

**Carlos Castaneda's Magical Passes**

# Yoga Journal

**For Health and Conscious Living**

*February 1998/Issue 138*

## Earth Yoga

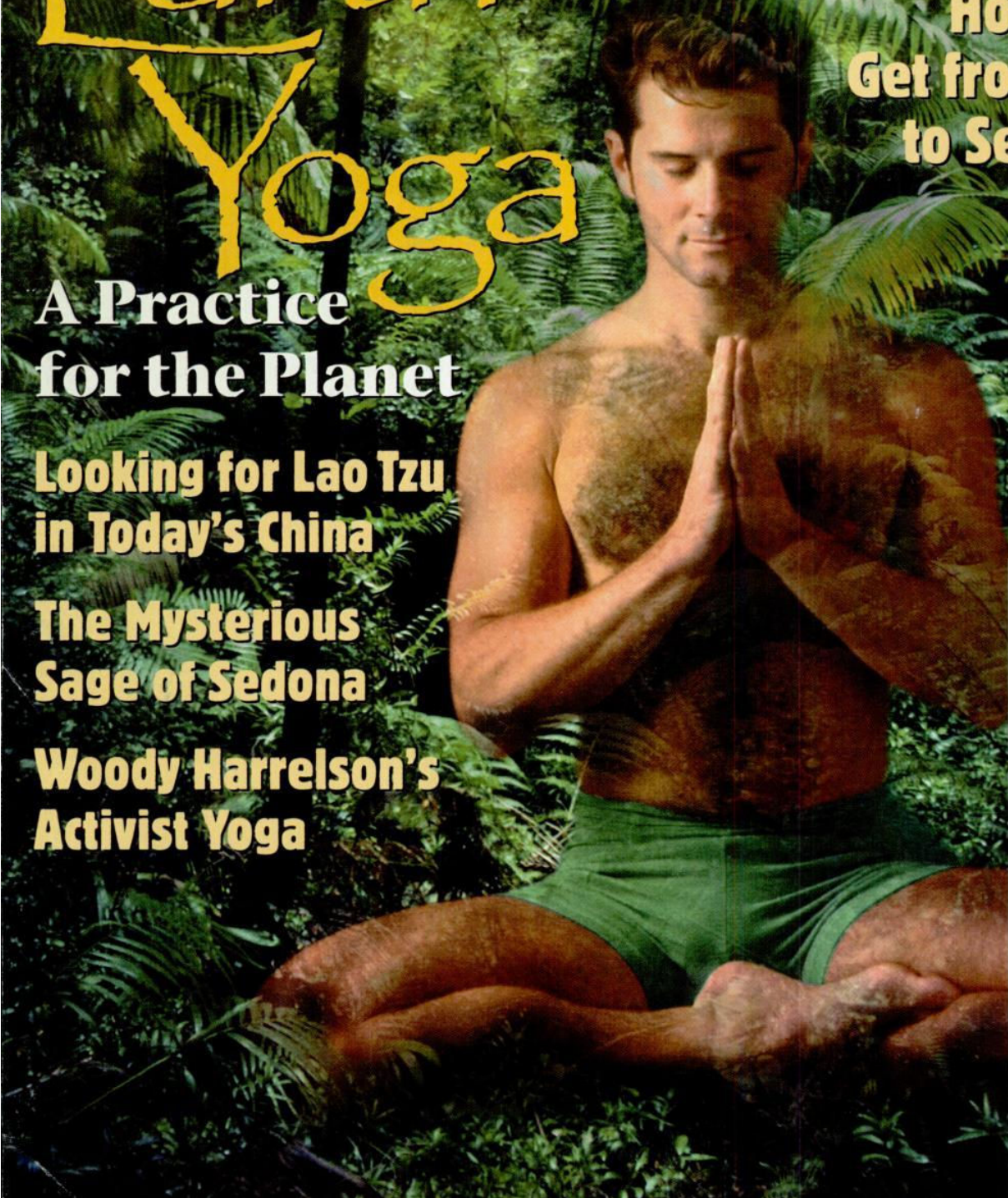
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**Looking for Lao Tzu  
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How to  
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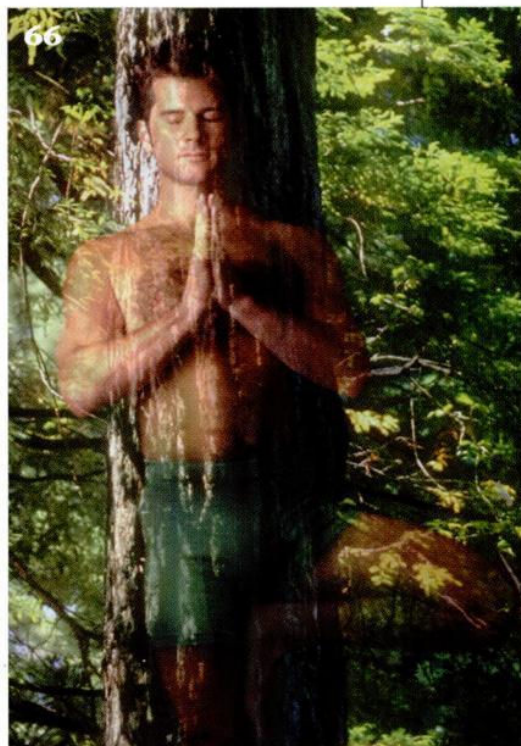
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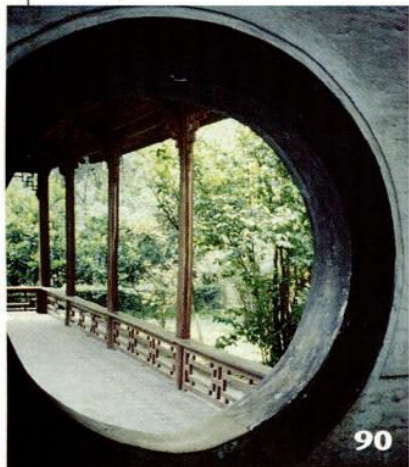
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# THE MYSTERIOUS SAGE OF SEDONA

**By Edward Muzika**

**A student reflects on the life and death of Robert Adams, an American who achieved awakening at the feet of Ramana Maharshi.**



Robert Adams, who taught a small group of students quietly and unobtrusively for 30 years in Los Angeles, was one of the best-kept spiritual secrets of our time. He founded no ashrams, centers, or institutes, never lectured in public or taught workshops, was rarely interviewed or photographed, and published no books. Even toward the end of his life, when word about him had begun to spread, his weekly meetings—or *satsangs*—never exceeded 50 participants. And yet he was perhaps the only American to embody and transmit the nondual experience and teachings directly from Ramana Maharshi, considered by many to be one of the greatest of all modern spiritual masters of India.

Ramana Maharshi had a spontaneous awakening at the age of 16. Gripped by the fear of death, he stretched out like a corpse, stiffened his body, and said to himself, “Well, my body is dead. I see it. It will soon be cremated. But who is it that dies?” His intense inquiry into this question resulted in the realization that the body dies, but Self-Awareness never decays. This Self-Awareness, he later said, “is unrelated to anything. It is also self-luminous. Even if this body is burned, it will not be affected. Hence I realized, that very day, that I was that Awareness.”

This realization never left him. Soon after his awakening, the young boy left home and made his way to the holy mountain Arunachala. He spent many years there, meditating in a cave, never speaking. Eventually Ramana Maharshi became celebrated as a self-realized *jnana* (wisdom) yogi, a great master of the spiritual tradition known as Advaita (“not-two”) Vedanta. Though many can discuss

this tradition at great length and with great learning, Ramana was one of the very few who had a direct experience and realization of nonduality.

Eventually an ashram grew up around him, and his presence drew spiritual seekers from all over the world. For the most part he taught through silence, and his first two books, *Self-Enquiry* and *Who Am I?*, were composed of written answers to questions posed by devotees. When he did begin to speak, he typically came back again and again to the same point: "Everyone says 'I' without understanding the significance of that pronoun. The seeker of Truth should first ask the question, 'Who am I?' As often as an idea or thought rises, then and there, the seeker should ask himself, 'To whom has this idea occurred?'" This process, he taught, would lead to liberation.

## A DWARF AND A SIDDHI

Like his guru Ramana, Robert Adams had a spontaneous experience of awakening as a young boy. Born in 1928 in the Bronx, Robert's earliest memory was of a two-foot-high dwarf with white hair and a white beard who would stand at the foot of his bed and jabber at him in a language he could not understand. This little man finally disappeared when Robert was seven.

After the little man stopped coming, Robert developed a *siddhi*, a power. By this time, he said, he felt the world belonged to him. Whenever he wanted something, he just repeated God's name three times, and within minutes or hours it would be given to him. Once, after he thought he would like to take violin lessons and so recited God's name, his uncle showed up with a violin, saying he thought Robert might enjoy learning the instrument.

By the time Robert was 14, he hardly studied at all. Whenever a test came up, he would again just say, "God! God! God!" and the correct answers would come. One day, just before taking an algebra test, he repeated God's name three times. But rather than the algebra answers, something else came to him—a great awakening. About the experience itself Robert always remained reticent, saying it was inexpressible. "But," he said, "it changed my life completely." In fact, Robert began to change so much that his mother thought he was going mad. He was no longer interested in food, school, books, friends, or hobbies. He had no idea what had happened to him, and began exploring Eastern religious books. One day he happened on the book *Who Am I?* by Ramana Maharshi. Upon seeing Ramana's photograph, he said, "I was shocked. The hair on my head and neck stood straight up. The little man who

had lectured me all those years was Ramana."

Robert attended meetings and had long conversations with spiritual teacher Joel Goldsmith. Eventually he discovered *Autobiography of a Yogi* by Paramhansa Yogananda, and made up his mind to study with him. So at 16 he left home for Encinitas, California.

Taken in by Yogananda, the boy asked to become a monk at the Self-Realization Fellowship monastery. But Yogananda refused the request. "He couldn't wait to get rid of me," Robert remembered. "I kept asking why he taught all the practices, mantras, affirmations, and healing techniques, when all of them missed the point of Self-realization. Yogananda's attitude, was 'I've done very well, thank you, doing things this way!'" Because of the nature of Robert's spontaneous awakening and his connection to the little white-haired dwarf, Yogananda told Robert that Ramana was his true teacher.

## MEETING RAMANA

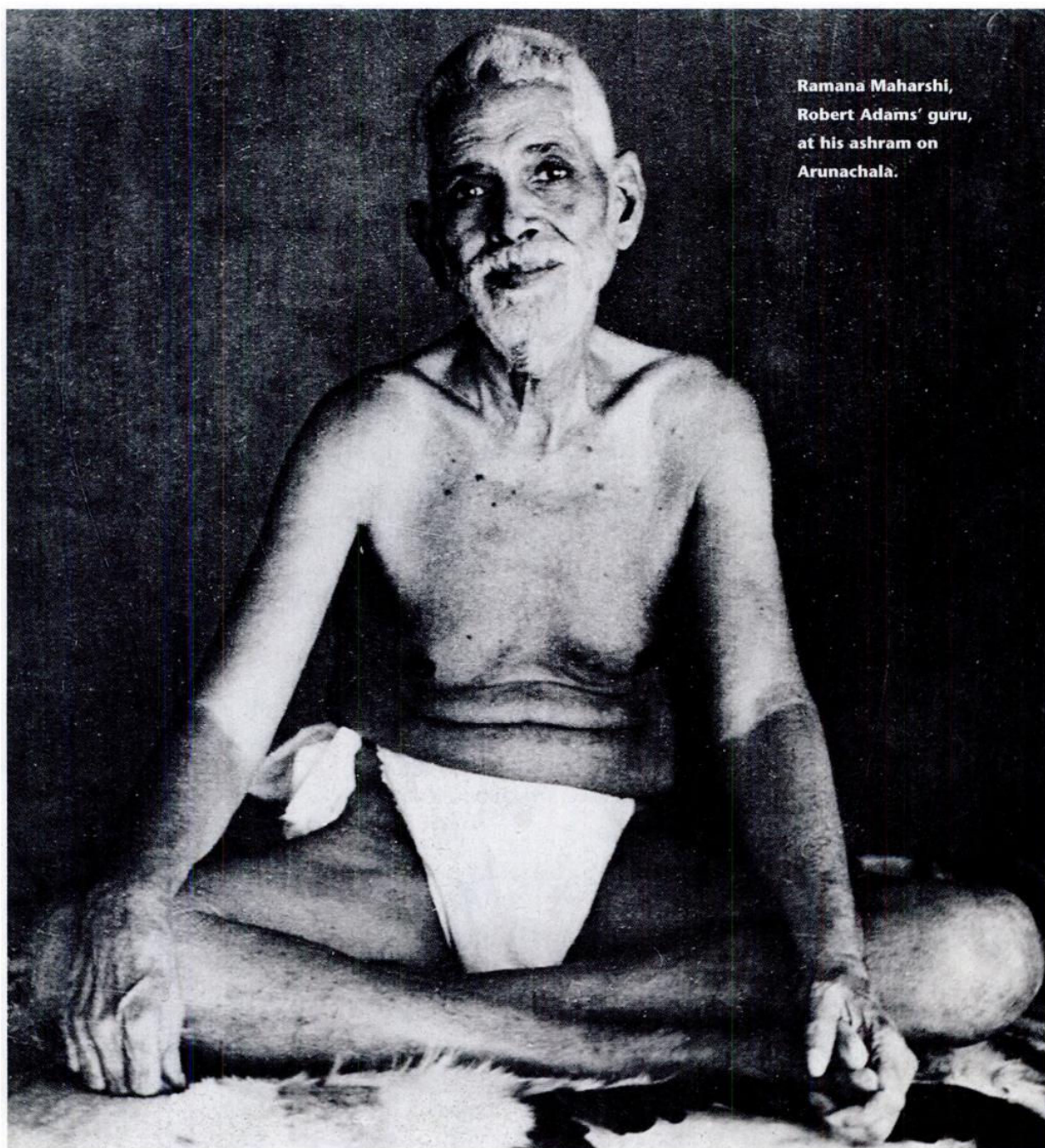
During the fall of 1946 Robert traveled to India, arriving by train in the town of Tiruvannamalai, a few miles from Arunachala mountain, the site of Ramana Maharshi's ashram. Early the next day, while walking toward the ashram, he spotted Ramana coming down the path toward him. An electrifying energy coursed through his body. He felt completely opened. As Ramana got closer, Robert stripped off all his clothes and dropped at his guru's feet. Ramana reached down, grabbed Robert by his shoulders, looked into his eyes and said, "I have been waiting for you. Get up! Get up!"

Robert stayed at Ramana Ashram for almost three years, during which time he bought a jeep for the ashram to bring in supplies from town and helped build a large hospital using money from an inheritance.

During the late 1940s Ramana was almost constantly ill with severe arthritis and other ailments, including the cancer that eventually killed him. Few visitors were allowed to stay for more than a few weeks at the ashram, so Robert lived mostly in the caves above. He later said, "It was with Ramana that my eyes were opened to the meaning of my experience."

After Ramana died, Robert wanted to visit several other saints in India, but had no money left. The famed Ramana biographer Arthur Osborne, hearing about Robert's situation, gave him \$7,000 to continue his travels and spiritual education. Robert wandered across India and around the world off and on during the next 30 years. He said he wanted to make sure he hadn't missed anything. No matter where Robert traveled, he was discovered, and a group of disciples grew up around him. But he always resisted being tied down to

**Ramana** REACHED DOWN, GRABBED ROBERT BY HIS SHOULDERS, LOOKED INTO HIS EYES, AND SAID, "I HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU. GET UP! GET UP!"



Ramana Maharshi,  
Robert Adams' guru,  
at his ashram on  
Arunachala.

an ashram or community and soon moved on. Eventually, however, he decided it was time to stop and take on a small group of students, to whom he could pass on his understanding. Without publicity or fanfare of any kind, he began holding satsang in Los Angeles.

## INTO THE SILENCE

I first met Robert Adams in June of 1989. I had been a Zen monk for many years and still had not found what I was seeking. I received a doctorate in psychology and started my own psychotherapy practice. But examining my emotions just seemed to make me more aware of my unhappiness.

Over the next few years I would hear Robert say the most perplexing things: "Nothing is as it appears to be. The world is not real. You are not your body, you are not a human being, you are God, the Absolute, omniscient, immortal, all-loving perfection." But a day later he would say, "Nothing exists—not the world, not your mind or body, not the Absolute or God. These are all just words." One day he would say, "Don't get excited; whatever you see, touch, hear, or feel is not real. Look within and find who you really are." Another day, he would say, "What is the worst that can happen to you? You can die, and what's so bad about that?" I never knew how to take his comments. They flew in the

face of the evidence of my senses, which constantly showed me the external world as solid and real.

Still I trusted him and his teachings, because of his utter peacefulness. He always maintained the same bearing of deep equanimity whether in satsang, riding in a car, sitting in the park, or at lunch. He spoke with a quiet confidence, as if he were talking from a living and absolutely constant experience, not mouthing philosophical knowledge learned from books or from Ramana. Because I trusted him and his teachings, I changed. Everyone recognized that I was less arrogant, less confrontational, less angry, less stingy, less frightened of the world; I was softer, gentler, kinder.

Many people, especially those coming from other traditions emphasizing the transmission of teachings or of *shakti* (spiritual power) found our satsang meetings boring. Robert did not present techniques to find bliss or God, or to make life work better. There was little chanting and few external signs of devotion among his disciples. Lastly, Robert's Parkinson's disease 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 found the whole experience lacking in energy, understanding, devotion,

## ON Waking FROM THE Dream

Awaken from this mortal dream. Who has to awaken? Ask yourself. There is no thing to wake up. Can you say why there is really nothing to say? We can play all sorts of games with mantras and tantric techniques—but for what end? Just know that you are nobody; there is absolutely nothing to do; no one exists. This relieves you of everything. It relieves you of all responsibilities to yourself and to the world.

Some of you still believe that if you become this way you'll become so sarcastic and belligerent you'll not care or be loving and kind, but this is not true. On the contrary, as you drop everything, as

you let go of all your preconceived ideas, your dogmas, as you forget all of your rituals and all the things you've been doing all your life, what we call love begins to function as you. What we call compassion begins to function as you.

Living kindness, peace—these attributes will automatically take over, for you've lost all fear. When you've lost all fear for existence, love automatically takes over.

## ON Teachers AND Students

You create a teacher to wake you up; but you are already awake and do not know it. A teacher gives you teachings, gives you grace, and lets you understand you

are already awake and in peace. In return you take care of the teacher. It is a reciprocal game. It is your game, it is your dream. Therefore waken now and be free.

## ON THE Heart

Your heart has to be your guide. If you are sincere, you will know where to go and what to do. If you are working out of your ego, you will find fault with everything. I can tell you this much, everyone is in their right place. There are no mistakes. None have been made. None are being made.

Those people who are with certain gurus belong right where they are, for the time being. Turn within and your heart will tell you where to go.

—from *There Is No Suffering, There Is No Death*. © 1991 by Robert Adams

or even basic comprehensibility. But because so much was lacking externally, those who stayed were drawn deep within by the silence. In fact, silence is the best description for Robert. Silence was his home, his source, his being, his teaching.

Just being in his presence had a profound effect on many people. Some were overcome by happiness, others by peace. Some felt a deep relaxation that lapsed into a barely conscious "sleep." Some experienced a sinking into light; others a dissolving into emptiness as the world dissolved into them; others a deep bliss and nothing else. For each it was different.

Mostly Robert was imperturbable—he never complained, never lacked a ready smile or humorous comeback, and I never saw him angry. He took a disarmingly light, even wry, approach to the spiritual search. "Someone in the group asked me to speak about suffering," he announced one evening. "I don't know if they want me to tell you how to suffer, or how to get rid of suffering," he laughed. "When you are suffering, you look for someone to relieve you of suffering. But if you take this approach, when one misery is taken away, another ensues. There is no end to it.

"So what do we do? We leave the world alone. We inquire within. 'To whom has this come?' That is what you must do with every problem, with every tummy-ache, with every unhappiness, and with everything you see in this world. Who is this I? Who gave it birth? Who is its source?"

Another evening someone complained that self-inquiry seemed "like a very intense activity."

"Nooo," Robert replied. "Do it in a comical way. Laugh—make a game out of it. Don't take it too seriously."

"Isn't inquiry a form of seeking, indicative of ego?" another student asked.

"You have to use your ego to destroy your ego," said Robert. "You use your mind to destroy your mind."

"Then there is no seeking after a certain point?"

"All seeking stops."

"Why can't we do that at the beginning?" the student persisted.

"You can. Why don't you?" Robert laughed.

Robert's playful, mischievous style of teaching continued outside of satsang. 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 such 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 they would clash with each other.

For example, after I first met Robert I began transcribing all of his talks, with the idea of selling them at satsang, giving a percentage to Robert and keeping a part for myself to start a publishing company for satsang. It all made sense. Robert did the talking, I recorded the talks, transcribed them, edited them, and wrote an introduction to cap things off. Thus a 50/50 split was fair, wasn't it? Things went along fine for a while, until one day I arrived at satsang to find new transcripts done by another student, Mary, on the table. She asked only for a donation. Then the next week, more transcripts appeared from yet another transcriber. I had lost my cozy post of being Robert's voice, my new business had gone down the tubes, and Mary and I were at loggerheads for a time. It was painful, but effective. I realized that Robert was always adjusting the fire, "stirring the pot" to make egos bump together, creating a scenario in which the grosser aspects of the personality—jealousy, envy, the need for recognition or control—could be brought into the open. Robert was a steel chisel knocking off the ego's flinty edges.

## EXODUS

From my first meeting with Robert, he had expressed interest in setting up an ashram in some other city. One month it would be a city in Chile or Argentina, and a year later it would be Calcutta or Nova Scotia. Offers were always coming in from around the world, asking Robert to visit or live there, and he usually ran these offers by me and a few others.

But the game turned more serious during March of 1995, as he seemed more determined to move. One fateful August day while driving Robert to satsang, I asked, "Robert, isn't it about time we checked out Sedona?" The people there had offered him everything he needed, including a residence and a satsang house. How could he refuse such generosity and declarations of love? Robert decided to move by the end of September, just four weeks away.

During this time Robert's Parkinson's disease was growing worse, but he only joked about his illness. Attendance at satsang was increasing, for no apparent reason. One evening Robert called me up to the chair where he was sitting, cupped his hand by his mouth, and spoke into my ear: "They're coming to see the dying guru. The day I die, we'll get a full house." Another time a devotee suggested that rather than have

[\*continued on page 137\*](#)

the capacity to absorb any contingency that might appear along the way. He himself was, to me, the living example of such an attitude. There wasn't any uncertainty or liability that his mere presence would not dispel.

He reiterated every time he could that the effects of *inner silence* were very unsettling, and that the only deterrent to this condition was the pragmatic attitude which was the product of a superbly pliable, agile, strong body. He said that for sorcerers, the physical body was the only entity that made any sense to them, and that there was no such thing as a dualism between body and mind. He further stated that the physical body involved both the body and the mind as we knew them, and that in order to counterbalance the physical body as a holistic unit, sorcerers considered another configuration of energy which was reached through *inner silence*: the *energy body*. He explained that what I had experienced at the moment in which I had *stopped the world* was the resurgence of my *energy body*, and that this configuration of energy was the one which had always been able to *see* energy as it flowed in the universe. ♦

Carlos Castaneda is author of *The Art of Dreaming* and other books.

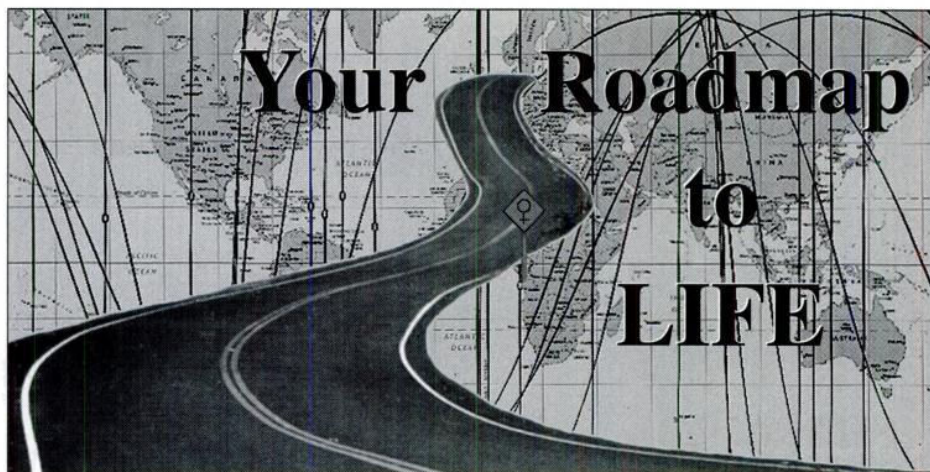
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## The Mysterious Sage of Sedona

*continued from page 89*

Robert give a talk, someone (meaning himself) could read one of Robert's earlier talks from a transcript. Robert's response was, "There are many teachers who talk; there are many teachers who are silent; but there is only one teacher who mumbles!"

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



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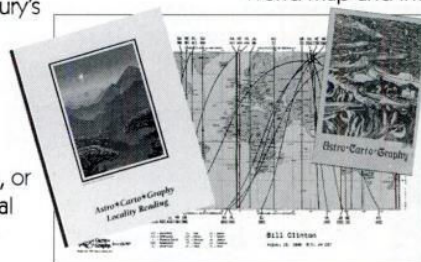
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and disappearing into himself for half an hour before he talked, as was customary, he sat forward on the edge of the chair, grasping the microphone, looking at everyone intently. This was a very different Robert, one who knew that profound changes were in the air. The power he was radiating was palpable. Robert still joked, but mostly he was silent. Sometimes he just looked deep into our eyes. Robert was pouring his all into us, giving us his last best shot.

In Sedona, Robert lived with his wife in a spacious two-bedroom house. The entire end of his living room was glass and faced Capital Butte, a mountain that looks remarkably like Arunachala. Robert often sat in a large easy chair facing the mountain as the sun rose. Twice a day he took his small dog, Dmitri, on walks. He slept very little, perhaps three hours a night, then he sat in silence from 3 a.m. until 6 a.m., joined by devotees all over the world who knew his schedule.

Robert spent his last days talking with students. He gave two people explicit instructions to begin satsang in Sedona and Santa Monica. To a few others he handed on the responsibility for taking care of his family.

During his last days, Robert requested complete silence. Devotees said he could hear their slightest whisper, no matter where they were in the house, and he would call out for silence.

A stroke took his vision in late February, but his mood never changed. Robert faced his passing with an attitude of happiness and excitement, as if he were embarking on a great journey. Robert's dog had died just a few months before, and he had said many times, "Dmitri keeps me grounded. When he passes so will I." And so it was. Two nights before he passed, devotees and family took him outside for a last look at the mountain. He pointed upward to its top and said, "Snow." Nobody understood, for there was no snow on the mountain. A day or so later, though, snow began to fall, gently at first, then with a growing fury. Within hours everyone in the house was trapped, unable to leave, and thus they were blessed to witness Robert's passing in isolation from the outside world.

On the evening before he passed, a

great peaceful energy permeated his bedroom, and he began smiling and laughing. He said that Ramana had entered the room, along with Christ, Buddha, and many other saints and sages. He asked whether anyone else could see them and talked to Ramana and the others, just as he had predicted would happen after a vision 10 years before.

His body and face were aglow, and he radiated an energy that invigorated everybody. Students remarked that they felt Robert was working at a subtle energy level, transforming and purifying them.

Robert was fully conscious when he died and laughed and smiled to the end. He said there was no more pain, only "tingling," despite the fact that he was now also suffering from liver cancer. Minutes before he died, he held his daughter's head, mouthing the words: "I love you; I love you!" His body was bathed, anointed with fragrant oils, and he was dressed in white linen and silk. Those of us who saw him were overwhelmed by his beauty. Parts of his body remained warm for days, especially his feet and his chest.

When Robert's guru, Ramana Maharshi, was dying he told his grieving disciples, "They take this body for Bhagavan and attribute suffering to him. Is it not a great pity? They are despondent that Bhagavan is going to leave them and go away. But where can he go?"

Robert left us with a similar message. "When you wake up," he once said, "there is no such thing as being well or being sick. But you don't understand what I say to you, and you go to different doctors, taking colonics, going to healers all over the world. What you should be doing is searching for the Self. Then you wake up. It was all a dream. The cancer did not exist. The searching for relief did not exist. I did not exist. You are free." ♦

*Edward Muzika spent many years as a Zen monk, and received a doctorate in psychology.*

#### RESOURCE

For information about Robert Adams' work and teachings contact The Robert Adams Foundation, Box 182, Sedona, AZ 86336.



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