

**The spiritual quests and
surprising discoveries of two gurus:
Rabi Maharaj (pg 1) and Michael Graham (pg 7)**

The Story of Rabi Maharaj

(author of 'Death of a Guru', an autobiography)

No matter how fulfilling life becomes, there are always certain regrets when one looks back. My deepest sense of loss involves my father. So much has happened since his death. I often wonder what it would be like to share it all with him, and what his reaction would be.

We never shared anything in our lives. Because of vows he had taken before I was born, not once did he ever speak to me or pay me the slightest heed. Just two words from him would have made me unspeakably happy. How I wanted to hear him say, "Rabi. Son." Just once. But he never did.

For eight long years he uttered not a word. The trancelike condition he had achieved is called in the East a state of higher consciousness and can be attained only through deep meditation.

"Why is Father that way?" I would ask my mother, still too young to understand. "He is someone very special -- the greatest man you could have for a father," she would reply. "He is seeking the true Self that lies within us all, the One Being, of which there is no other. And that's what you are too, Rabi."

Father had set an example, achieved wide acclaim, and earned the worship of many, and it was inevitable that upon his death his mantle would fall upon me. I had never imagined, however, that I would still be so young when this fateful day arrived.

When father died I felt I had lost everything. Though I had scarcely known him as my father, he had been my inspiration – a god – and now he was dead.

At his funeral, my father's stiff body was placed on a great pile of firewood. The thought of his body being sacrificed to Agni, the god of fire, added a new dimension of mystery to the bewilderment and deep sense of loss that already overwhelmed me.

As the flames engulfed him, it was impossible to suppress the anguish I felt. "Mommy!" I screamed. "Mommy!" If she heard me above the roar of sparks and fire, she made no indication. A true Hindu, she found strength to follow the teaching of Krishna: she would mourn neither the living nor the dead. Not once did she cry as the flames consumed my father.

After my father's funeral, I became a favourite subject for the palm-readers and astrologers who frequented our house. Our family would hardly make an important decision without consulting an astrologer, so it was vital that my future be confirmed in the same way. It was encouraging to learn that the lines on my palms and the planets and stars, according to those who interpreted them, all agreed I would become a great Hindu leader. I was obviously a chosen vessel, destined for early success in the search for union with Brahman (the One). The forces that had guided my father were now guiding me.

I was only eleven and already many people were bowing before me, laying gifts of money, cotton cloth, and other treasures at my feet and hanging garlands of flowers around my neck at religious ceremonies.

How I loved religious ceremonies -- especially private ones in our own home or those of others, where friends and relatives would crowd in. There I would be the centre of attention, admired by all. I loved to move through the audience, sprinkling holy water on worshipers or marking foreheads with the sacred white sandalwood paste. I also loved how the worshipers, after the ceremony, bowed low before me to leave their offerings at my feet.

What confirmed by belief in Hinduism was the regular spiritual experiences I had, while meditating, of heavenly music, astray projection, psychedelic colours, spirit visitations - including the god Shiva, the Destroyer. The problem however is that the so-called experiences I was having of being one with the Universal Being, Brahman, excited me, but made no impact on my life. It gave me no ability to make sense of daily chores, or relationships with people. It served as a temporary escape but that was it. I was haunted by the words of someone who said, 'The problem with these people who pursue Self-realization is that they just become more selfish'. In my pursuit of Self-realization, though there were times when I could almost taste it from time to time,

yet my inevitable moral failures set me back, till I was disillusioned, fearful that no amount of asceticism and meditation would ever get me there, considering the bad karma my sins attracted.

While vacationing at an Aunt's ranch, I had my first real encounter with Jesus. I was walking along enjoying nature one day and was startled by a rustling sound in the underbrush behind me. I turned quickly and, to my horror, saw a large snake coming directly toward me -- its beady eyes staring intently into mine. I felt paralyzed, wanting desperately to run but unable to move.

In that moment of frozen terror, out of the past came my mother's voice, repeating words I had long forgotten: "Rabi, if ever you're in real danger and nothing else seems to work, there's another god you can pray to. His name is Jesus."

"Jesus! Help me!" I tried to yell, but the desperate cry was choked and hardly audible.

To my astonishment, the snake turned around and quickly wriggled off into the underbrush. Breathless and still trembling, I was filled with wondering gratitude to this amazing god, Jesus. Why had my mother not taught me more about him?

During my third year in high school I experienced an increasingly deep inner conflict. My growing awareness of God as the Creator, separate and distinct from the universe He had made, contradicted the Hindu concept that god was everything, that the Creator and the Creation were one and the same. If there was only One Reality, then Brahman was evil as well as good, death as well as life, hatred as well as love. That made everything meaningless, life an absurdity. It was not easy to maintain both one's sanity and the view that good and evil, love and hate, life and death were One Reality.

One day a friend of my cousin Shanti, whose name was Molli, came by to visit. She asked me about whether I found Hinduism fulfilling. Trying to hide my emptiness, I lied and told her I was very happy and that my religion was the Truth. She listened patiently to my pompous and sometimes arrogant pronouncements. Without arguing, she exposed my emptiness gently with politely phrased questions.

She told me that Jesus had brought her close to God. She also said that God is a God of love and that He desires us to be close to Him. As appealing as this sounded to me, I stubbornly resisted, not willing to surrender my Hindu roots.

Still, I found myself asking, "What makes you so happy? You must have been doing a lot of meditation."

"I used to," Molli responded, "but not any more. Jesus has given me a peace and joy that I never knew before." Then she said, "Rabi, you don't seem very happy. Are you?"

I lowered my voice: "I'm not happy. I wish I had your joy." Was I saying this?

"My joy is because my sins are forgiven," said Molli. "Peace and joy come from Christ, through really knowing Him."

We continued talking for half a day, unaware of how the time had passed. I wanted her peace and joy, but I was absolutely resolved that I wasn't going to give up any part of my religion.

As she was leaving, she said: "Before you go to bed tonight, Rabi, please get on your knees and ask God to show you the Truth -- and I'll be praying for you." With a wave of her hand she was gone.

Pride demanded that I reject everything Molli had said, but I was too desperate to save face any longer. I fell to my knees, conscious that I was giving in to her request.

"God, the true God and Creator, please show me the truth!" Something inside me snapped. For the first time in my life, I felt I had really prayed and gotten through -- not to some impersonal Force, but to the true God who loves and cares. Too tired to think any longer, I crawled into bed and fell asleep almost instantly.

Soon after, my cousin Krishna invited me to a Christian meeting. I again surprised myself by responding: "Why not?"

On our way there, Krishna and I were joined by Ramkair, a new acquaintance of his. "Do you know anything about this meeting?" I asked him, anxious to get some advance information.

"A little," he replied. "I became a Christian recently."

"Tell me," I said eagerly. "Did Jesus really change your life?" Ramkair smiled broadly. "He sure did! Everything is different."

"It's really true, Rab!" added Krishna enthusiastically. "I've become a Christian too -- just a few days ago."

The preacher's sermon was based on Psalm 23, and the words, "The Lord is my shepherd," made my heart leap. After expounding the Psalm, the preacher said: "Jesus wants to be your Shepherd. Have you heard His voice speaking to your heart? Why not open your heart to Him now? Don't wait until tomorrow -- that may be too late!" The preacher seemed to be speaking directly to me. I could delay no longer.

I quickly knelt in front of him. He smiled and asked if anyone else wanted to receive Jesus. No one stirred. Then he asked the Christians to come forward and pray with me. Several did, kneeling beside me. For years Hindus had bowed before me -- and now I was kneeling before a Christian.

Aloud I repeated after him a prayer inviting Jesus into my heart. When the preacher said, "Amen," he suggested I pray in my own words. Quietly, choking with emotion, I began: "Lord Jesus, I've never studied the Bible, but I've heard that you died for my sins at Calvary so I could be forgiven and reconciled to God. Please forgive me all my sins. Come into my heart!"

Before I finished, I knew that Jesus wasn't just another one of several million gods. He was the God for whom I had hungered. He Himself was the Creator. Yet, He loved me enough to become a man and die for my sins. With that realization, tons of darkness seemed to lift and a brilliant light flooded my soul.

After arriving home, Krishna and I found the entire family waiting up for us, apparently having heard what had happened. "I asked Jesus into my life tonight!" I exclaimed happily, as I looked from one to another of those startled faces. "It's glorious. I can't tell you how much he means to me already."

Some in my family seemed wounded and bewildered; others seemed happy for me. But before it was all over with, thirteen of us had ended up giving our hearts to Jesus! It was incredible.

The following day I walked resolutely into the prayer room with Krishna. Together we carried everything out into the yard: idols, Hindu scriptures, and religious paraphernalia. We wanted to rid ourselves of every tie with the past and with the powers of darkness that had blinded and enslaved us for so long.

When everything had been piled on the rubbish heap, we set it on fire and watched the flames consume our past. The tiny figures we once feared as gods were turning to ashes. We hugged one another and offered thanks to the Son of God who had died to set us free.

I found my thoughts going back to my father's cremation nearly eight years before. In contrast to our new found joy, that scene had aroused inconsolable grief. My father's body had been offered to the very same false gods who now lay in smoldering fragments before me. It seemed unbelievable that I should be participating with great joy in the utter destruction of that which represented all I had once believed in so fanatically.

In a sense this was my cremation ceremony -- the end of the person I had once been...the death of a guru. The old Rabi Maharaj had died in Christ. And out of that grave a new Rabi had risen in whom Christ was now living.

Story of Michael Graham

(author of 'Guru to God', an autobiography)

Michael Graham was a leading disciple of one of India's most famous holy men, and then an international teacher of New Age spiritualities. Now he is a Christian. It's an enthralling story that will challenge all spiritual seekers. This article was originally published in the October 1999 issue of Alive magazine.

Many of the young Western spiritual seekers who flocked to Indian religions during the idealistic 1960s and 1970s became familiar with a mild-mannered Australian named Michael Graham. For Michael, who had embarked on an intense and far-reaching spiritual journey from the time of his graduation from elite Geelong Grammar School in the mid-1960s, came to find himself at the forefront of the great migration to the West of Indian religious teachings and practices.

As one of the first Western disciples of Swami Muktananda Paramanansa, who was to become a leading figure in America and elsewhere with his teachings of Siddha (perfect being) yoga, Michael helped manage his ashram (spiritual centre) in India, with up to 2,600 Westerners there at one time. He also became deeply involved in Muktananda's American activities and energetically promoted his teachings in Australia and elsewhere.

Yet today Michael, 52, is on a different mission. In 1997 he became a Christian, after being convicted with the realisation that his 28 years of spiritual practices and experiences amounted to, in his own words, "a big fat zero"—and he is now working to persuade other idealistic spiritual seekers that their needs are simply met by the figure of Jesus, "the fulfilment of all spiritual paths".

Michael's story is a remarkable one. Born and raised in Melbourne, his father a doctor and psycho-analyst, he spent three years studying and practising yoga while still in his late teens, then took his motorcycle by ship to Colombo, and rode around Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and India. After a trip to England he returned to India in early 1969 and spent six months in Muktananda's ashram. And it was during this period of intense spiritual discipline that he experienced a dramatic spiritual "awakening".

“The theory is that within everyone there is an unawakened divine potential,” says Michael. “By the intent or touch of a guru like Muktananda it can be awakened. I experienced this in a very powerful form.”

In an interview with Rowan Forster on Melbourne’s Triple 7 radio in April 1999 he recounted the experience:

“I was just sitting there, meditating, and all of a sudden my body started to gyrate in a circular motion. And then each day it began to sway more and more vigorously, even violently. I’d stop it, saying: ‘What’s this? How extraordinary. What an extraordinary phenomenon.’

“Hitherto, I’d always moved my body, but never before has it happened spontaneously. All sorts of dynamic and palpable activities started to take place under the influence of this spontaneous force. There’d be laughing one moment and crying the next, with nothing funny or sad in attendance—there’d be vigorous breathing rhythms, sounds of birds and animals coming from my mouth and speaking in tongues. It was fascinating. My body would start to move in classical dancing postures, I’d hop around the floor, I’d see inner lights, particularly blue, and sometimes torrents of peace would overcome me, even journeys out of the body.”

It was a tantalising experience for the young Australian. “I was totally seduced by this awakening. It is so engaging and seductive. It was real, with no suggestion or hypnosis involved. *And it had a huge promise attached to it. It promised a final merging with the divine.*”

Michael, with Muktananda’s Siddha yoga as his core practice, returned to India several times, but studied and practised under other gurus also, some of whom were to become famous (and in some cases, infamous) in the West, such as Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh.

In 1977 he rejoined Muktananda in America, and, as one of his renowned disciples, spent some years working and touring with him and his successors. Muktananda was attracting huge numbers of followers, including famous names like John Denver—whom Michael remembers coming daily to the Santa Monica ashram and often singing for all the students—along with

Diana Ross, actors Raul Julia and Olivia Hussey, and former California Governor Jerry Brown.

In the words of former Los Angeles Times journalist Russell Chandler, in his book *Understanding the New Age*, “Perhaps more than any other guru except Maharishi Mahesh Yogi of transcendental meditation fame, Muktananda made yoga meditation accessible and fun to Westerners—particularly the Hollywood set.”

But despite the exhilarating phenomena of Indian religious practice, Michael found that it was not bringing forth the life changes he desired.

“I remained the same at heart. It was always the same old me. There was no change of heart and mind. I was a young man, a modern man, with a philosophical bent. I had no affinity for major elements of the teaching. It was all the amazing experiences that kept me there, and what they were supposed to lead to. So I looked for something to supplement it, in the New Age movement. I became involved in various New Age mind dynamic techniques.”

For a time he was active in corporate consulting, designing and delivering a wide range of personal and organisational development strategies. He then discovered the US-developed Avatar® programme, an inventive way of creating a preferred reality through the management of one’s beliefs. He became one of the most successful teachers of this programme, delivering it in Australia, the US, New Zealand, Singapore and Switzerland.

“Avatar teaches that your beliefs determine your life’ experience. The point was that you could re-engineer your life by changing your beliefs. So you chose your desired outcome, then re-engineered your beliefs to create that reality. I explored it all assiduously, and drew as much from it as possible. But people’s deep-rooted beliefs are not amenable to change through strategic means. I decided ultimately that the programme’s impact was minimal.”

From around 1993 he started developing his own training courses. But increasingly, over several years, he felt frustration. His work was not developing to expectations. More significantly, he felt his spiritual life somehow in stagnation.

He resolved to intensify his spiritual practices, such as starting each day with 2½ hours of spiritual disciplines. Then he decided to embark on a series of 10-day meditations, in isolation, and it was during one of these that he had his encounter with Christ.

“At the time it happened I was in isolation,” he recalls. “But I wasn’t meditating; I was in a completely plain state of mind. All at once an image of Christ formed up in my chest cavity. Along with this image came a recognition of who He was. What followed was beyond conception. But to indicate using mere words...there was an openness to me from Christ of cosmic proportions, and an invitation and welcome, as if to say, ‘Give me your life and breath and I will take care of you.’ It was a personal invitation. It was equal to the deepest spiritual experience I’d ever had.”

But despite the marvel and intensity of the encounter, there was a problem. So entrenched was he in his existing spiritual ways, that Michael simply did not know how to respond. He carried that memory of meeting Jesus with him for one year, when he happened to be in Berkeley, California. And there, in 1997, he had what for him was another profound experience.

“I was overcome by the conviction that my lifelong spiritual quest added up to a big fat zero. It was a powerful sense. I was reduced to nothing.”

At the time he was driving 45 minutes each day, and as he drove he listened to evangelical Christian radio, which was building in him an understanding of the first principles of the Christian faith. “I started to get very excited by the promise of Christianity,” he remembers.

A prominent young Indian swami was visiting California at the time, and he was looking for 20–30 experienced people to be trained as gurus and healers in their own right. Michael was not in the least interested, but when three friends, separately, urged him to attend, he took that as some sort of sign that he should be there.

He went, and was not impressed by what he saw and heard. But one thing he noted deeply. The instructor reminded him that to achieve anything it was necessary to have faith. Thus reminded, Michael clearly recognised that it was only in Jesus Christ and His promise that he could ever have faith.

But there was for him one more step in becoming a Christian. “I knew about the importance, power and place of decision. I’d created a course on it called ‘The Decision Principle Training’. I knew that becoming a Christian would be the biggest decision of my life. I wanted to make a marker of it—an event. It so happened that Billy Graham was coming to San Francisco. So I went to that meeting for the express purpose alone of making this decision clearly, cleanly, surely, with no turning back, in front of 22,000 witnesses.

“And since that day I’ve never been the same. I knew absolutely what it was to be renewed, to be reborn. I was a new creation. It was a silent indwelling of the holy spirit. I started to be led in my Christian walk.”

Returning to Melbourne, he sought out a strong biblically-based church and found it in South Yarra Presbyterian Church, a short walk from his home, and a building he had strolled past numerous times previously with barely a glance.

Now after two years of dedicated Bible study he is eager to reach out to others with the story of his transformation. Exceedingly articulate, he has already addressed audiences at Christian colleges in Sydney and was a guest of Gordon Moyes on an Easter television special, and spoke to 25,000 Christians in India. He has also been working with the Community of Hope Christian mission in its outreach to the New Age movement.

He also tells the full and fascinating story of his 28-year spiritual odyssey in his book *The Experience of Ultimate Truth*.

In addition, he talks to friends and acquaintances who have been on a similar journey to his own, some of whom have also become disillusioned with the Eastern promise. “People I’m getting through to would normally never listen to a Christian,” he notes.

What would he tell today’s young spiritual seekers who are leaning towards Eastern religions? “I’d tell them my story,” he says.

“Fulfilment is found in Christ. He is the embodiment of Truth, in whom is contained all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. The point is that the salvation He offers doesn’t come through signs and wonders, though they may be appended to it, but from a turning to Him in acknowledgment of His pre-eminence and

His lordship, and as the medium through which total release can be known.

“In my experience the best the higher other ways can offer is amelioration of the human condition, coupled with large promises and tantalising effects. But they cannot penetrate to the very core, which is the call to utter renewal and the discovery of our sufficiency in Christ.

“Jesus doesn’t simply show us the way, or the truth. He is the way, the truth. He’s not another guru, or preceptor, or avatar, or holy man, or prophet. He’s God Himself stepped down into human flesh to die, identified with the consequences of our decision to turn from God, and thus eternally to reconcile us. The Christian revelation is the end of the end game, not the marvellous scenery on the way.”

And now that he is reconciled with Christ, how does Michael sum up his past? He smiles as he answers: “I was a dead man walking. I can’t believe I’m saying that. Because I thought I was so alive.”