

Interview with Richard Rosencrantz (Brahma Das)

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

February 3, 1996

**Q:** Um, is it the fourth? Is today the fourth? I'm not even sure.

**A:** Third.

**Q:** Today's the third. OK. This is . . . it's Saturday, February third, and an interview with Brahma Das, also know as Richard Rosenkrantz.

**A:** AKA, right.

**Q:** AKA, all right. So, Richard, did you live communally before you came to Kashi, 'cause I don't know when exactly this started in your history.

**A:** Yes, I did.

**Q:** All right. So could you tell me some of the events that led up to that part of your life?

**A:** In some ways, I probably have a, um, a longer communal history than, I guess, a lot of people here. 'Cause a lot of people living in this ashram, ashram, which means "interfaith community," um, a lot of people living here started their communal experience simply with Ma. They came, they were drawn in a spiritual direction with whatever spiritual teachers they may or may not have been with before, they came to Ma and then started living communally. With myself, I lived on, uh, a commune in Vermont which I, I'd worked for a while, well, so, so, it's actually a long story. Um, I worked, I worked as a journalist. I had been a, shall I just give you my, my --

**Q:** Please. Absolutely.

**A:** All right. I, I went to Yale, I graduated in, uh, 1964, I got a Fulbright in Paris, so I had a very strong academic career with a lot of, those, those were good credentials. So I, I went to Paris on a Fulbright, I came back from that, had been thinking about going into diplomacy, was very, uh, I was told by George Kennan, who was a major figure in American foreign service and diplomacy, and a former Princeton professor, who I met in Paris, said "Don't do it." He says, he says, "It's a terrible profession." He said "Forget it." He said "They're all yes-men, forget it." He was, he was a major person in the foreign service and everything, he said, uh, so anyway, I decided to go into journalism. I got a, I got a job with um, um, Westinghouse Broadcasting, first with an all-news station in New York as a copy boy. WINS. And after three months, I was a copy boy, but I bought a tape recorder and started writing scripts. And they liked what I was doing, so they sent me to Washington after three months, as a correspondent. So it was really a Horatio Alger rise from copy boy to national correspondent. And, uh, so I was there for, like a year and a half. I was offered a job through Westinghouse to do, to really go up the ladder, to be the, to, to go out to one of their flagship stations, but I got a fellowship at Columbia. Uh, an RCA/NBC fellowship. And I wanted to do that, because Fred Friendly was there, and he was my, he was the producer for Edward R. Murrow, who had been my hero in journalism. He was the one who had uh, pulled [?] the whistle on Joe McCarthy and so I always admired that. I went there -- this was the year of the, 1968, was the year of the major, first, campus demonstration in the country, a big one, around that time, against the Vietnam war, it, um, involved the treatment of, um, blacks in Harlem, which is right next door to Columbia, which was very terrible by the universities, the things they did. Columbia was also the second largest slumlord in New York City, behind the Catholic church, which was the largest slumlord in New York City, facts nobody knew. So I got very involved in this demonstration, and wrote a book about it,

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over two years, which was nominated for a Pulitzer prize and did well. And uh, in the meantime, what they did is, uh, it turned me off, in one sense, to regular journalism. Uh, because, over the two years that, from the, from the Columbia demonst-- the, the, the sort of the revolution at Columbia and my joining it, uh, it politicized me a little bit, but also got me out of regular journalism, uh, in a sense, and then the two years of writing the book, I, I got out of it even more. So, I then went to Vermont, um, to live for awhile. And, uh, and I bought a cabin in the woods and was doing some writing and other people came, um, I was living with a lady and her daughter and then some others came, after awhile, and we formed a little commune. So that was my first communal experience. It's taken me awhile to get to this, but that was my first communal experience, in the sense that we did this for about a year, we had about eight of us living in this house, forming a little commune, because -- and we shared music together, and um, uh, and ideas, and we're doing, I did some things with auras, looking at, she had the patience to sit there for like an hour-and-a-half a day, while I looked at her and looked at her aura. And uh, and it, the more I did it, the stronger I got, the more I could see. And it was just sort of like a muscle, you know, of, of like, you look at, you look at somebody, and you can just see that, that sheath around them and uh, so that was something that I just did while I was there. And, it was sort of like getting into different things. There was sort of like energy things, too, that I got into. I mean, it was, it was the period at which, after awhile, you could actually, there's a, between your hands, this is a, this is a positive pole, this is a negative pole. And if you hold it like this for a while, hold your hands like this, with this space, you can feel the heat. Or, there's energy which you can actually see -- the same as you can see auras. And you can -- anyway, so, but that's just like a thing you build up, after awhile I stopped, 'cause it's like, you know, why, why bother? I just, I wanted to get into something deeper that wasn't like, on that level. But there's absolutely something there. So, um, that was my first communal experience, of living --

**Q:** When was that? Like 1970 or . . . ?

**A:** 19 . . . 69. I guess it was. And then we went off, one summer, all of us, with a bunch of others, did a commune for the summer in West Virginia. With different people. That was after the one in Vermont. So that was another communal experience, with which, and it was kind of like, uh, you know, at that time, it was, it was a period at which I was sort of starting in a spiritual direction, but I wasn't . . . but there was also sort of like, the hippie, the psychic, all of those other [phone rings]. There was all of that stuff. I mean, there was a, an awful lot of music, there was pot, obviously, at that time. Um, I don't know that I want to get into too much, but there certainly was. But, uh, it was all, kind of like a, a nice hippie, very happy, very, like [or light?], and there was a spiritual side to it, but it was sort of like a New Age psychic spiritual side to it.

**Q:** [Sneezes].

**A:** Bless you. Um, is this too cold for you?

**Q:** Not at all.

**A:** OK. And uh, and there were, there were parts of it, there was sort of like a free love part to it, too. It was like even though, we were, I was, essentially monogamous, but there was a thing of like, people saying, "Oh, we should experiment with free love." So we sort of tried that a little bit. I tried that a little bit and, and found this was not a very good thing. Because it totally destroyed one relationship I was in.

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Because we did it, we sort of like, "Oh, you're supposed to do this," and we did it, and she said, and the woman I was with saying, "Oh, you should really do this, go try this!" And then I said, "All right." and tried it, and then she couldn't stand it, that I had done it. And she told me to do it. So I was like, that wasn't such a great thing. I realized I didn't want to do it in the first place, and it was a bad move, and so, anyway that, that, so, our relationship fell apart, and, and at that point, I said "Whatever the ideal was, where I formed this commune in Vermont," I thought it had fallen apart -- whatever the, the, the feelings of love and sharing and giving and everyone be open, and we were going to be beyond whatever the pettiness was of, uh, of things that divide people, when I saw that didn't happen, I just said, "The hell with this," and I just left the house and I said "You can all live here, I don't care anymore." I walked away and went to Israel. And, uh, I was actually going to go to New Zealand, but New Zealand was more, remember when we were talking about New Zealand the other day?

**Q:** Yes.

**A:** Well, New Zealand was more, at that time, more conservative, more not so open, which was twenty years ago -- to immigrants coming. I was just looking for a place to go, I wasn't crazy about the foreign policy in the country, and this commune didn't work the way I wanted it to, and I could, uh, you know, as I was saying, it was sort of like, here I had this communal experience, but it got to be people again, treating each other more as, not property, but feeling like ties on people, in a way, like "You belong to me or you don't," or you this or that as opposed to whatever the supposed open, free feeling that was supposed to be, uh, just didn't happen. We weren't, we weren't that evolved or together yet, or as we wanted to be. So I went off, uh, New Zealand didn't work, um, there was the possibility of going to a kibbutz in Israel. Now, going to a kibbutz, seeing what a collective community was like, I thought, "Well, I'll try it again." Here's another chance, I'll see, I'll see what that's like. So I went to Israel and lived on three different kibbutzim, which are these collective communities over a period of, uh, two years. Uh, and one was Kibbutz Kadri, K-A-D-I, K-A-D-R-I, one was Neveor, which is N-E-V-E-O-R, and uh, one was Einharod, E-I-N-H-A-R-O-D. Um, Einharod was first, then, then Kadri, then Neveor. And a kibbutz is a border community. It's what, what you use to protect the borders of Israel and things like that, and I was an immigrant, like, I'd come on thinking I was going to settle here. I wanted to settle in this country, I liked the idea of communal living in the sense of, so you live in this community, you share, you support each other, money is irrelevant, that's not what you're doing, um, raise a family, do, I mean, those are these kinds of things in my head that you get away from, from the kinds of uh, whatever it was that I didn't like as, as like a little, just a nuclear family thing that wasn't big enough. I liked the idea of communal living where there's, where you have a larger family, and you're all kind of working together, and without some of the things, you know, the parts that I didn't care about, other people would care about, would support that, and I would support other things. You know what I'm saying? In that, in that part of communal living, well, of course you do. But that's what, that's what a good community seemed to me, of the, well, like the community I'm in here now. Those parts that I don't care about, of administration of this or that, someone else would do, but I would take care of those things where I have my talents. And supposedly the whole thing working together as a large family that supports and loves each other. So that's what I thought a good kibbutz would be. And there were many things about these kibbutzim that I was on that were like that. Um, that, uh, that these kibbutzim in Israel were, obviously socialistic, in the sense that you had shared property and shared, um, um, the general resources of the community were, were owned in common, and you got like, this small stipend and,

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and, to cover your, whatever you needed, I guess. Little things. Um, I found that in Israel there was still a, uh, it was, because you're in the middle of a war, even when there wasn't a war, you were always faced, like, I remember being on one kibbutz, in the middle of it we went to a movie, and in the middle of the movie the, the Dirty Harry, it turned out to be, the movie stops because there was a terrorist attack right in the middle of the movie. You walk outside, and there are helicopter ships [?] flying around, and machine gun firing on the perimeter of the kibbutz, and so you're in the middle of a war. Uh, and it's, it was a relatively hedonistic thing, in that the people were living for the moment. Like, you have your children, you live this moment, who knows what's going to happen the next moment? And so things that were happening to me, then, more and more on a spiritual level of, of, whatever was happening inside me, of different things, they didn't want to hear about. I was having experiences with people on the kibbutz, we were having telepathic experiences and stuff, I mean, I wasn't, it wasn't so much that I wanted to get into that, I didn't care so much about the psychic stuff, but it was real. Same thing as third-eye stuff. I could see things. I could always see things. But I could see them more and more and it was real, and, and it wasn't that it was that important to me, 'cause as, as we say, as we are now, here with Ma, Ma is always saying "Don't get too much into psychic stuff, 'cause it can really sidetrack you." So I don't get into it so much. But it's still there. But in Israel, nobody wanted to talk about any of that stuff, because it's like very much a stress on the here and now. And certainly on the kibbutzim that I was on. Because of the war. They wanted, uh, not to focus on things beyond that moment, maybe because it was so much, like, you know, we could die tomorrow -- let's enjoy this moment. And there was a point at which it was like, um, I remember this Bob Dylan song, um, he not busy being born is busy dying. And there was a while when I thought, "Here I am in Israel, and I'm living on this kibbutz, and I'm trying this life, but a lot of these people, even though they're maybe twenty years old, are not being born anymore." They're just, they're stuck. They're right where they are, and that's it. They're never going to be any different than they are now. That's some of the people. Some of the people absolutely were growing. I'm not trying to categorize everybody that way, but, in this beautiful, utopian community, that I thought I was joining, a lot of the people there, if this were utopia, were not being born anymore. Whereas you can find 85 and 90 year-old people who are still being born. There's certainly a lot of people like that. So there was a point at which, after two years I said "I'm going to leave and come back." I got, I had, uh, gotten some tapes of Ram Das, um, and uh, who, while I was on the kibbutz, and I had listened to the tapes, he talked about this, this teacher of his, he couldn't say her name, because it was all a secret, but, uh, but that turned out to be Ma. I listened to his tapes. Then there was a tape of Ma talking, that, [unintelligible] part of this [?] Ram Das, it was like a, like a twelveset collection of Ram Das tapes that they sent me in Israel, or that I bought, or something, I listened to them. And it was like, "OK, I'm leaving." So I came back and I went to uh, a number of different retreats. I went to two Ram Das retreats, see, I was looking for something deeper and in a spiritual direction. I went to two Ram Das retreats, I went to a Sachadananda [?] retreat, I went to Hari Das Baba [?] retreats, these are all, you may not know them, but some of them are --

**Q:** I've heard those names.

**A:** OK. I didn't know about Hari Das Baba.

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**Q:** I haven't heard of Hari Das Baba.

**A:** Hari Das Baba was a . . . a follower of uh, he was a student of Ma's guru, Inkoroldy Baba [?] and he was with Inkoroldy Baba for twelve years and supposedly there's this thing like, well if you're with your guru for twelve years, you can be liberated. There's this thing they say, so after the first twelve years, he went to Baba and said, "OK, I've been with you for twelve years, now liberate me!" And Baba said "Sorry, it's not enough." And he went through [?] another, so he, [unintelligible] for another twelve years, and it still wasn't enough. So he'd been with him twenty-four years because, obviously, he wasn't ready to be liberated. Liberated meaning perfect. You're, you know, rid of all whatever. So he went off in a huff, and I when I met him, I met him in California --

**Q:** Is that Mata Giri's daughter?

**A:** That's her daughter. Very bright and talented, and she's uh, in my journalism class.

**Q:** OK.

**A:** And that's part of the, I tell you, I just love this journalism. This year, I don't know about next year, but this year the students are so -- I mean, this is the only year I've ever done it -- but they're so sharp and bright and I'm so happy I'm doing it.

**Q:** Oh, good.

**A:** I don't know if I'm going to take a sabbatical next year and wait for the next year's class that sounds terrible, but --

**Q:** Right. No, I understand.

**A:** Sounds terrible, but I think I may do that. 'Cause next, the, the class, the incoming class is nowhere near like this class. This class is her and Tony and Krishna -- you haven't met some of these kids, but, uh, [unintelligible] kids. Anyway, so, um, --

**Q:** You were talking about Hari Baba, is that his name?

**A:** Hari Das Baba.

**Q:** Hari Das Baba, OK.

**A:** He's been on silence for most of his life, but I went to see him. And, uh, he was a beautiful guy, beautiful satsang. I actually thought about staying there, because they were, they, you know, I do a lot of singing, I mentioned the singing. And they, and they put on a production of the Ramayano [?] all over California. They lived in California, Santa Cruz. And it was just beautiful, [unintelligible] it was a beautiful satsan. Satsang is a group of, satsan means, um, a group of people who are on the path together. Like, this is a satsang. S-A-T-S-A-N-G. Um, so his satsang, his group of students, uh, or people together, um, were lovely. And, uh, there was a woman there, whom I really liked, and "Well, you know, I mean, I could be like enticed into this, I'll just stay because of her." But then I thought, "Nah, this isn't, this isn't really . . ." and so I went. And I kept going on, I kept going on to different, to a couple of different teachers. I went to Ram Das a couple times, I came back to, oh, and this was, after I came back from, from, from Israel, when I started and, and I lived in New Jersey, where my parents live, in New Jersey, so

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I was going across the country to this first retreat, I was kind of like purifying myself on the way. As I'm driving across. Like the first day, I gave up meat. The second day, I gave up cigarettes. You know, 'cause I'm driving. So by the time I got to California, I was like "You know, . . ." like this two day old idiot, who was just like, "I'm suddenly pure, I guess, sure [?]" Baby Huey, or something, [inaudible]. So, so uh, anyway I got, I got uh, I got, I got there and the first Ram Das retreat was like totally silence, except for the teaching. But the rest of it was silence. And uh, uh, anyway. Interesting experiences. There, there, I mean, there's a lot, maybe I should just keep going on -- so um, I came back to New Jersey and was living at my parents' house and I started taking these, I started going to, uh, um, these singing things in New York, where they did like kirtan [?] like we did last night. Now, what kirtan is, if you do it right, is uh, is, when you do this devotional singing and you, and you do it in the way it's supposed to be done, it's a meditation that, it's a concentration exercise in a way, that clears your mind, so as you sing, whatever the words are, like shriyam jayram, jay jay ram [?] that's, uh, one form of God [?] or you can just sing, um, as long as it's not too complicated -- a few words, uh, I was trying to think of a simple song in English that works like that . . . um, I was going to say [singing] "Some say love, it is a river" but that's, but that, 'cause it keeps going on, and the words change. But one of things in, in Hindi is that A. the sounds are supposed to be seed-sounds, that resonate with something deeper inside you as you sing them, as well as the fact that the simple repetition of the, if you get into it, and use it as a meditation device, you can actually get transported to a different thing, I mean, like, I know that, I don't know if you were there last night when Moksharam [?] was saying, you know, when we start doing this singing, everyone should be quiet, and do it because it puts you into a space that makes you more receptive to what happens when the teacher, in this case Ma, comes in. So, anyway, I was going to classes in New York where I would sing, there was someone I had, who had been teaching kirton [?] at a Ram Das, uh, retreat, named Krishna Das, who was one of the better, or best kirton singers, leaders, that I've ever heard in my life. So I was going to his class, he was doing this, and while I was there, I heard that Ma was going, was teaching in Long Island, at this Jesuit retreat. And I asked him if I could go, and he said "Absolutely not, she's not public, you can't go, you'll be thrown out." Because she was doing this, but it was only private at that time, she hadn't gone public. So he wouldn't tell me exactly where she was teaching. But somebody else told me. So I thought, I'll sneak in, but Krishna Das had told me I'd be thrown out. So, uh, but I'm going to go anyway, because I don't care. Because I'd heard about her, and I'd heard this tape when I was in Israel, and I thought "I'll go. So what." So I go, she's teaching at this Jesuit, uh, monastery on Staten Island called Mount Monressa [?]. I go in, uh, I sit in the back of the room, read [?] close to the door, sort of hiding, so no one will see me, 'cause it's not public and I've already been told I'll be thrown out. And I, and I sit next to this woman who turns out to be Bina [?] but I didn't know that, I didn't know who she was, I didn't know anybody. And uh, and I'm way in the back, and there's this woman from Wales who's singing "Summertime." She's in a lot of pain, 'cause her, her husband had just had some tragedy or something, so Ma had asked her to sing so she could just, [unintelligible] Ma walks in, uh, first of all, she walks in, and she's so far from my image of a spiritual person. She comes in, a lot of jewelry, she's got some tattoos, she -- I don't know if she had tattoos at the time, [maybe?] she didn't, but she had jewelry, because she was raised on the streets, she was, swearing at something, and this and that -- absolutely not my image of a, of a spiritual teacher. I expected sort of, some silent little holy person with a nice white robe, and that was definitely not who she was. So, so anyways, so I've gotten that mold slightly broken, and I'm thinking "I don't know what I'm doing here, why should I bother, and . . ." so anyway, I'm still hiding in the back, this woman is singing and, and Ma says "OK, can somebody sing to

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her from their heart?" And I'm hiding, 'cause the last thing I want to do is be noticed, 'cause I'm going to get thrown out. Suddenly, my heart starts to explode, right?

**Q:** [Laughs].

**A:** I feel this incredible fire in my heart, it's, it's an explosion, and I start to sing. The last thing I wanted. And I sing this song called "I Know I Got a Long, Hard Journey, Sing Hallelujah, Better Get Started Early, Sing Hallelujah / Sing Out to the Lord to Help You, 'Cause the Lord is Mighty, Strong / Don't Worry About Your Heavy Load / The Lord's Gonna Help You Along / Sing Hallelujah." This is a song I knew when I was like, as a folk singer in the village. But I'm singing this thing, and I'm like, involuntarily singing this, because I'm going to get thrown out, and Ma, I, I hear her as I'm singing, she says "Who's that? Oh, that's Brahma Das. Come with me." And that was like in, in like five seconds, she named me, and it was like bam, that was that. So that was, that was how I met Ma, that was my first, certainly my first [unintelligible] spiritual experience with her. And I, and I really, and I knew from what was going on in my heart that, that something was happening. And with all of the spiritual teachers that I met, and I've, what I'm saying is, I've been to quite a number, all of whom, remember what I was saying last night -- you have a lot of teachers and only one guru? Whoever your guru is, doesn't, whatever is, whoever it is. Um, and so I'd been to, and I'd learned a lot of things from Ram Das, whom I thought was very beautiful, um, and shown me things, and, and Hari Das Baba had shown me things and Sachadananda [?] and the Dalai Lama, later, and a lot of others I've met along the way, um, but there was something that happened there that was at a much deeper level than anything else. And uh, so that was, uh, anyway. I've given you a long preamble, that's how I met Ma. Your turn.

**Q:** When was that?

**A:** 1976. June, June 6, 1976.

**Q:** So that was right before she came down here. So did you follow her to Florida?

**A:** I lived in New York and visited her in Florida, came back and forth. And eventually I moved down here. Um, probably in '78 or something like that. '78-'79. I lived in, she had houses, she had like little, miniashrams in New York, and I lived in one of those houses, just came down to visit, but I didn't live in the house down here right away.

**Q:** And what made you want to be part of the ashram?

**A:** Well, it was . . . in a, in a, in a worldly sense, I had been fairly successful and achieved. I had been a Washington correspondent, I had covered the Senate, I had done White House stories, um, I had gotten good recognition, had been considered competent and good, I'd written a book that'd been nominated for a Pulitzer prize, so I had, um, proven something to myself as well as, I did the best job I could and, uh, on the book. And I'd written three thousand pages over two years, which I whittled down to 350, edited, and did a good book. And so I no longer had anything to prove to myself on that. I didn't write it just to prove something, but I, I wanted to communicate something. And I did it as well as I could, and having done it, it was like, I'm not a woman, and I haven't given birth, but it was, in a sense I gave birth at that moment to the best thing I could, and I no longer, at that moment, I didn't need to write anything else. The fact that I've written some things sense, is, since that time, I've done some other

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things, but I didn't, I was like, I completed that phase, and I could go onto something else that was important, and so in a worldly sense, I no longer really had ambition to like, do something worldly, I wasn't really interested in making money, never was, and I wasn't interested in fame or power, I'd, I'd done whatever that was. And once I got into a spiritual direction and, and thought, like, well, "There is a God, God is real, and there's actually a possibility to merge with God in some way," sort of like that thing in Star Wars, when you see, you know, the Force is with you, and you can actually go to the Force or not, and you can actually become part of the Force -- just like in Star Wars, and if you really believe that, if one believes that, what's the point of doing something else? I mean, there're points of doing things like helping people, serving people, whether in a small thing or a big thing, you know, whatever one believes in, but once I really felt that, and once I felt that Ma was, for me, my spiritual teacher, real, that I could get something and, and do something, by being with her, then it didn't make sense not to do that. And it was in the same way that anything, um, I mean, I could be other places -- it doesn't mean that I have to be here. I mean, I could still, I could actually still be somewhere else, and either come visit, or do things with her, or, or do things with other people. It's just that, once I accepted that God was real, then there had to be a major part of God in my life. Once I accepted that she was a real teacher, that this was, this whole thing was real, it made absolute sense to me to be with her, on some level, just as it would have made sense, had I felt that Ram Das, or the Dalai Lama, or anything, were my, my major, sort of connection with God, or the, or the, I mean, obviously, it's the God within yourself, and you're connected with yourself, that's how, that's really where I, where, you know, the phrase that we always use -- Namaste [?]. The God in me bows to the God in you. I genuinely believe that it's the God in me -- I don't need a, I don't need a conduit. But it just happens that she's, she's my teacher, who's real good help, to help me to get to that space within myself. So once I accept that, it didn't make sense to me to live somewhere else. I could, there are householders who come see her, or come see whoever their teacher is. But I prefer that, and I also like communal living. I like living this way. I, I, uh, I mean, there are two parts to it. There's a part of, yes I want to be with Ma, and, and work with her, and learn from her, and there's the other part of, uh, um, I like living this way. Now there are, there are certain things when, when Ma started, um, as a teacher, and she talked to you last night, about, when you asked her, like how did she get in this, talked about her experiences with Christ, well there's a, there's a, she doesn't talk about it very much, but one of the earlier tapes, um, she had uh, um, experiences, a number of things -- she had stigmata in the beginning, she had a lot of very, very strong experiences in terms of her experience with Christ. Um, the third eye, which I've mentioned to you, and you know what that is, that, around Ma, I'm one of the people that happens to see things. Some people don't see anything, or feel things, and sometimes Ma says you can actually make more spiritual progress if you feel nothing and you keep going. You know, that, for some people, Ma says, that's actually better, because you persevere beyond that. I do happen to see and feel things. And so I see, when I'm in darshon, um, which means being in the presence of a holy person, that's the definition of it, so there can be all kinds of darshons, there's even like, things like hockey darshons. But to me, you know, that's not the kind of darshon I like. I like the darshon where you sit there and either Ma says something or, even better, when she says nothing. I like the silence the best. That's me. I happen to like that. Some people like words, I don't care about words. I just like the feeling that comes, like, being with her, in her presence, uh, because there is such a high shakti, which is a spiritual energy. S-H-A-K-T-I. The shakti, that is a palpable thing that you feel, and there are, then, and in a, in a highly evolved being, like Ma, um, the Dalai Lama, others, you can, it's a palpable thing, being in their presence. For some people, they fall



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asleep, because it's so strong they can't hold it, because they haven't, you know, people who normally meditate, like, like the Sikhs -- the Sikhs aren't part of this teaching. S-I-K-H-S. Oh, you know it. I'm sorry. But, the, the, um, the Sikhs generally have so much more discipline than most people on the spiritual path, that when they come to Ma, and a lot of them are coming to Ma, they have absolutely no problem. Some people, uh, who come to her, and come to darshon and sit there, nod out, or, or, or, sleep because the energy is so strong. Um, but for me, when I, when I'm in darshon, I see often, this light around her. And, uh, and, so it's not only do I, do I feel it, I can actually see it. Other people, they can't see it. So maybe it's a little harder for, for some of them. There was a French doctor who came, uh, Roland, whatever his name was -- he's French -- I speak French, because I lived in France for a couple of years. So I'm sitting next to this guy, and I translate a little bit, and then there's this whole darshon, and I felt really sorry for him, because he couldn't understand a word that Ma was saying, and I thought "Aahh, poor guy, you know, he's like, here he is, he can't, uh, you know, he's [unintelligible] it must be boring as hell, 'cause he doesn't understand a word." So after darshon, 'cause I didn't really want to talk in the middle of it, it makes noise and disturbs people, and I, I just said a few things at the beginning, but once Ma talked, started talking, I shut up, and just sat there. So in the end, I said, "Well, Roland, you know, what did you get for it? I'm sorry -- you want me to like, tell you some of what happened?" He said, "No, I don't need to know anything that happened," I said, "Well, why [unintelligible]." He said "Well, every time Ma talked, I saw light pass between her and the next person." 'Cause this guy is, um, way beyond me in terms of his third eye. His third eye is more open than anybody I've, I've, I have personally met. And he's had a lot of, he does, he's a regular doctor, I mean, a regular G.P., he's also a, a, uh, he does acupuncture, and then he does some kind of a psychic acupuncture, where he can just put his hand, but not actually touch something, and does a lot of different stuff. He also does things with, there's something, I don't know about this thing, there's something where there's, there's electromagnetic fields in different rooms -- do you know anything about this? This, where you put something to counteract them, so it doesn't affect people, you know, or, what it's at [?]. So I don't know, I'm probably having electromagnetic fields in here that are affecting me, and I don't even know it.

**Q:** Yeah, could be.

**A:** I should have had him do -- but anyway, so he could, he, he said he'd been around a lot of people where he could see auras -- he said he never saw an aura around anyone like her. He also saw that when she got up and left, there was still an, uh, ectoplasmic thing that stayed there for a long time, before it dissipated. And he could also see that every time she talked to somebody, there was a -- so he saw things that I didn't see. I didn't see that at all. And I was, I thought, well, far out, he had a great experience, he didn't have to hear a word. Because he saw this transmission, which is a transmission between, see, who knows what happens when, when, I mean, I don't know who your spiritual teacher is, who your guru is. I'm sure you have someone who is. And whether it's someone in flesh, or not in flesh, and whether you believe in it or not, I don't know whether you do, but, what, what it maybe, maybe Christ is your guru. Or, or in terms of the Holy Ghost. But if you have a, your, your guru, if were in flesh, probably, if you were in the presence of that being, there would be that kind of transmission between you and the guru, which would be in the form of light, some palpable thing. Well, he could see that with Ma and the person. So that was, that was pretty far out.

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**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** Um, but anyway, that's my, that's my experience with Ma. And there are another of other people here who, who see things. Who, whose third eyes are, are sort of open. We don't, you know, I don't even know that I should be talking about this now, in the sense, that maybe it gets to be too psychic, and it's off the beaten path, or it's off the, um, but anyway, that's my experience. And uh, and I can't sort of like, deny it. I mean, or, or hide it, or pretend, you know, there are a number of people who are sort of like, jealous that I see things they don't see. There's a woman, Kashi Ma, I mean, the, the name of the community is Kashi, but that's her spiritual name, Kashi, which is the same as City of Light. Her son is my godson. And she also sees some things. Sees the light around Ma, sees whatever. Whatever. Anyway.

**Q:** Well, I know they call Kashi an interfaith ashram. But, would you say that, is there more emphasis put on Hinduism, for example, or . . . ?

**A:** Yeah. There, there, well, there is -- there's more emphasis on Hinduism, but in one sense, Ma also says that she's really the only true Hindu on the ashram. Because she really, fully believes and sees, because she sees these forms of God. I've had like, I've had things where I've seen them, like fleetingly, every once in awhile, like in meditation. A number of times I've seen Hanaman [?] or I've seen this or that, but I've also seen Christ. Just in a meditation, I've seen, like a face, then it's gone. I don't see it very much, but I've seen it. Seen them, some, but -- there are people here who aren't Hindus at all, but who love Ma, and who know [?] that connection. There are, there are Roman Catholics, probably eight, who go to Mass every Sunday. And are still here. There are, I mean, I'm originally Jewish, although, um, I had, polio [?] when I was young, so I didn't have much, you know, formal Jewish training. I was trained for my bar mitzvah, almost right before I was bar mitzvah, and I did that, and then I, I call myself a Jewish-Christian-Hindu. Because, because I respect, you know, part of the thing, I totally believe in and accept Ma's teaching of, you respect all paths. All paths lead to God, as long as a path is not like, hurt someone, or put down another thing, that they're all open to other religions, or we are, that, that, what I was telling you the other night, that everybody can be your teacher, um, I go to different churches, try to get what I can, from them. I mean, I go as a member of the local ecumenical council, but as part of the Parliament of World Religions, I genuinely and personally believe in, in the, in the networking of all the world's religions, that they all go to the same place, that there really is only one God who comes in many forms. It's just, we look at that God in whatever form that we're most comfortable with. That, that the idea, when I hear, like a fundamentalist, or whatever it is, whether it's a Christian, a Muslim, or something else, whoever, saying "Mine is the only path, and people who don't believe in my path and my way are sort of damned, and they'll never get to heaven," that's just a bunch of crap to me. It's sort of like, how could, how could all of the people in, for instance, in Africa, who all believe in different forms of God be damned? I mean, everybody has a, and I'm sure there are so many forms of God that I don't know, or don't see or don't, that have come up along the way -- I mean, I'm very curious about, about some of the nature gods and the, the things in Scotland, in Finntorn [?] I really believe there's something there, I just don't know, 'cause I haven't been there, and I haven't -- but I've heard people who've been there, who have seen things, and I've seen enough things to know like, uh, what's that thing in Shakespeare? There's more in heaven and earth, Horatio, than is dreamed about in your -- I genuinely believe that, because there's so much. There's so much I know is there. Beyond what, what we see in our normal

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world, just because we're not open enough to it. But I know it's there. So, so I'm curious, you know, there's a part of me says "Yeah, I should go to Finntorn [?] and see what I see." And, but, you know . . .

**Q:** Would you like to?

**A:** Sure I would. But it would just be, I'm doing so much here now, that, that's important, it's like, to take the time to do it, but I would love to do it. I may, sometime, some summer, if I have some spare time or something, just normally, like when Ma goes off on a vacation in the summer, I probably will write a book instead. Unless I, unless I go to, I mean, that's how I did Bones and Ash, I did, I mean did work work work work along the way, but like, she went off for three weeks, and I was able to do like, major work. So, I may feel like, well, I should do this, it's a responsibility. I've got some other books [unintelligible]. But I, anyway . . . I just, I just don't believe in lopping off people because they have a different path or a different approach. And so this community's approach is very much, all paths are valid. Almost. Or whatever. I mean, to God. We don't, really, and I say collectively, all of us, don't know much about Islam here. We haven't had many, I mean, the people who have come to us, you know, or the ones that we know, or that we come from instinctively are Jewish, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, regular Buddhist, Tibetan Buddhist, Sikhs, now we have this Sikh [unintelligible] because we've had a lot of contact with Sikhs. Um, you know, different -- Zoroastrian, because there's a, a Rohintan Revetna [?] in the Parliament of World Religions, there's a Zoroastrian. So he started talking to a number of, so he thought of coming down here, maybe some Zoroastrians coming down, building a temple, then we'd learn more about Zoroastrianism. There've been a few Muslims who've come, but not enough. And Ma, uh, has talked about it -- well, we really need to build a Muslim, you know, Islamic temple --

**Q:** Well, I was surprised, when I walked around the pond [?] that I didn't see anything to Islam --

**A:** Well, that's only because, only because we've had very few around here who come, and they're, they're more like, um, but it's not that we're not open to it, we just need to -- and we talked about doing it --

**Q:** Right. Just need to learn more about it.

**A:** And Cammora [?], my brother-in-law, we've talked about, well, we've got to build one.

**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** We're also pretty cash-poor, so that what we're doing in terms of money for projects is more like, well, we spent about this thing on AIDS, or this thing on service, or this thing, another, Ma wants to build a thirty -- a forty-bed hospice or respite, whichever. I guess in this case it would be a hospice, because by that time we would probably try to figure out how to have some, a nurse, or, live there full-time or something, but . . . but we're going to do it. We'll build a, we'll build a, a Islamic temple someday. I know we will. We just, because, there's no way we can have an interfaith community with all of these things and not have that. So, whether anybody comes. We just want to have it. Just in case, so that, in case someone does come, 'cause one of the ideals is, that, that, whatever your religious approach, persuasion, that there's some, something here with which you can feel comfortable to worship God in your own way. We, we, I certainly believe that. And I would like to have a, I, for that reason alone, I would like to have an Islamic temple. We had a couple of Muslims from, from FIT, which is this local

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technical college in Melbourne [?] that a number of the kids went to. Study computers and things like that. Like Durga Das, Krishna Priya [and?] his brother, and Rudra Das [?] who's the cook. They both went to FIT. And it's a very good, small, computer-technical college. And there are a number of Muslims there, 'cause it's very international. And some of them came here, and, I, and I would like to, anyway, that's a goal for the future.

**Q:** Sure.

**A:** But -- but, you're right. Every time I walk around the pond I think of that, I say, God, we've got to do this.

**Q:** Can you describe some of the nuts and bolts of living here at the ashram? Like, you know, how you spend your day, and how the work gets done, and stuff like that?

**A:** Well, everybody is different. You know, [unintelligible] in my case, um, what was my case? Um, I get up in the morning, I meditate a little bit, I meditate like a half hour in the morning.

**Q:** Is there any group meditation?

**A:** No. It's not -- there used to be. In the beginning, it was sort of like taking baby steps. You know, Ma would be, before people could uh, could get it together, she would say "OK, everybody has to get up at this hour and meditate together, or sing together." But she stopped that, because she said it really is like, it's up to all of you -- you need to have the discipline to do it yourselves or not. I'm not going to spoon-feed you and I'm not going to tell you you have to do it. It's like, not only is, is God within yourself, but the, but the, uh, but the discipline has to come from everybody. So it's like, if people don't want to do it, that's up to them. If they do, then they're going to make the progress. But to be told, your whole life, by someone who stands over you and says "Now, meditate" is like, there's no way you're going to make any progress. Anybody. I mean, that's our belief. That's my, certainly my belief. So if I don't have the internal discipline to do it, then I'm not, then that's my fault. But, but to be spoon-fed the whole time is, where do you go? And, but we do have darshon every night. And because the, almost every night. And the darshon, to me, is a meditation. Now, to do things on top of that -- I mean, Ma may or may not do a meditation during the darshon, but there's always that palpable feeling, that transmission that I feel every time there's a darshon, I always feel it, and the fact of what I do alone, that's my own thing that I should be doing, just to strengthen it. It's like, the more, Ma refers to it as putting money in the bank. You know, you're making an investment. The more you sit, the more you meditate, whether it's meditating or, for some people it's praying, it's like, uh, it's like my wife prays. I don't, I don't pray. I haven't done that very much, and she also, she did it, because, as a Catholic, you know, growing up, she did a lot of prayer in school. I just didn't do that. So I wasn't kind of used to that. So I was learning that from her. And so every once in awhile, I do, for somebody else. I never pray for me. But, but, but, when I, when I feel like somebody else needs something, every once in a while, then I do do that. But I learned that from her, and not from, not from my own experience. But when I, when I meditate, it's sort of like, either emptying, trying to empty my mind, or go someplace, you know, starting with the concentration thing, and then going off into wherever it goes. Or going, you know, feeling energy centers in the body and, Ma talks about doing breathing exercises, breathing during the day, 'cause breath is . . . increasing awareness and you, you breathe, and at each moment, you're aware, you get past thoughts [?] and so you can, the whole -- everybody, here can have a mantra if they want

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to. You can ask Ma, give me a mantra, which is like, whatever that phrase of, of, uh, whatever that spiritual phrase is, the, um, you know, in English, to say "all is love," that could be a mantra. That could be your mantra. And just say it. And then that can be like the, like the, uh, the motif, whether subliminal or conscious, that underlies everything. So, so if you can, if one can reach the point, if you have a mantra, if one can reach the point of saying that, and just having it run through you, like, even to the point where you're not even aware of it anymore, it just runs -- all is love, all is love -- if that were running through you, then that would be the reality, and everything else around you, whether someone were, were ugly to you, or violent, or, or, whether people were cruel to each other, but as you look at that cruelty, as, as for instance, when you were working with those autistic children, and if you had had that thing going through you all the time -- all is love, all is love -- maybe it would have worked better, maybe it would have been less painful to you, maybe it would have, whatever. For all of us, that could have been, for anybody, whatever their mantra is, could be a way to go to enlightenment, to totally free their mind. So that's another tool. There's all sorts of tools, and that can make all of life a meditation. I haven't succeeded in doing that at all. I, you know, it's like, I have this mantra, but, you know, I never remember during the day to do it -- get totally distracted, you know, like I have a mantra -- you get into a conversation and someone can distract you in a second and it's gone. But living in this community, getting back to your question, more than, more, because it's like, it's a community, but it's a spiritual community, and the underlying common denominator is that all of us have chosen to live in this community because we're on the spiritual path. And um, and everybody doesn't choose to live in community for spiritual reasons. You know, when I asked you about, you know, communities you had lived in, or I asked you about Twin Oaks, which you didn't live in, but, something, that isn't really a spiritual community. It's living in community because of believing in community. Here, the point is, "Oh, we're on a spiritual path" or "Oh, I met Ma and Ma has totally -- different people -- totally like, captivated me from, from her beauty or her spiritual essence" or whatever it is, and people have chosen a spiritual path for whatever reasons. Or, or they want to God, and feel "I want to live on this ashram and, and, of all the teachers I've met, Ma seems to be, in this case, my best connection." Different people, different thoughts, different whatever it is. Or, you know, "I just can't make it in the world. I'm not a worldly person, I'm a spiritual person, or I'm a, whatever it is, and this seems to be the best way I'm going to get there." Or, you know, lots of different ors. And so, no one is going to live this kind of a life, which is not really, necessarily, an easy life in any way, if they're not strongly in a spiritual direction, because this life here, on this ashram, means no drugs, for people who like drugs, I mean, that's like, anybody, if Ma hears anybody about drugs, immediately gone, thrown off. We've only had a couple of people over the twenty years I've been here that ever did it, thrown off, absolutely. The, the uh, and no sex except for married couples who want children, um, no drinking, except maybe, for like, you know, like New Year's Eve, or some champagne, um, um, strong stress on service, um, which is a major, major, oh, what do I want to say? Major whatever, um, important common denominator for everybody living on this ashram. You have to serve. There's some people who don't, who are like, very shy with people and don't serve very well, so maybe they don't go out, maybe they'll babysit for somebody else who's much better with the outer community. So that's how they serve. You talked about someone serving um, by, by meditating, or by sitting in a, by praying -- that's fine with me, I believe in that. I, I told agree with you. Ma is much more like, "Yeah, that's fine, but they should also be doing hands-on serving." Well, that's Ma. I'm actually fine with the other way, but she's like "You've really got to be actively out there serving." Well, OK. That's her. And so fine. And I actually, I'm fine. I can do hands on stuff. But, uh,

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but, so there's that. There's also, since there's darshon every night, it is possible, you know, people live in this community and come here, maybe on weekends or come for occasional darshons, don't come every night. But if you live in the community, it's like, why would you live in this community and not come to darshon every night? And if Ma is there, giving this meditation -- of course, there are times when, maybe, you've got a headache, you don't want to -- but you still go, because there's something there. And, and that's why people are here -- because you want the greater intensity, you want the, the more, this is, this is an up level [?] it's sort of like a graduate course in, in spiritual commune thing. I would, I would say that this, in, in some ways, this is like a monastic commune, but a co-ed monastic commune, in a way. Because it's, uh, it's monastic in the sense that it is, it is, uh, celibate, and, to some degree, um, that the, the major focus is, is spiritual, but it's also not just spiritual inward, but spiritual inward and outward, because you're serving humanity, um, it's more, it's in some ways microcosmic, rather than macrocosmic, because you work with a small group, like the River House, work with where you are, but yet, we also operate, uh, Ma certainly does, and we do, nationally, you know, with the River Fund, operating wherever we are. Um, and um, --

**Q:** Crack in my neck.

**A:** Oh, I just heard the sound. I didn't know it was in your neck, I thought it was just -- oh, that's, that's the kitchen. Um, but the nuts and bolts -- the nuts and bolts are different for everybody. See, like, there are a lot of people here who do all of the physical things. Ma really wants people to be healthy, because a lot of the people here are like me, I'm fifty-three, getting older, wants people to be able to keep going and serving and be healthy, and I mean, it's kind of amazing, the degree to which there really have been so few injuries or whatever it is, in the twenty years we've been here, or people really sick or dying, or whatever. And, and that is, quite impressive or whatever it is. But, uh, uh, so a lot of people do the hockey, and the Tae Kwon Do along with her. I don't, because, when I was eight, I was paralyzed from the neck down with polio, so my body is not really good enough to -- the fact that I've recovered to wherever I am is whatever it is, but it's like, I'm not able to do those things. So, I do a different thing. I do a lot of work in different areas -- I work for um, do stuff for the ashram, or do stuff in terms of Ma's service work, or I do some consulting to make enough money to do the other stuff, or, and that's what I do. So I start, I meditate, and then I work the rest of the day, or I go out, or I serve in some things in the local community, um, other people do -- and I teach, [unintelligible]. But other people do, whatever they do. So the nuts and bolts are different. And then we all, I mean, most people work off the ashram. Um, and, and make money, and then they pay their rent, and they do whatever they do, and we all come together for darshon at night. I happen to be one of the people who works on the ashram, but this is just, I'm working in my office, doing all my different things. So that's kind of like nuts and bolts.

**Q:** Right. So how does, how do economics work? Um, each person is assessed rent, basically, or . . . ?

**A:** Yeah, each person pays, pays room and board, uh --

**Q:** And is that equal, across people, or --

**A:** Yeah, everybody, everybody pays the same -- it's just, that there are differences -- if you have children in the school, then you pay more for children in the school. If you live off the ashram, then you pay a certain amount, but nowhere near as much as the people who are living on the ashram.

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**Q:** To come to darshon? Is that? I mean . . . is that . . . ?

**A:** Well, it's not so much to come to that, it's, if you come to darshon every night, you're paying a certain amount for the, for, in one sense, the upkeep of the ashram and coming to darshon, I guess. Yeah. Um, I, that part, I couldn't explain as well as Krishna Priya. Because she's like the co-administrator of the ashram, and she understands that better than I do, because I don't, I not only don't, I don't even think about it. I just know that, I know that the rent is equal, I know for instance, like, I'm planning to build a house. And I'm going to build something bigger, and I'm going to share a house with Chandra Devi [?] the one I mentioned. She's going to have a house, she and her husband, uh, uh, Kamaar [?] and Bina [?] are going to have one, and then I'm going to have one, along with my wife, and then also with a studio. So there will be three different units together. When we do that, our financial relationship with the ashram will change, because we'll pay, be paying for that. And then paying a certain amount to the ashram. I don't know what that will be. Right now, I'm just paying the rent, here, I'm paying a certain amount of rent, and then, and then food, and since --

**Q:** Is it a pretty reasonable way to live? Given that, you know, 'cause people are sharing things, does it make it cheaper than if you were out living in your own apartment somewhere?

**A:** I think so. But it's been a long, a long time since I've done it. I've been here for almost twenty years now. So I almost don't even -- and because money has never been like a major thing in my mind, it's obviously, you know, very few people, I think, join, go into spiritual life with money as a major factor. Some, some may still have that, but I, I --

**Q:** Although it must be a concern for some people as to how they're going to support themselves.

**A:** Without a doubt. Without a doubt. But I've always been able to, to um, to make enough money that, that I'm, you know, I cover my expenses. I'm still trying to put enough away, you know, cover my wife's and my medical insurance, we don't have enough money now, in the ashram, to do medical insurance for everybody, and we've got to. So that's, that's one of our goals down the road. I'm able to cover it. Or if you work at a company where they, where they cover it. I'm self-employed, so I'm, I'm paying it for her and me. Some people work at, like, people work at Ma Cho, their medical is covered for them and their family. The people who don't, that's something the ashram has to do. Also, retirement thing -- I'm putting some stuff, some money away, you know, I have a, I'm able to just, it's not like enormous, but I'm trying to be efficient enough to do this, but some people, we've, we've also got to get that together for them, and that's a goal. Um, so you're right. People, they're, they're people that really need to be concerned with it. Um, . . . you know, I'm, I'm OK right now, myself, but, uh, but I'm worried uh, you know, for instance, Camarra [?], my brother-in-law, and Nina [?] um, they, they just work for the ashram. They don't really, Camarra could earn money, because he's this master craftsman --

**Q:** Right.

**A:** But he's so busy with all he's doing that he hasn't really, he's just starting to try to allocate time to start businesses, and I'm going to try to, try to help him, like, promote it a little bit, so he can make some money to cover those things.

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**Q:** 'Cause probably a lot of people aren't paying Social Security, either, right? So that, when they reach retirement age, they could really be in a lot of trouble. Right?

**A:** Right.

**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** Right. I'm doing, uh, . . . what am I doing? I need to call about my taxes on Monday, as a matter of fact -- I wrote myself a note, 'cause as self-employed, I've got to make sure that I really am covering that. No, I'm paying that in -- 'cause I'm paying taxes as a self-employed person. But I do it quarterly, so . . . What do you do? Are you, you're covered by the university.

**Q:** Well, this year I am. I haven't been in the past. So, that's, something I have to think about, too. Yeah. It gets complicated.

**A:** Well you, you file a joint return with your husband, though, right?

**Q:** Well, I just got married in September, so . . .

**A:** Oh, you haven't done it yet. Oh.

**Q:** Right.

**A:** Well, my wife has never had any money. We've, I mean, she has a little bit, --

**Q:** 'Cause she works for the ashram?

**A:** Yeah. So, I mean, she was a waitress at one time, and did this and that. So I always just file a joint return with her, she's, she's never really even thought about it.

**Q:** I'm curious, um, about who has access to Ma and kind of who doesn't. It seems like she has kind of an inner circle that is with her a lot and can spend time with her more easily than other people. How does that work? How does that happen?

**A:** Well, it happens in the sense that there are, there are always, like with her and everybody, you know, some people that you're more comfortable with than others. There are, there are people who are, um, when I, when I go to darshon and I come out of darshon, sometimes I'm very raw, and, and like, somebody coming up to me could say something and it would be like, you know, please, leave me alone -- I just want to be in a quiet space. And there are some people who are better than that with Ma than others. Some people who are more grabby and want attention, want to be noticed, want to be spoonfed, or want to be, have their own agenda, or want recognition, they always, they, it's always the same thing with a, with a child with a parent, you know? Some people want more attention than others. Obviously, in, in -- she'll talk to anybody who has like a need or a problem or things, but in those moments when she's got just, things to take care of, she, obviously would want people around her who are the least grabby, the least needy, and, as she terms it, the most like shadows. Who don't, who don't ask for recognition or anything. And I think that the people around her most are the people who do that most. And those, so that there's a small group of like four or five or six or something, who, um, who are the least demanding in that way. That's not to say that other people can't talk to her -- they can, but, you know, it's sort of like anybody has their, whoever their close staff is, who, who, uh, and, so, certainly



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Yashoda [?] you know, is a, is a, is a, an empty, cheery, very positive person, and, uh, empty in the sense that she doesn't have a lot of baggage, you know? Um, my sister-in-law, Bina [?], who runs the River Fund, is one of the, um, the emptier people I know. Even though she might not seem that way at times, because she can get really, like, passionate about whatever it is, but there's absolutely nothing personal in it. She's one of the people who has the least personal investment in, in, you know, like her personal take on something is never in there. It's sort of like, I don't know if you know what I mean, but there's no, like, you know, a lot of people need to get rid of jealousy, or envy, or competitiveness, or proving themselves, or, or, or "Look at me," or, she has none of that. That was done twenty years ago. That was done, even, maybe thirty years ago. From the time I've known her, she's one of the, in the, in that sense, you know, is like a dead. She's deader to those kinds of, uh, of traits, of, of, greed, envy, jealousy, lust, all of those things, she has the least of it, of, of many people I know. And so, I'm sure, for Ma, that's a pleasure for her to have someone like that around her, because she doesn't have to, you know, that's like kid stuff -- to try . . . for a spiritual leader to have to, especially with the closest people, you don't want to deal with that, you want to be way beyond that, so you can just say "This person is sick, go take care of them," or "This person, this kid is like really in trouble, go do that." And then just know that it'll be done, and you don't have to worry about that person's personality being involved in the thing. It's just do it. You know, and, so that's, you know, that's why with her -- with anyone -- I know, you know, with the Dalai Lama it's exactly the same thing. You know, that he's got around him people that he, who he can trust and feels really comfortable with, that he doesn't have to deal with kid stuff in, in, in those moments when, you know, he's off -- the big teaching, the big lecture, the big whatever it is. Um, in my case, um, I can see her whenever I want to, to talk about press or media, or other stuff. So I have access to her when I need it. Uh, but I'm not there all the time. Which . . . in one sense is probably good, because uh, uh, I'd probably go crazy if I, if I did.

**Q:** [Laughs].

**A:** [Unintelligible].

**Q:** Do her kids, um, live with her? I mean, in the same dwelling?

**A:** Yeah. Yeah. Well, she's got three kids in New York. Denise, the oldest daughter, whom you just met, who's got three kids of her own, uh, who just came down for a visit, lives in New Jersey, not New York. She's got a son who is married and has two kids, who lives in New York, and she's got another daughter who lives here, who's, how old she is -- thirty-three or something. Who lives in the area, works in the area. Then she's got, um, Tony, whom you just met, who is her grandson, but she adopted him, because, long story, his mother was going to have an abortion, Ma doesn't believe in that, certainly doesn't believe in like, she wanted [?], so she offered to take care of him. She took him . . .

**Q:** But it was one of her kid's kids, I mean, a blood grandson.

**A:** Right. Right. It was her son's son.

**Q:** OK.

**A:** And so she took him as, raised him as her son, and then she's got four other, no, three other kids who live with her here. Uh, . . .

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**Q:** With her husband, the Tae Kwon Do master?

**A:** Right. Who lives in Miami most of the time, has a school there and is [unintelligible].

**Q:** And are they teenagers, or, what age are they?

**A:** Um, thirteen, thirteen, and fourteen.

**Q:** There's twins?

**A:** No, they just happen to be the same age. Boy and a girl. They were adopted.

**Q:** Oh. OK. I thought "This doesn't make sense."

**A:** Right. They were adopted.

**Q:** All three of them.

**A:** Yeah.

**Q:** Oh, OK. And, um, do they get special treatment 'cause they're Ma's kids?

**A:** Uhh . . . yes and no. I actually think it's unclear [?] whether it's tougher.

**Q:** Really?

**A:** I suppose, I mean, people are like, really like, you know, watch them, and, and demand of them -- we demand of all the kids -- it's not, it's, I wouldn't say, like favoritism, certainly the teachers don't give them favoritism in class. Um, they're, like all the kids. There's a lot of love for these kids here, in the ashram, I mean, you've seen that. So they get that same level as uh, as the others. In some sense, when Ma is gone, because she does leave and is busy, there's always people who show a lot of love for her kids. 'Cause it's like, it's like, everybody, as I was saying, everybody's a parent of all the kids. Um . . . [inaudible]

**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** It's, I mean, they all get, every one of them sort of gets special treatment. But these, they have so many parents. I would say, especially her kids, too. Because she's really like, she wants to make sure that they're really, like, she wants to make sure of all the kids, she's very tough, she used to say, like, you need permission to walk across the street when you're twenty -- 'cause she wants to make sure nobody gets run over by a car. It's like an exaggeration, obviously, but in a way, like, she really wants to, wants to make sure that the kids have good values, that they're, that they're careful about themselves, that they don't make the mistakes that kids, certainly in the local, like in the local high school -- the reason we started our school, at all, was because when some of our kids were going to the local high school, and there was drugs all over the school, and I think I was mentioning to you, there was like teen prostitution from, from thirteen-year-old girls, and, and, like, that's not, that's not so widespread now, but the drugs are. The drugs are absolutely widespread. The school, she was talking, she said something last night about St. Edward's -- I mentioned that school, um, she mentioned it in darshon. I can't remember what she was talking about. Oh! That a couple of parents of St. Edward's had come to look at Kashi, and to see the school and, uh, and I just talked to somebody at St. Edward's, two days ago on the

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substance abuse council, where I'm serving, who said there was like an eighty percent drug user experimentation in the school. This is the richest school, from the richest families in this community, of families that are like, millionaires. The, the, the, many of them. I mean, John's Island is supposed to, which is a community, um, exclusive community in Indian River county, community is not the word -- resort -- is supposed to be the highest per capita income in the country. Uh, [unintelligible]. And here are these kids who, it's just sad. And so Ma's concern, sort of like really understandable, just to make sure they have good values. Just to make sure they understand that, that we don't approve of, of, of, A. The bad thing on the other side, and trying at the same time to inculcate good values, good, other things on the other side. And I really feel that, myself, that I grew up in a very stable family. My mother and father, and my father's dead now, but they, you know, for their fifty years of marriage, didn't get divorced, um, loved me and my brother, were very supportive, showed us good values within themselves, a lot of love, and that's what, you know, we try to teach to our kids. And, and, and do something with your life. You know, give to people, do, you know, achieve. They were more into achieving, my father was, you know, as a lawyer -- no, that's not true -- he also served and gave. And my mother was always, mostly just charity stuff.

**Q:** What did your folks think of you following Ma?

**A:** As long as I was happy --

**Q:** That was OK?

**A:** Yep.

**Q:** Did they ever --

**A:** Unusual parents.

**Q:** -- Come down here to visit you?

**A:** Yep. Well, my mother comes all the time.

**Q:** Does she?

**A:** And my mother, my mother, by the way, her third eye is open, somewhat, too. So even though, I mean, she comes and she sees things all the time.

**Q:** Wow.

**A:** And it's kind of like, a, you know, maybe it's a family trait, but she's, uh, she, so it's not like, for her, it's not so hard to understand.

**Q:** Does your brother come, too?

**A:** No, my brother is dead.

**Q:** Oh.

**A:** He was like, from an auto accident in --

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**Q:** I'm sorry.

**A:** Thirty years ago, so, it's like, but, uh . . .

**Q:** So your mom comes, that's great. That's wonderful. What would you say is the best thing for you about living, um, in a spiritual community?

**A:** [Pause]. That is a really hard question.

**Q:** Sorry.

**A:** God. I can't believe you asked such a . . .

**Q:** Is it, is it being close to Ma?

**A:** [Pause]. Well, that's not living in a spiritual community. That's living here.

**Q:** OK, living here.

**A:** And, and, and, and I don't, I don't know what to compare it to, because everything else I've lived in, I can't say was just a spiritual community. There were other aspects to it. It was either a hippie thing or a kibbutz thing -- there was always, I was always somewhat spiritual, there was always something there, but it was obviously much more, in those cases, psychic then, or as, or as like, um, [pause] I'll have to think about that, I don't know. What, what the best thing is? Um, is that it feel real. That it's a, that it's a, that it's, I'm living with a larger family of brothers and sisters, um, in which there's obviously love and support, and you have a feeling of, of um, of going to God and belonging to, going to God along with your family of brothers and sisters. At the same time. Um, so there's that, it's like, because going to God, going to God, that phrase, you know, being on the path, spiritual path, is ultimately and, um, and fundamentally absolutely a lonely thing. There's no way, no matter how close you are to your friends, your wife, your children, your guru, your whatever it is, you're still absolutely alone, in a, when it comes down to it. You know, you've got your guru there -- you've got your whatever it is, on whatever level, whether in flesh or not, anything else [?] but you're still alone. But in this, because, when you, when you sit to meditate. When you, when you talk to the God inside you, ultimately you have to do it by yourself. And, and you still, living in community like this, as much as possible you do have your family and whatever it is with you, it makes it a less, as, as much as it can possibly be, a less lonely process than it would otherwise be. I would think that, you know, when I think of a, um, a monk, uh, well, well even a monk in a monastery, you've got your brothers, or, in a, or, you know, for nuns, your sisters around you. So it would be a similar thing. That in a community, for them, for us, um, it is, it is, as much as possible makes it a joint effort of being on the path. Whereas there are people like, in the caves of the Himalayas where you here about, where, God, that's, that's really alone. It's, it's a harder, harder way to conceive it. Or being in the world. You know, there are certainly -- you don't have to be in a community to be a highly spiritual person. I'm sure there are, there are, there are people who are either liberated or very high beings who are living in a family. You know, either a wife or a husband or whatever it is, who are doing that kind of a life, as a householder, with children, with whatever, but just living in a family, going to church on Sunday, or, or not. 'Cause they don't believe in the church, or whatever it is, and are, and are very highly evolved beings going to God, and that's the path they're doing. Choosing not to live in

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community, um, but that's not easy. None of it's easy, actually. But that's, but this path is better for me, 'cause I like that, that, that reinforcement, the sharing.

**Q:** What's the most difficult and most challenging part about living in community?

**A:** [Pause]. The converse of what I just said. That, that because you're living in a collective environment, you, you have uh, a responsibility to the people around you, the goals of the community, the projects that are going on, that, um, that you don't necessarily have the time or the, to do everything you might want to do. For instance, when we talked about Finnthorn [?] before. If I were not living her, right now, I could just say "All right. I'll put this on hold. I'm going to go to Finnthorn tomorrow --

**Q:** [Sneezes].

**A:** Bless you. But, because I've got so many other projects, and because I've given to commitments to other people to, to help them with this or help them with that, or do this or that, that I'm simply not free to do that, and that's my choice. I've made that, and I could just simply stop, I guess, and say, "OK, I'm going to take this two or three weeks off," but I would never do that. Because I've made so many commitments to people. I've got a meeting later this afternoon with Krishna Priya to go over things that we need, that just she and I need to do together. And then, with Bina to help her with something, and, and, uh, I'm committed to so many things that, and that's partly because I'm living in this community with so many people who, I have certain talents, and so other people are asking for my help in things and uh, and I'm not, if I were just living alone, or just living with my wife, or just living, whatever it is, I would say "All right. I'm going off right now." And I would do that, and, I have done it in the past, but I can't do that now, and that's OK. I mean, that's my choice. But that's probably, in one sense, I would say the hardest thing. Because right now, I can see, we had this conversation, I thought "Finnthorn. Whoa. OK. I could get on a plane tomorrow." And that would, or, I've never been to Hawaii. Bam! I should just go to Hawaii right now. Or, you know, or I would just travel around, just like you. You're traveling around to all these interesting things. Of course, you're getting paid for it, but, and so it's great, you're covered. But I could, you know, if I have enough money in something, I would like, there are conferences all over that if I weren't, but that's the same as someone who had a regular job, saying "Hey, I'm committed to this, I can't just leave." In my case, you know, I have the, I have the disposition and the independence in a way where I could. In one sense. And I have in the past. But . . . so I guess that's the worst [?] thing.

**Q:** Why are you and, um, some other people building a separate house? 'Cause you want more privacy, or more space, or . . .?

**A:** Well, yeah. Both those things. And, and, like, here in my office, I need to make this a little more soundproof, 'cause I can hear noise from the kitchen, and sometimes it annoys me. Um, I want, I want more room and more space and it's time to maybe uplevel living conditions. And I think it's time to do that. So I want, you know --

**Q:** Yeah. Will you build off the ashram?

**A:** No, we have enough land on the, on the ashram, we have like eighty acres, so there's part where, where I will buy, along with couple other people, we'll buy a piece of land that we'll own, and that will be ours. It will be ashram, it will be originally ashram land, but they'll sell us the land, and then we'll

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build three different units that will kind of combine into sort of like one house, with separate units, like mine would be like, uh, oh, you know, three or four rooms. And uh, 'cause you know, I need an office, and bigger, and I'd like a -- you know, look at this room -- it's like, this is crowded as an office, I've still got more stuff that I can't -- here are books, because where am I going to store them right now? So I want storage places for those things.

**Q:** Yeah, sure. What's the glue that keeps Kashi together? It's been around for a long time.

**A:** Well, Ma. Everybody's love for Ma. And uh . . . that's one, and, and, I guess love for each other. And the fact that everybody here is on a shared spiritual path. Well, I, I mean, that's, we're all on a shared spiritual path, and each of us has, you know, and for each of us, Ma is our spiritual teacher, our guru. And, and, uh, and it's a strong enough desire to be on this path, to, in one sense, you say, choose to give up those, some of those things that are important to some people. But on the same level, they're not, they're neither more important to you, in most ways, than they are to us. I mean, I mean, you're, you're, I'm sure, you're not into drugs, you're not into major distractions like bar-hopping and heavy movies, or -- you know, you don't even watch television, in your case. So, so, um, in our case, what are we giving up? We're not, you know, giving up drugs is not like a major deal, or giving up [unintelligible] and service is not like a, giving up, that's a good thing to do. We feel that's a good thing to do. And the, and the fact that in the, in the, in the nightly darshons, you get so much back, in terms of the rejuvenation, the energy, the palpable physical thing that happens, as well, which is a spiritual thing, but you can, like feel it, for some people, see it, whatever it is, that it's like a constant reinforcement, reaffirmation of what's, what's really going on here. So that's, that's part of the glue. There's a, there is a, a daily discipline, which is different for everybody here, 'cause people do different things, depending on what they want to do. And their own spiritual practices. There's the coming together, that everybody does at darshon, but even for that, people are different. Some people do the kirton, some people don't. Some people, maybe, meditate in darshon in different ways, take different things, hear different things -- like some people are really into the words, I'm into the silence, or what happens between the words. Um, people are different. But, but there's a common glue there, and obviously, it starts with Ma -- she founded this and that's, she's why everybody is here.

**Q:** Yeah. Now I think someone mentioned to me that your turnover rate is pretty low. Is that true? People come here and they stay.

**A:** Well, there's an awful lot of people who've been here, like myself, for twenty years. Other people, whenever they come, they come, yes. I have no idea what, I would say it's a hell of a lot lower than, you know, what to compare it to, I don't know. I don't know, Gascon's farm, what they're . . .

**Q:** Yeah, I mean, some, I would imagine some of the secular communities, like Eastham [?] and Twin Oaks have a pretty high rate of turnover. I don't know what it is, but that would be my guess, from what I've heard.

**A:** That would be mine, too.

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**Q:** Mmm hmm. Yeah. Do you know how many people live here? Just approximately?

**A:** Two hundred, or something, but that, that's a Krishna Priya thing again. Have you talked to her yet?

**Q:** Um, no, uh uh.

**A:** She's better about that than --

**Q:** Not formally, I mean, not with a tape recorder -- OK.

**A:** Like administrative stuff like that, that's . . . I mean, I don't keep any, any records like that or anything

**Q:** I just wanted a rough idea --

**A:** I would say it's about two hundred, I mean, --

**Q:** That's a lot.

**A:** -- the school itself, see, I don't even know that.

**Q:** But a lot of it --

**A:** The school itself, I think there's a hundred and twenty people in the school --

**Q:** -- A lot of those [unintelligible]

**A:** Probably half of them are outside the community.

**Q:** OK.

**A:** And then when you say two hundred, how many of them are kids -- I don't really know. Um, most of [inaudible] I'm really more outward-oriented, in terms of what I do, so . . .

**Q:** I just wanted a rough idea, so that's fine. That's great. Um, last night, you told me what Kashi meant. Can you tell me again, please?

**A:** Kashi is the, is the City of Light.

**Q:** City of Light.

**A:** There was a book here by Diana Eck [?] called Manares [?], the City of Light, which is also Kashi.

**Q:** Now the full name of the ashram has Ma's teacher's name, too, right?

**A:** Yeah. New [or Nu?] Koroly Baba Kashi ashram.

**Q:** Now New Koroly Baba is his name, full name?

**A:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Q:** OK.

**A:** He's Ma's guru, which -- have you ever seen Miracle of Love, that book?

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**Q:** No, uh uh. Is that the one written by his student?

**A:** That was written by Ram Das.

**Q:** Ram Das, OK. 'Cause I think you, or someone told me, there were two books written about him, one by Ram Das and one by a student of his.

**A:** Uh . . . I didn't say that, 'cause I don't know which book you're talking about. There's a book about, well, there was Be Here Now, which was also written by Ram Das, which is, which is the beginning of it, in fact, I probably need to buy another copy, because I lent it to somebody -- that's what I've been doing, lending these books and I don't keep track . . . um, I guess I need to buy another copy [unintelligible] um, it's not here. Uh, anyway. Be Here Now starts the, tells the whole story of, of Ram Das meeting Baba, Koroli [?] Baba, going through this whole thing, and then the rest of it is like spiritual teachings that Baba taught him. That's what three-fourths of the book is. So that's not really necessarily about Baba. So if there's another book about Baba, and there may be, I don't know which one they're referring to.

**Q:** It was by a student of his that was like with him for a decade or so, studying from him. But he's not American, he's Indian. So it's more from an Eastern perspective, I guess.

**A:** Must be Dada [?]. Dada must have done a book, then. Dada visited here, you know, he took care of Baba the way he sort of takes care of Ma. And, uh, maybe I do have that . . . uh, nope. I don't know where that is. No, now you've got me [inaudible] I'll have to find out where it is.

**Q:** [Laughs]. You'll have to find it [inaudible].

**A:** Oh, my ribs are killing me!

**Q:** Oh, I'm sorry.

**A:** Me too. This was my book.

**Q:** Oh, I'd love to see it. Across the Barricades. Is that a picture of you?

**A:** Uh . . . don't I look like that?

**Q:** No, it doesn't look like you at all. That's why I had to ask.

**A:** Yes, it is.

**Q:** Sorry. [Laughs].

**A:** Do you remember, did I take these?

**Q:** Well, you said you were going to, but I can't remember who actually did. Would you have gone out and gotten a glass of water, 'cause you didn't.

**A:** No, I was [inaudible].

**Q:** I don't remember. I'm sorry. Ohhh . . .

**A:** It would be good if I, ah, OK.



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**Q:** Um, just as one final question -- do you, would you consider Kashi a success?

**A:** Absolutely. Yeah. Absolutely.

**Q:** And your involvement with it? Would you also describe it that way?

**A:** Yeah, absolutely. I know that, that, um, in the time I've been with Ma, in the time I've been living here, I'm a much better, fuller person than I was before I started. Much more satisfied, much more fulfilled, more, doing better things, clearer in my mind, more content with everything I'm doing. Certainly have a long way to go -- I'm not, I don't consider myself a liberated being in any, to any extreme. But I'm a lot better person than I was twenty years ago, and a lot less driven by any of those, uh, things, you know, all of the things that I mentioned, in terms of Bina, my sister-in-law. The greed, the jealousy, the love, the competitiveness, the sloth, the, all of those things are a lot less gone, better, in me than they were before. And I --

**Q:** Is your goal to become more empty?

**A:** Absolutely. More empty, more giving, more fulfilled, more loving. Love myself more, so I can love others more. Um, all of those things. And that's a lot of what Ma's teaching.

**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** And she's certainly an example. I mean, her service is an example for what I do in service, her loving herself is an example for me, you know, doing that. Her fundamental silence, which is really what she is, is where I want to go. And uh, so I am [?]. This community, when we first came here, we called it Kashi ranch, easily for twelve years, fifteen years, because A. We're living in a Southern Baptist community with a lot of, uh, um, fundamentalist Christians as whether, as well as, now evangelical, who are not really that tolerant, understanding of, or interested in an interfaith community which involves religions that, for some of them is, is heresy in terms of Christianity. For Hinduism, for instance, which has quite a number of gods, or aspects of gods that seem to them very unchristian. So, uh, for them, even the word ashram would be hard. Uh, the, the um, the local ecumenical council of churches, of which I am a member, eventually, mostly accepted us, because they saw that our service was heartfelt, real, um, and greater, uh, in many cases, than the service of most of their own parishioners, for the ministers. So none of them, so that was real [?]. And they also saw that, for us, even though we also believed in Hinduism or Judaism, or things like that, also they saw that our belief in Christ was, was very strong. Uh, one local minister, Lutheran minister said "I only wish my own parishioners believed in Christ as much as you do." Uh, which is a very strong thing for him to say, and actually very courageous, because, um, he could have been ostracized for having said that. Over the years, we got more and more accepted and, and, so, even though I was always careful in the community, or in the various things that I wrote for local papers, to talk about Kashi ranch for a long time, after, after twelve years or so, Ma said "It's time for us to publicly call ourselves an ashram. 'Cause that's really what we are, we don't have to . . ." and then, another couple of years later, she said "OK, now let's call ourselves Koroli Baba Kashi ashram," 'cause that's really also what we are. And that was, Ma wanted that, because that's honoring the name of her own guru, who is named Koroli Baba. Uh, his name comes from, um, the village of Nim Koroli [?] uh, he's the Baba and one, and one time, um, it was just one of those stories in, in India, I think a train that he was on stopped there, and, in the village of Nim Koroli and uh, I may actually be getting this story wrong, so I probably shouldn't even be telling it. I think it was a story where, uh, the conductor told him to get

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Interviewer: Deborah Altus

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off the train because he didn't have a ticket, and uh, and the train would not start. And the conductor, he did, he got off the train, but it wouldn't start and he just sat there, um, waiting, off the train. And then someone who recognized him said "Do you realize this is the greatest saint in India, and, and, the reason the train isn't starting is because you insulted him? And, and he's the friend of Nehru's and everything else, and how can you possible do this." And the conductor is like so ashamed and abashed that he went and said "Baba, please, get back on the train." He got back on the train, it started again. And then, that's where, that name, he had a lot of names. That was the name that seemed to stick. I think that's the story.

**Q:** Now Ma's had other names, too, hasn't she? I mean, someone said she was called, I forgot –

**A:** Well, um, her original name was Joyce Dithiori [?] which was her married name. When she was fifteen. Joyce, Joyce Green.

**Q:** But I mean --

**A:** You mean Joyce and [?] Jaya Sintan [?].

**Q:** Yeah. That's what I was looking for.

**A:** Um, Jaya, well, her name is Ma Jaya Sati Bhagavati now, which is Ma, Jaya, which means victory, and that came from Baba, En [?] Koroli Baba, her guru named her. So it's Ma, Jaya, which is victory, Sati, which is a very, uh, pure form of the mother, and Bhagavati is simply her name. Um, --

**Q:** Now when you say her guru named her, was that through some sort of vision, 'cause he was dead, right? Or out of his body, or whatever you call it?

**A:** Dead and out of his body, that's true, but, uh, um, she sees him all the time, he comes all the time. And quite a number of us have seen him too. So in this, in this, it's like what I was saying to you before, there's so many other things in heaven and earth than we see -- it's like the number of people who see Christ -- he's like, he's a reality in or our of his body, so yes, he definitely named her. She had, for a year, before she met Baba, she had Swami Nichiananda [?] who came and taught her, every day for a year in her house in Brooklyn, before she became publicly --