numerous to count, too varied to categorize, yet too meaningful to their participants to be ignored. Certainly there was much to criticize and even more to caricature in the fledgling attempts at ceremonializing and systematizing the process of self-understanding, and egregious mistakes were made—some by fools, others by well-intentioned if overzealous seekers—yet the basic message of the greater movement reflected the age-old quest of inner fulfillment as a complement to, not a contradiction of, earthly peace.

Still, the field was littered with charlatans and exploiters, some simply hungry for the buck, others twisted and demented, preying on the naivete of the people around them—the most pitiful, ghastly example being the Reverend Jim Jones in Guyana. It was easy to fixate on the dishonorable elements—which is largely what the media chose to do, sometimes pinpointing and exposing the snake-oil hawkers, but all too often lumping everything together.

Just as is the case with physical objects—some are beautiful and of rare quality, while others are shoddy and useless—so it is with methods and disciplines: the personal- and spiritual-growth worlds are populated by the elegant and the authentic, as well as by the spurious, shabbily produced imitations. To grow within, we must be discriminating about the nourishment we choose to ingest. As the sages have told us, there is no neutral ground in the universe—either we contribute or we detract. It's as simple as that.

There is no single right plan for personal growth, nor is there a central synod for the new spirituality. This chapter points to some of the connecting points for these unique networks—unique because to pursue and nurture and accept these personal and spiritual practices is surely a very important way of manifesting love in the world.

Personal growth

It is difficult to separate the personal-growth (or human potential or consciousness) movement from the many influences that have created a revival of interest in spiritual practice. The human potential movement arose in part due to the writings of one classically

trained psychologist, Abraham Maslow. Rather than looking at neurotic people and their problems, Maslow chose to study creative people and their possibilities. Maslow's 1962 book *Toward a Psychology of Being* popularized the concept of *self-actualization,* the process by which people motivate themselves to grow, evolve, and become more creative. Within his model, Maslow pinpointed the transformative moments that people live through—those *peak experiences* that metamorphose people's lives, making them more than they were before, propelling them toward the "farthest reaches of being human" (the title of one of his books, posthumously published).

Buttressed by the writings of Carl Rogers, Rollo May and Fritz Perls, just to name a few, humanistic psychology made a fragile claim to a place on the academic map, formed its own professional organization, the Association for Humanistic Psychology, began publication of a scholarly journal, *The journal of Humanistic Psychology,* and over the next two decades served as one of the primary hatcheries for scores of new psychotherapeutic methods.

With this miscellany of instruments for coping with personal dilemmas, we can become fluent in the language of our bodies, observe our birth experiences creeping into our behaviour at the dinner table, train our minds to reduce blood pressure, mobilize our immune systems to reverse life-threatening illnesses, and design more beautiful mental images of ourselves that will soon show on our faces, in our limbs, and in our lives, allowing us to work more effortlessly, run more lightly, sleep more soundly. There is a technology for every small hamlet nestled in our psyches: some are expensive and known to millions; others, virtually unknown, are passed along without cost in moments of crisis—like the person who teaches a friend the principles of progressive relaxation in the midst of an anxious long-distance telephone call.

Countless networks have emanated from the cornucopia of techniques, many of them derived from ancient teachings. Popularized, offered not only to initiates but to lay people as well, the techniques are really new again. With thousands, perhaps millions of people practicing them, a new form of awareness is in the process of being born.

The human potential movement is inseparably yoked to the establishment of meeting places, called centers, that were started in the 1960s and 1970s. Oldest and most famous of these is Esalen,

a “center” that has no direct connection to any of the others yet by its very existence has served as a symbolic template. Unpretentiously snuggled into a cliff beneath Highway 1 on the spectacular continental edge of the Pacific, steamed by hot springs once frequented by the Esselen Indians, Esalen has both natural beauty as a distinction as well as the history of being the original “growth” center in the United States.

Esalen came about because of Michael Murphy, a native of Bolina, California. Murphy, now an accomplished author, a serious long-distance runner and a “citizen diplomat,” got the idea to establish a center to explore his consuming interest in philosophy and religion, particularly Eastern religion. After graduating from Stanford, Murphy became one of the first 1960s seekers to travel to India (where he stayed for some time at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry). Returning with no clear plan for his life, Murphy suggested to his grandmother that he might take over family property at the hot springs in Big Sur, and before long, Murphy and a few friends had opened an “institute.”

Although it was originally conceived with a more intellectual orientation, Esalen soon became known as a place where people would go for “experiences” (now a very common word, like “relationships”, both of which have collected a family of semantic innuendoes that they simply did not have before the 1960s). Eminent and sometimes bizarre luminaries rising on the new psychological frontier came to deliver week-long and even month-long sessions, and people spent extraordinary amounts of money to listen to, take part in, and evaluate the presentations. All kinds of new techniques—from pummeling apart the connective tissue between the muscles (innocuously called rolfing, after its developer, Ida Rolf) to elaborating new models of the universe—were thrashed out in the Esalen bungalows. As time went on the personal orientation of the seminars expanded to embrace social and scientific issues, and as its contribution to the “citizen diplomacy” movement, Esalen was sponsoring its own Soviet-American exchange program.

While growth centers have at times functioned as the staging ground for absurd and sometimes destructive ideas, these new centers for a new kind of learning have also served a powerful purpose in authenticating the value of inner knowledge, corroborating the magnitude of affective (emotional) learning. Further, the

human potential movement has proffered permissions that depart from the cultural norm: for men to cry, for women to be angry, for people to confront the dark underbelly of existence, to wrestle with it, and to ingest it, composting pain into wisdom and experience. The panic that comes with loss, the wounds of rejection, the terror of dying, the awesome fear of giving birth are the daily agendas of growth sessions.

The workshops and lectures are merely one aspect of this imprecise realm known as personal growth. One may start with a "training," a jargonistic way of describing concentrated short courses, in which a particular way of looking at the world is espoused. While some "trainees" then become proselytes of that particular approach, volunteering or perhaps being paid to work for the organization, most people then move on to something else, perhaps to another training (yes, dilettantes appear here, too) or perhaps more selectively to learning about diet or exercise or meditation. A massage (or polarity or shiatsu or some other physical treatment or bodily reeducation such as Alexander method or Feldenkrais technique) may come next, possibly coincident with studying yoga or t'ai chi or aikido or inaugurating a daily exercise.

While there is no formal relationship between any two points in the network, an offhand remark or flyer on a desk or direct suggestion may guide someone from Point A to Point B. For example, two students in an Iyengar yoga group strike up a conversation after class, one mentions a dream, the other responds with an anecdote about a workshop she attended the weekend before, and within a few moments, the person who had the dream has decided to attend the Intensive Journal Workshop the next time it is offered. There is no explicit connection between B. K. S. Iyengar (who developed the yoga system) and Ira Progoff (who developed the Intensive Journal Method), yet their disciplines both are familiar stopping points on people's journeys inward. In a very large view, there is a *Gestalt* alliance among all the byways concerned with personal development, a coherence that ultimately links all the areas of networking addressed in this book. Anthropologist Virginia Hine puts it this way in her paper "How do we get from here to there? The conceptual paradigm shift."

> Many a down to earth anti-nuke farmer, for example, has a beloved and therefore influential son or daughter involved in

> Zen. A worker in a local rent-control project of the consumer movement is also a follower of a Swami presiding over an international network of meditation centers. An est graduate lives in a commune that is tied into the holistic health movement and is currently serving as technical advisor to an ad hoc corporate task force. A teacher in an alternative school practices Silva Mind Control and devotes her spare time to fighting multinational corporations selling non-nutritious baby foods in Brazil.

Here we see the personal and the social in a productive interplay, enhancing one's ability to be active in the world. But the bias against self-exploration is deeply ingrained in our Western culture. (Try consulting a thesaurus for synonyms for words like self-exploration and prepare yourself for a deluge of unflattering terms, including: self-centered, self-important, self-seeking, and self-absorbed, as well as conceited, egotistical and smug.)

The journey within is very long indeed, frequently leading people to a new philosophical view, one that may stand alongside, absorb, or possibly replace one's religious beliefs. A concern with self coexists with a concern for the context within which the self exists, that vast amorphous unknown quantity (or is it quality?) called Universe. This is the point of departure for the spiritual growth networks whose numbers have mushroomed in the past twenty years.

Spiritual growth

What is spiritual growth and why do people become involved, indeed engrossed, in it? Spiritual growth makes people happier and provides a framework for understanding the biggest questions of all: What is the nature of the universe? and Who is this "I" that asks this question?

The development of the spiritual growth movement was helped by at least three apparently unrelated phenomena rooted in the 1960s: the space program, which gave us physical proof that our pearly blue planet spins in a sea that is mostly empty (mirroring both the reality being revealed beneath the lens of the powerful electron microscope and ancient Eastern cosmological wisdom, which speaks of "the void" and "the Absolute" as the same thing);

the widespread availability of psychotropic (mind-altering) drugs such as marijuana, LSD, mescaline and psilocybin, which reportedly enabled their users to briefly experience states of universal “oneness” that had long been described by religious seers and mystics; and jet travel and electronic communication, which greased the tracks for cross-cultural connections. Science, technology, and the market place made it easy to accept and have access to what theologian Harvey Cox has called the “turning east,” one more stitch in the global community quilt.

The connection between Eastern teachings and Western followings did not begin when the Beatles went to India to meet Maharishi Mahesh Yogi—the incident that many regard as the catalytic moment in the life of the new spirituality. The tradition of Indian masters, in particular, coming to the West can be traced to the late nineteenth century, when the British established dominance in India. In the US, the history of the arrival of Eastern religion can be traced to one seminal event caused by one remarkable individual: Swami Vivekananda, a 30-year-old classically trained Vedantic monk, a student of the Indian sage Ramakrishna, who traveled at his own initiative to the Parliament of World Religions at the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair. Vivekananda, then unknown to both the other speakers and the audience, is reported to have given an electrifying speech. His reputation spread quickly, and he decided to stay in the United States, where he was invited to travel from place to place, largely at the invitation of the unconventional intellectual/Bohemian community then in the making. During his time in the United States, he created the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society, which still exists today. (Vivekananda’s visits to Boston, where he was particularly well received, were partially responsible for New England bluebloods being nicknamed “Boston Brahmins.”)

In 1920, Paramahansa Yogananda came to the United States, helping to bring the practice of yoga to the West. Through Yogananda’s organization, the Self-Realization Fellowship, some traditional Vedantic teachings (dating as far back as perhaps 4000 BC) were disseminated in the West through correspondence courses as well as meetings.

Over the next several decades, other classically trained Indian spiritual figures came to the United States, spreading knowledge previously locked in the East, and they attracted considerable

followings. Among these people have been four important and very different figures who began their journeys in India.

Meher Baba, known to his followers as the Avatar (meaning the incarnation of God), lived most of his adult life in silence, and made two visits to the United States before his death in 1969. A quote from Meher Baba, “Don’t worry, be happy,” became something of a slogan in the 1960s, serving as a common point of reference for his following which neither proselytized nor actively sought converts.

Hazarat Inayat Khan was the vehicle for the Westernization of Sufism, a word thought to be derived from the Greek *sophia* (wisdom), a variegated tradition based on teachings originating in Hinduism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, the mystery schools of ancient Egypt and Greece, and Islam. Headed today by his son Pir Vilayat Khan, the Sufi order is a nondogmatic path that recognizes the common heritage of all religious traditions.

Krishnamurti, who ultimately broke ranks with the British Theosophists (who had identified him as the messiah while he was still a young boy in India), eventually established bases in California and Switzerland, where he gave talks until his death in February, 1986. Krishnamurti’s basic message of spiritual self-reliance is a pertinent complement to networking theory.

Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, perhaps the most visible of these teachers, has brought transcendental meditation to the West. Although the TM program separates itself from any overt spiritual connections (choosing instead the somewhat sanitized subtitle “the science of creative intelligence”), Maharishi is a Vedic scholar who has undertaken the task of translating many scriptures still locked in Sanskrit. TM reached its peak of public visibility in the mid1970s, when Maharishi appeared on the “Merv Griffin” television show, resurfacing again a few years later, when the press began to report on the TM Siddhis (literally meaning “perfection”) program, an expensive and extensive training program in which meditators reportedly learn to bring the mind and body into a state of coherence and thus levitate.

The movement has also included American teachers schooled in Buddhist practice. Rick Fields, himself a student of Buddhism and documenter of what he has identified as American Buddhism, describes the phenomenon this way in *The Next Whole Earth Catalog:*

> It has taken about 2500 years for Buddhism to reach America. Thoreau ... translated and published possibly the first mahayana sutra [scripture] in America (from the French in *The Dial,* 1854) and ... realized what the Orientals mean by contemplation as he sat in his sunny doorway one morning at Walden.... D. T. Suzuki, the first patriarch of American Zen, took an editing and translating job in La Salle, Illinois in 1897, and there have been Zen Buddhists of some sort here ever since. In the sixties, formal Zen practice became generally available, and in the seventies Americans trained in the forest monasteries of Southeast Asia returned home, while Tibetan exiles, having crossed the Himalayas on foot, arrived by jet.
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> [There are] three traditional subdevelopments of Buddhist development . . . the Theravadin school is the earliest. . . and now survives chiefly in Burma, Thailand, and Ceylon. Mahayana, a later development, based on the idea of the Bodhisattva, who postpones entry into Nirvana in order to work with others, is found in China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. Vajrayana, or Tantric Buddhism, developed in northern India [and] was practiced in Tibet, Mongolia, and Sikkim.

The now considerable network of Zen (Mahayana) Buddhist centers—from the famous Zen Center of San Francisco started by Shunruyu Suzuki Roshi (author of *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind),* to the Zen Center in Rochester, New York, started by Roshi Philip Kapleau (author of *The Three Pillars of Zen)—have* reached many North Americans. Teachers coming out of Tibet, such as Chogyam Trungpa, Rinpoche, who founded the Naropa Institute, in Boulder, Colorado, have extended the Vajrayana tradition to the West. Americans Joseph Goldstein (who stumbled upon Buddhism while in the Peace Corps in Asia) and Jack Kornfield, among others, have imported the Theravadin tradition to the US, now based at the Insight Meditation Center, in Barre, Massachusetts—formerly a Catholic monastery.

Among the most impressive people to come to the West in recent years is Tenzin Gyatso, His Holiness, the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet. The Dalai Lama is the exiled spiritual and political leader of Tibet, a country occupied since *1959* by the Chinese. Recognized at the age of 2 as the "incarnation" of the previous (13th) Dalai

Lama, he was subsequently given an intense course of study in Buddhist scripture and logic. The Dalai Lama is symbolic as a transitional figure between East and West, one who deals both with the personal and the social, the spiritual and the political realities of daily life.

Speaking at Harvard Divinity School in February 1981 on the nature of the guru-disciple relationship, Pascal Kaplan, who wrote his doctoral dissertation on this topic, drew the following distinction between cults, which he believes appeal to people's egos, and authentic spiritual practice, which he regards as aiding the dissolution of the ego, a step aspired to on many paths:

> A cult figure will orient his or her teaching and organization to the process of enhancing the ego life of those who come under that person's influence rather than enhancing the spiritual processes. Cults are very precise in defining membership—who's in and who's out. Whoever's in is good, right, and holy. Whoever's out is everything else. In cults, the emphasis is on hierarchy—my place and *my* role-with merit badges and Boy Scout ranks and knowing one's place and having one's role clearly defined.

In the many spiritual networks, such distinctions as "who's in" and "who's out" are not only inappropriate but at cross-purposes with the desires of the aspirants. For every spiritual group *member,* there are dozens more people who participate autonomously in many spiritual disciplines, creating the links and thus the greater network of affiliated spiritual teachings. Even so, many people have been sucked into personality cults from which extrication is difficult. This does not mean that any of these groups or methods is "bad" as such. It does mean, however, that leaving a close-knit community, particularly one based on shared spiritual bonds, is very difficult.

Just as the East has spawned its own school of what has been called "freshwater spiritualism," so has the West. The new reformism in Christianity has been reported in the process primarily as the turn toward fundamentalism. Yet there is another strand with a typically Christian message, one that acknowledges a many-dimensional reality within which Jesus Christ is one, albeit central, figure. *The Course in Miracles,* two volumes reportedly dictated to an agnostic woman, then an assistant professor of

medical psychology at Columbia University, from a "higher source", has been one of the documents for the transmission of this third force in Christianity. "Miracle" groups have sprung up in many places, with people taking the course (which offers a program of study for every one of 365 days) and meeting to discuss their studies. While many aspects of traditional Christianity come through the pages of *The Course in Miracles,* it is reminiscent of the Christian mystics and carries a message that encourages the use of affirmations (repetitions of positive thoughts) and visualizations (creating mental pictures). Although less formalized and without a central written doctrine, a parallel practice is evolving out of classical Judaism. In Philadelphia and Boston, B'nai Or, started by Reb Zalman Schachter Shalomi, are Jewish Congregations that combine both traditional and alternative methods of worship. The entire congregation participates in meditation, storytelling, singing, dancing, and sharing of prayers.

Any thorough discussion of the "consciousness movement" must acknowledge the considerable upsurge of interest in the psychic and the occult in the past several decades, tantalizing and potentially absorbing practices that are often confused with spiritual traditions. It is often the case that when people meditate, or engage in some other spiritual practice in a disciplined way, they report that extrasensory faculties become more finely honed, enabling them to see beyond the five senses, demonstrating clairvoyance (the ability to perceive things that are out of visible range), clairaudience (the ability to hear beyond the immediate audio range), and other remarkable feats. (For some people, these "powers" appear to be innate.)

Westerners, long divorced from nonmaterial perceptions, are fascinated by such "impossible" abilities. However, ancient teachers and modern masters are adamant in stating that advanced "powers" are not the point, or the goal, or even a desirable objective of spiritual practice—they are merely its occasional byproduct. Is "seeing" an aura, described as colored halo around the body, any different from being able to see the skin on people's faces? For every layer of reality we unfold, there is another and another and another. Seeing auras or having preknowledge of an event, or being able to hear across great distances, or being able to bend physical objects with the mind do not *make* people spiritual.

Much of the life of the spiritual growth networks blossoms

because people read books like Itzhak Bentov's *Stalking the Wild Pendulum: On the Mechanics of Consciousness* and recognize experiences that they have not seen confirmed elsewhere, or because people see the sculpture and hear the poetry of Mirtala in her exquisite film *The Human Journey,* or because people pass along pamphlets such as *Conversations with John,* edited by David Spangler (author of *Revelation: The Birth of A New Age,* cofounder of the Lorian Association, a spiritually-oriented group, and one of the early members of Findhorn, the spiritual community situated in Scotland) or *Steps Toward Inner Peace* by Peace Pilgrim, the woman who walked across America for twenty-eight years ''practicing peace.''

While spiritual practice sits at the core of many people's lives, for others the very idea of a spiritual dimension in life seems atavistic, primitive, unenlightened. This perspective is shared by many intellectuals as well as by such groups as the American Humanist Association, who deplore talk of "other realities," imploring instead that people take full charge of their own powers and not abdicate responsibility to an unseen "greater force." There is a very loving and enriching quality to the Humanist message, one that satisfies many of the same yearnings that impel people toward spiritual practice.

Yet another dimension to the idea of spiritual growth is being explored from a feminist perspective. The work of nineteenth century historians such as Bachofen documents a distinct heritage of humans worshiping a female, rather than a male, deity.

In the twentieth century, the scholar Erich Neumann continued this research, which is documented in his extensive work *The Great Mother.* The physician S. Esther Harding followed with *Woman's Mysteries.* (Both Neumann and Harding were students of C. G. Jung.) Interest in this work was revived in the late 1960s with the publication of Elizabeth Gould Davis's widely read book, *The First Sex,* and by the end of the 1970s with the writings of theologian Mary Daly *(Beyond God the Father),* Anne Kent Rush's exquisitely designed and easy to read *Moon, Moon,* and art historian Merlin Stone's more scholarly works *When God Was a Woman* and *Ancient Mirrors of Womanhood.* Together, these works represent a new interpretation of religious history, one that encompasses the later patriarchal traditions that have inspired even the most modern of spiritual networks. People gather for festivals connected with

the moon, the spring and fall equinoxes, the summer and winter solstices, to honor these ancient traditions.

Carol P. Christ (yes, that's her real name), a theological scholar, forecasts the impact of this new trend in spirituality in her book *Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on Spiritual Quest:*

> Recently women have begun to write about the connections between spirituality and personal and spiritual change. They have pointed out that women's spiritual quest provides new visions of individual and shared power that can inspire a transformation of culture and society... Women's spiritual quest is thus not an alternative to women's social quest, but rather is one dimension of the larger quest women have embarked upon to create a new world.

Ultimately, the purpose of spiritual development is to enrich daily life. By translating sometimes abstract and abstruse teachings into ordinary situations, we make spiritual development a real, concrete contribution to the everyday world.

One working spiritual network

One special network that appears to bridge the esoteric realms and the gut reality of everyday existence has emerged from the transformation of Ram Dass—in his previous life a psychologist at Harvard, named Richard Alpert, who catapulted to fame alongside Timothy Leary. Ram Dass was one of the first psychedelic experimenters to observe the ephemeral nature of "getting high." By the end of the 1960s, he had sloughed off his previous identity in favor of a spiritual path, which he pursued to India, where he became a student of the spiritual master Neem Karoli Baba. Returning to an enthusiastic American reception, Ram Dass went on the first of many lecture tours during which he spoke humorously of his experiences with spiritual development. He convened gatherings, some of which took place at his family homestead on Webster Lake, in Franklin, New Hampshire, where interested people camped out for several days to meditate, chant and listen to him speak.

Although people tried to become his disciples, Ram Dass did not accept the role of guru to a devoted following, and beyond that, his ability to poke fun at himself has kept him in touch with

his own humanity. That quality, coupled with some embarrassing mistakes and rather substantial errors of judgment that he was willing to make public (in such classic essays as "Egg on my beard"), have endeared the man to many who would otherwise have written him off.

What fewer people know is that Ram Dass, and his network of friends who first met as students of Neem Karoli Baba in India, have created what amounts to a Spiritual Good Works Factory. In the mid-1970s, he established the Hanuman (after the Indian God-monkey by that name) Foundation as a nonprofit tax-exempt corporation to which he donated his earnings from his lectures and his books (notably *Be Here Now, The Only Dance There Is,* and *Grist for the Mill,* which he coauthored with Stephen Levine).

"An institution grows through expanding and contracting," Ram Dass explains in a 1985 telephone interview from his parents' home near Boston. "The Hanuman Foundation accordion is pulled in right now."

For a decade, the Hanuman Foundation has comprised three separate, independent projects: the Prison-Ashram Project, the Dying Project, and the Hanuman Foundation Tape Library. While the Tape Library continues to sell audiotapes of the Hanuman network's lectures, the Dying Project, started by Stephen Levine to help terminally ill people to practice "conscious dying," and carried on by Dale Borglum, is in a "holding pattern" until it relocates from its original base in New Mexico to a more urban setting.

Meanwhile, the Prison-Ashram Project has completed *We're All Doing Time,* its final volume of a three-book series. Run for over a decade by Bo and Sita Lozoff, the Prison-Ashram Project:

> ...provides information and encouragement to prisoners who would like to use their time for spiritual training. As well as introducing them to meditation, yoga, and spiritual ideas (not religious), we also try to help people avoid getting caught or seduced into various traps or trips that often go along with these studies. Our emphasis is on a light, good-humored, nonpreachy perspective.
>
> We've been fortunate through the years to gain solid credibility with the American correctional establishment. These linkages have taught us a great deal about relating to

the culture at large, since we have usually considered ourselves to be far outside that culture. It's nice to see how service tends to assimilate us into the mainstream and break down illusory walls which were our own creations in the first place.

When the originators first envisioned the Prison-Ashram Project, they expected that their constituency would be drawn largely from counterculture types who had been imprisoned for drug or political offenses. Much to their surprise, however, they found instead that "most of the thousands of prisoners who wrote to us were *35* to *45* years old and had been in prison up to 25 years already. Or they were people who had been sentenced to 200 years plus life; people who had less than an eighth grade education."

The response moved Lozoff to reexamine his original assumptions and to rethink how to present yoga and meditation within the prison walls. As a result, he developed what he calls "prison yoga... We can help people convert their prison experience into a monastic one," he told *Sufi Times,* "but it's a very particular monastic environment—one lived within an atmosphere of hostility, hatred, and suspicion."

If one branch of the tree whose roots can be traced to Neem Karoli Baba is shedding its leaves, another is sprouting them. In *1985,* Ram Dass became chair of the Seva (literally, service in Sanskrit) Foundation, the international public health charity based in Michigan. Founded in 1978 by Girija Brilliant, who holds a PhD in public health administration, and her husband Larry Brilliant, a medical doctor and epidemiologist, Seva has been involved primarily in blindness prevention in Nepal and India.

Both Brilliants were instrumental in the World Health Organization smallpox eradication program in India.

In 1983 Larry Brilliant, convinced of the utility of computer conferencing (see Chapter 7) to the medical community, founded Network Technologies International, Inc. (NETI), a publicly traded corporation that now markets software for "electronic meetings" to the Fortune 1000 companies, the legal community and the medical field.

One of NETI's earliest users was the Seva Foundation, which may have one of the first globally distributed nonprofit boards of directors to meet regularly "online."

"I spend about two hours a day online," Ram Dass explains. "That's how I keep up with my communication. It's amazing how much business we can do via computer."

Conscious dying? Prison yoga? Board meetings-online? Contradictions in terms? No, partners in the cosmic dance.