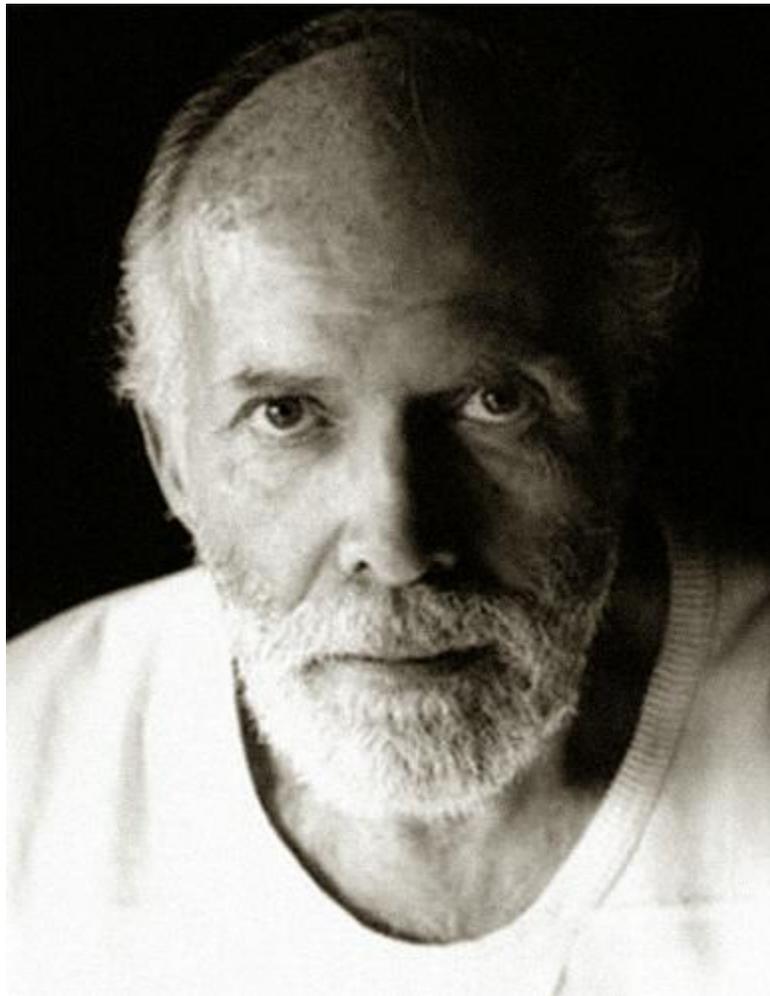


"SILENCE - THE LIFE AND TEACHING OF ROBERT ADAMS"

by

Matthew Brown



SILENCE – THE LIFE AND TEACHINGS OF ROBERT ADAMS

Writer's Guild of America (West) Registration Number: 1432614

I was asked to write this screenplay by Edward Muzika, living teacher in the dual lineage of Nisargadatta Maharaj (by way of Jean Dunn, Nisargadatta's long-time student and transcriber) and Ramana Maharshi (by way of Robert Adams, enlightened teacher) when I visited him in Los Angeles in March, 2010. I am happy to say this edition also incorporates some suggestions made by David Godman, prominent Ramana Maharshi scholar and biographer.

I offer this screenplay to the world in the hopes that it may provide relief in the form of the wisdom non-duality teachings of advaita vedanta.

I dedicate this screenplay to Robert Adams, a teacher whom I never met, but whose voice and presence resonate eternally within me as love. Om namah Shivaya, Om namah Arunachala, Om namah Sri Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi, Om namah Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj, Om namah Sri Robert. Om shanti, shanti, shanti, Om.

Peace.

If anyone reading this screenplay wants to make it into a movie or excerpt parts of it for a dramatic stage production, please contact me. I would be very happy to facilitate this.

Matthew Brown
370 College Street, Apt. 3,
Toronto, Ont. M5T 1S6
Phone: (416) 824-5632
Email: teacherintherye@hotmail.com

REACTIONS TO THE SCREENPLAY...

“I didn't put it down. I wanted it to go on. Far out.... It is EXCELLENT.”

- Ed Muzika

“BEAUTIFULL!!! BEAUTIFULL!!! BEAUTIFULL!!!.... The characters, all of them begin to live as soon as you start reading them.”

- Rajiv Kapur

EXT. ROBERT'S HOUSE, LOS ANGELES, 1990 - MORNING

We see ROBERT ADAMS, a tall, slightly stooped sixty two year old man with a white beard and balding head, emerge from the front door of his house. Walking in front of him on a slack lead is DIMITRI THE LHASA APSO.

Robert shuffles, his walk a bit off balance. Dimitri does not strain the lead, but definitely knows where they are heading: the park.

They walk along the road of their upscale suburban Los Angeles neighbourhood, Woodland Hills.

The SOUNDS OF BIRDS AND CAR MOTORS ARE ALMOST SILENT, THE VOLUME TURNED LOW.

As Robert and Dimitri descend a few steps in the sunlight from their shared courtyard to a winding road of similar houses, WE HEAR ROBERT SPEAKING. HE HAS A SOFT VOICE WITH A PRONOUNCED NEW YORK ACCENT.

ROBERT (VOICE-OVER)

I want to let you in on a little secret. There are no problems. There are no problems. There never were any problems, there are no problems today, and there will never be any problems.

We continue to hear Robert's voice as he slowly walks down the road with Dimitri.

Problems just mean that the world isn't turning the way you want it to. But in truth, there are no problems.

Everything is unfolding as it should.

Everything is right. You have to forget about yourself and expand your consciousness until you become the whole universe. The reality in back of the universe is pure awareness. It has no problems. And you are that.

If you identify with your body, then there's a problem, because your body always gets into trouble of some kind.

But if you learn to forget about your body and your mind, where is there a problem?

Robert and Dimitri have now come to a road with cars parked along it. They cross it and enter Warner Park, a large green space with recently planted trees. Joggers are making their rounds this morning, and there are a few other dog-walkers.

In other words, leave your body alone. Take just enough care of it. Exercise it a little, feed it right foods, but don't think about it too much. Keep your mind on reality. Merge your mind with reality, and you will experience reality. You will live in a world without problems. The world may appear to have problems to others, but not to you. You will see things differently, from a higher point of view.

Dimitri sniffs about in the grass. They enter a circle of recently planted coniferous trees. Dimitri inspects the base of each one, lifting his leg at each one. Robert follows behind him.

I had an interesting phone call this week. Someone asked me, "Do self-realized people dream, or have visions?" Now, in order to have a dream or a vision, there has to be somebody left to have it, and yet, if you're self-realized, there's nobody home. There's nobody left. So it's a contradiction, as truth is.

All truth is a contradiction. It's a paradox.

The answer is, sages do dream sometimes, and have visions. But they're aware of the dreamer. In other words they realize that they are not the person dreaming or having the vision. But as long as there's a body there someplace, there will be dreams and visions.

Even though there's no one home, there will still, once in a while, be a dream or a vision.

As an example, Ramana Maharshi often dreamt and had visions. Nisargadatta dreamt and had visions. And they were both self-realized. But again, the question is, who dreams, who has the vision? There's no ego left. As long as the dreamer is separate from the I.

Robert now takes a seat at a concrete picnic table, letting Dimitri off the lead. As Dimitri wanders about, Robert turns and addresses the camera directly.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

I can only speak from my own experience. There's no difference, to me, in the waking state, the dreaming state, the sleeping state, or the vision state. They're all the same.

I'm aware of all of them, but I am not them. I observe them. I see them happening. As a matter of fact, sometimes I can not tell the difference.

Sometimes I don't know whether I'm dreaming, or awake, or having a vision, or I'm asleep. It's all the same, because I take a step backward, and I watch myself going through all these things.

Robert looks at the camera for a while, gazing into it without blinking. Then he turns and looks at the sunlight coming through the pine needles of the trees.

FADE TO:

EXT. BRONX TENEMENT YARD, 1935 - DAY

Snow is falling. Seven-year-old ROBERT ADAMS is patting snow onto a snowman. He is smiling, fully absorbed in his activity.

There is just the SOUND OF HIS BREATHING and HANDS PATTING.

He is wearing a t-shirt and trousers, no jacket. The large flakes are falling down.

MRS. ADAMS (O.S.)

Robert?

Robert continues to pick up snow and add it to the snowman's head. He does not look up or acknowledge his mother's voice.

MRS. ADAMS (O.S.) (CONT'D)

(Voice is getting closer.)

Robert?

Robert's expression of contentment and focus on the snowman do not waver. We see the torso of MRS. ADAMS behind him, a modest winter coat hanging open, an apron under it.

As she grabs Robert's shoulder and yanks him up:

MRS. ADAMS (CONT'D)

Robert!

He looks at her with complete equanimity.

ROBERT

I'm building a snowman, Mommy.

MRS. ADAMS

Look around you, Robert! It's the middle of winter! You'll catch your death of cold!

Mrs. Adams begins yanking Robert toward the front door of the tenement.

ROBERT

But Mommy -

MRS. ADAMS

No ifs ands or buts! I don't want to hear any more excuses or wild stories!

ROBERT

But Mommy, I've been outside in the snow every day this week in my t-shirt, and I'm fine! See?

Robert holds out his arms as if to demonstrate. Mrs. Adams stops on the front stoop and stares at him:

MRS. ADAMS

Every day this week? Do you mean to tell me you've been out here in your bare shirt-sleeves in the freezing cold every single day? Robert!

She starts shaking him.

MRS. ADAMS (CONT'D)

You'll catch your death! Do you hear me? You'll die of cold! Do you understand what that means?

Robert's expression is blank as his mother shakes him back and forth.

Another woman, ROBERT'S AUNT SOPHIE, appears on the stoop, guiding Mrs. Adams away. Robert follows behind them.

MRS. ADAMS (CONT'D)

(Speaking to Robert's Aunt)

I don't know what to do with them since he died. It's more than I can handle. How am I supposed to raise two kids on my own? Running outside in his shirtsleeves in the dead of winter - he'll die of cold -

As the VOICES FADE inside, Robert turns back and looks at the snowflakes falling down.

We see his face, the snowflakes falling on his eyelashes.

He closes his eyes.

FADE TO:

EXT. SEDONA, ARIZONA, 1997 - DAY

The sixty-nine year old ROBERT opens his eyes, now blind, and looks to the sky. It is completely clear, blue.

ROBERT

Snow.

STUDENT #1(O.S.)

Did he say something?

STUDENT #2(O.S.)

What's that, Robert?

ROBERT

Snow. Snow.

Moving his arms. We pull back to see that he is surrounded by followers now, standing in front of a house.

Robert continues looking up. He is seeing something, although blind. They try to follow what he is seeing, although the sky is empty, sun shining.

Behind them is the enormous mass of Capitol Butte, a mountain.

STUDENT #2

He's moving as if he's swimming. What do you see, Robert?

STUDENT #3

He's acting like he's swimming.

ROBERT

(Smiling)

Snow.

STUDENT #4

But the sky is completely clear.

We move up toward the mountain. Silently, grey clouds gather and flakes start to fall. It is snowing heavily.

ROLL OPENING CREDITS: **Silence** - *the Life and Teaching of Robert Adams*.

FADE TO:

INT. CLASSROOM, THE BRONX, 1941 - DAY

A TEACHER's hand is writing on a chalkboard. The chalk SQUEAKS as it writes out grade 8 level math problems.

ROBERT (V.O.)

Reality is like a chalkboard. The images come and go..

Teacher's hand erases a number, then writes in another one.

ROBERT (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Some are erased and then new ones appear. The images are constantly changing, but the chalkboard remains unchanged. You can draw a picture of cowboys and Indians..

Teacher's hand continues to write out math equations.

ROBERT (V.O.) (CONT'D)

A beautiful sunset... People fighting a war... A couple making love... but in the end, all of it's going to be erased.

This is how your life, your body and your experiences are. But your real nature -

We see 14-year-old Robert's hand is holding a girl's bobby-pin surreptitiously in the hinge of a school seat.

TWANGING sound.

The teacher's hand stops writing.

ROBERT (V.O.) (CONT'D)

- is like the chalkboard. It ever remains. Perfect - unchanging -

He TWANGS it again.

14-year-old ROBERT attempts to hide his mischievous grin amongst a sea of grade 8 students in MRS. O'REILLY's classroom.

The GIRL sitting in front of Robert is GIGGLING.

Mrs. O'Reilly glares from the front of the classroom. She is a large middle-aged woman, weighing perhaps 250 to 300 pounds. As she stalks down the aisle next to Robert and the students try to suppress smiles, biting their lips. She passes Robert's seat, and stalks around the back of the classroom into the next aisle, moving toward the front.

Silence.

Mrs. O'Reilly picks up the piece of chalk and is about to resume writing equations on the chalkboard when Robert TWANGS the bobby-pin one more time. Mrs. O'Reilly turns, apoplectic, eyes bulging, face red.

ROBERT (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Empty. Blissful. Silent.

TWANG.

Mrs. O'Reilly SHRIEKS in rage and begins to JUMP UP AND DOWN in fury.

The students break into unabashed LAUGHTER, goading her to SCREAM and POUND THE FLOORBOARDS WITH HER FEET even more.

We see Robert's face, the picture of innocence as he passes the bobby-pin to the girl's waiting hand in front of him.

The SOUNDS OF MRS. O'REILLY'S TANTRUM FADE as Robert's gaze wanders out the classroom window to autumn leaves on trees in the sun.

FADE TO:

INT. CLASSROOM, THE BRONX, 1942 - DAY

The same trees that sported autumn leaves now have green leaves, rain is falling, the sky is grey. We see Robert gazing out the same window, same classroom, several months have passed.

He is disturbed from his reverie by a stack of math tests being passed back to him. It is the same girl who passed him the bobby-pins before.

GIRL

Robert? Pass the tests back, Robert.

He takes one test and passes the stack back. They both peel the test back to peak at the contents.

The girl's eyes widen.

GIRL (CONT'D)

(Whispering)
Did you study?

ROBERT

(Unconcerned)
No.

GIRL

Why?

Robert shrugs.

MRS. O'REILLY (O.S.)

You may now turn your tests over and begin writing. And before I hear any whispering or murmuring, remember that any talking will earn you a mark of zero.

Robert does not look at the test but gazes beyond it, with his pencil in his hand.

ROBERT (V.O.)

When I was very young, a little man about two feet tall used to appear before me standing in my crib. He had a white beard, and he used to jabber away at me for hours in a language I couldn't understand.

I only realized years later that this little man was the sage, Ramana Maharshi.

Anyway, back then I used to think that everybody had the same experience as me. But when I tried talking to other people about it they thought I was just making it up. The little man stopped appearing to me about the same time my father died, when I was seven years old.

But I soon found out that I had a sort of special power: whatever I asked for, would come to me. I would just say the name of God a few times... God, God, God. And I would get whatever I asked for. For example, if I wanted a candy bar, I

would just say, "God, God, God," and soon somebody would bring me a candy bar.

Another time, I thought it would be nice to have a violin to practice the God's name mantra. Of course my mother said no, Robert, you'll never learn how to play it. But I said "God, God, God," and a few hours later my uncle showed up. I hadn't seen him for a few years, but he said he just thought that maybe I'd like to learn to play the violin, and he'd brought me a violin.

So I never used to study in school, I would just say "God, God, God," and the answers would come to me.

And it went on like this, until one day, in Mrs. O'Reilly's Grade 8 math class, when we were taking a test... I hadn't studied, as usual, and I said...

Robert as a 14-year-old is mouthing the words:

ROBERT (CONT'D)

God, God, God.

The classroom floods with light. Robert looks at his classmates. They continue to write their tests, but their bodies have become swarms of light particles, which are growing brighter and brighter.

We can see everything made of millions of light particles, all of them shining until they flood and wash the screen with light, in complete SILENCE.

The light fades to all of the stars, galaxies and constellations, spinning in the void. Slowly the stars move apart until we are seeing only the void. We move back from the black void, it is the black pupil in Robert's eye.

Robert's face is completely frozen in bliss.

MRS. O'REILLY (O.S.)

(Very distant)

Robert?

Robert does not respond.

MRS. O'REILLY (O.S.) (CONT'D)

(Closer)

Robert?

Robert starts BREATHING again. Mrs. O'Reilly's torso appears behind him, her hands grab his shoulders and shake him back and forth, as she YELLS:

MRS. O'REILLY (CONT'D)

Robert!

The classroom is empty. His test sits, blank, in front of him.

Robert turns to look at his teacher.

MRS. O'REILLY (CONT'D)

What happened to you?

We hear the voice of a student from Los Angeles, 1991, in voiceover:

LEE (V.O.)

Did you pass the test?

FADE TO:

INT. STUDENT'S LIVINGROOM, LOS ANGELES, 1991 - DAY

Robert is now bearded, in the early stages of Parkinson's disease. He is sitting with a few students between 35 and 65 years of age in someone's livingroom: LEE, ED, KERIMA, MARY, FRED, DANA, EMILIO. There is a tape recorder on the glass coffee table, Robert is in an armchair.

ROBERT

Test?

LEE

Did you pass the math test?

ROBERT

No, I failed.

Students LAUGH.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

I left it blank, I didn't fill in any

of the questions. After that, I didn't want to do any of the things I used to do anymore. I couldn't understand what had happened to me, I just wanted to be alone. I stopped hanging around with my friends, stopped going to school, stopped eating.

My mother was worried, so she took me to see a psychologist, which was not at all a common thing to do in 1942.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Anyway, he told her that I was probably going through a phase, and I would grow out of it.

FADE TO:

INT. PSYCHOLOGIST'S OFFICE, MANHATTAN, 1942 - DAY

The psychologist, DR. FELDMAN is talking to Mrs. Adams while Robert sits in the background.

MRS. ADAMS

What do you mean, Dr. Feldman? Can you explain what's happened to Robert in regular language?

DR. FELDMAN

Robert is just going through a phase, Mrs. Adams. He'll be alright after a while. A lot of children who go through (lowers voice) the traumatic loss of a parent, demonstrate these kinds of symptoms. Dissociation, fantasy, withdrawal - silence.

(Raising voice again) We can make another appointment for next week, if you like.

Mrs. Adams fumbles in her purse for her appointment book.

DR. FELDMAN (CONT'D)

(Changing to a less official tone)
And if this kind of feeling persists, there's someone I'd like to recommend

you go and see, Robert. Have you ever heard of Joel Goldsmith?

MRS. ADAMS

Is he a doctor?

DR. FELDMAN

(struggling with how to explain)
No... Joel Goldsmith is more of a...
spiritual lecturer. I think he might
be able to make a bit more sense of
Robert's experience.

FADE TO:

INT. ROBERT'S BEDROOM, THE BRONX, 1943 - DAY

Robert, 15 years old, is lying on his bed with a comic book in his hand. We can hear the RADIO NEWS OF WORLD WAR TWO. Robert briefly looks at the comic book, then lays it aside.

As he turns on his side to gaze at the wall, we can see in his eyes that he is trying to understand the shift in consciousness which has happened to him.

Robert's POV: the drab green and brown wallpaper, with a Depression-era motif. It fades to his POV when he was a baby in the crib.

Standing there is RAMANA MAHARSHI, a tanned Indian man of about 40, wearing only a white cotton loincloth, a kind look on his face, and a white beard of maybe five or six days' growth. The bars of Robert's crib show behind him. He is standing inside the crib, maybe two feet tall.

He is animatedly LECTURING IN A LANGUAGE ROBERT DOES NOT UNDERSTAND (TAMIL) while the American RADIO NEWS OF WORLD WAR TWO goes on in the background. Robert's infant face gazes in wonder, amused and satisfied.

We hear UNCLE RALPH's voice, distant:

UNCLE RALPH (O.S.)

Robert?

Baby Robert gurgles.

UNCLE RALPH (O.S.)

(louder)

Robert?

The vision of Ramana Maharshi fades back to the wallpaper of Robert's bedroom in the Bronx. He turns partly on the bed. Uncle Ralph is standing in the doorway, dressed in a winter coat.

UNCLE RALPH

Robert, I've got two tickets to see Joel Goldsmith downtown. Do you want to come with me? Come on, we've gotta take a train and a bus to get into Manhattan. It's snowing out. We don't want to be late.

Robert picks the comic book off a Joel Goldsmith book, looks at it briefly, then swings off the bed. On their way out, they pass through the KITCHEN.

INT. ROBERT'S KITCHEN, THE BRONX, 1943 - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

Robert's OLDER BROTHER is sitting at the table, wearing a basketball uniform. He's a big, muscular boy, where Robert is kind of skinny. Mrs. Adams is just lifting a chicken from the oven.

MRS. ADAMS

Robert? Don't you want to eat something before you go? (to her brother) Do you have to leave so early? I just roasted a whole chicken.

Uncle Ralph looks at Robert, shrugging, ready to sit down.

UNCLE RALPH

Well Robert, maybe quickly let's -

ROBERT

I don't eat meat.

BROTHER

What are you talking about, you liar? I just saw you eat a whole smoked meat sandwich last week.

ROBERT

I don't eat meat anymore.

BROTHER

Since when?

ROBERT

Since I saw this chicken being murdered.

MRS. ADAMS

You mean *slaughtered*, Robert.

ROBERT

That's right.

MRS. ADAMS

(to the others)

We just went up to the kosher farm yesterday with Auntie Sophie.

ROBERT

(visibly upset)

It was the most disgusting thing I've ever seen. The animal never did anything to us. And it was crying for mercy, screaming, begging us. You could see it in the chicken's eyes, the way it was looking at us.

Trying to escape. It even kept running after Aunt Sophie had cut its head off, with its blood squirting out. Pumping out, like a fountain. I will never touch meat again. Ever.

There's no difference between people and animals.

Robert turns away. Uncle Ralph and Mrs. Adams exchange looks. Brother waggles his eyebrows as well, tucking into his portion.

BROTHER

I'll take Robert's piece. (Smiling)
He's a kook.

MRS. ADAMS

(Calling after them as they leave)
Careful on the train. Keep your hand on your wallet. Don't talk to any strangers. Try to leave early so you don't get back too late - Robert's got

school tomorrow!

INT. ELEVATED TRAIN, THE BRONX, 1943 - EVENING

The train CLATTERS and CLANKS and SQUEALS, LAUGHTER and ARGUMENT mix in the train compartment.

We see the long voyage downtown from the Bronx to Manhattan, the first appearance of the Manhattan skyline as Robert gazes out the window, the crowds of New York commuters, old, young, black, Jewish, Irish, Spanish, Italian, Chinese, all immersed in the day-to-day struggles of their lives, turned inwards or briefly energized by gossip or flirtation.

We see compassion and calm on Robert's face as Uncle Ralph tries to read the newspaper. Headlines blare about World War Two.

INT. AUDITORIUM, MANHATTAN, 1943 - NIGHT

Robert and Uncle Ralph enter a large auditorium packed with people. They take seats near the back. On the stage is a podium with a microphone attached to it, behind that some maroon curtains with a banner hung across them: "YOU ARE CHRIST CONSCIOUSNESS".

ROBERT

Thanks for taking me here, Uncle Ralph.

UNCLE RALPH

No problem, Robert. It's the least I can do to help your poor mother. Hey, remember I used to take you to magic shows here when you were a little kid?

ROBERT

(Smiles)

Sure, and one time they hypnotized you. And you thought you had a spider on your neck.

UNCLE RALPH

A black widow spider! I could've sworn it was right here -
(Grasps neck)

Biting me! Remember? I even got a red mark there, where I thought it bit me! Even though it wasn't real!

ROBERT

(Quietly)

Everyone is hypnotized.

The house lights go dim. A spotlight hits the podium and there is applause as JOEL GOLDSMITH steps up. He is a short, middle-aged man with graying hair, thick spectacles and a bow tie.

JOEL GOLDSMITH

Good evening. My name is Joel Goldsmith. I want to thank each and every one of you for coming here tonight.

Do you know why you came?

Somewhere in consciousness there lies a land undiscovered, a land not yet revealed by religion, philosophy, or science. I know that it exists for it continually pushes itself into my awareness. I know that when it discloses itself, it will change the nature of mankind: wars will be no more, and the lamb will lie down with the lion. I know its name, for it is revealed as *My kingdom* or *My grace*. Christ Jesus spoke of this Kingdom, but neither the spoken word nor the manuscripts so far discovered have revealed its full significance.

Robert watches Joel Goldsmith's face. He smiles in wonder, scanning some of the other people in his row... earnest SPIRITUAL SEEKERS from various walks of New York life in the 1940's.

JOEL GOLDSMITH (CONT'D)

This spiritual kingdom, this inner world, is as real as the world we see, hear, taste, touch, and smell- if anything, more real. What we become aware of through the senses eventually changes and disappears, but this inner

world, these spiritual glories that are revealed to us, these spiritual lights with whom we learn to tabernacle - they never disappear.

Robert settles back in his seat.

FADE TO:

INT. JOEL GOLDSMITH'S DRESSINGROOM, MANHATTAN, 1943 - NIGHT

Joel Goldsmith is sweating, his ASSISTANT, a woman ten years younger, in horn-rimmed spectacles with tied back hair, helps him remove his jacket and offers him a handkerchief to mop his brow.

JOEL GOLDSMITH

(Loosening his bowtie)

How'd I do?

ASSISTANT

(With a smile)

You were magnificent.

JOEL GOLDSMITH

Was my wife there? D'you see my wife in the audience anywhere?

ASSISTANT

(Frowning)

No.

JOEL GOLDSMITH

Huh.

A KNOCK comes at the door. A STAGE MANAGER opens it.

STAGE MANAGER

Mr. Goldsmith? Someone to see you.

JOEL GOLDSMITH

(Half standing)

Tell my wife I'll be right out -

STAGE MANAGER

No, Mr. Goldsmith. It's some kid and his uncle, they came up to me the moment you stepped off the stage and they've been waiting -

JOEL GOLDSMITH

Autograph? (Smiles) Sure, sure, send
'em right in.

Robert and Uncle Ralph come in. Uncle Ralph has a stack of recently purchased Joel Goldsmith books.

Assistant hands Joel Goldsmith a pen and leaves the room.

JOEL GOLDSMITH

To whom shall I make them out?

UNCLE RALPH

(Looking at Robert)

To Robert. He's my nephew. This is
him right here.

Robert stands, smiling faintly at Joel Goldsmith. Uncle Ralph prods him forward.

JOEL GOLDSMITH

D'you enjoy the talk?

Robert nods.

JOEL GOLDSMITH

(to Uncle Ralph)

Brought him along for company, huh?
Long trip downtown?

UNCLE RALPH

All the way from the Bronx.

JOEL GOLDSMITH

(Whistles, keeps signing the books.)

That's a long way. Thanks for coming.

Joel Goldsmith offers stack of signed books to Uncle Ralph.

UNCLE RALPH

Well, I did it for him.

(Indicates Robert.)

It was his idea to come here.

JOEL GOLDSMITH

Oh yeah? Have you got any questions...

Robert? About what you heard me saying
today?

Robert shakes his head.

JOEL GOLDSMITH (CONT'D)

We don't usually get 'em this young coming in. D'you come here for a Sunday School book report or something?

ROBERT

(Shaking head)

No. I just wanted to meet somebody like me.

Robert extends his hand.

JOEL GOLDSMITH

Like you?

Joel Goldsmith really notices Robert for the first time. Hesitantly extends his hand to shake.

JOEL GOLDSMITH (CONT'D)

And how exactly is that, young man?

Robert smiles at him, looking in his eyes.

Assistant pops back in the door.

ASSISTANT

Joel, you've got people waiting for autographs in the lobby. And there's a journalist, I think he's from the New York Times.

JOEL GOLDSMITH

Hold on a second, Janey.

(To Robert) Have a seat.

(To Uncle Ralph) You can have a seat too, sir.

They sit down. Joel Goldsmith turns to Robert.

JOEL GOLDSMITH (CONT'D)

So, young man. Can you tell me more about why you came here today? I'm all ears.

ROBERT

I just read your book. My psychologist told me I might like to read it, and my uncle gave it to me, because of what happened to me.

JOEL GOLDSMITH

And that was?
(Glancing at door.)

ROBERT

I don't know. But what you said in
your book - the universal Christ
consciousness -

JOEL GOLDSMITH

Mm-hmm.

ROBERT

I think I realized it.

JOEL GOLDSMITH

You realized it?

Robert nods.

JOEL GOLDSMITH (CONT'D)

And what exactly was it that you
realized?

ROBERT

Nothing. I just... turned into it.

JOEL GOLDSMITH

(Raises an eyebrow)
While you were reading my book? Well,
it's not uncommon that a lot of people
have had experiences where they were
reading my book and they -

ROBERT

No, it was before I ever read your
book. I was in Math class last year
and we had a test, and like usual I
didn't study or anything, I just said
God's name three times, because that's
what I usually did and the answers
would come to me.

JOEL GOLDSMITH

Uh-huh.

ROBERT

Then the room suddenly filled with a
brilliant light, and my classmates and
everything just turned into the light,

like we were in the middle of the sun,
except it wasn't hot. It was nice.

And it was like I could see everyone,
everything was made of millions of
little light particles. I could see
all the atoms, all the electrons,
everything.

JOEL GOLDSMITH

And then?

ROBERT

Then everything disappeared, and I sort
of... expanded in every direction. But
it wasn't me. I was not the body,
because I could see in every direction
at once. Up - down - right - left -
forwards and backwards - all at the
same time.

Joel Goldsmith exchanges looks with Uncle Ralph, who smiles
and makes a gesture, as if to say "*We don't know what to
make of it, either.*"

JOEL GOLDSMITH

(Leaning forward, slowly)
And then?

ROBERT

(Introspected)
Then I could see the entire universe.
No, not see it exactly. I was the
entire universe, and everything was
inside me. The stars, the planets, the
galaxies... the atoms too, the electrons
(gestures at his own arm)
it was all the same. And I was
everywhere in it, conscious of myself
in-between everything like... space.

Joel Goldsmith is speechless.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

And then there was no space.

JOEL GOLDSMITH

What was there?

ROBERT

Nothing.
(Smiles.)
No thing. Just... silence.
(Pause. Shrugs.)

JOEL GOLDSMITH

(Clears throat)
Does the experience continue?

ROBERT

It's not really an experience, it's just kind of... I'm always aware that everything is just consciousness, and I'm aware of the space that's in everything, and is everything. And the silence.

JOEL GOLDSMITH

Does it ever change? Do you ever go back to the way you were before, or...

Robert shakes his head.

Joel Goldsmith looks at the stack of books in Uncle Ralph's hands, gestures for them and holds them. His voice is now gentle:

JOEL GOLDSMITH (CONT'D)

But I don't really see what good these books of mine can do you, Robert. For most people, these might... point the way, or open a door or hold out a promise of something, but...

ROBERT

It's okay, Mr. Goldsmith. I just came here to see you.

JOEL GOLDSMITH

Me?

Robert nods.

JOEL GOLDSMITH (CONT'D)

I don't know if you understand this, but -

ASSISTANT

(Popping back in)

Joel, people are -

JOEL GOLDSMITH

Hold on honey.

(Waves the door shut. Leans close to Robert.)

Look, Robert. I feel very, very fortunate to meet you, too.

ROBERT

Can you tell me what happened to me?

JOEL GOLDSMITH

... I think you already know.

ROBERT

But I don't.

JOEL GOLDSMITH

You just told me, in complete detail, that you have been re-born into Christ consciousness. You got satori, nirvana, enlightenment. You woke up.

ROBERT

But what does that mean?

JOEL GOLDSMITH

Robert - did you see all those people in there today?

ROBERT

Sure.

JOEL GOLDSMITH

Did you see the look on their faces while I was talking? The hope? The faith? That yearning for God, for total unity with the Christ consciousness, for never-ending transcendent Grace?

ROBERT

I guess...

JOEL GOLDSMITH

Well, you got it. The whole nine yards. Congratulations.

(Stands)

Can you come and see me next time I

talk? I wanna hear more about your experiences. I talk here every month. Just come back and see me. I'll tell 'em to let you in. Oh -

Joel Goldsmith stops before going out the door, digs into his valise and hauls out a tattered hardback copy of Autobiography of a Yogi by Paramahansa Yogananda.

JOEL GOLDSMITH

And read this. Yogananda may be a lot better able to help you than I can. He's in the States, he's got an ashram in Encinitas, California.

FADE TO:

INT. TRAIN TO THE BRONX, NEW YORK, 1943 - NIGHT

On the train ride back home, Robert opens the book to a photograph of YOGANANDA and gazes at it.

FADE TO:

INT. YOGANANDA'S ASHRAM, ENCINITAS, 1945 - DAY

The photograph from the book fades to the actual Yogananda. Robert stands before him, carrying two suitcases.

Yogananda, beatific, is every inch the Indian yogi, attired in long orange robes and flowing hair, surrounded by disciples and devotees, American students in orange robes with shaven heads, wearing sandalwood bead necklaces. Sun shines through the open windows, the greenery of California is beyond.

Yogananda is sitting on a dais. An altar behind him holds photographs of his gurus, statues of Hindu deities Shiva, Vishnu, Ganesh, Kali, Laxmi, with bowls of fruit, vases of flowers and smoke curling from lit incense sticks.

YOGANANDA

(Joining palms together)
Namaste.

ROBERT

... Hello.

YOGANANDA

Are you the young man who came here all
the way from New York?

Robert nods.

YOGANANDA (CONT'D)

Did you leave your family?

Robert nods.

YOGANANDA (CONT'D)

And what do you want from being here?

ROBERT

I want to become a monk in the Self
Realization Fellowship and live here.

YOGANANDA

First we initiate you. Then, after a
few months, we see if this life of an
ascetic serving God agrees with you.
When you're ready, we can see about the
ordination.

FADE TO:

INT. YOGANANDA'S ASHRAM, FRONT YARD, 1945 - DAY

We see scissors snipping away at 16-year-old Robert's hair.

FADE TO:

INT. YOGANANDA'S ASHRAM, ROBERT'S ROOM, 1945 - DAY

In his monk's cell, Robert looks at the suitcases tucked
under his cot. There are orange robes folded on the cot,
he puts them on.

FADE TO:

INT. YOGANANDA'S ASHRAM, PRAYER HALL, 1945 - EARLY MORNING

It is early morning, still dark, maybe 4:30am. Robert
joins a line of American monks and nuns in orange robes,
filing into the prayer hall.

They begin to chant, joined by a harmonium, table, sitar and dholak (double-ended drum.) "O God Beautiful" and "In the Temple of Silence."

Through it all, Robert takes in the ambience, observes the looks on people's faces, the grandiose gestures of Yogananda.

They sit for a while in meditation, the various participants either wincing in contemplation, smiling faintly, weeping, opening an eye and shifting painfully, or periodically falling asleep.

Finally, a BELL is rung. Yogananda lights fresh incense and sits on his dais to give his morning talk.

YOGANANDA

...You watch a tragedy in a motion picture house, and when it is over, you say: "O, it was a fine picture!" So must you be able to look upon the pictures of trials of your own life and say: "O, my life is interesting, with troubles and difficulties to be overcome. These are all my stimulants to show me my errors, and help me assume the right mental attitude by which I can watch with joy the fascinating spectacle of life."

The consciousness of man is made of God and is pain-proof. All physical and mental sufferings come by identification, imagination, and wrong human habits of thinking. We have to travel along the labyrinthine path of life, visiting many motion picture houses of varied experiences, entering them with the consciousness of being entertained and instructed.

Then life and death will be watched with an unchangeable, joyous consciousness. We will find our consciousness to be one with cosmic consciousness, unchanged by the human

waking of birth or the sleep of death.
Thus we will watch the cosmic motion
picture with perennial, ever-new joy.

Please keep this in mind during the
day. Before breakfast, I would like
you all to welcome some new siblings
into our spiritual family: Ann from
Atlanta, Joseph from Salt Lake City,
and Robert from New York.

The three initiates kneel before Yogananda with heads bowed.

YOGANANDA (CONT'D)

As we conduct this initiation, remember
that we are one, big, happy family here
in the Self Realization Fellowship, not
just in our ashram, but on this world
we share. We are unified in our love
of God and our devotion to service in
the name of the Divine.

Assembled students murmur approvingly.

YOGANANDA (CONT'D)

(Leaning close to Robert's ear)
Robert, do you promise to love me, no
matter what you think you see me do?

ROBERT

(His face betrays some hesitation)
... Sure.

The initiation is performed. Afterwards, there is applause.

The next scenes are of daily life at the SRF:

Communal gardening; chanting sessions; lectures by
Yogananda; devotional offering ceremonies of fruit, flowers
and incense to statues of Hindu gods such as Krishna,
Shiva, Ganesh, Kali and Laxmi; meditation at different
hours of the day in the common hall.

FADE TO:

INT. YOGANANDA'S ASHRAM, PRAYER HALL, 1946 - AFTERNOON

Robert is sitting in the prayer hall while a student

approaches Yogananda.

STUDENT

Excuse me Master...

YOGANANDA

Yes, my dear one? What is it?

STUDENT

Master, I came to ask your permission to go see my family in Michigan for Christmas. It'll only be for two weeks, and I was thinking I'd be back on January tenth... but if you think that's too long, maybe I should stay here this Christmas and go next year? Or -

YOGANANDA

(Smiles sweetly)

Not at all, my child, of course you can go visit your family. You should visit them, they miss you.

STUDENT

Thank you Master, thank you.

Student bows, leaves.

Robert closes his eyes again.

Yogananda goes back to tending the altar when STUDENT #2 approaches.

STUDENT #2

Master...

YOGANANDA

Yes?

STUDENT #2

Master... I was wondering... if it's okay, if I could go see my family in Oregon for Christmas... just for two weeks.

Yogananda frowns.

STUDENT #2 (CONT'D)

Would that be alright with you?

YOGANANDA

Are you serious? Or are you trying to joke with me?

STUDENT #2

Well, I...

YOGANANDA

How dare you even mention such a ridiculous idea? Visit your family! Absolutely not. Go back to your cell immediately and do mantra recitation until dinner. Don't waste my time with such questions again.

Student #2 bows and leaves, humiliated.

Yogananda casts a glance at Robert.

YOGANANDA (CONT'D)

My dear boy, you've been here for almost a year now.

Robert nods.

YOGANANDA (CONT'D)

Do you think me unreasonable?

Robert shakes head.

YOGANANDA (CONT'D)

A terrible tyrant?

Robert shakes head.

YOGANANDA (CONT'D)

A benevolent despot?

Robert shakes head.

YOGANANDA (CONT'D)

But you surely must think me a hypocrite, having seen my two absolutely different responses to two devotees with the same request?

ROBERT

I think I understand about the students. The first one had a supportive family, and a lot of self-confidence. So you weren't worried

about him coming back, right? You knew he'd stay on the path, continue to practice, and he'd be back when he said he would.

Yogananda nods.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

But you could see the next student had a negative, unsupportive family and low self-esteem. So you were worried he'd stop practice and get bogged down in the pitfalls of worldly life, right?

Yogananda nods.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

But one thing I don't understand, if you don't mind my asking is... what's the point of all...

Robert sweeps his arm to indicate the altar, the statues, the prayer hall, the meditation cushions, the robes he is wearing.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

...this stuff?

YOGANANDA

Your meaning, my child? Please enlighten me.

ROBERT

I don't get why you have everyone doing all this... extra stuff.

YOGANANDA

Extra such as?

ROBERT

The mantras, the prostrations, the praying, the outfits... Isn't it kind of beside the point?

Yogananda raises eyebrow.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

To the truth, I mean.

YOGANANDA

To which truth my child?

ROBERT

Well... you have everybody searching for the atman, the universal self, or praying to God, when they already are the universal Self. I mean, why don't you just tell them?

YOGANANDA

(Slowly)
Tell them?

ROBERT

Tell them they already are what they're looking for. They are universal consciousness. They are God. Why bother with all the ceremonies and formalities and practices and all that?

YOGANANDA

And that is how you would run things if you were given the opportunity, is it?

ROBERT

I don't want to run anything. I just think it'd be easier to say to them, "Who are you? Who is it that wants Self realization?" You know what I mean?

And you could tell them how the individual "I" is just like a... just like a thought. It doesn't really exist. There is no individual I. It's like... hypnosis. Mass hypnosis.

When all there is, is consciousness. Love, joy, bliss. Why don't people grab onto their sense of "I", and follow it backward 'til they get there?

Long pause.

YOGANANDA

Robert, I have done very well running things the way they are, thank you very much.

Yogananda goes back to tending the altar, but his mind is not on it. His hand is shaking.

Robert gets up to leave.

ROBERT

I'm still getting ordained next week?

YOGANANDA

We'll see. We will see, my dear child,
about that.

FADE TO:

INT. YOGANANDA'S ASHRAM, ROBERT'S ROOM, 1946 - NIGHT

Robert is lying on his cot, facing the wall, in the same position as in his bedroom in the Bronx. A QUIET KNOCK comes at his door.

Robert gets up to open it. Yogananda is standing there. He doesn't look beatific or grandiose.

YOGANANDA

May I come in?

Robert lets him in. Yogananda quickly closes the door and paces.

ROBERT

Do you want to sit down?

YOGANANDA

No. I want you to leave. Leave the ashram.

ROBERT

(Eyes widen)

I thought I was supposed to get ordained.

YOGANANDA

This is not the place for you. I've been thinking about it, and this is not your path.

ROBERT

Not my path?

YOGANANDA

No. I do not know what I was thinking.

You are not a yogi. The way of yoga is not for you. Don't you see? No practices will benefit you, because you've already attained it.

ROBERT

Attained *what*?

YOGANANDA

(Sitting next to Robert on the cot.)
Jnana, Robert. Wisdom. Your path is *jnana marga*, the path of wisdom.

I want you to go see a great teacher in India. He awakened spontaneously just like you, at a very young age. He is very great, his light outshines the sun a million times. He is love itself, he is the embodiment of compassion. He is a *jnani*.

Yogananda hands a book which has been folded in his robe to Robert. On the cover is Ramana Maharshi, a tanned bearded man with an expression of peace, compassion and understanding.

He smiles at Robert. It is the same man who used to appear to him when he was a baby in the crib.

ROBERT (ADULT V.O.)

So at the age of eighteen I flew across the Pacific Ocean to go see Ramana Maharshi at Ramana Ashram in Tiruvannamallai, South India.

FADE TO:

EXT. WARNER PARK, LOS ANGELES, 1991 - DAY

Robert is sitting with his students at a concrete picnic table in a recently completed park in the suburban neighbourhood of Woodland Hills. Ten students are with him: ED, MARY, DANA, FRED, EMILIO and five others.

DANA

How did it feel to finally be going to see Ramana?

ROBERT

It felt great.

FRED

Had you known he was the little man who used to appear to you when you were a baby?

ROBERT

I figured it out a few years earlier, when I was in the library to do a book report for school. Something made me go look on the philosophy shelf, and there was a book with Ramana's picture on the cover. My hair stood on end. Literally.

MARY

And that's when you realized who he was?

ROBERT

Yes, that's when I first realized Ramana Maharshi was the little man who had been visiting me every night up until the age of seven.

EMILIO

But he wasn't actually visiting you.

ROBERT

He wasn't?

EMILIO

I mean, it was just a ... like a dream or something, wasn't it? Or a premonition, or a memory from a past life?

ROBERT

No, it was really him.

EMILIO

But he was in India.

ROBERT

Don't forget, a *jnani* can be in many places at once. He is not confined to the body. In India there are many stories of sages who appeared simultaneously in places far apart at

the same time. Those stories have been corroborated by witnesses who were there at the time.

DANA

But those are just stories.

ROBERT

They have not been part of your experience.

When I saw Ramana as a child, it was a vision. Remember, a vision is not a memory or a dream or anything else. It is an actual phenomena, happening in the phenomenal world.

I have visions all the time. Just like the other day, I was walking beside the Ganges River with Ramana. We were chatting about the weather.

Silence. Ed and Mary are there to be in Robert's presence, they are withdrawn into self-reflection. Fred and Dana are mulling over his words, and Emilio is feeling unsettled.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Who's hungry? Who wants to go and eat?

STUDENTS

Me! Me!

The students are competitive to take Robert's arm. (He is a bit off-balance because of early stage Parkinson's Disease.) They also vie to be the one to drive him, to help him into the car, and so on.

INT. "FOLLOW YOUR HEART" VEGETARIAN RESTAURANT, LOS ANGELES, 1991 - DAY - CONTINUOUS

The restaurant is a hippie haven, decorated with Buddhist and Hindu motifs. As the group eats, they chat and joke.

Robert eats silently. Ed notices this.

ED

What are you thinking about Robert?

ROBERT

I'm thinking about *you*.

ED

(Taken aback)

Me?

ROBERT

I'm thinking of how to cook you.

Robert goes back to eating. The other students carry on. Ed looks sideways at Robert, then smiles, going back to his own food.

As the students vie to pay Robert's bill, one of them points. A woman in the group has frozen, eyes shut, her spoon halfway to her mouth.

ROBERT

Just leave her like that. Don't disturb her.

They quietly leave, looking back at the woman alone, in bliss, her spoon halfway to her mouth, immobile.

We see her in the foreground as Robert and the students exit onto the sunny sidewalk and get into their cars.

FADE TO:

INT. CROSS-PACIFIC PROPELLER PLANE, 1947 - DAY

The sounds of the CAR ENGINES merge into the ROAR OF A TWIN-PROPELLER PASSENGER PLANE.

The 18-year-old Robert is sitting, his hair grown out a bit, in civilian clothes, looking out the window as the cabin shakes and shudders.

ROBERT (ADULT V.O.)

In 1947, crossing the Pacific in an airplane was a lot more difficult. It was a propeller plane, and the journey was very long.

When I got to Tiruvannamallai, the town where Ramana Maharshi's ashram was, I bought a bag of fruit at the market and took a bullock cart to the ashram.

FADE TO:

EXT. SOUTH INDIAN COUNTRYSIDE, 1947 - EARLY MORNING

Robert is shown, weary but elated, bumping in the oxcart. He is atop a stack of burlap bags. The driver is an emaciated farmer in white cotton lungi (dhoti.) The cart moves slowly on the pot-holed road, past verdant greenery.

The villagers are waking up with the first rays of the sun, drawing water from wells, sprinkling feed for chickens, school children getting into their uniforms, having their hair braided or combed, older sisters tracing rice flower decorations in the dust before their homes, etc.

FADE TO:

EXT. MOUNT ARUNACHALA, 1947 - MORNING

The sun is now high. We see Robert walking on the holy hill. He is on the mountain path which winds up to the ashram and caves where Ramana Maharshi lived for years as a silent ascetic in his youth.

A figure appears on the trail above Robert: it is Ramana, clad in a white cotton loincloth, with a white towel draped over one shoulder. He uses a walking stick and carries an iron pot of water in one hand.

Robert's face is euphoric. He throws off his pack and begins to run up the trail towards Ramana. He then stops to peel off his shirt, kick off his shoes, pull off his pants. Naked, out of breath, he stumbles to Ramana and drops to his knees at his teacher's feet.

RAMANA

(Looking down)

My son, I have been waiting for you.

Get up, get up.

Ramana reaches down to pull Robert up by the shoulders. His face is kindly. Robert beams with joy.

FADE TO:

EXT. RAMANA ASHRAM GATE, 1947 - MORNING

Now the bullock cart has arrived to the ashram. Robert gets down and enters the ashram grounds. There are white-washed buildings, the shade of trees, and clean-swept grounds.

An Indian worker points him the way to the prayer hall.

INT. RAMANA ASHRAM PRAYER HALL, 1947 - MORNING (CONTINUOUS)

Entering the door he sees Ramana sitting on a couch raised on a dais at the far end, reading his mail. It is still early morning, nearly 8 or 8:30am, but the South Indian sun is blazing down outside.

There is a small guard rail before Ramana, and the hall is sprinkled with students gazing at him or lost in meditation as he reads his mail. Among the students are Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Jains, Sikhs, Buddhists and various Westerners from different walks of life. They are all SILENT.

Robert is led by an attendant before Ramana.

Another attendant is pulling Ramana's fan.

Ramana looks up as Robert arrives, and gestures for him to sit down.

Robert lays the bag of fruit on Ramana's feet and sits down, wearily, smiling.

Ramana smiles at him.

RAMANA

Where have you come from?

ROBERT

New York City.

RAMANA

Are the buildings really so tall there?

Robert nods.

RAMANA

Have you eaten?

Ramana gestures for his attendants to bring Robert breakfast.

They spread a banana leaf before him, washing it with water from a metal cup, and dole out steamed rice cakes with coconut and peanut chutney, pepper porridge and fresh fruit.

As Robert eats the food, the hall is SILENT. Ramana continues to read his mail, then is brought a newspaper, which he flips through.

The students in the hall continue watching him or meditating quietly. The sun's heat is increasing.

As Robert finishes he curls up to sleep on the floor. Ramana gestures to his attendants and they rouse Robert, bringing him to a small shack.

EXT. RAMANA ASHRAM, ROBERT'S SHACK, 1947 - MORNING
(CONTINUOUS)

They arrive to the door of a modest shack behind the prayer hall.

Seen behind the shack is the gate to the mountain path, and the rising shape of Mount Arunachala (whose bulk recalls Capitol Butte in Sedona, Arizona.)

RAMANA

This is where you can stay, while you are here.

INT. RAMANA ASHRAM, ROBERT'S SHACK, 1947 - MORNING
(CONTINUOUS)

The attendants lift Robert's bag into the shack and wait outside, leaving Robert standing in the shack with Ramana.

RAMANA

How was your trip?

ROBERT

Very long.

They smile at each other.

RAMANA

Take some rest, now.

Robert nods.

RAMANA (CONT'D)

Ask my attendants if you need anything,
they will provide you.

Robert nods.

Ramana leaves with his attendants.

Robert lies down on the cot, turning on his side, as he did
on his bed in the Bronx, toward the wall.

ROBERT (ADULT V.O.)

In my life I have been with many
spiritual teachers, some well known,
and many unknown. I was with Papa Ram
Dass, Neem Karoli Baba, Anandamayi Ma,
Nisargadatta Maharaj and many others.
But I never witnessed such love, such
compassion, as with Ramana.

He came that evening to wake me up, and
brought me food again. He came alone.
Can you imagine that?

FADE TO:

INT. RAMANA ASHRAM, ROBERT'S SHACK, 1947 - EVENING

We see Ramana arriving with the metal dish with Robert's
evening meal. It is difficult for Ramana to walk at this
point in his life. They sit together on the bed.

ROBERT (ADULT V.O. CONT'D)

I bet you think we spoke of great
things then, very profound things.

But Ramana was just a simple man. He
was the soul of the universe.

He asked me a few simple questions... why
I had come, how long I was planning to

stay.

DANA (V.O. FROM SATSANG IN L.A., 1991)

Did you ever tell him about seeing him
in the crib when you were a baby?

ROBERT (ADULT V.O.)

No.

Ramana sits with Robert watching him eat his dinner from
the metal plate in the small shack as the light turns
purple in dusk outside.

ROBERT (ADULT V.O. CONT'D)

He just said that we had been together
before, in a past life, and that he was
happy to see me again.

And I laughed, to meet someone who saw
the world the same way I did.

FADE TO:

INT. RAMANA ASHRAM, PRAYER HALL, 1947 - DAY

We see Robert sitting against the wall of the prayer hall
with other devotees.

ROBERT (ADULT V.O. CONT'D)

We talked for one or two days, and I
then I settled in against the wall with
the other devotees, watching the stream
of people coming in to see Ramana.

We see some of the people coming over time to see Ramana...
Catholic priests, little children, bespectacled academics
bearing Hindu scriptures, a demanding Indian soldier in
boots, devout farmers, earnest Westerners.

ROBERT (ADULT V.O. CONT'D)

And as I sat and watched the people
coming in, I could see there were three
types of people who came to see Ramana:

First were the seekers. They came out
of curiosity, or to compare him with
other teachers. They stayed a short
time, gossiped, complained, asked many

questions and then left.

The next group were the disciples - they had accepted advaita vedanta, or non-dualism, which was the tradition that Ramana taught in, as their path, but they still had doubts. Some of them still went and saw other teachers, and they all read a lot of books, filling their heads with more ideas and concepts.

Finally, there were the devotees. They were mostly silent. These were the ones who made progress. They didn't care about anything other than just being in Ramana's presence, and letting his grace cook their egos away. They spent so much time with him, they started to resemble him.

This is true guru *bhakti*, total devotion to the teacher.

They never looked at time, asking whether they'd become enlightened tomorrow or next week.

There was one Indian devotee who had been with Ramana for forty years, and one day he said to Ramana,

We see Indian devotee.

DEVOTEE

Master, I've been with you for almost forty years now, and still nothing has happened. I'm still the same.

ROBERT (ADULT V.O.)

To which Ramana responded,

RAMANA

Why don't you stay another forty years and see what happens?

ROBERT (ADULT V.O.)

He preferred people to be simple, not elaborate and complicated with too much

book-knowledge.

He encouraged devotion, complete surrender to the truth, to the universal Self. The only practice he advocated was Self-inquiry, asking "Who am I?" to trace the feeling of "I am" back to the universal Heart.

But for many, just being in his presence was enough.

I heard that one day the man who had been pulling Ramana's fan faithfully for many years suddenly dropped dead.

We see the punkah-wallah, a thin, bearded man in a lungi, fall to the floor.

ROBERT (ADULT V.O. CONT'D)

And Ramana said,

Ramana mouthing the words:

ROBERT (ADULT V.O. CONT'D)

"He's completely cooked. He won't be coming back." He had realized the Self. Just from being in Ramana's presence for so long, he had merged into the teacher.

Ramana kneels by the dead man, touching his chest and forehead.

ROBERT (ADULT V.O. CONT'D)

Now let's talk about you, and all the problems that you think you have.

FADE TO:

INT. HENRY DENISON'S LIVINGROOM, LOS ANGELES, 1992 - DAY

Robert is sitting in a living room overlooking the Silverlake reservoir in L.A. The lesson group (satsang) has now grown to thirty students, including the familiar faces of DANA, FRED, ED, KERIMA, MARY and EMILIO, as well as many new ones. There are more tape recorders, several microphones.

HENRY DENISON is an affluent spiritual seeker in his 80's, he has a Great Dane who is also listening attentively.

ROBERT

I talk to a lot of you during the week, and many of you tell me about your problems. But I say to you, are there really any problems? Are there? Or is the earth just not spinning the way you want it to?

If you are really honest with yourself, the very next time something dissatisfies you or makes you angry, ask yourself, who is having the problem?

Who is getting angry?

Who is protecting their rights, as if you had any?

Who has their feelings hurt?

Why, I do.

I am the one who is getting angry, who is getting their feelings hurt, feeling out of sort.

And you should ask yourself, well, who is this I that is always getting angry, getting hurt, feeling out of sort? I know this I has been with me since as far back as I can remember. In fact, the "I" is a string holding all these experiences together.

Who is I? And it sounds like bad English, but it isn't. What you're really saying is, where did the personal "I" come from?

And as you do this, you'll find something funny.

As you follow the "I" thread back to

the source, which is universal
consciousness, bliss, your so-called
troubles will disappear of their own
accord.

Because you never really had them.

You, as an individual, never existed.

You were never born. You never
prevailed, and you can never die.

What you are is perfect, universal
consciousness.

Keep in mind that I'm not telling you
something I read in a book. I'm just
sharing with you my own experience.

So for whom is there a problem?

Robert looks around the room and takes a sip of water from
a glass. All the students are pensive.

One man with a white beard is fast asleep.

Some students are lying down, others sitting, on the carpet
or on chairs and couches.

Robert goes to put his water glass down, but has some
trouble reaching the coffee table. Mary helps him.

ROBERT

(Clearing throat)

Are there any questions? Comments?
Please feel free to ask anything about
what you have heard, or about spiritual
life.

Or you can throw a pie at me, whatever
you like.

Silence.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Speak now, or forever hold your peace.

RAUL

Robert, I'm just confused about one

thing.

ROBERT

Go ahead.

RAUL

You say nobody dies. And nobody is born.

ROBERT

Correct.

RAUL

Then how is it that we can see somebody being born, and somebody dying?

ROBERT

Because that's what you see. But it's not the truth.

RAUL

But if that's all I see, how can I know if there's something else, something beyond the body?

ROBERT

You have to find out for yourself.

RAUL

But from my perspective - I see you here. And I'm talking to you. I know that I have a body, and I know you have one too.

ROBERT

That's what you believe.

RAUL

That's what I believe? No, that's what I see, what everyone sees. That's how we know it's true. We certify that it is a fact, because we all can see it.

ROBERT

Sure, it's a fact. But it's not the truth.

Because you've been brainwashed, you've been hypnotized, from a very young age, by your parents, by your churches, by

your schools, to believe that you are a body, that you've got the name so-and-so, that you are a little boy or a little girl, that you were born, and that one day you will die.

RAUL

Yes, of course.

ROBERT

But it's all lies, hocus pocus. You're being fed a story.

RAUL

But if that's all we know - for instance, I was raised a Catholic. And I've been taught that we all have a soul, and that after death, we go to heaven or hell.

ROBERT

So what's your point?

RAUL

I want you to prove to me what is the truth.

ROBERT

Prove it to yourself.

RAUL

But I want you to - can you show me, definitely, can you *prove* to me, what happens when you die?

ROBERT

Who dies?

RAUL

When a person dies.

ROBERT

What person?

RAUL

Any person - say, a woman. And this woman dies. Her body has stopped breathing. As soon as she stops breathing, the body starts to rot, it starts to decompose. What is her

experience?

ROBERT

Why are you worried about her experience? Concentrate on yourself. Don't worry about other people's experiences. What about you?

RAUL

Me?

ROBERT

What you really want to know is, what happens when you die. Is that correct?

RAUL

Well alright then, yes. What will happen to me when I die? What experiences will I go through? Will my soul leave the body and go to heaven?

ROBERT

If you're going to heaven then you're not dead, are you?

RAUL

But the body - my body is lying there, it is rotten. Starting to decompose. The life is completely gone from it. What happens to me now? What is my experience?

ROBERT

Your experience when the body dies will be whatever you believe death to be at that time. If you think you're going to hell, then you'll go to hell. If you think you've going to heaven, then you'll go to heaven.

Then it appears that you're taking a sort of vacation for a while, on the astral plane, the causal plane. Then you take up another body and start the whole thing over again.

And again, and again, and again, going round and round, until finally you're sick of the whole game.

RAUL

So there is reincarnation.

ROBERT

No, it's an illusion. It's all an illusion, do you get what I'm saying to you? In reality, there is no body, no mind, no birth, no death, no world, no universe.

RAUL

... But you're speaking to me right now.

ROBERT

That's how you see it. Because you think you are the body. When you believe you are the body, then there is the world, heaven, hell, God, birth, death, karma and everything else. But I tell you, none of it is real. It is like a dream.

ED

A nightmare.

ROBERT

And then you wake up.

FADE TO:

INT. RAMANA ASHRAM, ROBERT'S SHACK, 1948 - EARLY MORNING

We see Robert waking up. It is very early morning.

EXT. RAMANA ASHRAM, COMMON YARD, 1948 - EARLY MORNING
(CONTINUOUS)

Robert bathes himself under a hand-pump.

Stars are still twinkling above.

He is wearing a south-Indian lungi (sarong), and his skin is tanned.

INT. RAMANA ASHRAM, PRAYER HALL, 1948 - EARLY MORNING

(CONTINUOUS)

Robert enters the prayer hall, where a few other devotees are gathering, sitting on the floor in lotus or cross-legged position.

Someone clears their throat and slowly, they start to CHANT THE DAILY HYMN, AKSHARA MANA MALAI (THE MARITAL GARLAND OF LETTERS) composed by Ramana to Mount Arunachala, the holy hill, equivalent to the Hindu god Shiva; and to the universal consciousness, and substratum underlying and permeating all phenomena, the ultimate reality: *paramatman*.

Throughout the following, subtitles translate the Tamil and Sanskrit verses of the hymn:

DEVOTEES

(SINGING)

Arunachala Shiva! Arunachala Shiva!
Arunachala Shiva! Arunachala!
Arunachala Shiva! Arunachala Shiva!
Arunachala Shiva! Arunachala!

O Arunachala, you root out the ego of those who think of you at heart.

O Arunachala, may I and you, like Azhagu and Sundaram become one and indivisible!

O Arunachala, why did you enter my home and carry me away and why do you keep me now a prisoner in your home, the cave of the Heart?

For whose sake did you conquer me? Was it for your pleasure or my good? If you now cast me off, the world would blame you, Arunachala.

Escape this blame. Why did you make me remember you? Who will let you go hereafter?

Kinder far are you, O Arunachala, than one's own natural mother. Such is your abundant grace.

Stay firmly in my mind, O Arunachala,
so that it may not elude you and wander
elsewhere.

Reveal your true beauty, O Arunachala,
so that the fickle mind is prevented
from wandering in the streets and is
stilled by your Presence.

Is it manliness, O Arunachala, if you
fail now to embrace me and destroy my
maidenhood?

Is it proper, O Arunachala, that you
should pretend to be asleep when
strangers are dragging me away from you?

When those robbers, the five senses,
enter my mind, are you not present
there at home to keep them out?

You are one without a second, the sole,
real being, O Arunachala. Who can hide
you or hide from you and come in here?
If strangers come in, it is with your
knowledge. All this is but your
jugglery.

Significance of OM unrivalled,
unsurpassed, who can understand you, O
Arunachala?

Like a good mother, you are bound in
duty to bestow your grace on me and
govern me.

You are the all-seeing witness, seeing
all sights and seen by none. Who can
see you? It is for you to see me and
give me your grace.

As their CHANTING INCREASES IN VOLUME, Ramana appears,
walked to the dais by his attendants. By this point,
toward the end of his life, Ramana has severe arthritis in
his hips and legs, which makes walking difficult. But he
is completely indifferent to his body's condition.

He radiates peace, calm and bliss. The twinkle in his eye and trace of a smile bely great compassion.

As he appears, the sun breaks out from behind Arunachala, also backlighting Ramana as he climbs onto his couch and begins to CHANT ALONG WITH THE DEVOTEES, smiling.

The sunrise is glorious and swift behind the mountain, and we move up the mountain in exactly the same manner as we earlier did Capitol Butte in Sedona, Arizona at the beginning of the movie.

As the sun climbs into the sky past the hill's crest it floods the screen with light.

When the light fades, we see Ramana reading his mail. He is as he was when Robert first entered the prayer hall.

Now Robert, in lungi, sits against the side wall with other devotees, just watching the proceedings. Ramana dictates some responses to letters, which a devotee takes down. The punkah-wallah is pulling the fan.

Ramana is handed his daily newspaper, which he starts to read.

Soon a line of seekers hopeful to speak to him begins to form, and he lowers and lays aside his newspaper to allow the first of them to speak.

It is a FARMER'S WIFE, crying and rending her sari, because her husband has committed suicide due to crop failure brought on by drought. Her only son is an alcoholic who has spent all the family money on alcohol, and her daughter has left home with a man other than the one she and her husband had arranged.

She has come to Ramana in desperation.

Ramana smiles at her and assures her to surrender all her troubles to God and she will be taken care of. He allows her to stay several days at the ashram.

The next devotee is a wealthy PARSI (Zoroastrian) WOMAN whose family in Bombay has ostracized her because she accepts Ramana as her guru. Ramana welcomes her to the

ashram and gives instructions for her to be accommodated in ARTHUR and LUCIA OSBORNE's cottage.

Next is a MUSLIM RAILROAD EMPLOYEE whose son in Madras is sick with a tumor no-one can treat. He shows Ramana a photograph of his son before the tumor, and normal handsome boy, and after, bedridden and deformed. Ramana assures him that his son will be alright and to surrender the situation to Mohammed or Allah, since all Gods are one.

RAMANA

(Turning to ATTENDANT)

People come to me with their troubles.
To whom shall I go with mine?

A group of three HINDU PUNDITS approaches Ramana. They are carrying age-worn copies of the major Hindu scriptures: The *Bhagavad Gita*, The *Mahabharata* and The *Vedas*.

PUNDIT #1

Sri Ramana, in Gita it is clearly shown that non-duality is relative, depending on the perspective of he who speaks, isn't it?

Ramana does not say anything.

PUNDIT #2

But in Mahabharata we see Sri Krishna directs Arjuna not out of Dharma, which is the caste obligation of humans, but out of karma, which is divine retribution for past acts. The karma must be purged before insight can occur, isn't it?

Ramana does not say anything.

PUNDIT #3

And yet the Vedas proclaim that only he who has purified himself through virtuous activity in past lives and rigorous practice in this life can approach the door to enlightenment, through *sadhana*. Isn't it?

Ramana looks from one pundit to the other, a faint smile on his face.

PUNDIT #1

Sri Ramana, please kindly affirm which of us is correct. Obviously non-duality is only valid as part of a larger path to godlihood.

PUNDIT #2

Nonsense, ignorant fool. Please excuse this fellow, Sri Ramana. He himself is an example of the impure karma, the life defiled by self-concern, procreation, the pleasures of the body.

PUNDIT #3

Both of my associates embarrass themselves through squabbling like haggling merchants in the marketplace. Instead their time and effort had better be spent in study, breath control and mantra japa.

PUNDIT #1

Pompous hypocrites!

PUNDIT #2

Arrogant asses!

PUNDIT #3

Mendacious morons!

The three pundits stop, out of breath, and look to Ramana.

RAMANA

(Quietly)

Remember the reason for which you came.

PUNDIT #1

You mean to Tiruvannamallai?

PUNDIT #2

Or to this ashram?

PUNDIT #3

Or to this life?

Ramana is silent. The abashed pundits slowly go to sit down on the floor and introspect.

SILENCE.

Ramana is about to pick up his newspaper again.

There is a COMMOTION at the door. HENRY WELLS, a Scotsman in his 40's bursts into the prayer hall. Attendants try to restrain him but he breaks free, runs across the hall and throws himself at Ramana's feet, prostrating on his belly. His arms and legs are shaking.

Henry Wells BABBLES PRAYERS HYSTERICALLY.

Ramana waves the attendants away, and lets Henry Wells carry on. Robert and other students look on, continue their yoga, meditation, mantra recitation, sleeping, etc.

Eventually Henry Wells pulls himself to his knees and grasps at the guardrail protecting Ramana.

HENRY WELLS

Ramana, you are my mother, my father,
my daughter, my son, my lover, my life,
my God, my everything!

Let me serve you Ramana, my Lord, my
master!

Henry Wells is weeping and shaking. He grabs fistfuls of pound notes from his pockets and dumps them on Ramana's feet.

Ramana merely smiles.

FADE TO:

INT. RAMANA ASHRAM, PRAYER HALL, 1948 - MORNING - ONE MONTH
LATER

The scene is similar to the last - morning prayers have just been recited. Henry Wells comes in and makes three prostrations, then quickly gets up and tries to sit in lotus posture to meditate.

He opens one eye, squinting, to see if Ramana is noticing him.

Ramana smiles at him.

FADE TO:

INT. RAMANA ASHRAM, PRAYER HALL, 1948 -MORNING - TWO MONTHS
LATER

Again, it is the same time in the morning. Now Henry Wells
is WHISPERING with a group of SEEKERS at the back.

HENRY WELLS

The management here is not running
things properly at all. They're
completely misguided. We have to do
something to put things right.

Ramana doesn't know what goes on
outside the prayer hall, we have to
take matters into our own hands.

The SEEKERS nod in agreement. Some of the local WORKERS
glare at Henry Wells in the background.

FADE TO:

EXT. RAMANA ASHRAM, PRAYER HALL, 1948 - MORNING - THREE
MONTHS LATER

Robert is approaching the prayer hall in the morning.
Henry Wells blocks his path.

HENRY WELLS

Hey, Ronald.

ROBERT

Robert.

HENRY WELLS

Robert, I've been talking to some of
the others. Do you think Ramana should
be allowed to present himself like this?

ROBERT

Like what?

HENRY WELLS

Naked, with just a loincloth. Some of
us have been talking, and we think it's
not really decent. It was okay when he
was up on the mountain, sitting in the

cave, being an ascetic.

But not now. We must move forward to promote Ramana's message to the world. He looks like a wild man. He may frighten off some of the foreign devotees.

Robert just looks at him. He doesn't speak, but he makes to walk around Henry Wells.

HENRY WELLS (CONT'D)

(Grabbing Robert's sleeve)

Do you think Ramana is really enlightened?

ROBERT

(Looking at him carefully)

"Remember the reason for which you came."

Henry Wells keeps holding his sleeve, stunned.

We see Henry Wells' distraught face, torn by suspicion, vulnerability, agitation, as ROBERT'S ADULT VOICEOVER resumes:

ROBERT (ADULT V.O.)

The next day I didn't see Henry Wells. The day after that I didn't see him, and on the third day I asked some people what had happened to him. They said he'd packed his bags and gone back to Scotland.

Ramana had refunded him the entire forty thousand dollars he had given to the ashram. And added fifty rupees on top of it.

When disciples asked him why, Ramana replied that whatever you give to others, you give to yourself. And whatever you take from others, you take away from yourself. There is only one Self.

FADE TO:

EXT. RAMANA ASHRAM, 1950 - DAY/NIGHT

Archival footage of Ramana Maharshi toward the end of his life, returning from a walk on the mountain, playing with a baby someone is holding, patting Laxmi the Cow, sitting on a couch and drinking some water, etc.

Also, his very last days, body wasting away from cancer, still smiling as devotees make their way past for last *darshan* (blessings from seeing the guru.)

Following that, footage of the mourning crowds and funeral procession, as ROBERT'S ADULT VOICEOVER continues:

ROBERT (ADULT V.O.)

I was at Ramana Ashram for just over three years. During that time, I used the ashram as a sort of home base to visit other teachers. Ramana's health was already declining when I arrived. He had a lot pain in his hips and his legs from arthritis, and needed help to walk.

Ramana developed a tumor on his left arm. He finally relented to his devotees and let the doctors remove it in an operation. The tumor grew back on his right arm.

Ramana's body was wasting away, but he would not let his attendants screen him from the thousands of devotees who were coming for his darshan. When his followers wept and begged Ramana to heal himself as he had healed countless others, Ramana smiled and chided them: "Don't you remember that I am not the body? I will never leave you. I am not going away. Where could I go?"

I was with Papa Ram Dass in Bangalore when I heard that Ramana left the body. By the time I got to Ramana Ashram, the crowds were too great. So I stayed in the caves above the ashram for one

week, until the crowds died down.

The well-known Ramana biographer Arthur Osborne gave me enough money to remain in India for five more years, visiting other teachers.

I came back to India several more times over the next thirty years. I traveled the world when my body was still young.

I wanted to make sure I hadn't missed anything.

We see archival footage and photos of some of the better-known teachers Robert was with over the next thirty years or so: Papa Ram Dass, Anandamayi Ma, Neem Karoli Baba, Nisargadatta Maharaj...

ROBERT (ADULT V.O. CONT'D)

Five years after Ramana left the body I returned to the States for my mother's funeral. I hadn't seen anyone in my family for almost ten years.

FADE TO:

EXT. JEWISH CEMETERY, THE BRONX, 1955 - DAY

We see the funeral party gathered around Mrs. Adams' grave. (She is not buried next to her deceased husband, since he was Catholic.) The gathering is of lower middle class Jewish New Yorkers.

Relatives are CRYING.

DIRT IS BEING THROWN on the coffin.

The RABBI INTONES THE HEBREW FUNERAL RITES.

The twenty-seven-year-old Robert is standing, impartially, gaunt in an ill-fitting powder-blue suit. His skin is taut and has been deeply bronzed and cracked by wandering around in India for five years.

Robert's OLDER BROTHER, BROTHER'S WIFE and their babies are

standing near him.

Uncle Ralph wipes his eyes with a handkerchief. Robert's aunt does the same.

Robert is absorbed in his thoughts.

AUNT (O.S.)

Robert?

Robert does not seem to hear.

AUNT (O.S.) (CONT'D)

(Voice louder.)

Robert?

No response.

Aunt grasps Robert's shoulder.

AUNT (CONT'D)

Robert! What's wrong with you?

Robert raises his eyebrows.

AUNT (CONT'D)

Can't you even shed one tear at your own mother's funeral? After all she sacrificed and struggled for you and your brother all these years since your father died?

And then to thank her you just ran off to India and -

UNCLE RALPH

Now now Sophie, it's not Robert's fault what happened - you know he was always special. Let's just let bygones be bygones and -

Robert's brother steps in, moving his wife and children away as if Robert were rabid.

BROTHER

What a load of bullshit! I'd like to know what's wrong with you too! Standing there like a statue!

Think you're above it all, Robert?

Is this all some sort of joke or game
to you? Is that what it is?

(Choking back tears)

You don't give a goddamn about any of
us, do you? Did you know that Ma died
of heartache? What the hell is wrong
with you?

WHY DON'T YOU CRY?

We see Robert's face. From the blank expression tears well
up in his eyes. Tears pour from his eyes, and he is
WRACKED BY SOBS.

Robert's knees give way as his whole body is convulsed and
they have to hold him up from falling in the grave.

ROBERT (ADULT V.O.)

Somehow I always do what people want.
I don't know why. I can't help it.

At my mother's funeral I cried so much
they had to bring me a towel.

We see Robert being supported by his Aunt, Uncle, Brother
and Brother's wife.

FADE TO:

EXT. ROBERT'S HOUSE, LOS ANGELES, 1995 - DAY

Now Robert is sixty five years old, his Parkinson's Disease
is advancing and he has to be supported by his wife NICOLE
ADAMS and student Ed to get into Ed's car to go to satsang.
Nicole is a heavy-set, blonde woman with a heavy Caribbean
accent.

NICOLE

Honey, if you're not feeling well, you
shouldn't go with these people.

ED

He just took his Parkinson's medication
about thirty minutes ago. We just
increased the dosage. He should be

alright in a few minutes.

NICOLE

What do you people want from him,
anyway?

Ed looks at her.

ROBERT

I can't work any more, honey. The
satsang brings a few dollars in. It
will be helpful.

Nicole does not look convinced.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

They want to see the monkey dance.

FADE TO:

EXT. LANEWAY, BOMBAY, 1980 - DAY

Robert is fifty two years old, skin very tan, standing on a
busy road choked with HONKING, ROARING, BEEPING traffic.

A family of monkeys is perching on a crumbling wall above
his head. The wall belongs to a temple for Hanuman, the
Hindu monkey god.

Robert reaches into a plastic bag and feeds the monkeys
some miniature bananas, smiling.

Once the animals have taken all his bananas, Robert goes to
a cart and buys some more fruit and flowers.

He has an address written on a piece of paper, he routinely
consults it, looking up, and can be seen to ask some local
shopkeepers, who point him down an even smaller and more
congested NOISY alleyway.

EXT. NISARGADATTA MAHARAJ'S HOUSE, BOMBAY, 1980 - DAY
(CONTINUOUS)

Robert confirms from the piece of paper that he has the
right house... there is a small shop selling Indian leaf-
rolled cigarettes (beedis), school notebooks and household
goods appending the front of the narrow tenement.

The shopkeeper, a PLUMP WOMAN in a sari nods and points Robert the way inside, indicating he should climb the ladder just inside the front door.

INT. NISARGADATTA MAHARAJ'S FOYER, BOMBAY, 1980 - DAY
(CONTINUOUS)

Robert balances the bag of fruits and flowers which are banging against the ladder rungs as he fits his tall body up the steeply inclined ladder and pushes his head and shoulders through an opening at the top.

INT. NISARGADATTA MAHARAJ'S TEACHING LOFT, BOMBAY, 1980 - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

Robert emerges and must twist around to greet the figure sitting on a dais immediately beside the opening in the floor which the ladder leads to. It is NISARGADATTA MAHARAJ, now past eighty years old, a sinewy, animated Bombay shopkeeper who attained enlightenment forty years before. He is attired in white dhoti and cap.

Nisargadatta's loft reverberates with HONKS and BEEPS and ENGINE NOISES and VOICES from the streets below. There is also the MURMUR OF VARIOUS ATTENDEES.

Pictures of gurus line the walls, including two large oil paintings of Nisargadatta, and two large mirrors facing each other on opposite walls. There is also a prominent image of Ramana Maharshi.

The small space is crowded with foreigners and a few Indians, divided along the middle with women on one side and men on the other. There is a tape recorder, and several people with cameras and one or two with notepads. They wait with rapt attention, as the session is about to begin.

Nisargadatta has just lit a beedi (Indian cigarette) and has a handful of smoking incense in the other hand. His TRANSLATOR, an older grey-haired Indian man, is sitting to his left beside the dais.

Everything said between questioners and Nisargadatta for the rest of the scene has to be translated into the local language of Bombay, Marathi. Nisargadatta seems to

understand English perfectly, but all his answers, wild and intense, acerbic, emphatic and theatrical, are in Marathi and must be translated back into English.

Robert gives the flowers and fruit to Nisargadatta, who instructs an attendant to put them on an altar before a huge framed portrait of his guru. Nisargadatta also instructs the attendant to put the incense sticks in various vessels around the room.

NISARGADATTA

(through interpreter, to Robert)
Where have you come from?

ROBERT

America.

NISARGADATTA

Have you been with any other teachers in India?

ROBERT

I was with Ramana Maharshi, Papa Ram Dass, Anandamayi Ma, Neem Karoli Baba and many others.

NISARGADATTA

(nodding)
Why come here?

ROBERT

I want to make sure I haven't missed anything.

Nisargadatta waggles his head in the Indian style and gestures that he is welcome. Robert walks down the dividing line in the middle and takes a seat against the back wall, as the morning question and answer period begins.

NISARGADATTA

(To a BEARDED MAN in the front row)
What do you want? Why have you come here?

QUESTIONER

I have come to Maharaj in the hope that he may help me put an end to this search.

NISARGADATTA

Can you communicate to me what you have understood?

QUESTIONER

It is all concepts, all illusion.

NISARGADATTA

Yes.

QUESTIONER

I don't believe in processes that take time and disciplines, I've done all that. I want it to end.

NISARGADATTA

The basic fact - that you are not the body - must be clear to you by now. You are working in the world and you are thinking that you are doing that work, but what is really happening is this: the life force, when it comes out in thoughts and words, *is* the mind, so it is this *prana* mind, life force mind, which is the acting principal.

The beingness, the consciousness, is the God which witnesses the life force and mind working. It does not interfere; it merely witnesses. The reason for your unhappiness is that you think it is you who are working.

We see Robert's face. He is smiling faintly in recognition of the truth he already knows. He is also enjoying Nisargadatta's fiery delivery, jabbing and pointing and pursing his lips to punctuate his points, occasionally re-lighting or puffing on his beedi.

QUESTIONER

I realize that anything I say is a concept arising out of my consciousness.

NISARGADATTA

That you are, the world is, are both concepts. You must know that.

QUESTIONER

How does this knowledge work? I mean:

you tell me words and there comes a sense of understanding. Is it a mental process? Is there still a faculty witnessing all this?

NISARGADATTA

The mind understands because of the consciousness.

QUESTIONER

Then it is all an automatic happening?

NISARGADATTA

That is true. The mind interprets whatever the concept is; the base is consciousness on which the concept arises at the moment.

QUESTIONER

So what is there actually to attain if you cannot touch, cannot reach by words? It is there all the time, right now. So for what are we here? Doing belongs to the mind - that is clear - it is going on like an automaton. I see clearly now. I want this mind to surrender to consciousness. Do you understand?

NISARGADATTA

All this conceptualizing, all this articulation, has been taking place only after the original concept arose that you are. What was the position before this concept arose? At that time did you have any concepts, any needs?

QUESTIONER

Like deep sleep?

NISARGADATTA

This concept that it is like deep sleep is not incorrect, but it is still a concept, and the original state is beyond concepts.

The questioner is looking more and more like he is having the rug pulled out from under him. Other students are in

states of perplexity, smiling faintly if they have some understanding, or in a private blissful state that is unrelated to the dialogue in front of them.

All of this is very familiar to Robert, and he is enjoying watching the student-and-guru game unfold, with Nisargadatta's particular incisive and compassionate dynamic.

QUESTIONER

What is the fact now?

NISARGADATTA

That you are awake is itself a concept at this moment. Let this sink in.

QUESTIONER

It's a movie.

NISARGADATTA

Go back to the source: before this concept of beingness, "I Am," arose, what was your state?

QUESTIONER

I don't know.

NISARGADATTA

That which you don't know, that is the right state. Everything that comes after this consciousness is attained, is like a dose of salts - it is useless, consciousness is useless.

QUESTIONER

So the search, all aspects of it, belongs to the same?

NISARGADATTA

Throw away every thought, every experience, everything that happens after this consciousness has come. Other than throwing it away as useless, there is nothing to be done beyond this firm understanding in which you become more and more absorbed.

Questioner scratches his head. The disciples shift in their seats, the session is over. Nisargadatta smiles at Robert as his assistants help him from the dais.

Robert, still seated against the back wall as others leave, nods back and smiles faintly. We see his features absorbed in blissful contemplation. He does not blink his eyes at all.

The glow and heat of the Bombay afternoon shift across his face to evening cool and the light of naked bulbs.

FADE TO:

INT. NISARGADATTA MAHARAJ'S TEACHING LOFT, BOMBAY, 1980 -
EVENING

We hear the SOUNDS OF BRASS BELLS AND MALLETS BEING UNLOADED FROM A TRUNK in a corner of the teaching loft.

Male devotees lift an enormous brass bell onto a hook hanging from the central ceiling beam, which is only six feet high.

Smaller brass bells are hung from two other hooks, and hand cymbals, brass plates, bells and mallets are handed to the devotees.

Meanwhile, more disciples and devotees are making their way up the ladder and draping garlands of flowers around Nisargadatta's neck. He lets them do it, although he does not smile. As the CHANTING starts in the next few minutes, arriving devotees keep placing garlands of flowers around his neck until they stand out about two feet from his chest.

Meanwhile, Nisargadatta is scowling, poking a brass button set above the trap door, anxious for his family members, who live downstairs, to show up. Between poking the brass button he is busy lighting incense and placing it before various shrines of gurus in the room.

Now the CHANTING and HAND CYMBALS BUILD IN VOLUME, RYTHMS LED BY SOME OF THE INDIAN DEVOTEES AND ACCENTED BY NISARGADATTA MAHARAJ, WHO NOW HAS A PAIR OF FINGER CYMBALS AND IS CHANTING LOUDLY.

The INTENSITY OF CHANTING BUILDS STEADILY, INTERSPERSED BY LOUD EXCLAMATIONS OF "JAI GURU!" ("Hail to the Guru!" in Sanskrit.)

Two senior devotees BEGIN TO BANG THE LARGEST BRASS BELL hanging from the ceiling beam, and THE SOUNDS OF BELLS, CYMBALS AND BRASS PLATES BEING SMASHED EXPLODES THROUGH THE AIR IN THE SMALL ROOM POUNDS HYPNOTICALLY.

NISARGADATTA NOW SWITCHES TO A LARGER PAIR OF CYMBALS, AS LARGE AS PANCAKES.

Robert is CLAPPING AND CHANTING TOO, he knows all the Sanskrit verses in praise of Lord Shiva, as well as grasping their metaphorical meaning.

We see Nisargadatta, his eyes shut in ecstasy, a pair of cymbals as large as garbage can lids are placed in his hands. He begins SMASHING THE LARGEST CYMBALS TOGETHER, sending shards of flowers from the garlands hanging around his neck flying through the air.

The flower pulp is flying and raining in slow motion as the CYMBALS SMASH TOGETHER, BLINDING THE SCREEN IN WHITE LIGHT once... twice... three times...

FADE TO:

EXT. CABIN IN THE WOODS, OREGON, 1985 - DAY

A 1984 Oldsmobile pulls up the gravel drive to a cabin surrounded by trees.

The car is driven by a CHAUFFEUR in cap and white gloves. In the back seat are a well-dressed ELDERLY WOMAN and Robert, now 57 years old. At his feet is a travel-worn camping backpack, marked by many years on the road.

SOUNDS OF THE CAR PARKING AND TURNING OFF THE ENGINE, the CHAUFFEUR EXITING THE DRIVER'S SEAT AND OPENING THE DOOR FOR THE ELDERLY LADY. SOUND OF ROBERT EXITING FROM HIS SIDE, shouldering his backpack and taking in the space.

FOREST SOUNDS... A FEW BIRDCALLS, PINE NEEDLES SHIFTING IN THE LOW BREEZE.

WOMAN

Here it is.

ROBERT

Very nice.

WOMAN

Welcome back to America.

ROBERT

Thanks.

WOMAN

When did your plane get in?

ROBERT

Last night.

WOMAN

(a bit surprised)

How long were you away this time,
Robert?

ROBERT

(looking at his watch)

About eleven years.

Robert begins to walk towards the cabin. Woman follows him, leaving chauffeur standing by the car.

WOMAN

So you've been there the whole time
since we met at the ashram.

INT. CABIN IN THE WOODS, OREGON, 1985 - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

CABIN DOOR CREAKS OPEN.

Their feet RESOUND ON THE WOODEN FLOOR BOARDS.

ROBERT

Yep.

The cabin is about a hundred years old, log walls with single-paned windows. It has a pot-bellied iron stove with a brass kettle on it, and jars of preserves on shelves lining the kitchen walls. There is an army cot in the corner, and a bookshelf loaded with old spiritual books (Joel Goldsmith, Yogananda, Ramana Maharshi, Krishnamurti, etc.)

There is no radio, no stereo, no TV.

ROBERT

So this is it. My retirement villa.

WOMAN

It's all yours. (Smiles) The gardiner used to live here when I was a little girl. In about the mid-30's my children used to camp out here in the summer, and then later my granddaughters. They had a vegetable garden out back... you might be able to revive it... peas, carrots, potatoes, that sort of thing.

Robert nods.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

The water is drawn from a well, and the electricity usually holds unless there's a storm. We have an emergency generator up at the house.

Robert nods.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Nobody barely every comes to this corner of the estate any more, Robert. You'll have all the peace you want.

ROBERT

It's lovely.

WOMAN

One thing though - there's no phone.

Robert nods.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Did you want to call your wife and kids?

ROBERT

(softly)
No, that's okay.

WOMAN

Do they know you're back?

ROBERT

(shakes his head)
I don't think so.

WOMAN

Well if you want anything, just come

back up the road to the house. It's about a twenty minute brisk walk. I'll be going back to India next week, but the groundskeeper will help you with anything. He goes into town once a week, if you need anything.

ROBERT

(Smiling at her)

You've been very generous. Thank you so much.

WOMAN

Jai sri guru... jai sri guru... Om, shanti, shanti-

Woman drops to her knees, trying to touch her forehead to Robert's feet to obtain *darshan*, the Hindu blessing from the master. Robert grasps her shoulders and tries to prevent her.

ROBERT

Please don't.

Woman stands up, never turning her gaze from Robert, dusting her skirt off and walking to the door with a radiant smile. She has tears of adoration in her eyes.

Robert tosses his backpack on the cot and follows her to the doorway.

EXT. CABIN IN THE WOODS, OREGON, 1985 - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

WOMAN

(Halfway to car)

What's your plan now, Robert? What are you going to do with your life?

ROBERT

I'm going to stay here until I die.

WOMAN

(although she knows it's hopeless)
You won't teach?

ROBERT

Nope.

WOMAN

Or write a book?

ROBERT

(squints eyes as if thinking, shrugs)
Nope.

WOMAN

Just...

Robert smiles.

Woman shakes her head and chauffeur opens the passenger door for her. She waves goodbye to him. Robert waves.

SOUND OF THE CAR DOORS CLOSING, ENGINE REVVING, CAR DRIVING AWAY.

FOREST SOUNDS.

Robert looks at the grey clouds gathering in the sky. Then he turns back into the doorway.

INT. CABIN IN THE WOODS, OREGON, 1985 - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

Robert goes to the kitchen counter and gets himself a glass from the cupboard. He places it in the sink and turns on the tap.

At first THE TAP COUGHS AND SPUTTERS, and brown liquid comes out. Then the water runs clear. Robert grasps the glass to move it under the tap, but it is slippery and he has trouble grasping it.

Robert frowns.

With some difficulty he fills the glass, turns off the tap and raises the glass to his lips.

We see the bubbles swarming in the water, the window's light shining through the water.

Robert DROPS THE GLASS AND IT SHATTERS, SPLASHING.

Robert holds up his hand to look at his fingers. They're shaking.

Mild concern and wonder cross his face.

FADE TO:

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE, PORTLAND, OREGON, 1985 - DAY

Robert is sitting in a hospital gown on the edge of the doctor's examination table, his legs dangling in the fluorescent-lit room. He is looking at an x-ray of a human skull on the wall when DR. RAMIREZ comes in.

DOCTOR

Hello, Robert. Well, the results from your CAT scan are in.

ROBERT

What's up, doc?

DOCTOR

There's some good news and some bad news. The good news is - it's Parkinson's.

Robert looks questioningly.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

It's not a brain tumor.

Robert nods.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

The bad news is - it's Parkinson's.

Robert laughs.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

Well, I'm glad to see that you're taking it so well. (Sits down.) Robert, how much do you know about Parkinson's Disease?

ROBERT

Illuminate me, doc.

DOCTOR

Parkinson's Disease is a degenerative disorder, Robert. It deteriorates your central nervous system, impairing your motor skills, speech and other

functions.

The body will experience increasing muscle rigidity, tremor, slowing of physical movement and, in extreme cases, a loss of physical movement altogether.

There is no known cure for Parkinson's, although we have drugs on trial which seem, in some cases, to be able to slow down the symptoms.

Robert sits silently. Then he smiles.

ROBERT

No more traveling.

DOCTOR

I would strongly advise against any traveling. You have to stay in one place with a doctor and specialists who know you. Now in the early stages we still have a chance of discovering the right combination of medications we can stave off the symptoms for as long as possible.

You may still have twenty, twenty five years of relatively healthy life in you.

Robert nods slowly.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

Do you live with anyone else?

Robert shakes his head.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

Do you have any family members you could stay with? You're going to need support.

ROBERT

The last time I spoke to my wife and daughters they were in Los Angeles. That was about five years ago, I called them from a long distance phone booth in Bombay.

I was there to see this sage called
Nisargadatta Maharaj.

No response from Dr. Ramirez.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

The "Beedi Baba," is what some
spiritual seekers called him. The
chain-smoking guru. He was quite rude,
actually. He was completely
enlightened, and he used to chain-smoke
these little Indian leaf-rolled
cigarettes...

Robert tries to demonstrate the rolling and the lighting
and smoking, but he is having trouble with his fingers.

DOCTOR

(Pulling out a pack of cigarettes)
Robert, would you like to have a
cigarette right now?

ROBERT

No, thanks. But if you don't mind, I'd
like to make a call to Los Angeles.

Robert's fingers are shaking.

FADE TO:

INT. ED'S CAR, LOS ANGELES, 1995 - DAY

Robert's fingers run along the dashboard in Ed's cramped,
messy car. He lightly rubs his palms along the suede
pattern on the dashboard.

Nicole kisses Robert goodbye and CLOSES THE PASSENGER SIDE
DOOR.

Ed GETS IN THE DRIVER'S SIDE AND STARTS THE ENGINE.

We see them drive past Warner Park and the concrete picnic
table where Robert met with his students before.

ROBERT

If people ever find out the real truth,
they're going to all beat me to death.

ED

What? Real truth? What's that, Robert?
(Trying to concentrate on driving)

ROBERT

I told everyone at satsang that there's
no body, no mind, no world, no God, no
universe.

ED

Right. (Driving) There's only
consciousness.

Robert looks out the window.

ED (CONT'D)

There's nothing but universal
consciousness. Right, Robert?

ROBERT

No...

Ed looks over.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

There's nothing.

Ed's face is completely nonplussed as they narrowly avoid
swerving into an oncoming truck.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

There's nothing as you know it.
Nothing as you can imagine it.
Universal consciousness is just the
first step... on a very long journey.
It's impossible to describe, because
there are no words. There is just...
nothing.

(Smiles)

There is something, but there is no
thing. There is no thing. If there
were, that wouldn't be it.

EXT. NEW SATSANG, LOS ANGELES, 1995 - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

As they arrive at the satsang, many people come out to help
Robert walk from the car. Some of them are familiar from
the earlier, small group - Dana, Kerima, Fred, Emilio, Lee,
Mary. But there are many new faces.

INT. NEW SATSANG, LOS ANGELES, 1995 - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

They are at a much larger place than Henry Denison's living room above the Silverlake reservoir. Many hands attach microphones to Robert as he sits down.

ROBERT

(to Mary)

I feel like I'm being strapped into an electric chair.

Mary tries to smile.

Robert sits and watches the large group, maybe sixty people, as they GOSSIP, SHUFFLE PAPERS, ARRANGE TAPE RECORDERS.

Robert gestures Ed to him. His VOICE IS SLURRED by the Parkinson's.

ROBERT

(to Ed)

They've all come to see the dying guru. Just watch... on the day I die, the place will be packed.

Robert sits and faces the satsang attendees.

The room goes QUIET.

Robert sits and looks at them. A few people SHUFFLE, FIDGET.

Robert continues to stare out into the space above their heads. Then he leans forward and clutches the microphone stand in front of him, staring intently out into the crowd.

His foremost devotees, those we recognize from earlier satsang sessions (MARY, LEE, FRED, EMILIO, DANA, ED), are visibly sweating in the front row.

Robert is "cooking" them intently with his gaze, sweat pours down their faces.

The SILENCE persists as we see only Robert's haggard face.

FADE TO:

INT. ROBERT'S HOUSE, LOS ANGELES, 1995 - MORNING

Still we see only Robert's haggard face staring, but when we pull back, he is alone in his house in Woodland Hills, Los Angeles, looking at a photograph of Ramana Maharshi.

Robert gazes at the photo without moving.

In time-lapse, we see the sun and shadows moving outside the window. Robert's gaze does not stray from the photo as the clock on the VCR moves from 7:48am to 8:25pm.

We hear the FRONT DOOR OPENING, PAPER SHOPPING BAGS BEING PUT DOWN IN THE HALL, DIMITRI THE DOG SCAMPERING AND BARKING off.

NICOLE (O.S.)

Robert?

He is still absorbed.

NICOLE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Robert?

Nicole comes into the frame between Robert and Ramana.

NICOLE (CONT'D)

Robert! What have you been doing all day?

Robert looks up at her and smiles.

The PHONE RINGS, Nicole goes to get it.

NICOLE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Robert, it's for you.

DIMITRI THE DOG STARTS BARKING again.

NICOLE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Oh my God! Robert, Dimitri went on the carpet in the bedroom. Didn't you take him to the park this morning?

Robert's YOUNGER DAUGHTER arrives home with her BOYFRIEND.

DAUGHTER (O.S.)

Hey Dad. Hey Mom, what's for dinner?

NICOLE (O.S.)

I just got in the door. Is Jim staying for dinner too? Maybe you could help make it. The groceries are in the hall.

Robert, the phone is for you!

DAUGHTER (O.S.)

Not now, Mom. Jim's band just cut a new demo tape. They were in the studio all night, he didn't even get a chance to sleep. We've got to listen to it.

The DOG IS BARKING.

The STEREO STARTS TO BLAST ROBERT'S DAUGHTER'S BOYFRIEND'S NEW DEMO TAPE... CHRISTIAN POP MUSIC.

Against all this BACKGROUND NOISE, Robert picks up the phone that is on the coffee table next to his armchair.

ROBERT

Hello, Ed.

ED (ON PHONE)

How'd you know it was me? What's going on over there? The end of the world?

ROBERT

Life on planet Earth.

ED (ON PHONE)

So Robert, what's the news? You said you had something important to tell me?

ROBERT

Yes. The move is definite.

BACKGROUND NOISES FADE.

ED (ON PHONE)

The move? You're moving? The satsang is moving? For real this time?

ROBERT

For real this time. This is really it, Ed.

ED (ON PHONE)

Well we're all coming with you. Where to? San Diego?

ROBERT

Nope.

ED (ON PHONE)

Atlanta?

ROBERT

Nope.

ED (ON PHONE)

Hawaii?

ROBERT

Warmer.

ED (ON PHONE)

Don't tell me... India?

ROBERT

Nope. We're moving to Sedona, Arizona.

ED (ON PHONE)

Oh, God! My mother lives in Phoenix, Robert. Do you have any idea how hot it gets there?

ROBERT

You'll be cooked!

Robert smiles.

FADE TO:

EXT. BANK OF THE GANGES RIVER, INDIA - MORNING

We drift upward, the SOUNDS OF THE HOUSE completely fading.

The blank wall becomes the heat shimmer of a sandy bank along the GANGES RIVER in northern India.

Robert and Ramana Maharshi are walking side by side. They walk slowly. Robert holds a leash with his Lhasa Apso, Dimitri, sniffing about at the end of it.

Both Robert and Ramana are wearing white. Neither of them

exhibits the health problems they had in the final years of their respective lives.

The sun shines down from a blue sky, sparkling off the waves in the brown river.

The only sound is from a bit of BREEZE, WAVES LAPPING, and the SOUNDS OF ROBERT AND RAMANA'S FEET SHUFFLING.

They walk like this, SILENT and content, for a full minute or two.

RAMANA

Do you think it will rain tomorrow?

Pause.

ROBERT

I think the forecast said snow.

Ramana nods.

They walk into the distance.

Screen floods to white.

THE END