



Robert and I

Robert was imperturbable – nothing bothered him. He never complained, never lacked a ready smile or humorous comeback, and I never saw him angry. Yet, for years, I harbored niggling doubts about him, though I knew I could not find a greater teacher. His behavior was so 'human' at times, and just plain confusing at others, that sometimes I doubted he was a guru at all. In this I was not alone. Mary, one of his longest-lasting disciples almost always had doubts. Robert's own wife, Nicole knew he was very different from anyone else, but did not, at that time, consider him to be a spiritual teacher or guru. At that time, she even lacked the concept of guru-dom.

In his very low-key way, he would say one thing to one person and a very different thing to someone else. Sometimes he would appear not to remember promises, though his memory was excellent, or he would equivocate in a way that everyone thought he had agreed to their separate and contradictory wishes. He denied being a Guru, but acted like one and constantly extolled the virtues of the 'Realized being,' or sage. He even appeared to set people up so that they would clash with each other causing friction at our meetings, which we called Satsang (meaning, being in the presence of Truth). In other words, he appeared to be an altogether normal, if not meddlesome person, acting the part of a Guru while publicly denying he was one, using the Hindu teachings of Oneness – Advaita Vedanta – as his 'schtick.'

Deep inside though, I trusted him and his teachings, because of his utter peacefulness, and because he was absolutely consistent in his description of 'reality'. He always maintained the same bearing and teachings, whether in

Satsang, while riding in a car, and while sitting in the park or at lunch. His teachings were always consistent, as if he were talking from a living and absolutely constant experience, instead of just mouthing philosophical knowledge learned from books or from Ramana.

Now that I tasted Knowing, I no longer cared for knowledge – secular, spiritual, or absolute; my focus changed. Rather than regard Robert as a source of teachings, seeking his presence for the transmutative effect he had on me, I began to watch how he behaved in different situations and how he dealt with me and with others. I began to understand how a real master operates with his disciples, *and operate he did!* As soon as a student gets close to a master such as Robert, the game of awakening begins.

I watched how Robert operated on his disciples' once during lunch. One day, while we were eating he appeared preoccupied. He did not talk; he did not look at me. Feeling left out I asked, "*What are you thinking about Robert?*" He responded, "*You!*" "*Me,*" I said – "*What are you thinking about me?*" His answer made *everything* that had occurred during our relationship clear. He said, "*I am thinking how to cook you.*" 'Cook' is the term applied to the spiritual heat that comes from spiritual practice (Sadhana) or from being in the presence of the Guru. One cooks off the ego. So he was thinking about how to process me while we were at lunch, and by deduction, every other moment we were together. I was lunch. Presumably, this happened with everyone else too. He was always stirring the pot, adjusting the fire, cooking egos, yet he always denied he was doing anything at all. After that I let him cook me all he wanted, because I knew he had no self-serving intent behind any of his acts, and by extension, none of his actions towards anyone else either. He was the Guru playing at being human, curing us of our human illusion.

Spiritual 'old shoes,' those who had spent a long time with the recent great teachers such as Muktananda, Rajneesh or Yogananda, know all about cooking and how the Guru sets up situations to cause self-consciousness and the ending of that portion of the ego. However, Robert lacked all the external trappings of being a Guru, so few people expected him to cook people – they saw him as a spiritual friend, or perhaps as a father-figure or as a prophet, but not as an operator. He never explained what he was doing when he operated on someone. His 'victim' would be 'innocently' walking along, thinking everything was fine with what he or she was doing with and to others at Satsang, when suddenly Robert would thrust a whole new situation on him.

For example, I initiated transcribing his talks with the idea of selling them at Satsang, giving a percentage to Robert, and keeping part myself to start a

publishing company for Satsang. It all made sense. Robert did the talking; I recorded the talks, transcribed them, edited them to perfection, and wrote an introduction to cap things off. Thus, a 50-50 split was fair. No? Things went fine for a while, until one day I arrived at Satsang to find new transcripts done by Mary on the table at no cost, asking only for a donation. Then the next week, more transcripts appeared from yet another transcriber. I had lost the cozy post of being Robert's voice, and this new business had also gone down the tubes, and Mary and I were at loggerheads for a time. Yet Robert never, ever explained to me, or Mary, how he had let me dig my own grave, and then used others, with their own ambitions and agendas to bury me.

So too, was it the same with everyone else. Robert let them walk into the quicksand, get attached and stuck, and then let them sink. At other times, he would put people together for a work function that just rubbed each other the wrong way, or he'd arrange for the two largest egos around to be placed in apparent competition.

One recipient of Robert's 'operating', described him in these belittling words: *"He is very controlling. He pits one person against another, and gets a great delight at watching what happens. He lies incessantly, telling one person one thing and another something else, then denies to both that he said anything."*

When I heard this, I just smiled and said, *"Of course he appears to do these things, how else can he work with people at their own level of psychological focus? He is the Guru and he'll do whatever it takes to get someone to move spiritually on levels we don't begin to understand; what we see on the surface is only a small part of his work."*

From that recipient's own viewpoint of frustration and disappointment, what she said was true; but she saw only the man, not the source, the Self-embodied Guru. She saw only actions she interpreted in terms of what people like herself would do. Nothing Robert did was from malice; nothing was done with intent to harm. Everything was done from love, with the intent of 'stirring the pot,' to make egos bump together creating a scenario where grosser aspects of the personality, such as jealousy, envy, the need for recognition or control, could be brought into the open and destroyed by Robert's grace. Robert was a steel chisel knocking off the ego's flinty edges in a shower of sparks from his heart's flame.

Nothing Robert did was as it appeared, *because disciples would project their own understanding and moral conditioning onto his actions*, and their understanding was based on a wide spectrum of maturities. What appeared to

be the intent of his behavior on one level was usually irrelevant to the level he was really operating on. What they saw was their own appearance, their creation. Long time students did not even bother to try to figure his actions out – they were unfathomable as seen from the outside. Robert was not of this world and worldly logic did not apply. The only thing you needed to know as his student was that he would do you no harm, and that nothing was done maliciously, no matter how painful a situation *appeared*.

By 'Robert's grace' I mean that he drew nothing out of the person that hadn't been brought out a thousand times before in a thousand life situations involving spouses, parents, employers and friends, but which had never been resolved in everyday life. Around him, once the ego showed itself in the situations he created, it was eventually destroyed, and Robert was a master of making the ego show itself. Unfortunately, many people, especially once they got used to him as a person, just saw a normal man doing unexplainable, 'self-defeating' or seemingly hurtful acts, not a Master burning a field of egos.

Another example of his power was Satsang, where he and his disciples sat together for his talk. Many people, especially those coming from other traditions emphasizing Shakti, or 'teachings-philosophy,' found our meetings boring. The teachings of the complete unreality of everything were essentially unfathomable, even by seasoned swamis from different traditions who regarded Advaita as mere philosophy. Robert did not present techniques to find bliss, God or to make life work better. There was little chanting, and few external signs of devotion among his disciples, who kept mostly to themselves.

Lastly, Robert's Parkinson's Disease moderately slurred his speech, hampering easy understanding of his words. I used to accuse him of getting the disease just to make people listen harder. He also spoke slowly with long gaps between sentences. He emphasized silence rather than content. Some newcomers just found the whole experience lacking energy, understanding, devotion, or even basic comprehensibility. However, because so much was lacking externally, those who stayed were welcomed by silence to go deep within to find perfect peace, happiness and emptiness.

Just being in his presence had a profound affect on many people. Some were overcome by happiness, others by peace. Much more frequently, at Satsang, people felt a deep relaxation that lapsed easily into a barely conscious 'sleep.' Most, who were fortunate enough to go to lunch with him, experienced an overwhelming need to sleep afterwards, a deep, relaxing and totally incapacitating sleep. I witnessed one disciple who went into this 'sleep' state during a meal with Robert. She was lifting a fork to her mouth, but it never

arrived. She froze with uplifted fork, her eyes closed, and she was 'out' for a long time. I think we left her behind at the restaurant, in that state, as Robert said not to disturb her. Of course, she would eventually have been disturbed, but he wanted the state to last as long as possible.

Of course these sleep states were actually forms of one or another kind of Samadhi, but to use that term is to create unnecessary mystical connotations that explain nothing. The subjective experience was of the involuntary turning of consciousness 'inwards,' closing down the body's functioning, of feeling great peace, and a of a total inability to attend to the external world, even while of remaining barely aware of everything. Some people experienced a sinking into light. Others experienced a dissolving into emptiness or the world dissolved into them. For each it was different.

One of Robert's favorite 'games,' I called *The City de jour*, which was loosely based on Marpa's handling of his most famous, hard-case disciple, Milarepa. Milarepa had been a black sorcerer, and had killed several relatives at the urging of his Lady Mac Beth-like mother. At some point, he began to feel extreme sadness and guilt over what he had done, and sought the teachings of peace from Marpa. Marpa refused to teach Milarepa, and instead made him an employee, building Marpa a new home made from loose rocks on Marpa's land. Each time Milarepa completed a house, Marpa found fault with its layout or location, and had Milarepa dismantle it, and begin anew. Milarepa built seven houses this way, and dismantled six of them before Marpa relented and initiated him.

In *The City de jour*, Robert hinted darkly of an impending earthquake that was going to destroy Los Angeles, and we all had to get out immediately. If the earthquake ploy did not work, he embellished on his prediction, saying it would be a 7.2 to 7.5 quake on a new fault near Cucamonga, near the juncture of San Bernadino and Riverside Counties, during the last quarter of 1995, most probably during November.

If this did not work as motivation, he found other reasons to motivate people to move. To one, he said, "*You will be my right hand.*" To another, he said, "*You will be my secretary.*" Behind the scenes, he would tell different people different locations where he wanted to move. Those who were about to build a house in Santa Fe anyway, were told he was moving to Santa Fe shortly. Those who wanted to move to Dallas, he said he would move to Dallas. Those who wanted to move to Arizona, were told to find a house in Phoenix or Sedona.

Of course, everyone knew what he told everyone else, and house finding was happening in four cities simultaneously, with everyone's life in constant uproar as they contemplated living variously in Sedona, Santa Fe, Dallas, Phoenix or even East St. Louis. Disciples were traveling to these locations, lining up houses, jobs, locations for Satsang, and agonizing over the disruption to their lives. Others, who felt they could not move, due to employment, homes or just plain attachment, felt abandoned and angry.

Because of his fragile health, Robert never traveled more than fifty miles to visit family, and even this, rarely. As a dramatic touch, he decided to visit Sedona, where a group of 15 or so disciples had offered him several houses for his use, and offered relocation assistance for other disciples that wanted to relocate there. Naturally, this aroused everyone's anxiety to the highest levels, for now it appeared he really was going to move, and disciples contemplated either losing their present comfortable lifestyle by moving, or losing their Guru.

Actually, at that time I urged Robert to pick Sedona as one of his students, Marty, owned a jeep tour business and promised me a job driving. Sedona was beautiful and I wanted a change from Santa Monica. Lastly, I was unemployed, so there were no longer strong ties to Southern California.

At this point, the game became even more chaotic, with Sedona disciples constantly flying to LA, and LA disciples scoping out real estate in Arizona during the mid-August monsoon season. Phoenix during August is unpleasant at best, and even Robert's wife remarked, *"You've brought us to hell!"* Another disciple, a well-known author, called Robert and said, *"I can't do this! I am driving through Scottsdale, it is a 108 degrees, and I am covered with sweat! I can't do this. I don't like anything about this state!"* She did come and bought a huge house. She wanted one large enough to hold Satsang to be close to Robert.

This is typical Guru behavior – creating chaos and anxiety where once there was order, which loosened attachments and roiled egos. He would do the same in all areas of life that could involve his disciples emotionally. He worked on people whenever they opened themselves, even a little, to his power.

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