

THE SPIRITUAL

*Robert Greenfield*  
SUPERMARKET

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*For Pop, a real spiritual teacher*

*Changing both partners and places as they whirl around on the carousel, the cabal continues. For their physical and spiritual support, I would like to thank the folks who sat down together for Thanksgiving dinner, who sat meditation on Thursday nights, who walked out over the mountains to the sea after taking the holy waters.*

*For providing shelter along the way, I am grateful to Benno in the Holiday Inn in Chicago, my man Jerry in Marin County, Miss April outside of Taos, and my parents. The continuing role of the Granary's sour pickles in sustaining the author cannot be ignored.*

*To those of us who have decided to stay where we've landed and to those who are taking it on down the road just one more time—shanti.*

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For as a result of that first trial, Hoffman, Rubin, Hayden, and Davis have become as well known for their politics as any pop star is for his music. They have become personalities commanding media attention. The realization of this fact has been traumatic for them all, and each has reacted to it in a different way.

Of all the forms of experience to which these four men have been driven by their fame, it remains for Rennie Davis to find one so unique it freaks out even his "brothers in struggle" as he calls his co-defendants. In the four years since the original trial, only Rennie Davis has ventured out on a limb so perilous that none will follow.

Rennie Davis has found God. He is sure that He is alive and well and on the planet in the form of a portly, swarthy, fifteen-year-old-boy from India. He means to tell whoever will listen about his discovery.

In an old ex-whaling town on the northern coast of California, five children of America sit in their house on Fargo Avenue. The house is large, blue, and Victorian. Five years ago, the children living in it would have called it a "commune, man . . . you know? We all live here and share everything . . . and it's like very beautiful. You know?"

The old town has seen many of its houses occupied by "communes," a word that has come to mean nothing more than a group of longhairs who separately cannot afford to make the rent. Communes have come and gone, and the town, as is its way, has ignored them. The house on Fargo Avenue and others like it were built with whaling money. Although the gray whales still run south every winter, charging into the bay like a fleet of maddened submarines, breaking the surface to spout plumes of white water before sounding and continuing on toward Mexico, they are no longer hunted.

On a night in October some weeks before Rennie Davis and his co-defendants sit assembled in a Chicago courtroom, most of the town is at home, watching the gold and green Oakland A's battle the blue and white New York Mets for the World Series. The children

in the house on Fargo Avenue have no television. They have no radio. They subscribe to no newspapers or magazines. They do not know that Spiro T. Agnew has resigned as Vice-President of the United States.

"Have you heard about the dream?" Chapin asks the others in the front room of the large blue house. Chapin is a thin girl with red-rimmed eyes and wheatshock hair. Roger, with whom she lived for awhile outside the house, smiles softly. Donna shakes her head in a gesture that could mean yes or no. Lisa and Payson sit silently. They have all heard about the dream many times. They want to hear it again.

"Guru Maharaj-ji had this dream," Chapin says, pronouncing his name the way premies always do, without the middle syllable so that the sound is "Marajee." "He dreamed that his family went traveling around the world gathering up all the premies. They brought them to Houston and they assembled in the Astrodome. And there was a great shaking . . . a great shaking, and the roof of the Astrodome lifted off. And then it was very still." Chapin's voice drops an octave, her freckled hands trace little circles in the air, "And when the people went outside, it was very green. Green meadows and hills and all very still . . . and no city. Nothing. Gone." She looks around at the others to see the effect of what she is saying, much like a mother checking on her children as she tells them a fairy tale.

"Yes," Roger says. He closes his eyes and he can picture it . . . the dome flying off, the stillness, the green meadows. Perhaps a few woolly sheep on one soft and verdant hillside. Roger has never been to Houston. He doesn't know that the only thing green within two miles of the Astrodome is the flash of new Texas money. Roger can see the dream easily. All he has to do is close his eyes.

Everyone closes his eyes then and sits for awhile, feeling the silence, testing its constituency. There is no need to speak. In the big front room the silence is eloquent. One has only to quiet the mind to hear it.

Roger lets out his breath in a long whooshing sigh. "*Bhole sbri satguru dev Maharaj-ki jai!*" he says with a rising inflection, letting the words slide into one another like water picking up speed as it rushes downstream. He launches his body full out onto the carpet with his forehead resting on a pillow set in front of the altar on which rests a full-color picture of Guru Maharaj-ji. Roger's act of physical surrender to his lord, the fifteen-year-old Guru Maharaj-ji of Premnagar, near Hardwar in northern India, is called a *pranam*. It fills him with bliss. Utterly and completely satisfied, he lies there for a long time, at peace.

America's flirtation with Eastern philosophy and religion had reached such a point by the fall of 1973 that the Divine Light Mission, an organization composed of the followers of the fifteen-year-old Guru Maharaj-ji, thought the time had come to make a slam bid for the allegiance of America's youth. They wanted their bodies, and they were prepared to go into combat for their souls. The full and complete story of their activities during that period tells as much about the state of America as it does the spiritual supermarket.

America was in the seventh decade of the twentieth century and the more things changed, the more they seemed to stay the same. All of the kicking, struggling, and shouting of the Sixties seemed to have produced nothing but a lot of very blown-out strugglers. Richard Nixon was still President. Tales of Watergate, the fuel crisis, and runaway inflation filled the newspapers. Social issues that had come under public scrutiny in the Sixties were no closer to being solved than they had been a decade ago. It was an easy time for men of conscience to give up in despair.

The white, affluent, confused children of the middle class, as rootless and dispossessed a group as you might name, would be only too glad to have something new to be "into" with which they could define their lives.

In 1970's America, some people were into "work" and "money." Others dug "music" or followed "pro football." Some

people got behind "dope" and stayed there or came out and were "gay." Some were "swingers." Others "dropped out" and bought "land." Each of the choices was defining and a person might go through more than one in the space of a year in order to name himself. That it made no difference which you chose was a fact. Successful dope dealers had, in some circles, attained the same respectability as doctors.

The code of behavior evolved in the first half of the twentieth century had been permanently altered by the Sixties and nothing offered in its stead. The river's tent was broken. "Anything Goes" would be the new national anthem. Many were lost.

In difficult times, the most extreme solutions often seem to be the most logical. Forty years earlier, when times were bad, Socialist Eugene Debs garnered a million votes as a presidential candidate. The Wobblies caught the ear of the worker and the Communists the discontented spirit of the writers and intellectuals. But politics, no matter how radical, was not the game this time around. America had lost the war in Vietnam, settling for a peace without honor that was no peace at all. The frontiers were finally and irrevocably closed. Politics seemed futile. Many who five years earlier would have been out in the streets demonstrating against the latest government outrage were now searching within themselves for something to help them cope with the everyday reality of their lives.

In the seven years since Maharishi Mahesh Yogi had ridden to transcendental glory on the coattails of the Beatles, a series of Eastern gurus had come to the West. For awhile, each of them had a pop star's reign, attracting the beautiful and the famous and the bored and their followers. In awhile, the teacher would drop from the public eye and his path would be of interest only to those who were already on it or sincerely interested in pursuing it further.

In the waning months of 1973, Guru Maharaj-ji was going public with a vengeance, on a scale that no Eastern master had ever before attempted. At times, it seemed he would out-America America in his quest for disciples, power, and publicity.

The techniques of traditional Hindu meditation, which Divine Light Mission people called "knowledge," would be their strongest selling point. "Take 'knowledge,' " every premie urged. Try it and see. Experience this thing. For once you did, you would not so easily be able to label the entire operation a fake. You might instead find yourself becoming peaceful, more content, able to function in a world changing beyond anyone's expectations.

It had been just three years since the child guru had first visited the West, yet the Divine Light hierarchy and the Holy Family—the guru's mother and three brothers—deemed that the time had come to offer his path to the public at large. In order to do so, the Houston Astrodome had been rented for three days in November, at a cost of twenty-five thousand dollars a day. A caravan of buses filled with premies known as "Soul Rush" made its way toward Houston. The child guru proclaimed November 8, 9, and 10 to be Millennium '73. He called on all men to attend the "most significant and holy event in the history of mankind."

Rennie Davis, who had led his generation through the political strife of the Sixties, would now lead it to his spiritual master. The children in the house on Fargo Avenue and children like them all over the country were to be given the opportunity to plug into an organization the size of a megacorporation. All through the summer of 1973, some three hundred and eighty people worked full time in Houston, planning Millennium '73.

Each month, Shri Hans Productions, one arm of the Divine Light Mission—Divine United Organization empire, gave forth a four-color magazine entitled . . . *And It Is Divine* which any New York ad agency could have been happy with. It produced *Divine Times*, a newspaper with a press run of twenty-five thousand. There were Divine Sales thrift shops in most major cities and a large Divine Light vegetarian restaurant on Forty-second Street in Manhattan. In one or another of its corporate incarnations, Divine Light Mission owned Cessna airplanes, Rolls-Royce and Mercedes automobiles, and palatial "divine" residences in Denver and Los Angeles. Its total

real worth was probably somewhere around the million-dollar mark. Actual figures were impossible to attain.

Anyone who took "knowledge" and ventured onto the Divine Light path would be taken care of totally. Inside the ashram, Divine Light pamphlets and magazines would be all that he would read, the films *Satguru Has Come* and *Who Is Guru Maharaj-ji?* the only ones that he would see, and the music recorded by various premie bands—among them Blue Aquarius—the only records he would hear.

Each time the computer in Divine Light headquarters in Denver sent another piece of information down the line (for it was linked by Telex with thirty Divine Light ashrams all across the country), the premies in the old blue house on Fargo Avenue eddied and shook. As October wore on and the A's defeated the Mets and Rennie Davis stood trial in Chicago, Millennium '73 came to be the only thing the premies thought, talked, or cared about. Lisa, a girl with Spanish eyes and dark chopped hair, quit her job in order to spend her days with her fellow premies. "I'm cramming for Millennium," was the way she put it, doing nothing but meditating and getting ready for the great event.

The premies on Fargo Avenue were "blissed out," a condition resulting from constant meditation and complete abstention from life's various temptations. To be blissed out was a light, spacious feeling that made all things seem beautiful and perfect. To be blissed out was to see the "why" behind everything (Guru Maharaj-ji) and the magical way in which all things always worked out for the "best," no matter what happened.

Much like in the early dope days when it took one "head" to recognize another, Divine Light brothers and sisters were the only ones who knew about this feeling, and this made their brotherhood the more special. The straight world could only guess at what went on within the walls of the old blue house on Fargo Avenue. The premies were people whose input came solely from one another and whose entire energy was focused on the events that would take place in Houston on the eighth, ninth, and tenth of November.

one and acting as the unofficial general secretary.

Everything about the house on Fargo Avenue is unofficial. It is not an ashram or live-in temple, because the residents of Divine Light ashrams are required to send thirty percent of their incomes to national headquarters in Denver. The rent on the house on Fargo Avenue is three hundred and twenty-five dollars a month and the phone, utility, and food bills bring the total cost of living there up to around five hundred dollars a month. Since only Chapin and Roger are working, no one can afford to send any money anywhere. In the laid-back, sunshiny atmosphere that prevails in the town, it's remarkable enough that they meet their bills.

But the house makes a difference. It gives Chapin and Roger and Lisa, who live there, and Donna and Payson, who hang out there nearly all the time, a concrete affirmation of what before has been only an abstract belief.

No one in the house eats meat, fish, or eggs. No one smokes tobacco or grass. Rather, they spend their days in service, which is work performed for their lord, physical work like painting the house, cooking and cleaning, and in meditation, both morning and night, using the techniques they learned when they took "knowledge."

When they meditate, they see *Light* which Roger describes as "twice as bright as daylight and not like a bulb or a candle in that it will never blow out but only get brighter and brighter." The premies hear *Music* which Roger says can be broken down into "violins, harps, strings, drums, and bells. But that's just me. Some people hear whole orchestras." They taste *Nectar*. "It's pure, it's sweet, it's dear, it's intoxicating," Roger says. "It gets you high."

In addition, everyone in the house on Fargo Avenue is endeavoring as much as possible to stay on the Word twenty-four hours a day. Being on the Word means tuning into your primordial vibration. When you successfully plug into it, you are removed from the strife and bother of everyday life. As Lisa says, "You get on the Word and tune into that vibration, and it's not you anymore. It's like you're a vehicle for Guru Maharaj-ji."

The premies on Fargo Avenue are celibate, nicotine and alcohol-free. They are on the Word, seeing Light, tasting Nectar, and hearing Music. Some night during *satsang* (truth sharing) sessions, the house feels like a spaceship headed for the planet Venus in the year 2003. It is not at all like being in the old ex-whaling town, California, America, or any other place you might name. It does not seem possible that just down the street people are sitting before their television sets slugging down Coors and shouting for Tug McGraw to lay off the sinker.

On any given night during the month of October, Roger could be found in the front room of the house giving *satsang*. With his short, sharp mustache and his lanky hair cut short in the manner prescribed for devotees, with his purple T-shirt tucked into his white pants, he would sit with his back very straight against the wall and talk. Talk ever so earnestly and slowly with his eyes closed and his fingers laced together, speaking of the "grace that allows to do this . . . Maharaj-ji's infinite grace. . . ."

As the night wore on, he would shift naturally into a higher gear and the analogies would start to flow. "Raindrops of grace have been falling on us," he would say. "We can hear them spatter . . . days that have been so beautiful, we have been swimming in love, bathing in love. We have been immersed . . . in love."

The *satsang* came from Roger but everyone listening knew that it was Guru Maharaj-ji flowing through him. When he spoke, premies would close their eyes and fold their legs beneath them and smile gently. At times, Roger would have launched himself so far into *satsang* that he would have to stop to locate himself, and there would be a long silence punctuated only by a string of quiet "oh wows." Then someone would give forth with *Bhole sbri satguru dev Maharaj-ki jai!* which means, "All Hail to the Perfect Master," and then Roger would start again, talking softly, putting everyone's feelings into words. "All of these things are boiling out of us now," he would explain, "And it's like . . . like . . . we can't turn down the heat."

to call in the cops when he learned of his son's predilection for good dope, was less than pleased.

One night the old man pushed his chair back from the dining-room table and shouted, "You listen to me, *Mister*," that being the term he used to address Pace in moments of extreme tension, "what you're into is complete and unadulterated *bullshit*! And the sooner you learn that, the better off you'll be." Then he knocked over his chair, stalked out of the room, and slammed the door.

Parents all over America were having a hard time with their premie children. When the Sunday *New York Times Magazine* printed an article about the child guru, the flood of mail from parents who had seen sons and daughters change overnight from future housewives and lawyers into "blissed-out zombies" was so great the magazine printed a full page of their letters. What Pace's father, and parents all over the country were unaware of, is that their premie children, Rennie Davis included, felt they were directly experiencing God in the way described by Scriptures of all major religions.

It is "kairos" or the actual mystical experience of God, the feeling that "knowledge" brings that keeps them meditating. Whereas the Bible says, "In the beginning, there was the Word, . . ." Pace knows what the Word is. He uses it every day. Whereas the Bible is full of passages about light and knowledge, Pace is seeing the Light and has the "knowledge." It's much like the days when people on the street first began taking LSD. Everything had two meanings then, the literal definition, and its referent, which was the physical experience you had as waves of electro-chemical energy exploded inside your brain. To "rush" and to "flash" meant different things to different people, depending on whether or not they'd had the experience.

"Christ reached what . . ." Pace asks, "five, ten thousand people personally? He had only twelve mahatmas, right? Buddha, maybe he reached four thousand. Krishna, who knows? But Guru Maharaj-ji will reach millions. He has divine airplanes and fast cars to help spread the Word. Christ wasn't talking about Christianity and Bud-

dha wasn't teaching Buddhism. They were talking about realizing God. And that's what we're talking about too."

It is raining cats, dogs, and other animals large and small on the fourth day of the trial in Chicago. Elevated trains rattle the windows of second-story apartments. Rennie Davis is on his way to lunch with Dave Dellinger and a small crowd of interested persons.

Annie Bishop, a honey-voiced, honey-blonde folksinger and premie who's accompanied Rennie around America on his Millennium selling tours, walks beside him in the rain with her young son. On the other side of Rennie, precisely at his elbow, a position he will occupy through to the end of the Millennium is Ken Kelley, who has written once about Rennie Davis for *Ramparts* and is in the process of gathering information for a book about the Divine Light Mission.

Following them are Dave Dellinger and a young friend who's helping out with his defense. Bringing up the rear is a media contingent, consisting of the editor of a local underground paper, a magazine reporter, and this writer.

Dellinger and Rennie Davis go back a long way. Dellinger is a broad-beamed, moon-faced man who radiates integrity and has been opposing war and social injustice in America for thirty years. He is a pacifist, an authentic voice of American dissent in the tradition of Eugene Debs and A. J. Muste. Had it not been for a gall-bladder operation, Dellinger would have been along on the plane ride when Rennie Davis met his first premie. Were it not for the trial, he would be in North Vietnam even now, checking on the implementation of the peace accords. Dellinger has had four operations in the recent past, the last for torn knee ligaments, and is now walking with a cane.

The party finds a red plastic restaurant and occupies a covey of tables in the far corner. "Whatta ya havin'?" asks a waitress with a rocks-and-gravel voice.

"Nothing," says Rennie, five days into a fast.

"Nothing," says Annie, seven days into a fast.

"Cup of coffee," says Ken Kelley.

Nothing, nothing, and a cup of coffee. Are these people serious? All across the restaurant, Chicago businessmen are half-strangling themselves with six-course lunches.

"Reuben on rye," Dellinger orders. The waitress smiles as she writes it down. A Reuben on rye is more like it. Dellinger sits back in his chair and says, "I have seen people who are quote—blissed out—unquote. You say that Jesus gave this 'knowledge.' Well, the disciples of Jesus worked. They were more than just this 'knowledge.' They led their lives and had social responsibilities. This is what bothers me most about Divine . . ." Dave stumbles for the word.

"Light . . ." Rennie says.

". . . Light Mission," Dave says.

"Well, Dave," Rennie says, only too glad to get into it with a co-defendant, "we're only two years old in America. We're already better organized than the Movement was in thirteen years." Rennie smiles blissfully. "You've got to be close to it to really appreciate it."

The waitress puts down the food. Dave bites into a sandwich stuffed with sauerkraut. "Because, Rennie," he says, "a smile will not do it." Rennie smiles involuntarily. "And," Dave says, "a smile will not convince me."

Rennie tells Dave a long, involved story about Guru Maharaj-ji playing chess with a premie in India, taking a pawn from the board and saying, "Man thinks he is so big. But he is like this pawn. Can he reach that light? Never. Why does he try? But if I lift him, I can put him there. If a puppet does a great show, do they congratulate him . . . or the puppeteer?"

"Ah," Dave says, with a mouth full of sandwich. "That's it. Does one have to be a puppet to be spiritual and realize God?"

"We are all instruments for this energy, Dave," Rennie says. Ken Kelley had his small, black, Sony cassette recorder with the built-in microphone lying on the table between the two men. It's

picking up every word, making the conversation into an event. At the adjoining table, reporters and writers watch and listen.

"Yes, yes, I agree," Dave says. "But why does there have to be a living master? Why must one offer this obedience to another person?"

"That's a fundamental question," Rennie concedes. "Because *he* revealed it to us."

Dave finishes eating the parsley that comes with the sandwich. He picks up his cane and says, "Excuse me, but I have to make time. I've got to speak in my own defense this afternoon."

After he's left the table, Rennie sighs a Divine Light Mission superspecial sigh of bliss. "Dave's a wonderful man," he says. "We've worked together on so many things. He's open. He wants to know."

Outside the restaurant in the cold Chicago rain, Dave Dellinger and his young friend search the streets for a taxi. Dave's friend has just come from the Boston Dharma Festival where several well-known teachers, Ram Dass among them, spoke.

"I'm getting tired of him," Dave's friend says.

Dave taps the sidewalk with his cane. He sighs. His sigh is completely different from Rennie Davis'. "Me, too," he says.

If the heavy politicians could not understand Rennie Davis' transformation, perhaps Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin would have more insight into it. After all, Hayden had told one reporter that he had never taken LSD. Hoffman and Rubin could hardly make the same claim.

They had been the acid radical pranksters of the New Left, the media manipulators, the political arm of the emerging hippie street culture. They'd urged kids to "do it," to "fuck the system" by living off the fat of the land with phony credit card numbers and food scavenged from supermarket parking lots. Hoffman wore a shirt resembling an American flag on a network TV talk show, forcing them to electronically "mask" him. He and Rubin whipped out



"joints" on Educational Television and informed a long-time liberal editor of the *New York Post* that he was "dead." Rubin smeared warpaint on his face and went to testify before a Congressional committee clutching a toy Tommy gun. Abbie threw dollar bills from the visitors' gallery of the New York Stock Exchange.

Much of it was theater and nothing more, but the media picked up on it, and the police reacted. Police reaction meant nightsticks and blackjacks and spattered blood on the pavement, and every time a white kid from a good neighborhood got hit with a billy club, the "revolution" acquired another soldier.

Now many of those children had children of their own. New children had taken their place on the street and many were taking "knowledge." Abbie Hoffman was thirty-seven years old. He had been expelled from the Yippie party he'd helped found along with Paul Krassner and Jerry Rubin.

Hoffman had dropped out of politics nearly two years before his arrest for selling cocaine. He'd concentrated his energy on raising his son, America, and told one reporter he wanted to explore the bounds of sexual experience. He wanted to open up his marriage, he said, and experience a woman's orgasm. He was living in the country and growing his own tomatoes.

His ally, Jerry Rubin, had undergone the most striking physical changes of any of the defendants. The one-time candidate for mayor in Berkeley, who had visited the Haight-Ashbury in the hazy of Flower Power days in a suit and tie and urged the flower children to get their heads into politics before it was too late, now favored flowered cowboy shirts. An earring hung from his left ear lobe and his hair fanned out like the plumes on a swan's back. He looked healthy, and was lecturing at Esalen Institute seminars. The welfare of his physical body had replaced that of the body politic as his primary concern.

On the third day of trial, Abbie Hoffman and son find themselves riding in a down elevator with a towering, blond-haired man in a good suit and glasses who is the United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois, James R. Thompson. Thompson is

keeping himself busy by putting corrupt aldermen, judges, and crooked cops in prison. Mayor Daley is said not to be amused.

"Hello, Abbie," Thompson says pleasantly, looking down, "Hello, America. How's it going?"

"Oh," Abbie says, screwing up his gremlin face into a mischievous grin, "We're scorin' points right and left."

"Beatin' us into the ground, huh?" Thompson says, as though someone else were responsible for this prosecution. After the original Chicago Seven trial, the prosecuting U.S. Attorney, Thomas Foran, said that of all the defendants only Bobby Seale is "... I don't think ... a fag." Abbie Hoffman he called "scummy but clever."

Now Hoffman and Thompson are discussing the case as though it were Sunday's pro football game. Abbie, who stands a good foot shorter than Thompson, looks up at the current United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois and says, "Homewrecker."

"Only nineteen minutes' worth," Thompson protests, referring to the amount of time it took him to enter the transcript of the original trial into the record as the whole of the government's case this time around. "Your lawyers are responsible for the next six months."

"Oh, yeah?" Abbie says in that flat twang that endeared him to working-class toughs all over America in the Sixties. "What about the six months after that? You oughta give the kid a few citations."

Thompson shifts from foot to foot. "I don't think that's appropriate," he says.

"Awright then," Abbie beams. "Let's make a deal. Monty Hall is my agent." People riding in the elevator guffaw.

Later that afternoon, Rennie Davis slides an autographed copy of *Who Is Guru Maharaj-ji?* across the defense table to Abbie, who accepts it. He has only one question about the Perfect Master. "What I want to know is," he asks Rennie, "can he do any tricks?"

The premises who lived in the house on Fargo Avenue believed in tricks. They believed in signs and omens and portents and the way, after you took "knowledge," you could look back and see how

each of the signs along the highway had directed you to the off ramp bearing Guru Maharaj-ji's name.

The premies in the house on Fargo Avenue believed in reincarnation. They believed in dream readings. They were sure that the state of California was going to fall into the sea (that one yet again) and that only those in the hills would be safe.

They believed in the Comet Kohoutek. Its name signified KO-HOU-TEK, which meant "Kayo Houston Texas." The rash of UFO sightings throughout the South indicated that extraterrestrial beings were on their way to Houston for Millennium. There was to be a rare and favorable configuration of stars on the night before Millennium. This, too, was significant.

Liberated at long last from the starched white collar of American rationality, the premies were now willing to recognize the miraculous in any form, no matter how bogus, as though every phenomenon which could not be explained reinforced their own conviction that the Lord of the Universe had come back to earth.

Lisa had been dreaming of mahatmas and throwing the *I Ching*. She said she loved the Book of Changes so much, especially now that she could ask it questions about her life within the Divine Light Mission penumbra. Lisa had taken "knowledge" two-and-a-half months ago. She was a cheerful, spunky lady with no job, some money, and not too many prospects. She'd never felt better. All she was thinking about was Houston. After that, who knew?

"I hear they want premies in Puerto Rico," Donna said to her one night.

"Puerto Rico is nice," Lisa said, although she might just as well have been talking about Kalamazoo. "All I know is I'm going to Houston to see my sister and my Lord. Other than that I'm trying to avoid thinking.

"This is it," she says, "I don't know if this thing was out looking for me or if I was out looking for it, but here we are. I've never been so caught up in something. The 'knowledge' is everything to me. I see it in flowers. I smell flowers and it's like Nectar. I throw the *I*

*Ching* and it tells me about 'knowledge.' Like tonight. I threw it, asking the question, 'How may I feel Guru Maharaj-ji's love in my heart?' "

The answer the *I Ching* gave to Lisa was Meng, the fourth hexagram. Meng is translated as Youthful Folly. It reads in part, "In time of youth, folly is not an evil. One may succeed in spite of it, provided one finds an experienced teacher and has the right attitude towards him." The judgment of the hexagram was that perseverance furthers.

With all the activity in Chicago going on around the periphery of the trial, the courtroom proceedings turn into no more than a sideshow. A week passes and slowly like the first trial, this one, too, becomes a matter of transcripts, legal records, and newspaper clippings. One morning, an avuncular defense counsel speaks in a monotone for over three hours. Spectators read magazines. No one titters anymore when a reference is made to page nineteen thousand nine hundred and ninety-two of the original transcript. All contempt charges against two of the Chicago Seven are thrown out.

The binding and gagging of Bobby Seale hangs over the contempt trial like the ghost of some long-dead ancestor who can find no rest. Just before being sentenced to more than two years in prison for his actions during the trial, Rennie Davis attempted to explain something to the original trial judge, Julius J. Hoffman. The spectacle of a black man chained to a chair in a Federal courtroom had caused Rennie and his co-defendants to lose any respect they might have had for the court. He was not permitted to refer to the incident.

The transcript is painfully clear here. Davis struggles to get a word in. The judge will not let him speak. Davis persists.

"You know what he called me?" Judge Hoffman asks, referring to Seale.

"He called you a racist, a fascist, and a pig," Davis answers.

"Several times," Hoffman notes.

"Many times," Davis responds. "And not enough."

Hoffman orders Federal marshals to put Davis in his chair and he bursts out, "Judge, you represent all that is old, ugly, bigoted, and repressive in this country, and I will tell you that the spirit at this defense table is going to devour your sickness in the next generation."

Four years later at the defense table in an identical courtroom, Rennie Davis is delighted by the news that an unidentified flying object has fallen onto a church in Bogota, Colombia. Extraterrestrial beings have come out of the spaceship and told the nuns, "Guru Maharaj-ji is the Lord." Rennie Davis believes this story and takes pains to repeat it to those of his fellow defendants who will listen. His face cracks open with a blinding grin and a high, wracking laugh issues forth from his throat when he tells it to others. "What?" Ken Kelley says, when he is told. "They did? *Far out!*"

A month later, this judge finds the defendants guilty of contempt. In view of the time they have already spent in prison on the charges during the original trial, he suspends their sentences. He sets them free. The book on the Chicago Seven is closed.

*I live in an ashram but I'm like a . . . traveling salesman.*

RENNIE DAVIS

## 2: THE SELLING OF THE GURU

- Although he had opted for God and the peace that comes with meditation and not political struggle, Rennie Davis' task in the fall of 1973 was as difficult as convincing any political coalition to agree on unified action. In interviews, speeches, and public appearances, it had fallen to Rennie Davis to convince both the youth of America and their parents that Guru Maharaj-ji was not a smuggler, an ulcer-ridden puppet who drove a Rolls-Royce while thousands starved in his native India, or the boss who had ordered a Detroit reporter beaten unconscious. It was a task no sane Madison Avenue public relations firm would have attempted. For once those issues were

dealt with, the question of where all the guru's money came from had to be answered. And, like any true nightmare, that question occurred again and again and again.

It was a fact that customs officials had seized twenty-eight thousand dollars in undeclared money and jewels from a high-ranking Divine Light premie on her way into India with the guru. It was a fact that the guru, who many doubted was only fifteen, had been committed to a Denver hospital with a diagnosed duodenal ulcer. It was a fact that Pat Halley, a reporter for a Detroit underground newspaper called the *Fifth Estate* had thrown a shaving cream pie into the guru's face and then been beaten with a blunt instrument by two men who were identified as premies. It was a fact that several wealthy premies who had just turned twenty-one had donated trust funds of over one hundred thousand dollars to Divine Light Mission.

Then there was the guru himself. For those who had a conception of what an Eastern holy man should look like, much less the Lord himself, Guru Maharaj-ji was a joke—a fat, self-satisfied boy whose face reflected the benefits of nutrition rather than meditation.

"I think Guru Maharaj-ji has come to blow minds," Rennie Davis would say, shaking his head at the cosmic humor of it all. "That's the main thing going on. He's a mind blower. He does things you would have to label outrageous and they are never what you would expect. But I don't think he moves a finger without it being a completely conscious act of teaching. I think he is the perfect teacher."

Rennie Davis was no less the perfect front man. One day in Chicago, sitting in the glare of quartz-bright TV lights, he talked his way through three reels of videotape for a documentary to be screened on Educational Television. In the studio of a hard-rocking, Chicago AM radio station, he took a black woman interviewer through the jumps, repeating things he had said a thousand times before as though they had just been revealed to him. In a big room at the Chicago mansion serving as a Divine Light ashram, he spoke into the tape recorder microphones of a series of reporters, remem-

bering always to work their first names into the middle of a sentence to hold their attention ("What I mean by that, Bob, is. . .").

In order to spread the word about the glory and perfection of his Lord, he used all the techniques he'd learned in a decade of dealing with the media, the very techniques employed by President Nixon when waffling on some critical issue. Rennie Davis told the non-lie. "Was it not two premies who beat up Pat Halley?" he was asked in Chicago.

"Yeah, it was," he responded, neglecting to mention that one of the assailants had been a mahatma, one of those "great souls" whose job it was to impart the "knowledge" techniques to others. "What happened in Detroit may have something to do with something out of the pages of the Ramayana rather than 1973 Detroit," he said. "In the Ramayana, people go to war when a perfect master is offended. But then you say this 'knowledge' is supposed to bring peace and how could two people who had 'knowledge' commit an act like this?"

"It's not instant sainthood at all. Even though you're very high on this path, you can still fall off . . . on another dimension. It's perfect, see. Absolutely perfect. Premies really freaked out when they heard about it. 'Cause people knew who was involved and they couldn't believe it. It just made everyone think . . . wow . . . you've got to be completely clear on this path. And in terms of the individuals involved, I just feel in the deepest way that it was their karma to do that at the time . . ."

"How about those two individuals? Are they still premies? Are they under arrest?" Rennie Davis was asked.

"No, they're not under arrest. They're premies . . . the whole thing's been dropped and both premies are just doing fine. They're very dedicated."

When, in fact, the mahatma had been shipped out of the country to Europe and was still giving "knowledge" and a warrant for the arrest of both men was still in effect.

The particular ability that allowed Rennie Davis to continue

functioning in the glaring media spotlight, turning aside questions about scandals with reasoned, carefully measured responses designed to mask the truth, was the existence of Shadowman. Shadowman was the Rennie Davis that the public knew, the man who had spoken into more microphones than anyone else in the Movement, who had led marches and aroused college audiences for a decade. "People come up and confuse you with the shadow," Rennie Davis says, "and they think, 'Oh, so that's where you are now.' It's like a thing that follows me around wherever I go. People have a relationship with the other thing which is sometimes like me and sometimes not me at all. I've always felt detached from that image. And now I feel detached from what I would formerly call myself as well."

Shadowman, a creation of media, led protestors away from the tear gas and the police at the Republican Convention at Miami Beach in the summer of 1972. The real Rennie Davis was in the midst of a forty-two-day fast. Shadowman helped organize the counter-Inauguration demonstration that brought people to Washington to protest as Richard Nixon began his second term in office. The "real" Rennie Davis had long since stepped back and begun searching along the spiritual path.

Rennie Davis' search began after the failure of Mayday in the spring of 1971. For months, he had told cheering crowds, "If the government of the United States does not stop this war, then we will stop the government of the United States." But the massive protest—which resulted in thirteen thousand arrests and the specter of American citizens herded into detention camps in the nation's capital—did nothing to turn the world around. Rather, in the eyes of the media which Rennie Davis considers important—the *Washington Post* and *Time* magazine—it became the swan song of a movement which dominated the Sixties.

"It became like a final action," Rennie Davis says, "of a generation that had tried every tactic and no tactic worked. Rather than measure its success in terms of impact and consciousness-raising, Mayday was considered a failure. Its lesson was that no single event changes history."

Two and a half years later, Rennie Davis is pitching for an event that he is certain will transform the world totally. After Mayday, Tom Hayden says that Rennie Davis was "trashed" by his brothers and sisters in the Movement for being a leader and an elitist. At the same time, he was breaking up with the woman with whom he had been living on and off for four and a half years (she, too, later became a premie). He was dropping acid. He retreated to the farm in Virginia to think things out. The political string that had bound together the first ten years of his adult life had begun to fray badly. For the first time in a decade, all questions were open. If someone had a better answer, Rennie Davis was willing to listen.

On the farm, he read *Be Here Now*, the account of Richard Alpert's transformation into Baba Ram Dass. He read the Yoga Sutras and the Bhagavad-Gita. He consulted the *I Ching*, and a curious thing began to happen. Every time Rennie Davis wondered about something, every time he had a heavy question that needed answering, he walked into a bookstore and presto! a book virtually leaped off the shelf, and the book answered the question. But invariably. Over and over, so that after awhile, it became a joke, this seeking and being answered immediately, a joke that Rennie Davis didn't tell too many people about.

*Astroflash*, the phenomenon of cosmic coincidence, or divine intent, depending on your viewpoint, is something not easily explained to those who have never experienced it. It's when all the lights on the astral pinball machine are blinking on and off like crazy as the score keeps mounting and you my friend are the pinball. For some reason as you go spinning and ricocheting from one "FIVE THOUSAND WHEN LIT" bumper to another, the plan suddenly becomes evident. You feel the links, the higher power that is guiding you from one collision to another. Those who have taken LSD a number of times know about astroflash, and although Rennie Davis had experienced it in that way, the phenomenon kept right on occurring when he was straight.

Rennie Davis had not yet totally given up on politics. He felt that perhaps he could find a teacher, a spiritual guide, who would

help him clean up so that he could focus his energy outward and begin working full time again. It was on a flight to Paris, where he was to meet with Madame Binh, one of North Vietnam's representatives to the peace talks and another in a long line of Rennie's political "gurus," dating back to Tom Hayden, that he met the man who took him to his teacher.

Charles Cameron, a scrawny Englishman able to talk rings around even Rennie Davis, was on his way to India with Jacques Sandoz, the Swiss filmmaker who had made two color films about Guru Maharaj-ji. Both were premies and with them traveled . . . an old friend of Rennie's from the Mayday demonstration. Astroflash! That yawning sense of coincidence that gets you wondering . . . wow . . . oh wow . . . wondering who is editing this movie.

After much discussion on the plane and in Paris, Rennie Davis decided to go East with Cameron and Sandoz to narrate and direct a film about North Vietnam. With a ticket provided by the Movement friend, he journeyed to Premnagar, Guru Maharaj-ji's "City of Love" in Northern India. The ashram there was filled with Americans, many of whom had been involved in the Movement in years past. They were all very beautiful now, radiant, soft-spoken, filled with peace. Rennie Davis spent ten days there doing service and listening to satsang.

On February 11, 1973, Rennie Davis took "knowledge." The techniques he was taught were effective, and, in the next few weeks, he found himself getting higher and higher, becoming more peaceful and tolerant and loving. His only difficulty came when he was in the presence of Guru Maharaj-ji, who was not at all Rennie's conception of a teacher. It had something to do with being unable to surrender to another human being. Among premies, this is called being "inside your head." It means you are thinking instead of feeling, trying to reason things out rather than letting the meditation take you where you are supposed to go.

In an attempt to reconcile his reluctance about the guru with his new found inner peace, Rennie Davis pranamed. He laid his head

at the feet of Guru Maharaj-ji, hoping that the act of physical surrender would hasten the process of opening up which began with taking "knowledge." It was a significant gesture. As a rule, Americans do not pranam. They beat each other up in bars and live ruggedly.

Once Rennie Davis had performed this act and "come out," he began to get high all over again. "All I want," he told interviewers when he returned to America, "is to put my forehead right on his boot for as long as he'll let me. Sometimes, he'll let me for awhile." Rennie Davis knew how badly that statement would freak out some people. It was a declaration by one who had crossed over a line.

Even after his pranam, Rennie was having difficulty with the guru. He was taken to Dheridun, to the house where Maharaj-ji was born. This is an honor any premie would die for. He spent three days there, and it was there that it started to happen. Every time the guru looked at him, Rennie Davis heard a ringing in his ears. He felt as though he was on some kind of very pure acid. His body dissolved when Maharaj-ji was around. Rennie Davis started to see light pouring from the guru's face. Actual golden light pouring from the face of this golden boy who had been put on earth to save the world. Rennie Davis' search was over. He had fallen in love.

Within weeks of his return from India as a premie, Rennie Davis was on the road, out on a twenty-one city tour to tell others about his conversion. Many times before, he had gone to the campuses of America and been given a mandate. This time he got to see the other side of pop stardom, which is what happens when you fail to conform to the expectations of your fans.

In Berkeley, people shouted "Kiss my lotus ass, Rennie," and leaped onstage to pull down the altar. They let loose with mad Red Mountain wine yells and flung tomatoes when he informed them that Richard Nixon, too, is "truth, knowledge, and bliss." At Yale, a bunch of drunks took the stage, supporting themselves on crutches, their limbs twisted in impossible positions. One girl bowed to the

picture of Maharaj-ji and flung her crutches away crying, "I'm healed, I'm healed." She didn't throw away her bottle.

Articles about Rennie Davis' transformation appeared in the *Village Voice* and *Ramparts*. It was the beginning of a floodtide of publicity, all instigated by Rennie Davis and his desire to go public about his spirituality, as he did with his politics. A woman writer in the *Voice* thanked God that she was created female and therefore not subject to the terrible pressure a Movement male in America was forced to undergo in the Sixties. Another writer proffered various theories as to why Rennie converted, among them his skill as a chicken judge back in high school. Robert Scheer, former candidate for Congress from Berkeley, offered an analysis of the "speaker-leader phenomenon" of the Sixties which permitted white male radicals like Rennie to evolve constituencies of which they were not a part, composed of people who were expected to follow without sharing in their experiences.

So staid a publication as the San Francisco Sunday *Examiner* donated the opinion that Rennie Davis was possibly the survivor of a lobotomy. "If not," the writer of the article that appeared on its Op-Ed page suggested, "maybe he should try one."

The idols died hard, and when they did, the media jackals would not be denied. Nor would Rennie Davis. As the summer wore on, he continued going from ashram to airport to press conference, carrying the good news that the Lord was on the planet. With the media paying him heed and the ante rising, he floated on toward Millennium '73, feeling "very, very blissful," a state of mind akin to Custer waking up with a nervous stomach on the morning of the Battle of Little Big Horn.

"Flight six-six-five non-stop from Chicago to Houston is now boarding. Please extinguish all cigarettes and board through the door on your left. Thank you . . . and have a pleasant flight."

But a small figure in the crush and bustle of O'Hare Airport is Rennie Davis, standing with his half-gallon, plastic jug of juice se-

cure under one seersucker-sports-jacketed arm, waiting to board.

The announcement is of limited interest to Rennie Davis. He doesn't smoke. Once on the plane, he won't need the simulated plastic-wrapped airlines food the stewardess will serve him (he's still fasting). He won't have to turn on the reading light to pore through six or eight magazines to pass the time (he's on the Word). Rennie needs only to present the ticket he's bought with Divine Light funds (the organizer still, he travels by credit card), take off his shoes, close his eyes, begin meditating, and the airliner in which he sits will take him to the most "holy and significant event in the history of mankind."

Rennie Davis is going back to the city where he wrote, "The world is littered with smashed hopes and dreams. It seems easier to end our troubles in a bottle of Quaaludes or Seconal than evaluate the proclamation of a fifteen-year-old boy. . . . He is the greatest event in history and we sleep through it. . . . I feel like shouting in the streets. If we knew who he was, we would crawl across America on our hands and knees to rest our heads at his feet."

Rushing south at six hundred miles an hour from Chicago where old witch winter has already presented her calling card, to Houston where the warm salt air hangs thick enough to touch, Rennie Davis sits with his eyes closed. His breathing is shallow, an occasional fluttering of his eyelids the only sign of life. He sits that way for an hour. Then he says, "Well, I'm just flyin' in like everyone else. I don't know what to expect. I don't even have a speech ready for Saturday night."

"How," he is asked, "can Divine Light Mission do what the Movement never could in the Sixties?"

"Well," Rennie says, leaning back into his seat and reaching for the jug of juice that rests between his knees, "the difference here is that we're following the Lord, which might be a little hard for anyone outside of the thing to accept. In fact, it's right there, Bob, that we lose a lot of people who were capable of listening up to that point."

Rennie smiles kindly. In a few minutes, his eyes are closed once again, his eyelids fluttering. He is back on the Word and flying home to Houston to see his Lord.

Welcome to Houston, the city that oil made, the air-conditioned nightmare where new money is king. Space-age Houston, where the green tile airport is awash with premies, premies waiting for their baggage, premies giving out housing information from behind tables hung with blue and white Millennium posters, premies everywhere, and the Baltimore Bullets, several large and doleful pro basketball players, looking for lost luggage.

"RENNARD C. DAVIS!" shouts a little man in the waiting room. "RENNARD C. DAVIS!" he repeats, leaping up and down on the chipped terrazzo floor. "This *is* fantastic," he says. "I've come to pick up me mother who's due in from New York in one, three, five, seven, or ten minutes and here's RENNARD C. DAVIS!" He recommences jumping up and down with glee, talking all the while, filling Rennie Davis in on what's been going on in Houston. Bhalbhagwan-ji, the guru's older brother, has had a meeting with the church council and just "blown everybody out.

"It was fantastic," the little man jitters, "Baba-gwan-gee was quoting them chapter and verse and them saying Marajee was the anti-Christ. I talked a bit meself. You know when you get so charged up you forget what you want to say? And you go HENNNNNNH?" the little man explodes his face and body outward in a gesture of complete exasperation. "Or HUHNNHHH?" he implodes all his features, mugging like a British music-hall comic to pantomime uptightness. "But I just opened me mouth and PHEWWW into fourth. Just blew into a higher gear and didn't know where I was coming from. Man," he says definitively, "it *was* fantastic."

This is Charles Cameron, the Englishman who talked so long and so well on a plane ride to Paris that Rennie Davis went on to India with him to take "knowledge." Charles has come to the airport

to greet his mother, who's flying in from Oxford, England, by way of London and New York. He's overjoyed at this chance encounter with "RENNARD C. DAVIS" whom he considers a "political saint," but, at the same time, bereft. Charles has spent some twenty hours with Bhalbhagwan-ji and now, "He might not want to see me anymore. I would have been with him now if he'd asked me," Charles says, sighing deeply. "Just to see his back, you understand, evokes feelings."

Charles Cameron's eyes burn like coals in the hollows of his skull. He is scrawny, thin to the point of wasting away, and seemingly able to function forever on a never-ending current of nervous energy. He is thirty years old, took "knowledge" four years ago in London, among the first in the West to do so. He edited the paperback *Who Is Guru Maharaj-ji?* and will for the next three days act as onstage moderator for Millennium.

Educated at Wellington and then Oxford, the legal ward of Bishop Trevor Huddleston, Charles was, by his own admission in London, "the kind of freak who couldn't tell what speed the world was moving at. I'd go to a tobacco store stoned out of me head and ask for cigarettes and skins [rolling papers] and not know if one sentence or two was enough. Smokin' fifteen chillums a day for six years, droppin' acid and hangin' out . . . I couldn't get anything much together." He wrote haiku and affected black velvet jackets with cigarette burns in them.

On the night before the day before the thousand years of peace is to begin, Charles Cameron walks the writer out through the centerfield fence onto the Astroturf that is hallowed ground to any follower of sport in America. On Sunday, the Houston Oilers and the Cleveland Browns will go at it on this very spot and, in a few months' time, the Super Bowl will be contested here. More than once Cesar Cedeño has made the long throw from near the wall to keep the runner from taking the extra base.

Now premies scurry like worker ants across the floor of the Astrodome, a self-enclosed city where the sky is formed by inter-



stices of silvered beams and the machine-made breeze blows at a well-regulated one mile an hour. In the vicinity of home plate, a spun-sugar, seven-tiered wedding cake of a stage is going up, up, up to a small platform where the miniature bride and toy groom would hold hands on a cake. Here the Holy Family will sit.

Below that are stage decks with room enough for entire orchestras and ballet companies. A paneled mirror hangs above the stage to provide illumination. Premies cling to sound towers erected at either side of the stage. Premies wearing white hard hats with blue lettering which says "Millennium '73" saw timber and bang nails. Premie carpenters and premie electricians and premie truckdrivers. Premies who ladle out tea and English premies known as the World Peace Corps stand guard and check that no one goes anywhere without a proper badge, button, or pass.

A premie army has assembled in the Astrodome this night. They are hard at work, converting one end of a sports arena into a throne for their Lord. It's like the first twenty minutes of the *Woodstock* movie, premies testing mikes and spotlights, premies erecting a stage on which any star would be proud to appear.

"By Saturday," Gary Girard says, "they'll call the football game off. The vibes'll be too high in here. They won't be able to come in."

Girard has been at work in the Astrodome since eight this morning. He is twenty-three years old, a tall, striking man with a sharp nose and a thatch of blond hair. For the next three days, he will be driving Raja-ji, the least public of the guru's brothers, around Houston. Girard has had "knowledge" since February 1971, which makes him an elder. He had to journey to India to find it.

Girard was twenty when he went to India. He had been living in a cabin in the mountains, moving fifty kilos of hash and a hundred kilos of grass a week, making what he says was "hundreds of thousands of dollars. Maybe even a million." He gave up dealing to go East, walking through India like a saddhu, carrying only a pot for water and a pot for begging, a blanket, and a kilo of the best Afghani

hash. He and a friend were on their way to *kumbha mebla* (the lotus festival) when they met the man who led them to Maharaj-ji.

"This guy came up to us," Girard says, "and he was far out. Had three marks here [arm], three marks here [chest], three marks here [forehead]. He comes walking out of the shed where they keep the water buffalo wearing just a *lbungi* [wraparound cloth]. He's far out, right? He makes a few hand signs so I ask him to sit down, but my Hindi's not that good yet so he walks around us a few times and splits.

"When the guy I was traveling with wakes up, I tell him, 'Man, this guy was here and he was really far out.' Some people who live nearby ask us to stay for supper and then this guy reappears. They bring him a piece of paper and he writes, 'What is the aim of your wandering?'"

Sitting on the concrete floor of the Houston Astrodome as the preparations for a great event go on around him, Girard shakes his head. In the middle of nowhere in the midst of India, a half-naked saddhu who had taken the vow of silence appears, writing out in English the question that is basic to every spaced-out Western kid in the East looking for an answer. What is the aim of your wandering? What have you come to find? Why are you passing this way?

"We stayed with him for two weeks," Girard says. "And he kept writing out questions in the sand with a stick, anywhere, questions like 'Have you peace?'; 'Is peace God?'; 'Why did America kill Kennedy?'; 'Why did people kill Jesus, Rama, Krishna?' This guy was blowing our minds with his questions. So we decided to prostrate ourselves in front of him and ask him for this 'knowledge' that we'd read about in a passage in the Bhagavad-Gita he'd pointed out to us.

"It was then he told us about satguru, which we thought was a religion or a place. 'Aren't you the guru?' we asked him. 'I have a guru,' he wrote. 'The lotus feet of Guru Maharaj-ji are upon my head.' So we asked him where we could get the 'knowledge.' And by February, we had it."

The first time Charles Cameron met Girard in India, he had long hair, matted and covered with fleas, a thin muslin sheet for clothing, and not much more. Now Girard looks neat, officious. His hair and mustache are trimmed and there's a Divine Light gleam in his eyes. Just one year ago, he was at the Ram Lila grounds in New Delhi for the annual celebration of Guru Maharaj-ji's father's birthday, called Hans Jayanti. Shri Hans Maharaj was also a satguru, who directed his teachings at India's lowest class, the "untouchables." When he died, he "transmitted" his powers to his youngest son. It is on his birthday this year that Millennium is being held. Hundreds of thousands of Indians attended that earlier festival but Girard feels that this one in Houston will be bigger. Higher. Heavier. It will be the biggest event of the year. "I've been here all day," he says. "Working in the sound towers. You get up in that scaffolding and you can feel it. It's just so high . . ."

"*Chai, chai,*" calls out a premie carrying a huge bucket of the Indian cardamom-flavored tea that is traditional in India. "*Jai satchidan,*" he says to Gary, giving him the Divine Light hello, a phrase meaning. "Hail to truth, knowledge, and bliss." "How do you like this ashram?" he asks, gesturing at the Astrodome, stretching away huge and cavernous all around them.

"As soon as we get the altar up," Girard says, accepting a cup of *chai* and gazing up at the stage, "and the picture . . . it'll be fine."

Charles Cameron has got to move. The energy coursing through his body propels him, forcing him to walk through the different colored sections of Astrodome seats, up to the press box where Shri Hans Productions controls the Dome's special effects, down to the field to watch as the spotlights trail white circles across the real-as-life, chalk-striped, synthetic grass, around and around the circular Dome, pointing out the sights. As he walks, he talks.

"So there I was in Istanbul," he says. "In a van. Me, who was so completely untogether as to be unable to cross a street in London. With my poems and my woman of four years on our way to India.

I already had the 'knowledge' and was going to see my Guru Maharaj-ji. Soon we found ourselves going over the pass at Kambia in Afghanistan, one of the highest in the world, where there's a hundred-and-fifty-foot statue of the Buddha and I realized . . . 'I don't want Afghanistan and I don't want the Buddha; I want my Guru Maharaj-ji.' I left both my woman and my poems. It was my renunciation.

"When I finally reached India I went straight to Guru Maharaj-ji and fell on my knees before him. 'Do you have my knowledge?' he asked. 'Yes,' I said. 'Why weren't you here in November?' It being January, I said, 'I'm late.' 'See me in April,' he said. Chip, chip . . . I'd come six thousand miles and he'd slammed the door in my face . . ."

Charles has walked once around the mezzanine level of the Dome and is now passing by a beef-and-burgundy frontier-style restaurant that will be closed during the three days of Millennium. Some premies have turned on the TV set at the end of the bar. "He's on . . . it's him," they cry. In living color, on a national network's late night talk show, there sits Guru Maharaj-ji. Astroflash! The premies twitter like small birds. They vibrate. They pulse. They know they are at the very epicenter of something about to sweep the nation . . . there *he* sits in living color on national TV.

"Goo-roo," says an earnest TV interviewer, "When I was fifteen, I was interested in women, football, hot cars . . . things like that. I'm thirty-seven now, but since you're only fifteen . . . tell me how it is possible for you to be all that your followers claim."

"When you were fifteen," Guru Maharaj-ji says, "you wanted perfection. I have it."

The premies twitter. They vibrate. Charles beams. The whole nation is getting a chance to hear the truth. As soon as the program ends, he begins walking again.

"I was crushed," Charles says, picking up his story. "I wanted to leave. He told me to go to Premnagar and wait. I did service there and meditated and waited and then one day on this path I saw

. . . a perfect lime-yellow butterfly over a lime-yellow flower next to a perfect blue butterfly over a blue flower. Do you see? A<sub>1</sub>, A<sub>2</sub>, B<sub>1</sub>, B<sub>2</sub>. A perfect parallelogram.

"So I wrote a poem about it, one for me that was quite simple, non-Donne even, you might say:

*My heart is open like a tulip  
Still I fear my heart may close  
My heart is open like a tulip  
May it open like a rose  
My heart is open like a tulip  
Please make sure that my heart grows.*

"See, I was asking him to teach me, teach me to love. I gave him the poem and he crumpled it up and stuck it in his pocket without reading it. Crumpled me up. I ran to him and said, 'Guru Maharaj-ji, please tell me how to love.' 'Oh,' he said, 'for those who are quick to learn, it is easy. For those who are not, it takes an incredibly long time.' But I only heard the second part. Then he drove off and left me standing in the dust.

"I saw him standing in a sand dune at the back of the ashram; he'd driven around the perimeter . . . my poem of sand, do you see . . . and I began running, running, past the perfect parallelogram of flowers and butterflies . . . I picked a flower and fell at his feet where I pranam'd and thrust the flower into the sand. And he said, 'Oh, I think this flower will grow.'

"My heart exploded with joy," Charles says. "I was so light-hearted. The flower . . . he had used my image . . . he had taken the image of a poem he had not read and put it together in real time. It was a time of blooming, not thorning. Do you see? A time of blooming," he repeats, "not thorning."

It is now well past one A.M. Charles has talked and walked at a fantastic clip for nearly four hours. All around the Astrodome, whey-faced English security guards with thick accents are saying, "I

doan care wha' i' says there, bruther. You need a *pass*, a *blue* one, and if you've not got it, I can' let you in." Charles floats through one checkpoint after another, immune. He passes through one near an exit leading to the parking lot when down the ramp comes a golf cart rolling.

A huge, fat man with a sombrero fighting to maintain its hold on his head sits pink and sweating behind the wheel. In back of him is precious cargo—Bhalbhagwan-ji, the guru's eldest brother. Bhalbhagwan-ji, whose name is always pronounced "Baba-gwan-gee" by premies, is a bespectacled, serious-looking young man in a black Indian tunic and white trousers. He has the dark, somewhat melancholy air of an exchange student majoring in engineering at Stanford who is homesick for the old country and wants to build dams and bridges there to help bring his people into the twentieth century but has also just discovered his love for both McDonald's hamburgers and a coed in DPhiE. The fat driver wedges the golf cart into a wall and Bhalbhagwan-ji hops out and starts to walk.

By ones and twos premies fall to the ground to pranam as he passes. He acknowledges them as one born to the purple and keeps moving, pushing through a glass door into the humid, mosquito-filled Houston night. He is nearly into the car waiting for him at the curb when Charles Cameron spots him. Charles runs. Oxford-black-velvet-haiku-poet Charles runs, as fast as he can, and flings himself down into a patch of moist swamp grass. A premie who has been serving as Charles' driver hits the dirt next to him and they stay down there praniming as Bhalbhagwan-ji passes. A small smile plays its way across Bhalbhagwan-ji's face as he recognizes Charles, then the car door goes slam, and the car pulls out, the winking of its red taillights marking its retreat.

Charles and his driver untangle themselves from the grass. The driver, who is big and rangy, has tears streaming down his face. The two of them walk back to their Divine Light station wagon. They sit in silence in the front seat for a few stunned seconds then Charles says, "*Bhole shri satgurudev Maharaj-ki jai!*" The driver fumbles for

the ignition key, gets the windshield wiper button instead, and the wipers go back and forth across a windshield dotted with dead mosquitoes. As the wipers whip back and forth keeping time, a high pitched "AUMMMMMMMMMMM" comes from the motor.

"I quite agree," Charles says, as if that too were part of the plan. Welcome to Houston.

On Wednesday morning, the press begins assembling in the ballroom of the Rice Hotel. Helpful Divine Light Mission folks hand out Millennium '73 press kits designed to aid any reporter who hasn't done his homework. The line is forming for Millennium press passes, which come in two varieties, blue and yellow. One gets you into the press box, the other to the base of the great wedding-cake stage itself. Years of covering events of all sorts have taught reporters to always ask for as much accreditation as possible so journalists who haven't held a Brownie in their hands for years are talking about ". . . two Nikons, telescopic, but I'll really want to get *close* for something we can use on the cover."

Inside the ballroom, a semiradical press corps of impressive proportions is forming amidst the general rabble. Richard Levine, ex-*Saturday Review* editor, is covering for *Rolling Stone* along with their chief photographer, Annie Leibovitz. *New York Review of Books* has Francine Du Plessix Gray on the scene. Ex-Movement heavy and feminist Marilyn Webb is present for the *Village Voice*. Ken Kelley is about. So is photographer Peter Simon. Michael Shamberg, who's in charge of the TVTV crew videotaping the event for a documentary to be screened on Educational Television, holds one of those brand-new Polaroid SX-70s that develop the picture outside the camera. *Rolling Stone* editor David Felton is expected as is Bob Scheer, who is polishing up his article about Rennie Davis for *Playboy*. Someone says Nick von Hoffman of the *Washington Post* has his name on the press list and Charles Cameron insists that Kurt Vonnegut is on his way. Marjoe, the child evangelist and movie star, is going to write about it all for *Oui*.

From the outset, it is clear that to carry a notebook and pen at Millennium is to be part of a special interest group, the mongrel press, who will be directed from event to event, shuttled from "happening" to "happening" and generally urged to report the news the way the Divine Light people want them to. Millennium '73 is going to be a press circus of the first order, which means a lot of wired reporters chasing around trying to find sources who haven't already told every other reporter the same thing a thousand times, consulting taxi drivers for background and local color, staying up all night for no apparent reason, and drinking a lot of weak coffee in motel restaurants at three A.M.

"All we can do is invite you to be as close to this happening as possible," Rennie Davis tells the assembled horde. "This is the most profound news story of all time. The greatest scoop ever. So please, if you want to, receive this 'knowledge.' Are there any questions?"

Up stands a thin, worried-looking fellow with an Adam's apple that keeps time as he talks. He identifies himself as an employee of the *Christian Herald*, only the first of many newspapers represented at Millennium that no one has ever heard of.

"A Christ freak," someone in the semiradical press corps moans. "Jesus! What a way to start." The guy mumbles a long, involved question which entails listing all the accomplishments of Rennie Davis' life in chronological order joined by conjunctions and brief but soporific parenthetical digressions.

"Would you speak *up*?" someone shouts.

"Does all this mean," the guy summarizes quickly, his Adam's apple throbbing, "that Millennium has a political overview?"

Rennie puts the satsang machine into second and starts to talk about the varying political views one finds among the members of the Divine Light Mission. Reporters swig coffee out of good china cups and bite down on apple, cherry, and pineapple tarts dusted with powdered sugar. "The Lord is on the planet," Rennie Davis says. Whirrrrr goes the new Polaroid camera. A picture of Rennie Davis, real as life, pops out right away.

Houston has freeways enough to make Los Angeles green with envy. This becomes apparent as a good portion of the semiradical press corps attempts to transport themselves to Hobby Airport for the first real event of Millennium '73, the arrival of Guru Maharaj-ji in Houston. The freeways interlock and intersect and take you away from where you're going at sixty miles an hour. Since Houston is Oil City, with regular gas going for thirty-two cents a gallon, there's no financial reason to worry. If you so desire, you can spend your life going around in freeway circles.

The corps is jammed into someone's rented, economy-sized, 1974 bucket of a car, hung with shoulder straps and seat belts, buckles and cinches, equipped with dashboard lights that flash if everything isn't hooked into everything else, emitting an omnipotent buzzing noise that indicates something is remiss with the system designed to save your life. The noise is just this side of having a hornet's nest flung into your face and, after a few blasts from it, you're so conditioned that you'd rather do anything than offend the great god General Motors and cause it to begin.

The weather in Houston is alternately blast-furnace hot and completely overcast, the air so heavy it can be sold by the pound. It feels a lot like one of those gray midwinter days in Miami Beach when the blue-rinse matrons shake their jewelry at the sky from poolside at the Fontainebleau, imploring God for a little more sun . . . a little more would you mind, please . . . would you . . . consider the room rate?

Hobby Airport looks like an abandoned Air Force base, all green, cracked creosote and empty concrete runways with a couple of thousand premises seated on the hot pavement in front of a stage. The high blue sky is dotted with fleece-white clouds. Neatly lettered signs proclaim, "KNOW THYSELF," "TOWARD THE PERFECT UNION," and "I DECLARE I WILL ESTABLISH PEACE IN THIS WORLD." The gathering has the carefully arranged air of a "Welcome Home Dick Nixon" rally or some student demonstration staged by MGM for a 1960's Candy Bergen movie about campus protest. Sighing Divine Light sisters string red, white, and yellow flowers to the hood

of a green Rolls-Royce bearing blue and yellow California license plates that read "HANSA." In the car's cassette player is Steve Miller's "Your Saving Grace," presumably the music Maharaj-ji prefers for trucking in the Texas sun.

Through the crowd comes Rennie Davis, striding like a man with a purpose. In back of him are two TVTV people, one tracking with a camera, the other taking sound. Ken Kelley is at his elbow. Like a dog picking up foxtails on his way through the weeds, Rennie attracts pressmen as he moves. A small detachment soon is shadowing him. Rennie clears the crowd, passes a truck dispensing free orange drinks, and keeps going. The cameraman pulls up. The soundman removes his earphones. Ken Kelley halts. Rennie Davis continues on alone, opens the door of a Porto-toilet, and slips inside.

Banners flutter, then die in the still air. Instructions are given to the premises in French, German, Spanish, and English. Satguru is late. As it enters its third hour, the satsang is getting a little strident.

"Our generation is the generation that articulated love and peace for the world from the streets in the Sixties," Rennie Davis says when he takes over the microphone onstage. "We are going to carry that message forward in the Seventies and Eighties. What can I say? It's springtime, everybody. Welcome to Millennium. I'm really really really really thankful Guru Maharaj-ji has come. *Bhole sbri . . .*" he says.

"*. . . Satguru dev Maharaj-ki jai!*" the crowd shouts.

Maharaj-ji has come. In back of the terminal building, a Cessna-340 escorted by a Toyota jeep and a car full of security heavies taxis toward the stage. A quarter of a mile away the convoy halts. They're bringing the guru in through a building so no one will get to see him until the very last minute. Out of the car and into the building and then up on stage he comes, all of the tension of the last three hours leading to this, as the sun fires down hot and fierce from the sky and Mata Ji leads the Holy Family out. "*Bhole sbri satguru dev Maharaj-ki jai!*" the cry rips through the heated air again and again. "*Bhole sbri . . . satguru dev . . . Maharaj-ki . . . jai!*"

The child guru takes his seat and Rennie Davis is right there,

laying himself down in a full pranam with his forehead at Maharaj-ji's feet. Lei after lei is draped around the guru's neck, as though he had just come off some tourist flight in Oahu. The guru is thin. He looks a good thirty pounds lighter than his pictures, the result of going on the road in America. Premies sing, shout, and cry.

"This is really fantastic," Guru Maharaj-ji says after the noise dies down. His voice is filled with nonchalant joy, like some child just handed a Peter Paul Almond Joy. "That we can get together and understand who is God. It's time we know that by now . . . Blessings to you all," he says and he's up and on his way out. That's it. A two-minute speech. The World Peace Corps members link arms to protect him and, within seconds, he's off the stage and into his green Rolls-Royce with the sound of Steve Miller in his ears.

Bang bang. He's come and gone, and it's not until later that the press learns the whole event is phony, staged for them and the premies. Guru Maharaj-ji, like nearly everyone else who has come to Houston for Millennium flew into International Airport where the rules on people going out onto the runway to welcome their Lord or anyone else for that matter are more stringent. He was brought crosstown to Hobby Airport so that proper festivities could be arranged.

Now, premies reach out longing hands for the flowers that were just a minute ago around the guru's neck. They hold them to their faces, caress their petals and cry, "I've got one. OH, LOOK! I've got one. It's *so* beautiful."

On film and videotape, with their tape recorders and notebooks, the mongrel press tries to get it all down. God is on the ground in Houston. It's time for the real show to start.

## PILGRIM'S PROGRESS: ON THE APPEARANCE OF SAVIORS

In April 1225, a hermit said to be the well-loved Baldwin the IX, Count of Flanders and Emperor of Constantinople, who was thought to have met his death some twenty years earlier during the Crusades, rode into Valenciennes. Clad in scarlet, he was hailed by cheering crowds as the reborn emperor, the Messiah king whose coming had long been prophesied. After a short but bloody civil war, the hermit was crowned Count of Flanders and Hainault and Emperor of Constantinople and Thessalonica. Borne aloft by his supporters from town to town, he was hailed by fanatical followers who fought to drink his bathwater and be allowed to kiss his scars. Princes offered

was a new Divine Light center in town, he had been there only once, to drop off a cord of wood.

He still owed about two hundred dollars for various bills run up while in the house on Fargo Avenue. More money was owed to him by fellow premies to whom he had made loans so that they could get to Houston for Millennium.

"I'm thankful for that house," Roger said, smiling into the sun, "for all the trips we went through, the times when we hated each other's guts and got so caught up in our own egos we couldn't see the lessons it was teaching us. And I was glad to get out when it broke up. A lot of people felt like they had been in prison, like they denied themselves natural functions.

"So we made love and smoked dope and drank when we got out, but it was different than before. A lot different. We didn't make love or take drugs to get high because we'd already experienced that high point through the meditation."

Roger says he feels closer to Guru Maharaj-ji now than he ever has in his life. So, he says, do the women who lived in the house, all of whom are now living with men who are or were premies. Roger swallows his beer and says, "I'm finding, actually, that the Kingdom of Heaven is within us and is on earth. And everyone can have that—everyone. It doesn't matter what they are or who they are because we all are . . . human."

Three months to the night after Rennie Davis boarded a jetliner in Chicago for Houston and the most "holy and significant event in the history of mankind," he sits on the floor of the East Side town house which is Divine Light Mission headquarters in New York City. He has come to New York to appear on the Dick Cavett show with Abbie Hoffman, who will soon disappear rather than face charges on his cocaine bust; Tom Hayden, who is about to make another journey to North Vietnam; and Jerry Rubin, whose withdrawal from radical politics is a *fait accompli*.

Already Millennium '73 seems like ancient history, an event full of sound and fury, signifying little. No flying saucers came to earth,

no stadium rooftops levitated. Once again, the Messiah was late. Having spent half a million dollars in Houston, the Divine Light Organization's finances are in tatters. . . . *And It Is Divine* has gone out of business, as has *Divine Times*. Blue Aquarius will soon disband. At a post-Millennium meeting in Denver, Guru Maharaj-ji suggested to his disciples that they go out to work to help pay off the organization's debts.

Quickly, save for an occasional joke in some gossip column or natural news item like the guru marrying his twenty-four-year-old secretary (after having obtained permission from a judge because he was underage, with wedding gifts which included a silver Maserati), or an advisor being indicted in a stock swindle, the activities of the Divine Light Mission have passed from the pages of newspapers and magazines and now are of interest to disciples only. The media is done with them. The news of the guru's tiff with his family over his marriage, and the temporary banishment of Bhalbhagwan-ji and Mata-ji, is ignored.

"I feel all right about it now," Rennie Davis says with the detachment of a good politician reflecting on a landslide loss in the last election. "I don't feel as I suppose people think I should, which is, 'Oh boy, did I blow it!' . . . Generally, I said the event was significant not because of numbers but because we saw it as the changing of an age. Twelve people came to the Last Supper. How many came to the Sermon on the Mount?"

Like Roger, Rennie looks a lot healthier now than he did during the pre-Millennium days. The skin is no longer stretched rice-paper tight across his cheekbones. His hair is longer. He's not fasting anymore and although he still meditates three hours a day, it is not with interviews scheduled before and after.

"You cannot judge a process by one frame," Rennie says. "Like the biggest thing going on now is that Guru Maharaj-ji is the Lord but every person alive in this time who is searching for the truth will find it. And if this is not the truth, as some people believe, then people will find that out . . ."

Rennie moves next door to a room crowded with people inter-

ested in taking "knowledge". Sitting on the floor, talking again before an audience, he delivers a very pure satsang on the subject of remembering the holy name.

"When I come to a city now," he tells them, "the thing is not to call the press together but to just be, so that anyone passing by can see that the transformation of the human race is a practicable fact. People will realize Guru Maharaj-ji as we realize ourselves. It will just be.

"Remember the Holy Name," Rennie counsels. "It is the only thing to do. Manifest love. People will see love on the planet. Please remember the Holy Name. Help each other remember the Holy Name. Remember," he pleads, "remember . . . remember . . . remember." More than a year later, Rennie was in charge of the guru's world welfare association and feeling the time had come again to go out and get public about Maharaj-ji, whom he still referred to as the "source."

Still the All-American boy as prophet and leader, Rennie Davis needed it to be very total and all-consuming. Even he was making an effort to trim his sails and accept that the journey was as slow and gradual as life itself. No one event changes history. Maybe that was the lesson Rennie Davis had to learn, again and again, until he had finally and thoroughly understood it.

I don't really know what lesson Rennie Davis is supposed to learn. Outside the covers of this book and beyond the edges of the page these words are printed on, his journey continues. As does mine, and yours. Here is what I do know. Meditation works, if you let it. It can calm your mind and make you more peaceful and open. Serving people works, if you first serve yourself. The same goes for loving. Compassion works but only if it truly comes from within and is more than a concept.

What doesn't work is to hook yourself to someone's vehicle and expect them to pull you out of the mud. We come into this world with our mothers' help but we go out alone. We can only struggle

together successfully once we have struggled alone. Each of us bears responsibility for his or her own life. This realization, terrifying as it may be, liberates. It can lead to real action—of what kind, each person defines for himself.

"Men of good will should not have formulas," Krishnamurti has written. Neither should they hide behind dichotomies. As soon as we get over the mad Western notion that there is any difference between politics and spirituality, between a President who orders the bombing of civilians in Cambodia and has never heard of the Tao, we will have taken an important first step. As long as we go on defining ourselves by our differences, we are caught. Science, the religion of the West, and the spirituality of the East are but two sides of the same coin. Either can become the "opiate of the masses" for those who want only false nirvana resembling nothing so much as a narcotized stupor.

There is no difference between the writer and the pilgrim. One's progress is the other's. Together they stand or fall. The Tao says that to accept life whole is the mark of a sane man. Consider my grandfather, for whom it has become all of a piece, like the leather he used to cut into shoes in Europe. His is the "faith that looks through death," the kind of spiritual conviction that cannot be bought, sold, bartered, or shaken. For him, I include what John Bunyan wrote of the passing over of Mr. Valiant-for-Truth at the end of the second part of *Pilgrim's Progress*.

When the day that he must go hence was come, they accompanied him to the Riverside, into which as he went, he said, "Death, where is thy sting?" And as he went down deeper, he said, "Grave, where is thy Victory?" So he passed over, and all the Trumpets sounded for him on the other side.

So be it for all of those who search.