

# Who's Who in Gurus

An essential guide for the impending 1970s revival.

by Dennis Bartel

SEE, I WAS at a gathering one evening back in August and *once again* the conversation turned to the future of NPR, so I made my way over to check out the Smok'n Pit, and there I was, inhaling the salmon steaks, when this lady in a Members Only jacket and a touch of Tenax in her hair comes up to me. She'd intrigued me all evening, but I hadn't quite gotten myself together enough to attempt a connection. Now there she was in front of me saying "Well, I love 'All Things Considered' like everyone else, but the way I look at it is: he blew McGovern in '72 and now he's blown this. That's all."

"Uh-huh," I offered.

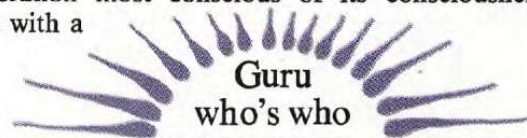
She took this as a go sign and saddled up closer. "I'm bored with all that stuff. Let's talk cults."

Oops, I thought, does it still show? Back in the sequestered Seventies I too journeyed nomadically from one Aquarian act to another, finding some fulfilling, some fraudulent. I too spoke the words "Be Here Now" with the same obliging compassion as my older siblings had flashed peace signs. But c'mon, that was years ago. Hadn't I by now nestled back into my lower three chakras? Were there still flecks of light in my muddled aura? Was I looking more meditative than casual?

Then I realized I was staring directly at the start of a social movement. This lady had not singled me out because I had traces of spiritual teachings in my face. She, like so many of us Baby Boomers, was smitten by New Age Nostalgia. We have listened for years to Tom Wolfe smirk at us as the "Me Generation," and we're fed up with Tom Wolfe. We want to think back and assess for ourselves what we did. Was the Seventies really one long *Om*? Are we better because of it? Did we miss something? And just who were those men leading the chants?

*Dennis Bartel, who lives in Pittsburgh, is completing a novel about classical music.*

As we talked, I got caught up in my Remembrance of Paths Past, and yet for all my experience I felt ill equipped to make a final appraisal. I felt I needed to look at the whole lot of enlightenment lecturers all at once. A group photo. Assuming one can judge a generation by its leaders, I thought the best place to begin examining my generation—the generation most conscious of its consciousness—was with a



LET'S BEGIN with one of the biggest: **Maharishi Mahesh Yogi**. The Maharishi was as legit and nondenominational as they came. He was no know-nothing opportunist. He laid the foundation for his guruship: a B.A. in physics from Allahabad U., a thirteen-year apprenticeship with Swami Brahmananda Saraswati, and two years in a Himalayan cave. To Indian youth who were fed up with the maudlin emotionality of Hinduism, the Maharishi offered Transcendental Meditation, a "practical, nonreligious technique."

But it made no sense teaching meditation to lifelong meditators in India. So as soon as the Maharishi had amassed enough cash to take his teachings on the road, he headed for—where else?—Los Angeles. Through the Sixties he slowly built a modest following of white, upper-middle-class college students. Then, during a return visit to India, who should show up at his ashram but John, Paul, George, and Ringo. The Beatles had had enough psilocybin. Now they wanted to sit at the feet of Enlightenment Manifest. The Maharishi laughed his squeaky, benevolent laugh and said, "S'all right with me."

Suddenly the lid blew off. Now the Maharishi was everyone's quintessential guru. Transcendental Meditation was *Newsweek*-ized into TM, and TM



swept across America like a warm-weather front. Millions of Americans began practicing this watered-down version of a 2,500-year-old Hindu tradition by sitting for twenty minutes twice a day and mentally repeating their own, individual mantra. (Mantras were dished out at \$75 each—\$35 for students and housewives—by the Maharishi and by Mormonish-looking graduates of Maharishi International University, Switzerland. Mantras were not to be revealed under any circumstance: mine was *eine*.) And with everyone doing it, the Maharishi suddenly found himself the figurehead of a multimillion-dollar promotional campaign. Maharishi posters, Maharishi records, Maharishi films, talk-show appearances, lectures in sports arenas. For a while the Maharishi was more popular than John Lennon, except in Georgia.

But it didn't last. TM's biggest selling point, its homogenized simplicity, proved too weak to satisfy serious meditators and too vague to hold the mildly curious. Some TMers moved on to strict religious disciplines, others signed up for Nautilus. Today, TM centers still struggle along on a shoestring, TM propagators still claim that school systems around the world are *right on the verge* of incorporating TM into the curriculum, and the Maharishi still occasionally shows his forever friendly face, usually on cable. But who practices TM anymore? You? Not me. It had been the biggest East-West crossover movement in history. Now it's just another seasoning in the melting pot.



*Siri Singh etc. hosted sing-alongs for "tuneful Sikhs" of the Healthy, Happy, Holy Organization.*

**A**N ONLY slightly less enterprising guru was **Swami Satchidananda**, who was also launched into celestial stardom by rock and roll. Satchidananda started humbly enough, a cub scout in South India. He attended art college and agricultural school, ran his uncle's car dealership, distributed B-films, made it to foreman of an electrical motor plant, married, and had two sons, all before he was twenty-eight. Then his wife died of some plaguey Indian disease and Satchidananda freaked. He unloaded the kids on his father and became an ascetic sadhu. In 1951, after nine years of

traveling, begging, and studying yoga with one master after another, Satchidananda went on a teaching tour of India. The tour was a huge success. But Satchidananda remained unknown in the West until the filmmaker Conrad Rooks hit on him to come to Paris. There Satchidananda hung out on the Left Bank and taught yoga to artists. He also dropped many of his sadhu ways. By the time Peter Max met him and persuaded him to come to New York, Satchidananda was downing ten cups of coffee a day and chain-smoking.

His reception in America was no better than lukewarm, perhaps because of his nonyogic oral fixations. But he soon swung what remains to this day the most sensational guru-gig in history. He opened at Woodstock. There he sat on a white bedspread, surrounded by microphones, cameras, and a half-million stoned Aquarian Agers hungry for Hendrix, The Who, Crosby, Stills, and Nash, et al., and he played right to them. "I am overwhelmed with joy to see the entire youth of America gathered here in the name of music. Through music we can work wonders. Music is the celestial sound and it is sound that controls the whole universe." What an orator! What a high being! Standing ovation! Fifty-five years old and he's knocking 'em dead!

After Woodstock, Satchidananda could have soared right past the Maharishi, but he settled for something smaller. He opened the nationwide Integral Yoga Institute and, in 1973, the Satchidananda Ashram-Yogaville in Connecticut. That's where you can find him today, with devotees on all sides (among them Carole King) and a Benson and Hedges held between forefinger and thumb.

Of course, gurus had long known that surrounding yourself with stars could help raise your credentials as a karma-cleanser. **Swami Prabhavananda's** Vedanta ashram in L.A. (c. 1949-1978) overflowed with potential Hindus every time Prabhavananda collaborated with Christopher Isherwood. **Siri Singh Sahib Bhai Sahib Harbhajan Singh Khalsa Yogiji** occasionally played host to Johnny Rivers, who would sing with the white-turbaned and tuneful Sikhs of Yogiji's Healthy, Happy, Holy Organization



(1969–present). And how many people knew **Babaji** (c. A.D. 400–present) from Babalooie until the rock group Supertramp got religion?

But the man who seemed to have had the greatest number of luminaries in his camp was **Georges Ivanovitch Gurdjieff**. In the Twenties and Thirties Gurdjieff attracted notables like a No-Pest Strip. Editor-critic A. R. Orage, composer Thomas de Hartmann, writers Peter Ouspensky and Katherine Mansfield, to name a few. And despite having dissolved his physical self in 1949, when he was eighty-three, Gurdjieff is still an attraction. Keith Jarrett has recorded several piano transcriptions of Gurdjieff's *Sacred Hymns*, and Peter Brook's staggeringly dull film, *Meetings With Remarkable Men*, is based on Gurdjieff's book of the same name.

Gurdjieff wrote three posthumously published books. But he did not have the same command over the English language that he did over his pupils. As a result, his books are unreadable without piles of supplementary material. Even his long-time pupils had trouble with them at first. Orage (whom T. S. Eliot called "the finest literary critic of his time") said of them: "Completely unintelligible. I've no idea what it is about." (He later changed his mind and referred to it instead as "objective art, literature of the highest kind.") But beyond the language problems, the Gurdjieff System has remained incomprehensible to most of us because, as all Gurdjieff pupils explain, "His system has a method not taught in books." Not even in his own books.

So what say we take a brief look at Gurdjieff the Man and Gurdjieff the System? He grew up in Armenia and as a young man traveled for years in central Asia, searching for ancient Sufi and Khwajagan wisdom. He eventually became a dervish (as in whirling) and pieced together fragments of Near and Far Eastern folk art, Christian dogma, and common sense to form the Gurdjieff System. With system in hand he set out for France. There he charmed a few wealthy patrons and established his embarrassingly opulent Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man at Fontainebleau. But instead of hitting the books, Gurdjieff pupils studied a marvelously complex and artful set of dances, exercises, music, and "inner teachings," and engaged in hard labor. The system is designed to help you coordinate your three centers: intellectual, emotional, instinctive. Once they are coordinated you can really love, and therefore really be, and therefore do. As Gurdjieff said, "He who can do, *is*."

The system also calls for frequent public humiliations of students. At least that was the method Gurdjieff used. It provoked cries of "Charlatan" from people in the "Outer Circle of Wisdom" (namely, you and me). Those in the "Inner Circle" responded that it was his job to "stick the pitchfork in you-know-where." Most Gurdjieff pupils were more than happy to take it there.

**B**Y CONTRAST, if in the Seventies you were after clear, concise prose and consistent spiritual straight-shooting, you could have done no better than **A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda**, founder in 1966 of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. Uh-oh. You mean the head of the Hare Krsnas? Yes, yes, that rubbery-faced fellow in an orange robe.

But wait. I was no more enamored than you of all that clanging street-dancing by horn-rimmed devotees. And yet I couldn't help but read Prabhupāda's work and say, "By Shiva, if this guy ain't okay, Krsna Krsna."

Prabhupāda's following never included luminaries—only a handful of academics and a legion of bright-eyed skinheads (with ponytails), most of whom seem to have been lapsed Catholics who'd once published poetry in the *Georgia Review*. True to their rigorously literate upbringing, these devotees wanted some reading material on their newfound "non-Hindu cultural movement especially meant to educate people in how they can love God." Prabhupāda supplied it in abundance.

Before leaving his body in November 1977, Prabhupāda wrote sixty books, many of which are transcribed talks. Time and again he demonstrated his erudition and urbanity to Westerners naïve enough to think that no man in a robe with a white streak on his forehead could have done his cross-cultural homework. And what did he say? Well, in order to really hear Prabhupāda you first need to forget about those ceremonies at which everyone hops around shouting "Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma," tossing granulated sugar at enormous garish idols. You first need to forget about those devotees standing on street corners whacking tambourines, or soliciting in airports dressed as Santa Claus. Strange cultural accouterments aside, Prabhupāda had some neat things to say. Like why people turned to Hare Krsna in the first place:

*Religion means to know God and to love Him. . . . Nowadays, because of a lack of training, nobody knows God. People are satisfied simply going to church and praying, "O God, give us our daily bread." This is called a cheating religion. . . . First-class religion teaches one how to love God without any motive.*

**Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare!**

If in the Seventies you were an academic with a bent toward spiritualism, but weren't bent so far as to embrace Prabhupāda, then perhaps **Rudolf Steiner** was your man. Then as now, this spiritual scientist remains ideally suited for academic types. First, he's been dead since 1925; second, he has never been sullied by mass appeal. Steiner was himself much too deeply embedded in the bedrock of academe to have ever reached the multitudes. He had his followers, but most of them stood well above the teeming throng. Saul Bellow, for instance. He's been running with the Steiner gauntlet for years.



Steiner was born of Catholic parents in Vienna in 1861, and he claimed that even in the bassinet he had "karmic clairvoyancy." As a kid he performed psychic healing on family members and friends. After a Ph.D. from Rostock U., he exploded onto the scholarly scene by editing the natural scientific writings of Goethe, and working closely with Mrs. Nietzsche in getting Crazy Ole Friedrich's papers in order.

His interest in the occult led him to the Theosophy Society, the German section of which he headed, 1902-09. Then, in 1912, the society discovered **Krishnamurti**, the seventeen-year-old son of a poor Brahmin family in India. Talk about prodigy. Krishnamurti had a *perfect aura*. The theosophists decreed that Krishnamurti would, after a few years of grooming, become the Lord Maitreya, the World Teacher for whom the society had been waiting.

Steiner was miffed. "That kid?" he was reported to have said. He left the theosophists and got together his own club: the Anthroposophical Society.

Steiner's influence deepened, if not widened. He became intimate with Frau von Moltke, and through her persuaded General von Moltke, first German chief of staff, into several disastrous military moves during World War I.

After the war, having been strategic in bringing down the Weimar Republic, Steiner sought to reproduce it in his private schools, financed by the Waldorf-Astoria cigarette company. Today more than 35,000 children in seventeen countries attend the seventy Waldorf Schools—making it the largest private K-12 school system in the world. And, as I said, the Waldorf Schools have a touch of the Weimar Republic. The curriculum includes not only your standard three Rs, but Steiner's eurhythmic exercises ("visible speech and visible song"), a healthy dose of the arts, particularly Wagnerian opera, and of course all fifty of Steiner's books.

(An update on Krishnamurti. In 1929, on the very eve of his elevation to Lord Maitreya, after seventeen years of intense theosophical training, Krishnamurti called a mass meeting of the Theosophy Society and gave them this message: You have no need for occultism, you have no need for this society, and you have no need for me. Goodbye.)

**W**HEREAS an old-timer emphasized learning, a relative newcomer like **Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh** emphasizes ignorance. (Shows you how times have changed,

I suppose.) In what at first seemed a real faux pas paradox, Rajneesh, before taking a vow of silence two years ago, sang the praises of ignorance by citing Socrates: "I know one thing—that I can't know." Through the Seventies, as science continued to puncture the New Age balloons, hangers-on needed a place to retreat; a place where science could not charge in and prove them wrong. His sannyasins, mostly veterans of other dharmas, are scattered across the nation, but the majority live near Antelope, Oregon, on the 64,000 acres Rajneesh bought

in 1981. Rajneesh put his sannyasins to work building \$62 million in modular homes, greenhouses, and a reservoir. They resurrected 3,000 previously uncultivable acres, and thereafter their tables were never without generous helpings of Swiss chard.

Along came the local elections; sannyasins swept into office, winning the mayoralty race and appropriating five of six city-council seats. They promptly quadrupled the water rates. Suddenly Antelopians stopped laughing, and have since been using every legal—and not so legal—means to drive Rajneesh and his horde of green-thumbers from the land. The U.S. Immigration Service denied Rajneesh permanent-resident status. Lawsuits are pending everywhere. Rajneesh businesses have been targets

of some ugly vigilante attacks. And Rajneesh himself has been subject to much bad press. Journalists are forever dubbing him "India's Free Love Guru" and noting his thirty Rolls-Royces.

The cars aside, the truth about the free love jive is this: Rajneesh, like almost *every* guru, sees sex as an opportunity for higher spiritual growth (tantra), and only occasionally do sannyasins get overanxious and light from flower to flower, sipping the darshan nectar. Further, disciples on the Rajneesh road to enlightenment do a great deal of touching and hugging and staring into one another's eyes. But all the hugging in Oregon does not constitute a free love orgy. Many of Rajneesh's followers may be aging hippies, but with age comes restraint. Word has it,



Rudolf Steiner (with his wife Marie) "claimed even in the bassinet that he had 'karmic clairvoyancy.'" Saul Bellow apparently agrees.



libidos are pretty much under control in Antelope.

One sure way for would-be gurus to spark some initial interest in their campaign was to perform some fabulous physical feat. **Swami Rama**, for instance, stopped the flow of his blood and made sure a representative from the Menninger Foundation was on hand with "psychophysiological equipment." Back when **Sri Paul Twitchell** (a.k.a. Peddar Zaskq) was still the Living Eck Master—that is, before his "translation from Earth" in 1971—he frequently astro-traveled, and in his travels he always made sure to drop in on a few non-Eck-believers. And over the years how many tons of *vibhuti* (aromatic gray ash) has that avatar **Satya Sai Baba** produced for just *anyone* with an ailment, simply by rubbing his fingers together?

**A**MONG THE BOOKS that lit up our third-eye point in the Seventies was *Autobiography of a Yogi* by **Paramahansa Yogananda**. Written in yogically overgrammaticized English, it included all sorts of casual references to Christianity. On top of that, it was a terrific read, spectacularly anecdotal. It felt right. **Thomas Merton's** autobiography, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, traced his journey from hip Columbia student, throbbing with the strange animal travesty of jazz, to Trappist monk, no longer seeking to live for his own gratification but sacrificing his pleasures and comforts for the love of God. There were more **Kahlil Gibran** quotes in Seventies weddings than peanuts in a Snickers bar. We learned all about the risks and riches of raising your *kundalini* from the books of **Gopi Krishna**, particularly *The Awakening of Kundalini*. And enough of us were still reading *Zen and Buddhism* from 1956 on to keep **D. T. Suzuki** on the New Age best-seller list. *The Urantia Book* wasn't well known but its presence was felt. It was supposed to have been discovered in a locker of a Chicago bus terminal. It was also supposed to have been recited by some guy in his sleep—serving as a conduit for the omniscient **Orvonton Corps of Truth Revealers**—and transcribed by some other guy in a trance. But never mind the rumors. *The Urantia Book* is astonishing. Over 2,000 pages of This-Is-It-No-Matter-What-Anyone-Has-Ever-Said prose, it explains the structure of the universe and points out where every religion has gone askew. Only the serious Seventies seeker messed with *The Urantia Book*. However, if you wanted merely to dip your toe in and test the water, there was always *Siddhartha* by **Hermann Hesse**. Intense fellow, that Hesse, but no Avatar of the Age. On the other hand, **Meher Baba** was the A of the A, according to his official biographies. Meher Baba, who wrote several books on Sufism, took a vow of silence in 1925. He promised he'd eventually speak again, and say the One Word that would spiritualize the world. But he dropped the body in January 1969 without uttering a sound.

**A**ND THEN there was: "I'm the water boy on the team . . . a Western, Jewish boy from Boston who has studied Hinduism." Don't let that Harvard-bred diffidence fool you. **Baba Ram Das** may not have had centuries of Hindu rhythms running through his veins, but he did as well as any angst-itching son of the founder of Brandeis University could do. First he altered his blood chemistry to one part plasma, three parts LSD (along with fellow experimenter and good buddy Tim Leary), then he trekked off to India, then he wrote *The Book. Be Here Now*, written in Ram Das's hippy clipped prose, tells of his conversion from psych prof to acid head to disciple of Neemkaroli Baba, "a universal consciousness embodied in an old man." By the mid-Seventies *Be Here Now* was everywhere. And the sight of its bright blue cover became a sign of assurance that you were among the ever widening circle of New Age initiates. Now, at fifty-two, Ram Das has shaved his beard and gone back to being Richard Alpert. Still, he legitimized much of Eastern thought for those who had to have it bear Western education's stamp of approval. And who knows, without *Be Here Now* there might never have been a Seventies.

If you wanted enigmatic, the man to go to was **Don Juan Matus**. Even after those books (*The Teachings of Don Juan, A Separate Reality, Tales of Power*, etc.; a new one seemed to come out every other week), it's still difficult to get a sure fix on Don Juan, mostly because his teachings are filtered through the inexorably literal **Carlos Castaneda**.

Castaneda was a graduate student in anthropology at UCLA when he started his first four-year apprenticeship with the sorcerer. The first Don Juan book was published in 1968. The editors at the Univ. of Cal. Press thought it was science fiction. Castaneda thought it was a scientific study. It's neither, but it is entertaining. Don Juan comes off as a Borscht Belt *brujo*, reeling off occultish one-liners like a Yaqui Henny Youngman. Everyone had a favorite Don Juan line. Mine: "You must attempt to pierce the woman with your shotgun."

But despite Castaneda, Don Juan is fascinating. He's a widowed Yaqui sorcerer living in the Central Mexican desert, where sorcery is taken seriously. His only son was killed in a rockslide. His only grandson, Lucio, is an egocentric flake. (With rare understatement, Don Juan says Lucio will never become "a man of knowledge.") And rarest of rare, Don Juan is a kind, affable man who appears to have gone through psychedelics and come out with a resolute, albeit sometimes macabre, understanding of what they are all about. When Don Juan spoke of tripping he made it sound essential, as though if you weren't doing mushrooms you were missing the whole cosmic show. Soon tens of thousands of people were popping peyote buttons, vomiting violently, and heading off on that *Journey to Ixtlan*. Many of them are still out there.



**A**ND SINCE we're in the general vicinity, let us not forget the shuck-and-jivers, the hucksters, the clowns who gave consciousness a bad name. There was **Guru Maharaj Ji**, the pudgy Perfect Master of the Divine Light Mission. He was the one who, when still knee-high to a *gopi*, inherited control from his father of a respected religious institution in India and proclaimed himself an avatar; who at thirteen blew over to America to spread the light and who by the time he was fifteen had accumulated enough followers to rent out the Houston Astrodome for a three-day festival. Guru Maharaj Ji could transmit Knowledge through his touch. But more importantly, he knew how to work the media. You'd think that getting hit in the face with a shaving-cream pie during a Detroit airport news conference with the whole world watching would cause a drop in your guru stock. But not Guru Maharaj Ji. He handled himself with aplomb, grinning at the cameras, showing everyone that even a God-incarnate can take a joke. Everyone was getting a kick out of this Pie-in-the-Face-of-God business, especially the pie thrower, Pat Halley. Then one night two Divine Light devotees came to Halley's apartment and beat his skull in with a bludgeon. The police did nothing, but suddenly the whole world soured on Guru Maharaj Ji. Even his own mother turned against him, though not so much for the violence as for his marriage to his twenty-four-year-old secretary, Marilyn Lois Johnson. Mama

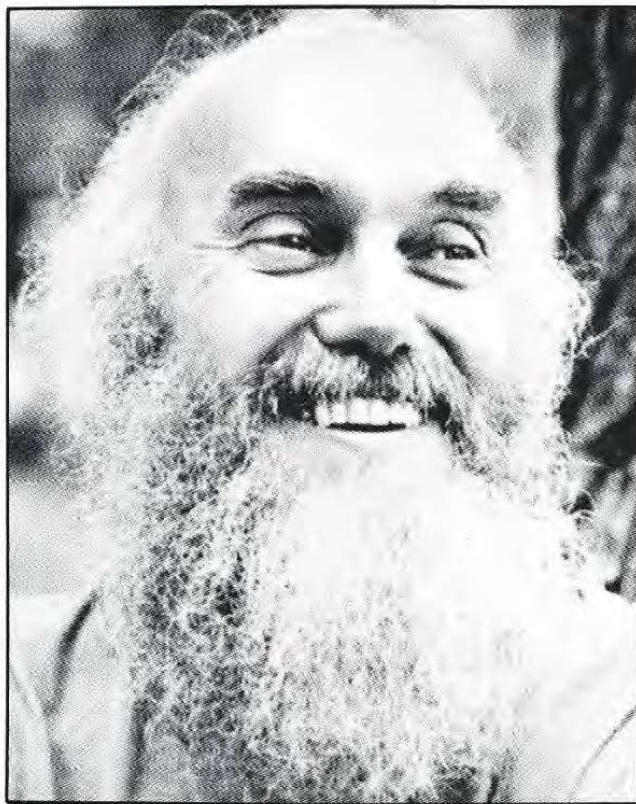
Maharaj Ji took the guru to court to transfer control of the Divine Light Mission to her younger son. By May 1975, after a lengthy lawsuit, Guru Maharaj Ji was left with an enormous compound in Denver, land holdings across America, and a fleet of Mercedes—but not Perfect Mastership.

**L. Ron Hubbard**, who always looked to me like Mayor Daley, got his slice of the Primrose Pie too. In 1950, after fifteen years of writing second-rate stories for *Astounding Science Fiction*, Hubbard made "a discovery comparable to the discovery of fire and superior to the inventions of the wheel and the arch"—Dianetics. The victory of the analytical mind over the reactive mind, Dianetics begat Scientology, a billion-dollar business. Thousands began

taking E-meter tests, measuring "engrams" from their earlier incarnations. Engrams dissolve; they could free themselves from their bodies and return to the god-state, or become "clear." Scientologists called this "becoming an Operating Thetan, O.T." Hmmm.

Transparent or not, it was snapped up by millions of people. In 1978, Hubbard, sixty-seven, went off to Greece to bask in retirement aboard his yacht fleet, *Sea Org*. L. Ron Jr., a former Scientology strongarm who is now making money bad-mouthing the church, claims his father is dead and decomposing at the bottom of the Mediterranean. The church says that's nonsense. Hubbard is still running things, says the church. But L. Ron Jr. is sure otherwise, and he wants a bite before the church eats away all that Hubbard left behind.

It's a short step from Hubbard to **Werner Erhard**. At twenty-four, Erhard abandoned his wife and four children in Philadelphia and hid so well they couldn't track him down for years. By then he'd changed his name from John Paul Rosenberg and moved to St. Louis, where he was selling used cars. He settled out of court with the old lady and took off to Spokane, where he sold encyclopedias door-to-door for the Grolier Society. He was so good they made him manager. He was so good a manager *Parents* magazine stole him away and made him vice president in charge of advertising. Next came national sales director for the Christian Unity



*Baba Ram Das, né Richard Alpert, wrote the influential book Be Here Now. He got there then by altering his blood to "one part plasma, three parts LSD."*

Church. Then he struck out on his own.

In 1971 Erhard combined his Scientology training with the methods of hypnotism he got from the Christian Unity Church (Mind Dynamics), and formed est.

Oh, boy, another series of cheap shots about bursting bladders? No, no, it's all right. We're all feeling good here. I can say right up front that est worked. *Something* was happening in those "psychic workshops," and whatever it was it sure made people feel better about themselves. It also made them obnoxious, but such is the price of "transforming one's experience of experiencing." The est training program remains today the most slickly packaged psychic cure-all of our time. Does it work?



Of course it works. You ever try to convince an estian otherwise? Est makes you feel great! Est is great!

**O**F COURSE, when talking gurus, eventually someone will prop up **Jim Jones**, founder of the People's Temple, just to show *what can happen*. Don't fall into that trap. Jim Jones is not fodder for an informed discussion on Seventies Spiritualism. Jim Jones was a freak accident. He doesn't count. He was to Gurudom what Oswald was to Dallas, a momentary, ugly flash that ruined everything good and promising. At least for a while. After the mass suicide at Jonestown, Guyana (1978), Jim Jones took on archetypal proportions. Every longstanding dharma became a *cult*. Kool-Aid sales took a dip. But Kool-Aid is selling again, the difference between a discipline and a mindless conformity again seems clear, and Jim Jones has taken his rightful place as a mashed insect on the Wall of History.

Enough said on Jim Jones.

Of far more consequence was **Reverend Sun Myung Moon**, a Presbyterian electrical engineer from Korea who received a visit, Easter morning, 1936, from Jesus Christ. Jesus and Moon sat on a mountainside most of that morning discussing the covert messages in the Bible. After nine years of letting this sink in, Moon created his Divine Principles, explaining everything to the rest of us.

Apparently, after Adam and Eve blew it when trying to create a perfect family, God sent Jesus down to do the job right. But before Jesus could find a suitable bride and commence copulating—*whoops*—the Jews (or Romans, or whoever) nailed him up. *This wasn't supposed to happen*. So, God is giving us one more chance. Jesus has been reborn as—guess who? Well, no one is actually saying. But we do know one thing about him: he's Korean.

The Divine Principles needed a home, so Moon created the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity (Unification Church). Churchgoers were called Moonies.

Moonies were emphatic fanatics and ferocious street solicitors (\$175 million in 1978, forty countries, 120 U.S. cities). In order to help "unite the peoples of the world as children of God" they flocked to Moon's infamous mass weddings and married the strangers Moon picked out for them. They set a standard for obedience rivaled only by the Hare Krsnas.

But some people thought that Moonie obedience was little more than forced submission, and so began Deprogramming. Instead of being prosecuted, deprogrammers like **Ted Patrick** and **Tom Dulack** became fashionable, even mercenary. Deprogrammers in the Seventies were looked on as the qualitative equivalents of VISTA volunteers in the Sixties. Parents were so passionate about saving their

children from this cult or any other, they acquiesced to having them imprisoned in a cellar for four months of starvation and shock treatments. Whatever it took to get Reverend Sun Myung Moon out of their innocent heads. To the regret of nearly no one, the growth of the Unification Church has begun to slow down. But beneath that shadow, Moon is ablaze with gold, richer than ever. His organization owns several homes in the U.S. and Korea, an undetermined number of businesses, the *Washington Times*, and a large portion of Tarrytown, N.Y.

This is not to imply that spiritual teachers mustn't make money for fear of losing their purity. That's a cliché we should all be hip to by now. No one in the Seventies was preaching asceticism. And all the gurus agreed, it isn't how much you make, but how attached you are. *Everyone* likes nice things. If you knew the road to Oz, wouldn't you charge a little something as leader of the expedition? Do we think less of the Scarecrow because he did?

**O**F COURSE, The Word usually did come as a gift. And no one in the Seventies offered it with more compassion and eloquence than **Alan Watts**.

I'll admit, I was once one of those hoping that after his death in 1973 Alan Watts would be placed on the mantel alongside Kierkegaard and Lao Tzu. I was young and under the spell of those sedately rambling, late-night radio talks of his where he gave us a synthesis of the best ideas floating through the rarefied stratosphere of the Sixties and Seventies. And while his many books were not the most impressive New Age manuals around, they seemed to be the ones filled with the most common sense and paternal guidance. When you needed someone to explain that Hinduistic gem you stumbled on while treading through the tangle of Vedantic writings, or when you needed a Western rope to hang on to while meditating out on some Aquarian limb—you went to Alan Watts. He was always so patient, and he made it so clear that you could "not only understand the words but *feel* the fact." Take, for instance, our Seventies core motif: Be Here Now. Every guru worth his worry beads was chanting it. Some understood it better than others. Some sniffed it in the air and went around claiming it was their own home cooking. Some lived it without ever learning how to say how. But Alan Watts was the one who explained it best: "Unless one is able to live fully in the present, the future is a hoax."

Still, as much as Alan Watts once knocked me over, today I can no more read him than I can read *Winesburg, Ohio*. It's sad, but it's true.

You know that lady in the Members Only jacket? She's coming over tonight. I was going to get out the sandalwood, and serve a curried vegetable casserole. But nah. I think I'll just whip up some lamb chops instead. ■