



Exodus

One fateful August day while driving Robert to Satsang, I asked, "Robert, isn't about time we checked out Sedona? The people there seem to really want us all, as opposed to Santa Fe." He replied in his typically taciturn way, "Yup, next week."

For years, we had talked about where we might go to develop a spiritual community, but he always lost interest when push came to shove. The last six months were different. He seemed insistent that we move to another city, whether it was Santa Fe, Dallas, or Florida. I did not want to move that far, so I suggested Sedona, since it was closer to Los Angeles, and even closer to where my mother lived in Phoenix. For the last six months, many new students were coming to Satsang from Sedona, and I had been exploring the possibilities of us relocating there at Robert's request.

Robert traveled in a van when going anywhere for a distance with his family. Parkinson's caused easy tiring, and he could not sit upright for long periods, so he usually lay on the van floor. Therefore, I rented a large Buick that had a passenger seat that reclined almost to a flat position.

Early Monday morning I arrived at his apartment to find him agitated: I had never seen that before. He was pacing around the living room, clearly going nowhere. His wife, Nicole, also appeared anxious. Only Dimitri, Robert's little Lhasa Apso, remained calm. I felt unexpectedly relaxed, because I habitually felt quite anxious before a trip.

The three of us departed at 7:10 AM on a beautiful, sunny Monday. Robert sat upright and alert, while Nicole talked about the people at Satsang – her favorite topic. In fact, Robert sat upright the entire 400 miles to Phoenix, not appearing to tire at all, which confounded Nicole. Nicole was highly attentive to Robert's health and comfort, and she had fully expected him to tire quickly and to require a lot of rest. Instead, he seemed rejuvenated by the trip.

On the other hand, I began to feel hot and tired after about an hour of driving through the heavy morning traffic. By the time we stopped near Palm Springs for breakfast, driving was becoming very difficult. After four hours of driving I felt exhausted and hot despite excellent air conditioning. By the time we reached Phoenix, I was disorientated, and had made wrong turns three times.

The original plan was to spend the night at my Mom's house in Peoria, a suburb of Phoenix, so that Robert and Nicole could get a feel for the town before spending five days in Sedona. By the time I arrived in Phoenix, I was just plain sick. I called Hale Dvoskin, head of the Sedona Institute in Phoenix, and one of Robert's newer students, and asked him to take Robert and Nicole out to see the town. The next day, Hale and his wife Amy drove Robert up to Sedona without me. I was as sick as I remember ever having been. I felt like Moses, unable to enter the promised land.

By Wednesday, I felt a little better and intended to drive up to Sedona the next day, but my mother became ill with symptoms identical to mine, and I could not leave her. On Thursday, I relapsed, and could not drive again. On Saturday, Robert was to come back through Phoenix so I could drive him home. The Sedona people sent an extra driver back with Robert to help me drive home. Driving home, I felt almost completely better.

The whole trip appeared very strange to me – the illness coming on suddenly the closer we came to Phoenix, and left completely just as we left Phoenix. I never got to see Sedona. No one but Robert and Hale called when I was lying sick in Phoenix, and I felt left out. It made me think I was not destined to accompany Robert, and I told him so. Something inside me was telling me not to go. I took the illness to be a message from myself to myself.

The die was cast. Robert accepted the Sedona devotee's offers. They offered him everything he needed to live there. One LA woman offered to buy a house that we could use for Satsang. Another Sedona businessman offered to buy him a house instead of investing in raw land. Everything was set up and unconditionally promised, at frequent lunch meetings, over the phone and by

letter. How could he refuse such generosity and declarations of love? Robert decided to move by the end of September, just four weeks away.

Everything changed now at Satsang in Los Angeles. Robert talked much as he always had, but he had a radiance and presence that he had never revealed before. Rather than sitting back in his chair and disappearing into himself for half an hour before he talked as usual, he sat forward on the edge of the chair, grasping the microphone, looking at everyone intently. This was a very different Robert, one who knew that profound changes were in the air.

The power he was radiating was palpable. During the last four Satsangs, I felt I was being burned alive. Mary, my dear friend and Robert's long time devotee, had to move to the back of the room because she could not tolerate the bombarding energy. I was covered with sweat and had difficulty breathing. Robert was pouring his all into us, giving us his last best shot.

Lunches too were different. Robert still joked, but mostly he was silent. Sometimes he just looked deep into my eyes and I felt him touch the center of my being. He also invited me to his house more often, sometimes just watching television or doing little chores. Overall, I felt that I was burning in his presence. My body was burning, my being was burning, my everything was burning. Being with Robert had become a very intense experience.

Everyone else felt it too. With this change, I realized he really was moving. I wondered if he was pouring so much energy into me because he knew I was not going, and this was his last chance to 'finish me off.' Perhaps this is what happened during the Phoenix trip weeks before.

During this month, my life was hell. I was torn between moving and staying, making plans, packing things, and trying to find a place to live in Sedona by talking to devotees there. I had already lined up a job as a jeep tour guide, generously offered by a Sedona devotee, and a three bedroom house that I could sublease to other LA devotees moving to Sedona.

Kerima, my girlfriend, was unable to leave at that time, and her recent career change made attaining this kind of work an impossible quest in a town as small as Sedona. We would have to separate for a time, six months or more we thought, and perhaps even longer. Kerima had little interest in Advaita and had stopped coming to Satsang a year before; she was totally devoted to her new acting career, and we appeared to be drifting apart. I would have to maintain a Sedona residence and help sustain our Santa Monica apartment at the same time.

Besides these problems, I still maintained a colony of feral cats in a Santa Monica neighborhood. (Which gave me all sorts of grief later.) All the houses where the cats lived acquired new owners, and none of them liked the idea of the cats being there. Several became increasingly hostile about my feeding them. No one wanted to take them. I decided I had to take the cats with me to Sedona, to my new house, and to build a cat run in the yard where they could be protected from coyotes, dogs and the heat.

At one point, just three days before Robert left, I had made a deposit on the Sedona house, enlisted friends to feed the abandoned cats while I was away, tried to placate the neighbors who were now threatening to trap the cats and take them to the local animal shelter where they would be destroyed as feral, and attempted, unsuccessfully, to talk to the devotee, Marty, who promised me the tour guide job.

On the way to renting a car, I got sick again. I felt the same illness as I experienced in Phoenix, a month before: nausea, dizziness, weakness and heat – extreme heat. I felt overwhelmed by the prospect of leaving Kerima, moving to a new house in Sedona with rent three times as much as I paid now, to begin a new job as a tour guide in a town I didn't know, capturing and transporting six semi-wild cats, building a cat run at the new house, and worrying about whether Kerima could take care of our own five cats and the three strays that lived under our Santa Monica home by herself. I was overwhelmed and sick. It was too much to handle all at once.

The jeep tour operator later reneged on his offer, pretending he never made it. All other promises made both to me and to Robert were never kept. The Sedona "devotees" had made commitments to financially support Robert and his family, which were never kept. After Robert made the move, all those who made commitments, reneged. One of the L.A. devotees that moved up there was shoved aside as the Sedona people wanted Robert all too themselves. Many of the Sedona people advertise themselves as students of Robert, even though they didn't act like it.

For the last two years while I was with Robert, I had done very little. For work, I wrote a few psychological evaluation reports, and created a few projects here and there, writing, speech writing for religious leaders, and I tried to launch a new radio show called "The Voice of Consciousness." But mostly I did nothing. Each afternoon, from about 1:00 to 3 or 4:00 p.m., I would go into an involuntary 'trance,' where I would remain consciousness, but my body and mind would disappear. This made holding a regular job difficult – very

difficult. I was not used to being so involved in the world, making decisions about moving, transporting cats, finding a job, and assessing what the Sedona situation was like. All this involvement felt unseemly and a little loathsome, and was dragging me from my state of constant peace.

The day arrived, Rosh Hashanah, September 25, 1995, and I did not leave with the caravan that carried Robert. Robert had suggested that I drive separately from him so that I had transportation in Sedona, and a way to return to LA. Two new devotees, who had known him less than two weeks, moved with him. Robert rode with Nicole in the van of one of the Sedona devotees. I let him go. I felt I had no choice. I was not used to dealing with a dozen problems at a time. I decided I would tackle just one problem at a time. I would find homes for the Palisades Street cats before I moved, or I'd have help lined up in Sedona to take them there, if that were at all possible.

The first few days after Robert and Nicole left were horrible. Terror gripped me. My body was wracked with pain as all my muscles tensed from fear. I was terrified of the idea of moving to Sedona. I feared something awful would happen to me there.

I had lost any interest in or ability to reenter the painful world of the human condition for several years, but now I was again totally immersed in the tumult of human fears, money concerns and logistical problems. It was as if I had allowed myself to become human again. Still, a part of me was entirely unperturbed. I knew this situation would pass, and though it once again appeared real, I knew it was not. Moreover, I knew I had to undergo this immersion into fear to overcome it. I had to experience it fully without Robert's soothing presence, alone.
