

# EPISODE 1

## GETTING STARTED

Hello everyone. Whether or not you are still on the path that you may or may not have ever been on. This is the first episode of my new podcast, ManWomanSexGod. And my name is Michael Folz.

Now that no doubt is an intriguing title for a podcast. And you probably also want to know who in the world I am. And we'll be getting to those issues in just a little bit. But first I'd like to start off with sort of a preface. To wit:

Richard Alpert first became known to the world when he was Timothy Leary's young Harvard psychology professor sidekick during the soon to be notorious LSD experimentation done there in the early Sixties. Well, he wasn't that well known, since Leary was always at center stage. Although it's kind of interesting that it was Alpert's gay infatuation with an undergraduate, and then giving acid to the guy, which was the cause of the two professors getting fired, and of LSD ending up becoming an underground, and then illegal, drug.

Anyway, a few years after all this, in the late Sixties, while Leary was getting more and more erratic, a rich friend offered Alpert a free trip to India, and off he went. Once there he found himself drawn into the serious study of yoga. One thing led to another, and he ended up finding a guru and staying at an ashram for over a year. During that time he meditated several hours a day and led an extremely disciplined life.

When he came back to the States he was now Ram Dass, and he moved into a cabin behind his wealthy father's summer home by a lake near the small town of Franklin in central New Hampshire. Here he spent most of his time continuing with his yogic practices. And then one day a friend of mine, a local girl who was all of twenty years old back then, saw him coming out of the local market with a loaf of bread and a jar of Skippy's peanut butter. And as local small town girls who saw total freaks wearing totally weird clothes were wont to do at the time, she walked up to him and blurted out, 'Do you know where I can get some speed?'

Now in his telling she came up and asked, 'Do you have a connection?' And in his telling he could have been a humble yogi, politely said, 'That stuff isn't good for you', and gone back home and meditated some more. But what he did say, somewhat mysteriously, is 'I do have a connection to something much better.' And then he invited her over to his cabin to discuss yoga. And thus his career as a spiritual teacher of sorts had started.

Well, as it so happened an American ashram of my particular Indian guru was only a few miles away on the other side of Franklin. And a couple weeks later Ram Dass drove up in his '38 Buick and made acquaintances. So that it wasn't long before word got out to us initiates that the person formerly known as Richard Alpert was just down the road.

And it wasn't like he and I became good friends or anything. But he had a policy that if anyone showed up in the afternoon then they could come in and sit and talk with him for a couple of hours. It turned out that he really liked to talk, that he was really, really good at it, and that he was absolutely open and unfailingly honest to boot. Moreover, he *looked* the part of a sage, with shining eyes, glistening bald pate, long, frizzy white hair and beard, and wearing a simple white kurta and drawstring pants while sitting cross legged on the floor. The 'wise elder' part of it is funny to think back upon now, because he was all of 40 years old at the time. (Of course, when you yourself happen to be 22 or 23...)

Anyway, between 1970 and 1973, whenever I would visit my ashram, I would try to take an afternoon off to go visit him. The cabin was clean and simple, we would all sit on a medium sized rug laid out on the wooden floor, and he would hold forth on his ongoing insights about life and spirituality.

And so it was one afternoon in 1972, after the book that he had written at that lake house, "Be Here Now", had become a surprise runaway best seller. He was relating about how bizarre it was to all of a sudden become a 'star' after having forsaken the prestige of being a Harvard professor, and after vowing to renounce all of the rest of the worldly world. About how he had had to argue with his businessman father because he had set the purchase price of his book too low. Things like that. In the course of the conversation he mentioned that he had almost wanted to name the book, 'From Bindu To Ojas'.

Probably not as catchy a phrase as 'Be Here Now'. But I knew, in theory at least, what he was referring to. Because, although one generally doesn't learn about this during the first week of stretching classes, Yoga teaches that through a lifetime of meditation and pure chastity (or 'brahmacharya'), a practitioner can transform his Bindu, or semen, into Ojas, the mysterious spiritual force that rises up the spine in preparation of full Realization.

But for me at that age this was still mostly theory. There was little experience that I had had that I could draw on to relate to this in any real way.

Now it is fifty years later. And I can't claim to have led that lifetime of rigorous and long meditation, not to mention pure chastity, that yogis are supposed to. Nor can I claim even partial Realization.

But I have had some small glimpses. And now I also have had enough understanding to know what it was he was talking about.

So this is my attempt to tackle the same subject that Ram Dass did back then. Except that, it being fifty years later, those beautiful hippie-ish drawings, which populated his book, probably wouldn't cut it. What's more, any two people's style and approach are going to be different.

Still, the idea is the same.

To explain the religious experience in an entertaining way.

And to try to get you to understand why said religious experience is so damn important.

Okay. That's the short, succinct explanation for why I'm doing this. But now let me expand on that a bit.

Because it's not just hippie-ish drawings which separate 2021 from 1971. For, although certain parallels can always be made between one date and another, I think that the differences between now and fifty years ago are much greater.

First and foremost, in 1971, as the best seller status of *Be Here Now* showed, people in general were really hungry for spiritual explanations. And to a large extent this was due to what has been called the 'psychedelic revolution'.

And if you didn't live through it, it is hard to over-emphasize how revolutionary psychedelic drugs were back in the day. Because LSD and its brethren more or less exploded out of nowhere upon a world which was both buttoned up and buttoned down. I mean, when I first went to college in 1965 you had to wear a coat and tie in order to enter the dining hall. And this wasn't the rule only in exclusive schools; virtually every college in America had it. Nor, in 1965, did anyone think to question this. Yes, there had already been the Beatles and the beatniks and Bob Dylan. But if you look at pictures and videos from that era, you'll see just how clean cut both the young men and young women were.

So that when LSD hit, one could say that the minds and egos which were taking it were still relative 'virgins'. And so that both the alienation from the 'straight' world, which resulted from imbibing the drug, and the consequent longing for some meaning to life which ran deeper than success and materialism, were way more profound. So that today one can still argue whether LSD was 'really' any kind of real spiritual experience. But the net effect of taking it back then was that many people became sincere seekers of a high which transcended chemicals.

Today not nearly so much. Because our minds and egos have had fifty years in which to build up defenses against being blown away. Nowadays people will drop acid along with any and all kinds of combinations of other drugs. Worse, to a large extent the whole idea of 'spirituality' has become both co-opted and encapsulated within a larger framework of materialism and self-satisfaction. New Age doctrines have cleverly figured out BS that ends up equating one's own personal desires with that of God. And it's great that so many people take yoga classes, and that there are so many vegetarian options in restaurants. But those yoga classes almost never delve into the deeper aspects of yoga, like, ahem, chastity, and, even weirder, many of those exercise classes are actually franchises which are branded with some guy's name.

And those quirky health food stores of fifty years ago have been mostly subsumed by Whole Foods, which shamelessly sells both meat and all sorts of sugary crap at inflated prices. And those people ordering vegan fare at high end restaurants will usually also order alcohol of some kind, which had always been a big no no in most spiritual and health food traditions.

Now I'm not trying to be on a high horse dissing eating meat or drinking alcohol. There are certainly far worse things that one can do in life. But I used these examples to show just how co-opted postmodern life has become. And I do think that it is instructive that fifty years ago people were more willing to accept self-discipline more, and to sacrifice at least some pleasures, in the pursuit of a 'spiritual' life.

So that's one aspect of why 2021 is so different from 1971. And here's another.

Because one can put the 'psychedelic' argument aside. And one can still see that the fabled 'rebellion' of the Sixties had everything to do with young people (and others) desperately trying to break free of the stifling 'plastic' artificiality of life and society as it was perceived back then. There was, of course, plastic itself. Then there was the sterile, endlessly replicated, ticky tacky suburban houses that were mushrooming all over the place. There was Dad driving the station wagon to some

meaningless job every morning. And Mom, still trying to be Betty Crocker, while secretly gobbling speed and/or tranquilizers all day long. There was ‘twenty years of schooling, and they put you on the day shift’.

So who wouldn’t want to break free from all of that? And, once you did decide to break free, well, it wasn’t that hard to swear off watching Lawrence Welk. What’s more, there was that energy of youth. For, even with the genuinely real pain of having to separate oneself from the dominant culture, still, when you looked around back then, for some reason there were plenty of others on the same journey. And everyone thought, at least for one brief moment, that a new world was dawning, and that it’s implementation would flow naturally and easily.

Little did we know, however, that building anything by definition would be far, far more difficult than spending a far out afternoon on an acid trip. And that, having grown up in the tame, easy world of suburbia, then who knew that framing that house off in the woods, let alone putting the plumbing and wiring in, or actually growing enough of your own food, would be so hard, man.

And, of course, the forces of co-optation and distraction weren’t standing still, either. Which means that today, if you wanted to unplug yourself and go back to nature, there wouldn’t just be three networks to ignore. There are 150 channels. Plus Netflix. Plus Hulu. Plus Whatever. Not to mention the internet. Your smart phone. And, of course, you have to keep checking in on Facebook to see how your likewise totally atomized imaginary ‘friends’ are carefully curating their equally relatively meaningless lives.

So that now the really weird thing is that, looking back in the rear view mirror, the world of 1962 which the hippies rejected so out of hand appears in comparison to be almost quaint and slow paced, with people still mostly, compared to today, having been friends and neighbors. You know, the good old days.

And who in the present has the strength or energy to even begin to fight all of the chaos and confusion of the present?

Anyway, with those points as a foundation, kindly indulge me now in a short Jeremiad. And then I promise to fill the rest of this podcast with positivity. No more doom and gloom. And ever onward and upwards.

But first the Jeremiad.

Because these are the best of times and these are the worst of times.

On the one hand, there is a postmodern irony that imbues and infuses everything we see and do. Nothing is real any more. No one is serious. It's all a game.

So it should be fun, shouldn't it?

What's more, compared to everyone else throughout history, we're all super-rich and we've seen it all. Twice. At a deep level we know how pointless name and fame are, we're familiar with all the phony baloney. If we wanted to, we as a society could easily re-arrange our affairs to that we had a thirty hour work week and could spend the rest of our lives on something useful. After all, our big screen TVs show us the big beautiful world of nature out there that we could work to save and that we could go out to commune with. And they also show us the poverty and misery that still exists all over the less developed world, poverty and misery that we would have the wealth and the time to do something about.

So, viewed from that angle, if we were ever going to see that there is something that's more important and meaningful than our day to day striving and melodrama, if the stage were ever going to be set for an outbreak of, regardless how you define it, spirituality, then this time would seem to be it.

And it's true that most people, at least here in America, still say that they are spiritual, even if not religious. That many people are going to those yoga classes. That many people are volunteering for charities. And even though neo-atheists get a lot of publicity, still most of the U.S. population still says that they believe in God.

But at the same time, ours is also the most relentlessly materialistic society that the world has ever seen. And by 'materialistic' I don't just mean consumer goods. I mean that Western culture—and especially the knowledge elite that runs it—believes in Materialism in its literal philosophic sense: That this Universe consists only of material, and that any belief in 'spirit' or 'soul' is only an illusion, and a superstitious and childish one at that.

Philosophers have of course throughout the ages argued back and forth about where the ultimate truth lies. But the real world result of having an entire culture adopt Materialism as its default position is that now all that is left for any member of such a culture to do is to maximize their self-interest and collect more material. Because, if you stop and consider it, all of the supposedly 'Higher Things' in life—poetry, art, music—originally arose so as to put us in touch with our spirit or soul. But if there is no such thing as spirit or soul, then there therefore also is no such thing as a Higher Thing. And then...

And that is why we work longer and longer hours, even though there is more and more automation. That is why ersatz 'sports' such as pro wrestling and NASCAR racing, which were seen as

totally mindless not that many years ago, are now so popular. That is why Utah and Hawaii are the only states that are left which don't have some kind of legalized gambling. Because we will do anything and everything to constantly divert our attention so that there isn't that one second of time left over where we can introspect. And then have to look into that void of materialistic nothingness that our culture says that we intrinsically are.

One can even observe that the pull of Materialism is so pervasive that it has surrounded much, if not most, of what passes for religion nowadays. There are so many modern Christian groups which believe that financial prosperity is what naturally follows from believing in Jesus. As I've said, there are so many New Age believers who think that their personal wishes and desires are somehow synonymous with God Himself. It used to be that every religion dealt extensively with what happened after you died. You know, heaven and hell. But few followers of any persuasion talk or think about the afterlife, let alone the inevitability of death, any more.

For many of us old enough to remember, when the Eighties first happened the decade seemed to mark a major and final realization of pure self-centeredness. Material girl, indeed. Yet when one looks back now *that* decade almost appears quaint. And the disintegration keeps accelerating. In 2005 there were twice as many sexual references on television as there were in 1998; one can only guess what the figure is now. Video games keep ratcheting up the violence; and yet now both the liberals and the conservatives on the Supreme Court agree that allowing children to play the most violent of them is somehow part of freedom of speech. Internet pornography is already beyond increasingly sick. And of course it's always just one click away. Awful addiction to it is a huge problem. But still absolutely nothing has begun to be done about it.

It all sounds complicated and sad. And in many ways it's even worse than I've portrayed. For instance, one of Britain's foremost scientists, Martin Rees, has concluded that the odds of humanity making it to the year 2100 are 50/50 at best. And he was only talking about potential disasters stemming from the advancement of science. Add in the very real possibility of the collapse of civilization due to that atomization of individuals and the emptiness of that Materialism that I've been talking about, and the chances for our cultural survival really don't look all that good.

But even though one would be foolish to pretend that these aren't very dark and dangerous times, it's also true that the end of the world doesn't have to happen. As I said, even with all of the negativity around us, the fact remains that this is also the one time in history where we are wealthy

enough and (potentially) aware enough and free enough to actually make an attempt to create some sort of Heaven on Earth. It could be done. Really.

Such a turnaround wouldn't and won't be easy. Far from it. Because, right here at the beginning of the podcast, here's something I want you to really take to heart: Namely, that if the outlook and behavior that you and I and the rest of the world would have to have and to do came easily or naturally, we would already be having it and doing it.

And as an example of how we kid ourselves that it could be easy: Did you know that some 19 million self-help books were sold in the U.S. in 2019 alone? That over 85,000 *different* self-help books were published in 2019? That Deepak Chopra's net worth is over 150 million dollars? And that Millennials are willing to spend much more on self-help than even Boomers were?

Anyway, if you extrapolate self-help sales over the past forty years or so, this means that just about every man, woman, and child in America has bought, or had bought for them, at least several. So that if self-help actually did help anyone, wouldn't we all be happy, healthy, and actualized by now?

But we're not.

Because it seems to be a fact of existence that, irrespective of the surrounding culture, the human mind and the human condition tend to lead us away from what's good for us. So although you *can* make a turnaround, the question will be (as it always has been) whether you *want* to make it.

Not to mention whether you ever actually go ahead and do it.

And then there's the problem of the microcosm inside of the macrocosm. If the entire world is falling apart, then what chance do you or I have in changing anything? Doesn't this call for some sort of Movement? Some political program? Some change in government policy?

No, it actually doesn't. Because that's the beauty of what could be called the 'spiritual path'. Because even if no one else ever chooses to opt out of mindless Consumerism, even if everyone else continues to merrily head for Hell in that hand basket, even if you are the only one to ever make the attempt to center yourself and to achieve what I will be calling the religious experience, then you are still going to end up in a far more peaceful state of mind than you were before. Nor will you be nearly as freaked out as everyone else will be as it all unravels.

And who knows? Because there probably will be others. Because if anyone ever stops long enough to think about it, there's really not any other game out there worth playing, is there? And we don't need 51% of the world's population, either. 10% would probably do it. 3% very well might.

And surely 3% of the people out there are sincere seekers, right?

Right?

Okay. Now that I've maybe got you wound up a bit, let's stop and unwind for a moment. Because you are no doubt wondering by now, 'Who is this guy?' 'And why should I be spending my time listening to him?'

Well, first and foremost, and even second and foremost, I would hope that you remain listening because what I am about to say makes sense. And I also hope to make it as informative, as entertaining, and as interesting as possible.

As for personal qualifications... Well, I do have a couple of Ivy League degrees. And I have been reading about and thinking about all of this stuff for over fifty years. So that I can natter on for paragraphs at a time about topics as diverse as Zoroastrianism, Medieval Christianity, Gnosticism, or the pantheon of various Hindu gods.

But my knowledge isn't just limited to academic subjects. Because I can also talk somewhat knowledgeably about more esoteric topics. Such as the Kabbalistic background of the tarot deck, or the actual meaning of those chakras that you might have heard about. And if you stay with me, we'll be getting to all of that soon enough.

Most importantly, to me at least, is that I do have some experience in the field. I have meditated for some fifty years or so. I have sat at the feet of someone who was considered to be a genuine guru in India. And I have actually gone through at least some of those first hand 'spiritual experiences'.

Now this doesn't mean that I claim to be any kind of teacher myself. In fact, trying to be a teacher is pretty much the furthest thing from my mind. And I would think it beyond weird if anyone who listens would ever consider themselves to be a follower.

Further, and as you might have picked up by now, I am not going to be trying to fill your head with New Age-y or self-help images or jargon. What I will be calling the religious experience is way too serious for any of that silliness. After all, as I just intimated a minute or so ago, if any of that was anything more than a temporary feel-good-about-yourself measure, we'd all be enlightened by now, now wouldn't we?

And, finally, I am most definitely not trying to sell you anything. Not in the financial sense. And not in the spiritual sense. I'm not going to be telling you to follow this particular person or that

particular path. Nor do I have any books or merchandise to offload on you. Because I really do want to maintain my ‘amateur’ status.

So, if I’m not in this for the money, then why *am* I doing this? Well, partially, I suppose, it’s out of respect for all of those people those fifty years ago who at least started out on the path. And although many of them ended up not staying the course, that doesn’t mean that their initial impulse wasn’t correct.

Far more importantly, though, I want to share with you a framework of ideas—or, to use a TED talk phrase, a new paradigm—that I think you will find original, unique, and really interesting. To be clear: The ideas themselves are not necessarily new. As I will strive to show, they are embedded, either consciously or unconsciously, in most of the world’s great cultures and religions. The framework, the paradigm, however...

Now, that, I think will be worth your while. Because it answers questions such as, Why do all world religions seem to be so anti-sex? Why do they have all of those do’s, and, more importantly, don’t’s? Most importantly, Why, in our scientific and technological age, should we even care about a religious experience?

So that, even though the podcast’s title, ManWomanSexGod, may appear, depending on your outlook, to be whimsical, trivial, or even blasphemous, I assure you that the podcast is none of that. Although, of course, you are going to have to keep listening so as to find this out for yourself.

And I especially would like you to keep listening to the next episode, which is sort of an Introduction, Part Two. Because I will be leading it off by telling you the point of existence. Honest. For real. And surely you have a few moments to spare for that, don’t you?

Although right now it’s the end of this episode. And it is also time for you to hear the song snippet which is the outro of this episode. Which, by the way, like the intro, is sung by my wife Maureen.

So, mister engineer, kindly cue the music...