

Travels with a Yogi

by
"Norman Rule"

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Colophon

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These observations and meditations are inherited
from many individual sources - all parts of the
Infinite Universal Creative which we are and in
which we live.

“...before our first imprint, our consciousness is
formless. The first imprint creates the first
structure.”

G. Spencer Brown, The Laws of Form

Baba Yage was a toucher, a knocker, a puncher, a pusher, a puller, a shaker, a slapper. I'd heard he'd kicked a man who stuttered (because he'd stuttered his own name) and Yage was caressing my wrist with his fingers - he'd grabbed it up we were sitting so intimately - and, despite his soft tones - our heads near each other as we sat on the same bench, on one side of the wooden table - I couldn't relax. I expected something. I feared a head-butt. What he'd been saying:

"To know an angel is to know a planet. Knowing a planet is a simple affair. Find your breath. With all your human sensitivity, strive to find where that breath came from; find the source of breath. This is a meditation. When you find the source, come tell me where it is."

And then he gave me an Indian burn.

"Baba Yage." I spoke above the din of the airport traffic. "I'm concerned. I think we're going to be late to the fund-raiser."

"Stop worrying!" Baba Yage raised his voice. "None of your experiences are your own. They've all been done, by you and others. There are no challenges never met, just the same challenges dressed in different clothes. You've lost something? You're late for something? There's something threatening you? What's new? Nothing! Accept that you are a center of power and accept responsibility for yourself, blaming no one and no thing for your thoughts and actions, and accept that which is.

"What happens when we get there will be. Whenever and wherever we arrive, that will be there. Let go."

We'd been meditating together all day, the two of us, and the afternoon sun had found its way to my face. Feeling unattached to the moment - and by that I simply mean that I was giving it no great importance, yet still mindful (I thought) - I unfolded my legs, about to move to a shadier bit of our platform. Baba Yage seemed to know my plans. Without opening his eyes, he said:

"You won't find stillness over there, Kharghush. We can meditate on it, find and explore stillness."

Then he Charley-horsed my thigh something awful and he laughed as I hobbled around, swearing with soft words, working out the pain.

Kharghush, in Farsi, means 'bunny'. And his spot was still in the shade.

"What is consciousness, Baba Yage?"

"That's either a philosophical question or you're feverish."

We were in a hotel by a highway eating our supper and listening to a piano-man.

"I'm wondering what it is that concentrates attention on something. I know that 'I' don't exist, not as anything but a story in my mind, so what is consciousness?"

Baba Yage nodded his head. "This is a meditation. What moves and what does not? Come tell me when you have an answer."

Baba Yage stamped his foot!

"Presence!" He spat. "You think you know!

But you mean awareness! Which is the gift of
absence! When you are not, love happens,
awareness blooms. Your presence is the problem!
The more you are absent the better. Love is
inevitable when you are absent. It bursts into
being. When you aren't there to judge and
understand and grasp, love is right there.
Awareness comes from not grasping. This, too, is
a meditation."

"Richard?" Baba Yage asked me in the car.
"Are you doing something?"

I said, "Baba, you know we're going to the grocery."

He asked, "How is it that we're going to the grocers while neither of us are going anywhere? I know I'm not going to the store."

"This sounds like a riddle. I don't understand the question."

"This is a meditation. Look inside. Find the you you call you. Where is it? Is it anywhere near the doing? Should you find it, tell me. Don't worry. I never mess with the driver."

Baba Yage never attended but grade school yet he can explain the workings of nature. While hand-pollinating watermelon flowers with a feather on a cooperative in Indiana, he explained:

"All things come from a seed. We can use metaphor but we do not have to if you agree. Even a seed comes from a seed. Unusual things begin as seeds. Bridges and buildings begin as seeds; that's metaphor, maybe. You, me, even perhaps God are the result of the same seed. Maybe that seed is God. Maybe the seed is of God. This could be meditated on."

And with an expert judo throw, flipped me to the ground and pollinated my nose with the feather.

Baba Yage and I were over-looking the Grand Canyon from a spot just a half-mile from the parking lot, a place where we could hop a little fence, ignore a little sign, and sit with our legs dangling into the abyss - an activity I needed talking into.

"Fear is native to the body. It's for survival," he said. "Intelligence is iconoclastic. The ever-obedient are idiots."

Then he opened his pack and handed me a sandwich.

"Baba Yage?" I asked him while he tied his shoes. "What does enlightenment look like? I have read that one doesn't see a Buddha with the eyes."

Baba Yage tapped my leg with hand and smiled a bit maniacally. He said:

"It's always the same, it looks exactly the same, every time. An idiot sits down. A wise man stands up."

And went to stamp on my toe.

Baba Yage and I went to Newark to visit a bookseller who was enlightened.

"Baba Yage?" I asked in the taxi. "How do you know if someone is enlightened?"

"An enlightened man is always right. He might misremember a fact or get some detail not to your liking, but a fact is just a fact. He knows truth and he's trying to describe it."

That day Baba Yage was trying to stick his wet fingers in my ears.

Baba Yage, the bookseller, and I were having a supper of bread, greens, and lentils prepared by the monks and adherents of a local temple.

As if he'd been listening to our conversation, the Bookseller offered: "I met a man the other day. He was remarkable. I thought, ah, he's awake. But then he disappeared into a fog of household drama."

"I'm sure it's just as you say," said Baba Yage. "However, if a man follows a mirage he learns not to follow it again."

"Maybe not the first time, but he'll get home, eventually." The bookseller said.

"Exactly," said Baba Yage.

"Thank you, Baba," said the bookseller with lowered head and templed hands.

The Baba slipped him a wet willy.

The next morning we travelled to the Northwest for a sort-of Congress of Religions in Seattle, hosted by one of that cities' many universities and Baba Yage spoke his cosmology of universal laws dealing with the octaval progression of frequencies and periodicities and, during the Q&A, a student asked, "How would you go about changing your frequency?"

Baba Yage replied. "I would will a change and perform all the necessities for change.

"First, I would breathe the right way."

At a thrift store, looking for jeans, Baba Yage explained:

"Bodies feed the soil. Souls feed the sun. The moon gathers all the earth-souls that are mature and stores them until it sends them along at the beginning of each cycle. Those souls are the nutrition for the Divine Being that manifests as the sun. The sun could feed our bodies directly but we have lost the science although some claim to have rediscovered it. This I don't know. I know sun energy feeds plants, plants feed us, feed animals, we are sun energy, these bodies. The sun doesn't eat bodies. It's health comes from the spirits it draws to itself. Maybe true, maybe not, I'm still taking your milkshake."

Sitting near enough to Baba Yage to be a target of bits of gravel and sidelong grins tossed by the Baba, I was working through the flower of life drawings with pencil, compass, protractor, and rule in the shade of an acacia while he danced in the sun with a four year old girl on the edge of a baseball field parking lot to the music coming from her mother's car stereo.

"This is a meditation, Richard. Who is at play? Introduce us."

Baba Yage had been sitting in meditation for nearly three hours when a woman and a man came breezily talking right through our camp site. The woman shrieked and laughed when she saw the Baba under his tree and said, "I've never seen anybody so still."

I watched from the car as she examined him, up close, not touching him, but close enough to touch.

"What's he doing?"

"Should we get someone?"

"Is he real?"

"Let's get out of here."

Over breakfast:

"Tigers won't eat meditators. It doesn't happen. Wild animals have been known to protect them."

"What about mosquitos?" I asked humorously.

"I left my wallet in the car," said the Baba.

"Baba Yage?" I questioned. We were preparing for a satsang and arranging flowers.

"Yes, Richard?"

"I was looking for self. I now know that self is not mind."

Baba Yage froze, his hands stopped in the act of positioning a stem. "I agree," said the Baba, slowly. "It may be above, below, behind - who cares? - but if the self is not the mind, then where is it? What is it? And how do you know it?" Then he set his scissors and flower down and turned to look up at me, his eyes amused and curious.

"While in meditation, I realized that the mind is constructed by ideas while the self pre-exists ideas."

"I also agree," said the Baba. "But, how is the mind made up of ideas?"

"Baba Yage, I'm not sure. I think it must be that conditioning is identity. It seems to me that I must be identifying - and wrongly - with the mind. How do I re-identify and rightly?"

"You have made a good observation. Look deeper. There's more to find. What is the

mechanism that locates the identification of self in mind? Come tell me when you find it."

"To find self, you must reject all things that are not you. This is easy in isolation, in nature, in warm, quiet places. Some people think, if meditation is done in isolation doesn't that mean it is anti-world? Meditation, though, is not anti-world. It is anti-mind. The mind is the enemy all meditation techniques are designed to subdue, to conquer; to overcome and enslave the mind is the promise of yoga. We differentiate, of course, between mind and intellect. We're not trying to blunt our intelligence.

"Neti Neti, not this not this, is a meditation. But this is not Neti Neti. You must take even your best models you make of yourself and destroy them because your understanding of yourself is not yourself. Mind will make thought for you but the self is to be the real master and is not the same as the mind. And your arrangement looks ridiculous."

Baba Yage said, "Start here:"

"Know this by learning it in meditation. I hear with these ears. These eyes show me the world. This I moves my body and sees what happens. This body is an instrument used to experience this place. I have awareness. This body does not. This body belongs to me. And who am I? Is my ever-changing face me? Is my name me? I'm not the materials that make my body. This body is not me. And who am I? I am a spiritual entity. As a pure consciousness manifestation, I am a light being. I am aware that my body and I are not the same. My body moves. I do not."

A seagull flew past the Baba as he skipped stones between the waves.

"Baba Yage? What is stone consciousness?"

"These are happy stones," said Baba.
 "They're on an adventure." He slung one sidearm that flew flat and skipped five big jumps before hitting the face of the next wave.

Around the fire:

"Richard, you think you know how to relax." He picked up a stone. "A stone is a meditation. Become stone. Find the heaviness that makes a stone. Become the still, unmoving stone. Become the stone that does not move because it is only a stone. This can be explored. Attainment can be reached this way."

And he faked a throw at me that made me duck.

Baba Yage asked me to come to a garden party being thrown by a chef of some reputation and we ate carrot-cake-rum-raisin cookies as we toodled about on the lawn with The Chef, his wife, their sous chef, her husband, their children, and a small crowd of talented and artistic friends.

The Chef complained of being over-worked. He said, "I love what I do and it seems I'll do it always, yet, the pace of it..."

Baba Yage smiled and pulled The Chef in close, and while talking, laid him down on the grass. He said, "This is how to relax: lie down and, starting with the head, release all tension. Tell the muscle, muscle relax." Baba Yage touched the Chef's head. "Scalp relax." He touched the Chef's forehead. "Forehead, relax. Sometimes it helps to tense and release," he said tightening, then relaxing, his face. "And go from tip to toe and back again," touching his fingers along The Chef's chest, belly, and legs and feet and back up. "Toe relax, calf relax, thigh relax. Thank the skin for its flexibility, thank the blood for supporting the muscles, the veins and arteries for guiding the blood, thank the heart for its ceaseless pumping,

thank your lungs for the work they do. Thank your stomach and your mouth, thank your hands and feet. Thank your spine for holding it altogether and upright. Thank the brain for all of its thoughts, let it know that it, too, can slow down. It can be more wrought over or less wrought over and takes only ten to thirty minutes.” Baba Yage rose and pulled The Chef to his feet. “It helps to repeat a little prayer or mantra. That's the recipe. Now, can I have the one for these cookies?"

"The mind is just a collection of thoughts in a process, like clouds in the sky.

"This is a meditation. Join with the clear sky, the empty sky; become sky. Become the spacious clarity of the empty sky. Attend it. If you can do this, mind will cease. Gaps between thoughts will grow. Come tell me if you do this."

"Who are you?" Baba Yage asked. "In dreams, who are you? In deep, dreamless sleep, who are you? To whom do troubles come and when? With whom do you identify?"

Baba Yage and I were skating in Central Park, New York City. He hung on me and nearly fell and nearly pulled me down dozens of times in that hour.

"What about destiny?" I asked. "What about Karma?"

"Destiny is for people who prefer the idea of being a robot to being a human being. Karma is for people who want to take some responsibility. Sometimes they're both excuses by people for acting badly."

Baba Yage let go my sleeve and kicked off, skating effortlessly to the exit.

"Baba Yage?" I inquired, bringing him some tea.

"Yes, Richard?"

"Is enlightenment gradual?"

"There are those who say it is but I disagree, however I know that those I disagree with are sympathetic liars. They don't want to teach an unbelievable truth, so they share an encouraging falsity. Enlightenment is lightning, it hits you, it redefines you from that moment, you are immediately different. You are not you. You cease to be the seeker. It's the learning to sit in stillness that can take time."

"It is easy enough to find God. Look for God everywhere, all the time. Call the name of God. Sing it in your heart, cry it in your mind, let your love of God, your wanting God, give you fever. Very soon, you will find something enough like God that your search will be over. Remember, though, that the search for God always begins with finding Him."

Baba Yage and I were waiting our turn for the putting green next to the windmill and watching others putt-putt.

A smiling man putted at a yellow submarine and his ball hit an obstacle, bounced back and forth and came to a stop in front of the tunnel entrance. His face warped in frustration yet he smiled at companions as they razzed him.

"You see how you are intangible, never solid, never there?" Baba Yage began. "One moment you are hate - and hate is a mood. You are love one moment and that is a mood, too. You are lust, you are anger, you are happy - all moods. The mood masters the man, changing the consciousness, crippling it, deforming it, putting a thousand voices in his head. For the man who masters himself, there's no one home."

And rapped on the side of my head for effect.

Baba Yage sat at his writing desk. "Did I write this?" He called out.

"I am passing through this stage of existence making the best possible use of Heart, Hand, and Head."

"I think that was Ramacharaka."

Baba Yage laughed. "It's a good mantra. Repeat often."

"Write down your prayer. This is an approach. Compose your prayer like a song, like a symphony. Craft it. Change it. Make every word true. You'll know you're close when you start crying. Speak your prayer until it sounds like the flowers themselves were praying... if flowers could pray. They don't have to. This is funny."

"But, Baba Yage?" I asked. "Does that mean a Buddha doesn't love?"

"Maybe a better way to express it would be that he has become love. He has become just one thing, a presence, a simple being. No mood effects him. He has no lust nor anti-lust. No greed nor extravagance. No sorrow moves him but his compassion is endless. He is polarizing, but not polar. We could say a Buddha is beyond love. If you are sensitive you might feel his aura, feel his being. If not... Invisible."

"Let's look at Karma. A Buddha has shed his karma. He can do nothing to bring karma upon himself. He is beyond good, he is beyond evil, he resides in love, out of reach of either, in another dimension."

"Baba Yage?" I asked, "Tell me more about love and hate."

"I'm loving the French Toast. The French Toast is not the cause of my love. I'm full of hate for my coffee cup but the cup is not the cause of my hate. I'm angry with the waitress but the waitress is doing her job. The cook is lazy - your hash browns are underdone - and I disrespect him, yet the cook is not the cause of my disrespect."

"Baba Yage? Then where does the hate, the love, the anger, the disrespect come from?"

"These are my belongings and I carry them with me. It looks like the French toast is lovable, but to a man who doesn't eat eggs, it is hateful. My coffee cup looks despicable but that's because it's empty. To a man who'd had enough, it would look perfect. I'm angry with the waitress because she didn't see me when I asked for a refill. For someone with patience, this would not be a problem. I'm disrespectful of the cook because I have an opinion about food yet the restaurant is full and others love the cook. It is obvious now, to me, that I am the source of love and hate."

"Play is fun. Meditation is fun. Why do children play? Because it's fun. But adults work. Work work work. What is work? It's just following rules. Rule for adults: go inside and work. Rule for children: go outside and play. Children know that the game changes, that the rules change, can be different, and nothing is wrong, when in play. Grievous injuries, even broken bones, are forgiven immediately. As grown-ups, we forget that about play because we've learned work and work doesn't change, and it can be done wrong and work has meaning because it has consequences and it does something important, but play... The rules change. The results are inconsequential. Nothing important gets done. But, really, everyone is playing games. Imagine all the games! Everyone following the rules of their own games. You following the rules of the wandering monk. Nothing getting done, nothing of consequence. Me following the rules of lecturing spiritualist. The world is still spinning. That man in the hat

playing a game of "angry man" and following all those rules. Now, it's good to know you are playing a game and now you know the game you're playing is your choice. If you don't know your game or if you're unhappy with your game, this could be a meditation. What's your game? What are the rules? Can your gamesmanship improve? Because games are usually played with others, most of your playing has been in exterior social games with rules of control, and your unhappiness may be because you have taken the games seriously, or haven't considered the rules deeply. Games of governments, of course, games of friends, strangers, all gaming, all giving you rules. Meditation is exactly the opposite. Meditation can only be done alone, in this moment, in a spirit of play."

Baba Yage asked: "What is your awareness when it is aware of its own awareness? What are you? Are you the seeker or are you the sought?"

Baba Yage and I were cooling our feet, our legs hanging over the edge of the boat, in the river. One of the barge passengers, a middle-aged man with a straw coolie-hat, said to Baba Yage:

"Why do I feel like my life is cyclic? Full of conflict? Even after spending many years of my life in spiritual search?"

"Perhaps it's the years you've been searching? You could stop, anytime." Baba Yage said, taking the man's hat off his head.

"Baba Yage. I don't understand." The man rubbed his head.

Baba Yage put the hat on as he talked and tied the cord fast under his chin. What he said:

"Buddha is credited for saying, 'Dissatisfaction with reality is the hallmark of suffering.' It can be even an obsession, this agony of wanting to be different than we are. It leads to neurosis and disassociation and insanity. You're okay with me keeping this hat? I think it suits me."

"Baba Yage?" I asked, as we walked across a horse pasture to retrieve a ladder from the stable. I had volunteered to fix our hosts' gutter and Baba Yage had volunteered to help. "How best can we control our negativity?"

"Ah!" He cried, rolling over in the grass. "There is a meditation! It's to be done every day, until negativity ceases. Concentration is wanted, but the visualization is fun. In your mind, imagine your face. If you're no good with pictures in your head, don't worry about it. The small flashes you get are enough. Imagine each of your seemingly negative emotions expressing themselves on the left side of this imaginary face. Imagine the balancing emotion on the right. Let your jealousy, your rage, your frustration all play on the face on the left, one after another. Take your time and appreciate these expressions. Hang your charity, your peace, your contentment on the face on the right. All of your pettiness, all of your hatred, all of your depression, whichever negative feeling you possess, imagine it expressed on the face on the left. See these faces, really. Put your compassion, your love, your joy on the right. It

will not be long before you are so disgusted with the faces on the left, you will decide only to wear the faces on the right. Soon, you will be only the right side of you. Self-realization can be found this way."

And then he blew a dandelion seed-ball at my face.

Baba Yage had taken the window seat and given me the aisle. During take-off, he distracted me from my anxiety with this story:

"Two monks - both of whom have made strict vows of poverty and chastity - were going door to door, begging for rice. They knock on the door of a beautiful widow who takes a fancy to the younger of the monks and, touching his arm, invites him inside. To get the rice, I'm certain. The elder brother restrained him, however, and reminded him of his vows. The widow - disappointed - fetched the rice herself and the two shortly went on their way. Having left the village for the monastery, the two monks were hit by a downpour that soaked them and washed out a section of road. On the other side of the washout, a beautiful young woman stood, unsure how to cross. The elder monk, hitching his robes, forded the washout, scooped up the girl, and carried her across. An hour later, while drying their robes by the fire, the younger monk asked, "How is that we made the same vows and you can touch a woman but I can't?"

“The older monk laughed and asked, "How is it that I put that woman down five miles ago and you're still carrying her?"

“Baba Yage... Everyone has heard that story.”

“Does everyone also wonder why the aggressive gaslighting from the old monk? He’s hiding something.”

"You can dislike anything. Buddha says have no preference yet there's a difference between disliking something and thinking it personal. Can't you see that even when someone is attacking you, it's not personal? It's just life meeting life. Jesus certainly disliked the the walk up Golgotha, however he didn't take it personally. Rama didn't like Sita being stolen, yet he knew it wasn't personal. If you feel that life is attacking you, or it conspires to make you unhappy - not only are you dead wrong - you should be meditating on this."

"All learning follows the same path of error and correction. We try and fail; we try again. As a baby we learned language that way. Even meditation must be learned, tried again and again, before success occurs. We still the mind but it starts again. We still it. It starts again. Still it enough times, the mind becomes an instrument. For now, it is just important to meditate frequently."

Baba Yage loved the smell of roses.

"There are stories of holy people in the last days of their lives who smelled of roses. These stories must be true, there are so many of them, from so many traditions. When we are dying, we smell of decay, create a stench. When a holy person dies, they don't even rot like normal people. Their bodies can stay pristine for months or even years. Believe."

Baba Yage and I were moving through the crowd at the night market in Bangalore. There is a temple there, as old as the oldest part of that city.

Outside the doors of the temple, monks were gathered together in groups, feeding, washing, healing and caring for the elderly who came to them.

Baba Yage pulled my sleeve and said:

"When, out of the great, great love you have for God, you renounce Heaven for the love of your fellow men, you have realized."

"Baba Yage?" I asked. "If Man is part of God and all powers of God are both available and inherent in Man, then where does prayer fit in?"

"Richard, you ask such good questions." Baba Yage answered over the sound of the sewing machine. "Most people think of prayer as directed toward another, toward God, but this is a mistake. Your thought is God's. Concentrating makes thoughts more powerful. Meditation. Prayer. Worship. All thoughts, yet, they require concentration, intensity. Pray fervently, feverishly. Intoxicate yourself in worship. Abandon yourself in meditation. This is where Yogic power comes from."

Baba Yage was flying kites with children at a reclaimed gasworks. I wondered aloud, "Baba... Tell me about selfishness." He could not have heard me, thirty feet away on a windy day, playing with children.

He held a finger to the children and walked to me. What he said:

"Selfishness is divisive and civilizing. It's the defining feature of contemporary mankind. You know how I feel about division. You know how I feel about society."

He handed me the kite handle and I took it.

"The only demonstrable cure for selfishness has ever been spiritual awakening. Bring the kite," he said. "The kids want ice cream."

"Ice cream!" Yelled the kids.

"This thing we call 'awareness' is only consciousness beyond oneself. It is a simple thing to see what is in front of you. It can seem more difficult to see that which another sees, and difficult beyond to see the reality of the moment. It is easier, really, but self... Say 'goodbye', to self and you'll feel what I mean. It really was no trick, hearing you. Would you like the rest of my cone?"

At a Buddhist temple, Baba Yage walked the prayer-wheel wall one hundred and eight times, spinning the wheels, turning prayers into the ether.

Osho said:

"Never compare. Comparison is one of the causes of keeping you tethered to the mundane, because comparison creates competition, comparison creates ambition. It does not come alone, it brings all its companions with it. And once you become competitive there is no end to it; you will end before it does. Once you become ambitious you have chosen the most stupid path for your life."

Krishnamurti said:

"Comparison leads to conformity."

Baba Yage said:

"Comparisons suck. Bliss exists when all comparisons end."

"Scientists will tell you that nothing stops a thought. Not stop it from happening, but stop it from traveling. Stone and earth do nothing to stop a thought from traveling. Neither do oceans or clouds or magnetism. Scientists have made instruments that detect thoughts, can read thought, put it on a screen, in the same room, but none yet so sensitive as the instrument of the human being - who is directly connected to another just through existence. Now, the power of a thought dissipates, like a radio wave, weaker and weaker the farther it goes from the source."

"The science of Yoga tells us that our least powerful thoughts effect others for one-hundred fifty feet around. If we have a thought, positive or negative, it is understood by the human instrument, if not by the conscious mind. Now, this makes joy a spiritual obligation, doesn't it? And imagine the power and sensitivity of a highly self-managed yogi to send and receive. You've heard the stories."

Baba Yage spoke in satsang, answering a question.

What he said:

"I come from a tradition that emerged from mysticism and we have never accepted the idea that man was 'finished', in the sense of complete. Where then the universal fire for improvement? Many of the images in my tradition contain mystical meaning. The Magic Rose is one of those symbols, an image, and it provides meaning for that improvement. It is not complicated. Osho said it best.

"Man is born as a seed.

"Identifying with the seed is the mistake. All are born as seeds, with a germ of potential. Accepting the seed-state means rotting, potential unfulfilled.

"Tending the seed, it germinates, grows, thrives, flowers, releases its fragrance.

"It seems magic when you see within yourself the rose. You see yourself as blooming. You see it perfectly. Always in bloom, never having bloomed. The petals unfolding. It is truth."

Baba Yage and I were putting up the dishes after a day of cooking with others in a local soup kitchen.

Baba Yage inquired, "Richard, I know you know about the third eye. The seat of the soul. Do you know how to move your awareness there?"

"Baba Yage, I'm not sure. In Raja Yoga, the eyes are looking up to that spot, but in other practices the eyes could be looking at the floor, or at the sky, so... No, Baba. I don't know."

Baba Yage stacked pots on a shelf.

"There are many ways to visualize it. 'Moving into The Heavenly Abode.' In meditation, close your eyes, relax, and imagine that you are looking at your own face, from the inside. You see your eyes and eyebrows, nose, nostrils, lips, chin, cheeks. You see the way your face sits, completely relaxed. Then, give some attention to the bright thread of light where the third eye resides, just back from and between the eyebrows. On the inner face, put the smallest smile of amused satisfaction as you set your attention upon the light of your third eye. See

how bright it is, how tiny and fine the source of that light. Join with the light of your third eye and look out through your eyes at the world, directing your life from this vantage. Realization can happen this way.

"Would you like to sweep or mop?" He asked, holding up the options.

"I'll mop."

"There are head yogis who will tell you the third eye, in the head, is the seat of the soul. Heart yogis will tell you it resides in the heart. There are good reasons for both views. I believe it is in the head. Why? Because I'm a head yogi. That's all."

"This western model of mind-body-soul is not enough. Man is more complicated. To be complete, we must exercise all our bodies, not just those three.

"The true body of Man is seven-fold. The Spirit, the finest, is pure luminescence, the result of the original sound. It is the gatherer of this body and its octave of instruments. From this soul comes the Purusha, the intellect, the instincts, the life-energy, the etheric body, and the meat and potatoes body."

"What's the Purusha, again?"

"As the optic nerve is an instrument of the body, the Purusha is an instrument of the Spirit and is between the Spirit and the intellectual mind."

"Baba Yage?" A woman asked. "There are so many paths, so many gurus. Which one should I choose?"

"Choose one who knows and follow them resolutely. Even if that guru is yourself."

Baba Yage stirred the lentils, mixed the salad, polished the serving utensils. He was saying:

"We cannot judge our fellow men, no matter how astray we think they've gone. Man is constantly unfolding, a flower in bloom a hundred years, throwing its petals, growing its petals, always new, always changing, always weather-beaten. All things in this world can be seen this way. All things within the universe."

"In this way, a man can be a thief one week, a soldier the next, maybe a monk. Sobriety might finally overcome a drunk. And any day might be the day of realization."

“The Spirit within - that spark of The Infinite-Creative-All-knowing-All-Thing - made you the best body for being you. The Spirit guides and shapes the body for you. The Spirit outside - The Great Exterior Manifestation of The All-knowing-All-thing - provides the material. Whoever you are, you're just along for the ride.”

Baba Yage sat.

People came and went, asking him all sorts of philosophical questions.

"Tell me about God," one asked.

"I'm looking to find a way to be of service," one said. "What should I do?"

"Sometimes I feel like a robot. Are people really conscious or do they live in a delusion of consciousness? Would that be a dream?"

Baba Yage said:

"Look inside. Find the Self. The Self knows God."

"Look inside. Find the Self. The Self knows what needs done."

"Look inside. Find the Self. Is Self mechanical? It is in the absence of mechanical things as well as the presence, isn't it?"

"I look inside. I see Spirit."

"I look inside. I see disorder and unrest."

"I look inside. I see that I - the I-thing within - doesn't exist. This frightens me."

"It is accurate enough to say, 'That Spirit is God.' Now you know."

"Sit often. Soon you will be ordered and your work will begin."

"Sit often. Soon you will know and be ordered. All fears shall pass."

Baba Yage sat with a journalist from a Dutch magazine in a teashop. The aging writer and I had digital recorders on the table for accuracy.

"You ask me to compare something with something else. It's not pretty but there it is," Baba Yage said.

"It is not pretty. It is...ruthless." The interviewer smiled.

"Most people do not like to hear their universe compared to amoeba, but they are very alike. One thing, alone, containing many, many, things within it; all those things subject to decay, to digestion, time being the pressure that rejoins us. It is a metaphor I do not share often, but the Dutch are a truth-loving people. Please don't reprint the article in English," Baba Yage laughed, easily engaging the other in laughter.

"English speakers are fact-lovers," the Dutch spiritualist replied, "and their language is commercial - by that I mean dealing with things commercial; sales, bookkeeping, organizing. They'll resent having read it for the comparison and they'll resent as well my having their

language used to downplay, not advertise, some thing."

"Some people!" joked the Baba.

Baba Yage and I made kale soup after sitting in meditation most of the afternoon.

"Baba Yage?" I asked.

"Yes, Richard. Fire away."

"Because it is you who taught me to sit, I ask you, 'Why does my back ache after a long meditation?'

"Another tool for killing the mind in meditation! I apologize for not sharing, sooner. I have taught you to sit straight and still. That is part one. Most are not so earnest that they ever need part two. It is a meditation by itself and attainment may be reached - it's not typical - yet it can be made automatic and automatic makes for a reliable tool. Start by making the focus of your meditation, stillness. Within that space, keep your body, spine, shoulders, gyrating, so slowly as to be seen a statue. The movement is held within a three-inch box, covering your spine. Go up and down the spine, gyrating the vertebrae. It can help. There are also meditations to relieve pain, to forget pain, to dissociate utterly from pain. Yet, pain is being human, and sitting so long, quite unnatural.

"And please chop these. Onions make me
sniffle."

"Baba Yage?"

"Yes, Richard."

We had brought some decorative plants to a young yogi's studio and were sitting on the floor, and had admired the plants' effect on the room.

"Why are you mostly-vegetarian? Why not all?"

"It would be impolite to turn down a meal in someone's home. They are hungry and want to eat, too. It would be disrespectful and disruptive to refuse, wouldn't it?"

"Baba Yage, you're joking with me."

"It is not a joke, yet it is not the real reason. If you read Chhandogya Upanishad - the dialogue between Uddalaka and Svetaketu - it is explained."

"Baba Yage!" I protested.

"Kharghush, be still!" It was a whisper of a shout that froze me in place.

"A pure thought is a sword," Baba Yage said. "It has power, energy; It requires power, energy, to wield. The power to think comes from food. If the food is pure, thought becomes pure. Pure thought - the state of thought without a

thinker - is one of the bliss worlds and getting there by cultivating higher-minded thoughts is an exact science, used everywhere.

"When cooking for myself and others, my table is vegetarian. I find I offend no one."

"Thank you for explaining your views to me, Baba Yage."

Baba Yage and I were driving away from the yoga studio and I asked him, "Where should a yogi practice?"

"To avoid the demons of vanity, a yogi should always remember that the best place to practice is in a quiet place, behind a high fence, where you'll expect no disturbance. Where to teach Yoga is another question. That answer is: Everywhere!"

"Richard." Baba Yage silenced the stereo.

"Baba Yage?"

"This is a straightforward thing. It's a meditation and realization can come this way, for sure. Strike down your thoughts. Wait for them to come up and strike them down, quick. Make it a game. At first they will come up one thought upon the other but soon they will slow and a thought "about paying rent" becomes "about p..." Don't let the thoughts finish. And a gap will be there, between the thoughts. In the anticipation, there will be a silence. Even the thought, 'There's a gap' must be stopped as its begun. It may help to make categories and label the thoughts you have as "critical" or "worrying" or "fearful" and other such, but it is usually better to be passive, still. Play this game until mind ceases and freedom is achieved."

And he didn't hassle me. I was driving.

"Baba Yage?"

We were in the train station in Mumbai, waiting with many others for the scheduled 8:15 for points East.

Babe Yage threw one of his freshly roasted peanuts at my head. "Yes, Richard?"

"I've watched my thoughts in meditation and it seems that my thoughts are random, chaotic. Is this unusual?"

"Ha!" Barked Baba Yage. "It is a good observation, a good question. We have been working on stilling the mind, on concentrating upon the mind, itself, and you are ready. This is a meditation. It's all the same, stretch, relax, mantra, meditation, everything. Except now... Choose a topic, it can be anything."

"Railroads."

"Then meditate on railroads. Let no other thought intervene. No problem if they do, just get rid of them. Think about railroads. How and when they were built? Don't know? Guess. What are they made of? Who made the steel? Who cut the lumber? Poured the nails, pounded them in? How wide are they? Why? How long are they?

Organize your thoughts about railroads. When you're finally done with railroads, when you have exhausted the mind finding the forms, gross and subtle, choose a new subject. I think it's better to meditate on the life of a saint, a Christ, a Buddha. Railroads work to prove the concept but, Richard, keep up. We're perfecting ourselves spiritually, not becoming railway engineers."

"Babe Yage?"

"Richard?"

"What is real?"

Baba Yage cackled. What he said:

"All experience is fiction. Whatever your life seems to look like, remember that all experiences are only acts of imagination; this is Maya. The experiencer is the only truth.

"So, drop those stories about what vision happened to you, what chakras opened, how it felt when you 'saw' God. Don't boast. Try and forget. It is all illusion. The imagining is a disease to be cured. The only real thing about your life is your existence. No matter how compelling, all experience is identical to dreaming."

Then he poked at my stomach and I flinched.

"Meditate on that," he said.

Baba Yage called across the hall, his voice echoing over the empty seats, “Richard? Who said this?”:

“Look at the world without mind. It is the only way to see it. Mind camouflages reality, hides reality completely behind its curtains.

“Going astray is meaningful, desirable, even if it seems self-destructive. If you never go astray you will not achieve realization and you will never find simplicity.”

“Osho. Pretty sure it’s in your librettos on Osho, from last year.”

“That’s right!” He clapped his hands.
“Richard, I was going to salt your sheets, tonight, but you can feel easy now.”

Baba Yage said:

“The mystics are all the same. We all believe in gifts that cost, always sacrifice mixed with abundance and abundance mixed with deep expense. Many mystics have risen through the path of forgiveness and redemption. Do you see?”

“See what, Baba Yage?”

“Do you see that real learning requires deep interest in a subject?”

“Baba Yage, what does it mean to be
“making karma in a cave”?”

“It can be good or bad Karma being made because we’re just human beings doing the human being thing, even alone. If your desire is for suffering, you can lead the holiest life, doing good, being good, doing nothing but meditating, and never find love, peace, a healthy desire. You will play the suffering game, never knowing that you’re just covering it with other games, the holy game, the sacrifice game, the service game, the sitting still game, the compassion game.

“Even though people who meditate in caves are real, the real cave is in you.”

“Baba Yage?”

“Yes, Richard.”

“Are negative emotions contagious?”

“We’ve spoken of the sensitivities of the body so you already know the answer. Now, what do you really want to know?”

“How best to control them, I think.”

“Negativity is to be denied. When you deny a negative thought, you prevent that thought from getting stronger, from repeating. Think of it neurologically. Plasticity in the brain. We build deep channels of good thinking, depriving the old, negative, channels of traffic.”

“Why do negative emotions feel so good?”

“Because they are an addiction, because it is what the body wants, what it’s used to. The body wants the rush that comes of anger, of being dramatic, of feeling emotional surges. We don’t care what the body wants, do we? If we did, why Yoga? We don’t always behave in the same manner when the body wants something. If a man hurts us we get angry at the man. If we bump a table and are hurt, we don’t blame the table. Yet, both are the same. How can we be angry at a sleeping person, a table, a machine, an event?

“So find in your negative programming that which is appalling; envy, lying, guilt, scorn, anger, hatred, whatever is your scourge. Look carefully. By memory, find examples of what was expressed, and look over the memory for the ridiculous and reprehensible. Examine the words and the motives for the words. Examine the facial expressions and the feelings driving them. How you feel about the negative pattern will change and the negative pattern will change in turn. Slowly, awareness will arrive and the negative impulse will be gone.”

“And by ‘slowly’ I just mean relative to ‘immediately’. And this isn’t the best method. It’s just another useful one.”

“Baba Yage?” I asked, putting away the dishes.

“Yes, Richard,” Baba Yage replied while putting the silverware in the sorter.

“Krishnamurti says Yoga isn’t a path to awakening. He says it’s just another form of conditioning.”

“He would know,” he answered, smiling.

“Are you being serious?”

“Of course I’m serious,” he said, still smiling. “He wants you to question everything, to think things through, to examine yourself deeply. He wants you to see your true individuality without any help from the outside, without any authoritative beliefs guiding you.

“He’s just making sure to let everyone know that it doesn’t matter what we do when we bring expectations. And since Yoga is a system as such, all results derived are suspect. We all create our illusions. Smart man.

“Krishnamurti also said that we have to begin by getting beyond words. What else is Yoga besides a way beyond words?”

“What good will it do me, Baba Yage?
What good will it do me to admit that my life is,
and has been, unreal?”

“It’s not an admission I want, Richard.
It is reality that you want. Digging deep into
the question ‘Who am I?’ will reveal the truth.
The good it would do? It would transform you
from a human doing... into a human being. In
your case, I’m not at all sure that would be
good.” Baba Yage. Such a
joker.

“So what am I not seeing?”

“If I told you the answer, I’d be a lousy
teacher and you’d never make the inquiry
yourself. Yet, I will tell you this one thing
further. I would examine myself, find and
eradicate all my ambitions and behaviors with
roots in envy and sex.”

“You’re not being moralistic are you?
It was sex that put you and I both on this
ferry.”

“Bite your tongue, Richard. Love-making yogas exist, as do love-making yogi.”

“Baba Yage,” I said.

“Have you found ‘Self’, Richard?”

“I know that I am close.”

“Tell me.”

“When I look deeply into matter, I see that nothing is there but the fact of its existence. There it is. Yet, there is nothing there but eddies of protons and other quanta - light in various evolutions. It’s here, where and what we are, and it’s nothing, yet it has information. With your guidance, I have looked inside and I see how utterly effected by the ideas of the world I am and how those ideas - from within and without - are the proof of the self and the proof of my lack of self.”

“I understand your words. Keep speaking,” said Baba Yage.

“The self, stripped of everything it’s coated with, must not exist for, digging deeply enough, I see it has no attributes excepting the matter of its own existence. Matter and consciousness seem to have, after inquiry, the same description, which, if matter could speak, would seem to say only ‘I am.’”

“And are you?”asked Baba Yage.

“I am.”

“It’s about time,” said Baba Yage.

“There’s so much to be done.”

“How are you with fear, Richard?”

“I’m not worried about the future.

Although, your driving makes me jittery,” I joked.

“Are you not worried about dying?”

“Dying might be rough but I’m not worrying about it now.”

“And death?”

“After? I’ve given this some thought and I don’t think there is any sort of ‘after’. It might just be only ‘now’.

“Well, don’t believe it,” said Baba Yage.

“You wouldn’t want to believe just anything.”

“What’s wrong with it?” I asked, grinning.

“Your reasonings are mine, as well, so I have nothing to argue. But, if we choose to believe this story, it’s just a change of story. Better to be uncertain, uncomfortable, unsure. That way we remain flexible and open to life.”

“Baba Yage,” I said. “It’s time to talk about pain. Physical pain.”

Baba Yage and I were at a children’s hospital in Bengal and the patients were at play with the toys we had brought.

“Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras identifies physical pain as within the five types of distractions from concentration. Those obstructions are ‘ignorance, egoity, attachment, aversion, and clinging to life’. Physical pain can, in ignorance of its effects, bring about self-centeredness, a self-reinforcing identification with pain, and fears of the future for the personality. Meditate on pain. Put all your attention on it. All your focus. Two things will happen. The first thing you will see is that inevitably attention will drift away from the pain and moments without pain will exist. The second thing you will notice is that under observation, under scrutiny, the inquiry itself makes the pain disappear for a time. Pain, like silence, can be explored and the times without pain, extended.”

I was sitting with many others, all of us oriented toward Baba Yage. He and I had picked the wildflowers the day before, the ones that filled and over-flowed the dried hala baskets, and their various fragrances mingled in the room.

What he was saying:

“There is a simple conception of the forces of nature within my philosophy. It describes, with just three words, the dominant state of anything in this universe. Rajas, sattva, and tamas. Energetic, balanced, and inert. Active, even, and still. Workaholic, good parent, lazy bum. We, as people with fears and ambitions, we swing wildly, to and fro... some moments Rajas has you, the next, Tamas. It’s amazing we get anything done at all.

“In our work, in the work we’re doing here, today, in this hall, we want to achieve a higher state. What is this higher state and how do you get there? Two words. No leisure.

“All your energies will become balanced if you live by this. When you attain consciousness, you’ll see you can move easily from one state,

energetic, to calm, to anyplace in the middle,
whatever is needed. In the meanwhile: no
leisure. Always be attending something. Always
be attentive.

“After the first few weeks, you’ll adjust.
You’ll find delight.”

Someone in the hall asked:

“How should we order our lives, then?
Reading seems to need leisure and you
recommend reading.”

How Baba Yage replied:

“Always, the first way to help others is to
rightly help yourself. Once you are right you find
few needs for yourself and your work becomes for
others. This is the beginning of the stage of ‘no
leisure’. Culture in yourself the joy of acting
unnecessarily, the joy of getting something done
yourself. Tend a garden. Do patchwork. Learn a
language. Stop wasting your time here. A
thousand years ago I would have told you, “Go
meditate until you wake up and then spend the
rest of your life doing the only thing that makes
sense, which is hurting nothing and helping
everyone.”

“Does it matter where you start?” I was folding clean towels and Baba Yage was standing across from me, sorting out apron strings and folding aprons and lab coats for the traveling clinic.

“Well, yes. You don’t want to start from the wrong place. And, no. Since all self-work improves the whole self, starting just anywhere will work, too. But why, when the right place of starting is in the same place as the hardest, why would you start anywhere else?”

Baba Yage continued. “A deep negative pattern is neither inevitable nor undefeatable, yet we’re afraid of it. We consider it too powerful to face, but we can show resistance to it if we persist and we can overcome.”

“Work against any weakness and you will work against all weakness. It is merely justifying yourself, Richard, to say you do not know how to fight your negativity. Let it be and fight against some other weakness—the result will be the same.”

“Isn’t it funny how the West is finally seeing the world through Yogic eyes? We said there were atoms and things smaller than atoms and an energy beyond that. We said it thousands of years ago! Cosmology, too! Our model, one of flux, of dynamic change, of growth, of charge and expansion and disintegration, is emerging. The Yogi are Nietzsche’s “ubermensch”! We are scientists of the soul, the greatest psychologists and spiritualists the world has known for three thousand years and more. We have known and described the scales and structures of the universe from the smallest to the largest since before the West wore diapers. Just in the last twenty years, almost everyone talks about how quantum mechanics says there’s really nothing here. Yet, no one seems to think about what that implies or how it implicates consciousness in creation. Yogi’s have known.”

“What will you see?”

“It is not a seeing which is a thing in the past. It is a thing of communion - a thing of now - of experiencing the essences of the world. Do you understand?”

“No. I don’t.”

“Have you found the source of breath?”

“I’m still looking.”

“Have you found the stillness of the blue sky?”

“That’s my favorite,” I said, helplessly grinning.

“Tell me, Richard.”

“It fills my heart with love. I get to be that which I breathe. Everyone. And everything.”

“Snap out of it, Richard!” Baba Yage shook me by the shoulders.

What he said, next:

“The bliss is a sideshow! An effect of a cause.”

“Let us describe the evolution of this illusion we call matter. It is all of light, this matter - which might look static like a stone or temple, but that is an illusion within dimensions of time. The stone is constantly polished, changing, radiant, decaying. The temple is maintained for a thousand years then lost, consumed by jungle. Neither are static, you see? Both arise then fall. A breath.

“Light exists to us as spectrum. The chemicals of a planet are told to astronomers through mass-spectrometry so this is true. The light the astronomers see is the radiance of the elements. This tells us that even our elements are merely illusions of form created by time.”

Baba Yage and I had flown to Dallas, Texas to teach for a weekend at a working ranch resort some hours north. On the drive up, he and I talked.

“Resistance is the result of inexperience with thinking on a certain line,” Baba Yage said. “To overcome resistance, we change our thinking.”

“What do we change it to?” I asked.

Baba Yage looked at my thigh like he wanted to give it a knuckle, then sat back, adjusted his shoulder belt, and closed his eyes.

“Richard... That’s a question you can answer yourself

Baba Yage said: “There are two ends for the Yogi. Either they teach or they do not.”

Baba Yage and I had traveled to California, to attend and speak before a gathering at a retreat center in Big Sur. After sitting all day, receiving people and speaking with them individually, Baba Yage now sat in front of all of them, a group of nearly one hundred.

What he said:

“We are here, whether we know it or not, to heal. I speak of here in this hall but that is an arbitrary envelope that is only as big as my conception of it. Some people will hear me and think, ‘I’m in this body to heal.’ Another thinks they’re in this role, or this world, or this universe. I speak of how all saints, all holy people are healers and how it is love that drives them.”

A voice spoke up:

“How can we understand Yogic healing?”

How Baba Yage replied:

“There are three healing powers that may be developed by the spiritual. The first is Pranic healing, which the West is just discovering. Another is Mental Healing, the power of which comes from fervency of prayer, of devotion or worship, or strong belief. This is the Law of

Suggestion, working. You suggest to Krishna, or Christ, or Buddha - the God, the Krishna, the Christ, the Buddha in you - that this aspect of the universe could use attending. When you have no more prayers for yourself, this is when to start work healing this way. The West denies this methods' existence yet acknowledges the anomalies. The third way, Spiritual healing is master work; a disciple can not do it although it is still Prana work, yet understood and experienced fully."

And a voiced asked:

"What is a method of developing these Yogic powers?"

"You mean aside from semen retention? I tell you because it is no secret. Everyone knows it already, everybody parrots it. 'Raise your frequency.' Here's a simple 'how'. This is a meditation to be done every day for a month, five times a day, each period extending the last. It can be done in any environment, sitting, moving, no difference, right? Consciousness does not move."

"Slow, rhythmic, breathing. Like a runner training to be a sprinter, pray as hard and as fast

as you can during these times. Worship with the deepest emotions you can find. Fatigue the mind with your prayers! Lose the words of prayer! Pray with the wordless heart! Worship with an empty brain! Feel only worship, gratitude! Pray your hardest. Become insensible through prayer. Build your endurance. A normal persons' emotions are, however acted out, a tenth as powerful as when they are directed in prayer. So you must develop your emotions so your feeling is ten times what it is, now. This method works for girls and boys. Yogic healing will begin inside you, then."

“What can I do to have faith in Yoga? I want to believe because I love and admire your spirituality yet there seems to be mysticism and magic.”

“You will understand why Yogic powers are described as ‘magic’ if you do just one meditation, sincerely. You could choose any one of a hundred meditations and see for yourself, yet I will offer one.

“Five times a day, focus your attention on the tip of your nose, as you breathe, for five to ten minutes. It should not be twenty days before you notice the change.”

“We should speak neither of virtue nor sin. Everybody knows who they are and what they do. We all have conflict in ourselves and we all like to believe that we are, in one sense or another, good. The businessman has conflicts about the values he possesses, just as the farmer, the criminal, the more obviously spiritual. There is no difference. If your idea of virtue is anti-social, it is no virtue. Integrity is wholeness, inner and

outer. It is accommodating and it accepts challenges to itself.”

“Richard,” Baba Yage said. “We realize lovingness. When we do, we shall experience integrity. Integrity is more, means more, than keeping ones word or avoiding lies, or punctuality. What are these? How many times has the universe conspired to force a broken promise? Integrity is and is about one-ness, wholeness, a sense within of completeness. Having integrity means being of strong moral fiber. Your morals do not break. When presented with a moral choice, the person with integrity will attempt moral action. It is good to keep your word. It is ridiculous to hold yourself and others hostage to extremism and binary thinking. It is extreme to say, ‘Always do this. Never do that.’ If you live like this you’ll make yourself anti-social. People will try to avoid you.”

Baba Yage and I sipped cold lemonade, shaded by a jacaranda near a farmhouse, on a working retreat farm in Puna, Hawaii. We'd woken at four to meditate then toiled in the morning rain; we'd been tasked with gathering the ripe bananas and armed with good machetes to chop the trees down and chop the trees up and we'd finished. We'd cleaned up, changed clothes, and were sipping cold lemonade. We could hear cars pulling in the driveway, feet crossing the cinder, a nice crowd gathering in the farmhouse.

"Do you know what you'll talk about?" I asked Baba?

"Not yet, Khargush."

"I'm asking for myself, only, yet I would like to hear your words on Life and Death."

"For you, the short version, now: It's not a binary. It's not even two sides of a coin. It's just one thing. The Universe is evolving.

"I'll speak of death today," Baba Yage pronounced.

Baba Yage sat casually on a cushion on a raised dais. During the reception he'd been gifted and garlanded with several flower leis and every so often he would bring a flower to his nose for a sniff. His already beatific smile would intensify and then fade as the scent faded.

“Exoteric versus esoteric. To be (or being) understood by many. To be (or being) understood by few. The exoteric doctrine in the East, reincarnation, is a vastly simplified model, easily understood: You'll never be good enough, so you're coming back for millions of existences. 8,400,000 we're told is the minimum. Unless you try.”

“The esoteric idea is the same, sort of. It's different, really. The same model of souls occupying spacetime, living and dying in an evolving universe, but that is all they really share.”

Baba Yage lifted a puakinekine lei and smelled at it.

“There's recurrence, reincarnation, evolution, and annihilation. Recurrence is at the end of the annihilation, when things have settled, bits can resolve, can join with the lifestream, attach to new souls and bring their gifts and

curses. Reincarnation happens sometimes, when a being of great love wants to perform some work in the world. The spirit then evolves, becomes angelic, and may eventually grow in luster and grace to become a sun for a solar system, or the central black hole of a galaxy, becoming God's local Kingship, empowering an entire galaxy. Annihilation is just a "lights out" for the individualized consciousness but all energy continues.

"You see. I am not a teacher. Nothing this irrational could be real. I'm putting my view on display so you can see a different world than your own. In my world, conversations with lovers and smelling flowers are more important than spending any more time on this ridiculous topic. Death. It's not even a thing."

Baba Yage lifted the string of flowers to his lips and inhaled deeply.

“Baba?” I began walking next to him on the path. I had veered off for a few moments, investigating an anthill, and had returned to accompany him through and along the arboretum trail.

“Oh, Richard?”

“I thought of two questions for you.”

“More questions.”

“What powers do the yogis receive?”

“And?” Baba Yage spun a rhododendron flower off its stem and licked at the stamen.”

“Why do Yogis change their names?”

He laughed.

“In order. The powers of the Yogi are the powers of God. Is that clear?”

“Oh yes,” I chuckled.

“Most yogis get new names because most parents make bad choices. A name should be uplifting, not ordinary.”

“Baba Yage? I don’t know if I’m being intrusive... What was your given name?”

Baba Yage clapped his hands once, loud, right in front of my nose.

“My father named me ‘Raphe’. And before you ask the next question - does it matter?”

Baba Yage and I prepare yage by stripping the roots and breaking up the leaves, working in the staff kitchen of a retreat center in Chile. Hours of boiling and reducing leave us with a remainder of a dark reddish-brown liquid that thickly coats the tongue with a complex bitterness.

“Baba?”

“Yes, Richard?”

“How does the world look to an enlightened Yogi?”

“Richard? Look around you and see the golden mandalas, suspended by red and gold strings, spinning, rising and falling, floating in the air.”

“I don’t see any mandalas, Baba Yage.”

Baba looked around the room. “You might, tonight,” he said with a joyful grin.

Although I didn't see any mandalas under the influence of the yage, I had seen a puma, a panther in an inner vision.

"Puma's are good," Baba Yage said. "You are learning to become a shapeshifter.

"Visions of animals are a sure sign of connection with the Earth. Pumas are the most graceful - the most aware animal. Everywhere they go, whatever they do, it looks easy. Meditate on that. And all animals can be meditated on."

"You said something about shapeshifters?" I prompted.

"Didn't I just?" Baba Yage returned.

“There is nothing that is not made of God, like there is no bread made without dough. God is the only substance in the universe and we are it. One could try to say that we, too, are made of it, but that frames the idea wrongly. It suggests that in a universe made of wood, houses would still get built. What would build them and where? It’s nonsense. We must try to understand the universality of this substance. We call it ‘light’, love, mind, God. All matter, everything in this Universe is a manifestation of this light. From what we call a quantum particle to what we call an atom, from atom to element, from element to stone, space, animal, vegetable, mineral, you, me, simple thought, sun, moon and stars; it is all light in various stages of evolution, light in its varieties of form. Light is the substance. It is God. Think this through, Richard. And tell me your conclusion.”

“Richard...” Baba Yage’s voice floated into my awareness and I shifted my shoulder to let him know I’d heard him.

“Do you want to be perfect? Is it a desire? Is it something to achieve?”

“Baba Yage,” I answered, keeping my eyes closed. “I know, intellectually, that I’m comprised from head to toe of things comprised of light. By extension, I know that this light exists in a great bath of light because all things in this universe are of the same substance, and the source and being of this light is what you and I, non-dualists, call God. Again, by extension, I know both that I am perfect and that I am. I’m waiting to personalize it.”

Baba Yage cuffed the back of my head, surprisingly hard.

“Now, you’ve personalized it.”

“I know I’m not taking your hand hitting my skull, personally,” I said with a tone that suggested otherwise, my eyes open.

“Meditate on the implications of what you know of healing, then tell me I give the wrong cures.”

Baba Yage rubbed my head lovingly (I didn't even flinch) and smiled. "Am I too rough with you?" He asked.

Baba Yage and I sat with a group of friends on a cold and mostly deserted beach in Oregon in February.

“Everyone knows the basics, yes? We start with movement, usually. Then prayer. Then breath control. Then meditation. Yet, with meditation comes breath control. Either way... Then realization.”

“We want to realize and then do MORE breath control. It is here, after realization, in meditation, that the powers come, and with them our power to attract loving and healing moments intensifies. It is in meditation that our generative and radiant powers can be focused and set to use.”

“Unless a committed couple can do these exercises together, it is best they be done solitarily, man or woman.”

Baba Yage was teaching a yoga class and he sat in sukhāsana (easy pose, a single posture held for a time, in yoga) and gave instruction on breath.

“In meditation, control of breath, comes by itself. The cycle of breath becomes slower and slower until it seems to cease. When the mind becomes attentive on any subject, the respiration cycle slows down. Pranayama comes by itself to those who are deeply absorbed in mantra, prayer, or meditation.

“Prana, mind, and seminal energy are all threads of the same cable and if you pull one, you pull all. Some Yogis approach Brahman by Prana. Raja Yogis approaches Brahman by controlling mind. It takes twelve years of seed retention - no cheating - to wake the Kundalini and it has been known to happen, accidentally. So watch out.”

“You are you, Richard. Enlightenment will only rouse your intelligence, not make you someone else. We all know the story of Mulla Nasrudden and the donkey.”

Baba Yage decided to share our conversation with two friends we’d made while walking the beach.

“Richard, here, is my most ambitious student. His ambitions toward realization are all that obstruct him. He’s always positive, always helpful, never complaining, and as sincere as any. He does everything with heart. He’s going to laugh at himself when he realizes that he’s the rider of the lost donkey. You’re on the donkey, Richard. Quit looking.”

“I’m not seeing the donkey, I guess.”

“Quit looking. Just ride!”

And he took off, imitating a donkey and galloping in the sand.

Baba Yage spoke in front of group in Los Angeles.

“Breath rhythmically. In for a count, out for a count. Imagine a whirlwind of prana coming down to you from the sky and filling your head and chest with life energy. On exhale, send this life energy to the parts of the body that need attention.”

A woman raised her hand.

“Does it matter which way the whirlpool spins?”

Baba Yage nodded his head with a smile.

“Some of the sages will tell you that it does matter but I say it doesn’t. Attention and intention are all.” Yet, Baba Yage held up a finger.

“That said, the more involved the visualization, the more voltage, so to speak. And speaking for the sages... the right-hand rule applies.”

