

In the summer of 2003, I, Guy Atchley journeyed from Arizona to Ibiza, Spain for a three-week yoga retreat with Godfrey Devereux. I had read his books on yoga and found them incisive and inspiring. For three weeks I lived in a tent with no phone, no fax, no computer. It was a break I desperately needed. After five hours of yoga each morning, I spent afternoons on Benirras Beach ending each day with a picture postcard sunset.

It's important to state here that yoga is not a religion, but it can greatly enhance your religious life, or spiritual quest, or your life in general simply by helping you see what's really happening. I came away from Can Am with a new understanding of God's role in my life. It was quite surprising to me, considering Godfrey was not the yogi I'd envisioned. He was human, humorous, and occasionally profane, but above all, he was honest.

GA: What is your education?

GD: I had the best education English money could buy

GA: And that is?

GD: Well, I went to one of the five exclusive English public schools, the one that according to my father has as its fundamental educational ethos to help you to learn, to think for yourself-- Marlboro. It's what we call public schools, which means it's private.

GA: So, when did you get out of Marlboro?

GD: When I was 16.

GA: From there where did you go?

GD: From there I went into a solo exploration of the nature of consciousness.

GA: Which means?

GD: I got into doing yoga and LSD.

GA: Oh, really? And how long did that last?

GD: Well, the yoga is still going 30 years later. The LSD lasted intensely about 5 years and stopped completely after 8 years.

GA: And was that the limit of your drug experience, or were there other drugs?

GD: Well, I smoked marijuana during that period, but my main interest was with what happened when I took LSD.

GA: Just finding out what was there?

GD: Well, the thing was, the first time I did LSD on my own, I did yoga for 8 hours. So, the two became fairly deeply inter-linked. I'd done LSD maybe 3 times before at festivals and I did this trip and I did yoga the whole time and at the end of it-- I didn't know that I did-- but I knew everything about Indian wisdom, and I knew it and I started talking about it to my friends about reincarnation and we are all one and all this stuff and I never read any of this stuff. But because I was doing yoga while I was tripping that's where the acid took me...with that understanding.

GA: So you learned something from your trips?

GD: Yeah, I learned that we create our own reality or you could put it now that reality is a projection existing in the mind. And the senses reveal only a tiny part of the amount of data that's available to consciousness. All kinds of things. And I didn't necessarily quantify or understand it the way I do now. But I would say that what yoga has done is allowed me to embody the wisdom that drugs gave me, if you see what I mean. To embody it, so it wasn't just conceptual, you know I can see through taking drugs certain things. But the implications of that, in terms of how you live your life, drugs don't give you. But yoga has over the thirty years brought me to a similar state of consciousness today without the weirdness. I'm no longer just relating to the surface appearance, even though that's all I'm seeing.

GA: Where you ever addicted to a drug?

GD: I never took a physically addictive drug, so I only took drugs that are not physically addictive. I made an agreement with myself when I was very young before I started that I wouldn't take addictive drugs. I didn't trust myself to stay alive if I did that.

GA: And why did you STOP taking drugs?

GD: I stopped smoking cannabis basically because it became boring. And I

didn't enjoy the effect anymore, the novelty wore off. The last time I took LSD I sat in lotus posture for eight hours in a sanctuary in a holy house, in a holy place. And I could feel very, very clearly within my body that the energy that was fueling the movements of my consciousness was coming out of the cells in my body. And I could feel it weakening. So then I didn't have to think. There was no question that I would never do it again.

GA: What years are we talking about?

GD: That was 1980 or '81.

GA: Were you a hippy?

GD: I was a hard core hippy (laughs).

GA: And how have you evolved from that?

GD: I am a hardcore hippy (more laughter).

In terms of values, yes, definitely. But I was being somewhat ironic by saying I am a hippy. If you think love and peace means you can push me around, think again.

GA: How did you discover yoga, or how did yoga discover you?

GD: I left school when I was 16 because of my involvement with drug-taking and this was just before we're supposed to take our A-level, which were the examinations in those days that you had to pass in order to go to universities. So, in order to still do those, my parents sent me to stay with my uncle to carry on preparing myself for the examinations on my own. And I used to do it in this sanctuary. He was a minister of the Church of England, and one day in the afternoon, he was standing there in tree pose in a pair of boxer shorts with his palms together in front of his chest in front of the altar. Now, my uncle was the only adult, really, that I ever met whom I could relate to. He had a fantastic sense of fun and this amazing ability to communicate to anybody. And I got on with him very well, and he was probably the only adult, at that time, that I'd be open and honest with what I really thought. And I walked in and I could feel something coming off him and I wanted it. I felt this very peaceful vibration, and within it was only what I could say is reverence. As a minister it was obviously directed towards Jesus or God.

GA: Is your uncle still alive?

GD: Still alive, still stands on his head sometimes.

I dedicated my first book to him and three other people, so he has a copy. He told me he used to go around to every library demanding that they get a copy to boost my sales.

GA: I heard why you were drawn to yoga. Why are the people who go to your retreats drawn to yoga?

GD: I don't know. And I don't think that you could point to a common factor, but I think they're all drawn to Can Am by forces unknown to them. It's very few people who come to Can Am, who find it unpalatable, but there are many in the yoga world who find me unpalatable and would find what we do there unpalatable.

GA: Because?

GD: Because I'm outspoken, because I tell the truth, because I do not subscribe to the orthodoxy of the church. So those who have a deep investment, whether in their own practice or whatever, they get that feeling about me and they don't want to have their path upset.

GA: So, for some people yoga is like a religion to them?

GD: Well, not overtly, but they bring to it or they use it to develop their own belief system. Whereas yoga is fundamentally a way to see into the pragmatic nature of a belief system. That's about all it is, it has a pragmatic value or not. It doesn't have an absolute value. But people put absolute values on their beliefs. They say you shouldn't eat meat. I eat meat. You shouldn't wear leather. I wear leather. You shouldn't swear. Well, f--- you.

GA: During a retreat, you said you had seriously considered not being a yoga teacher anymore.

GD: Well, I...yeah, I tried to get out of it (laughs), fundamentally because I didn't like being put up on a pedestal.

GA: Oh, really?

GD: Because I've lived with myself all my life, and I know I'm no less of a wanker than the next guy. And so when people put me up on a pedestal, as if I could answer every question under the sun, you know, and as if I had solved all the mysteries of life, I didn't like it because I felt that they were disempowering themselves. It didn't bother me what they thought of me particularly; it bothered me that, even in my unwilling participation in that dynamic, they were disempowering themselves, then what I thought could benefit them was not really happening. So that was the problem. And I didn't see a way around it. I tried really hard to subvert that process by being a wanker as much as I could, you know, in front of my students, but it wasn't really genuine. I kinda went over the top. And I think that on a certain level that bothered me, also. And so, a few years ago, I had a three day crisis. I spent it on the beach, and I had this dialogue with myself: Do you want to do this? Why do you want do that? My one option is to live a nice quiet island life for ten years and forget about being a yoga teacher, or I could take my money and invest it in my teaching center. But anyway, I realized I had to carry on. The same people were still putting me up on a pedestal and I wasn't liking it, but I came to some kind of superficial realization that I had to carry on.

GA: You say you've broken every rule in the book. Do you have a reputation as a womanizer?

GD: Yeah, I think I have a misplaced reputation as a womanizer. I think a womanizer is something quite specific. A womanizer is someone who uses women to bolster his poor self-esteem. And that I'm definitely not.

GA: So, how would you describe yourself?

GD: I'd say that I'm somebody who loves life and women seem to be a big part of life.

GA: You say that yoga is the most dangerous form of exercise, because you get into a position that you don't normally get into, and you stay there. I read an article from a doctor who said he had not seen so many injuries from a fitness craze since the Jane Fonda aerobics days of the 80's.

GD: Totally.

GA: So, give me your thoughts on that and how it could be prevented.

GD: Well, if yoga was approached in the way yoga is designed to be approached, then it wouldn't be a problem. But it's approached as a physical exercise; therefore, people are concerned with the physical results. Hence, their trying to get more movement or their trying to get more strength. But it's the movement thing that causes most of the injuries. They're trying to get more flexibility, and they don't have any understanding of the body so they're making their ligaments and joints do stuff that they can't. And if they could realize that yoga is not really a physical medium, it just has a physical aspect, and that physical aspect should be approached according to the rules. Rule number one is sensitivity; number two is honesty. You must have sensitivity and honesty about what you're capable of, then those injuries wouldn't happen. Those injuries don't happen to my students-- at least not in my presence.

GA: What do you hope your students take away from Can Am?

GD: Well, I hope they don't take away anything that was here (laughs). What would I like them to take away? I'd like them to take away-- well being. I'm offering people space really. A psychological space for them to hopefully learn to appreciate who they are and the life that's happening. That's what I see of the potential value of what I do really. More specifically I could say I'd like them to take away the understanding that-- it is always and only God.

GA: "It is always and only God." What does that mean?

GD: The 'always' means nothing. You can attribute anything to that word you like--feelings, actions, events, situation, an object. There is nothing that is NOT God. So that is what always means. And "only" means the same. There is only God. There is nothing apart from God. God includes everything. "It" means that every little thing in its true self is the whole of God. "Always and only God" means no blame, no guilt, no shame, no pride, no resentment, no regret, no anxiety, no manipulation. So that's the point--peace.

GA: Have you been able to achieve that?

GD: It's not something that you can achieve. The natural unfolding of events seems to be such that I have become a stranger to all those tendencies, but I make no assumption that they're not going to pop up any minute now.

GA: What is the toughest ordeal you had to go through, and how did you deal with it?

GD: Being separated from my children--especially him. (Godfrey points to his son, Arum, who is tape recording our conversation). How did I deal with it? I don't know. Lived it out. I came to peace with that particularly on his birthday during a zen retreat. I was meditating and freaking out about the whole thing. I wasn't just freaking out about my relationship with my son, but also freaking out about my relationship with my father, seeing how even though the externality was different, it was the same dynamic. I had been unfathered, even though he hadn't been absent. And so I felt that I didn't know what it meant to father.

I came to peace with it because a Buddhist sensei said to me, "Can you tell me this now, Godfrey, that no matter how else you judge anything that you did or didn't do, was there any moment that you didn't do your best?"

And I said, "No."

"Then every moment you did your best?"

And I said, "Yes."

She said, "Then why do you feel bad about it?"

And I said, "Well, I don't--now"

GA: Who is your guru?

GD: Who is my guru? My guru right now is you. Whatever is present is my guru. I no longer have the personalized guru.

GA: Do you have any advice for people regarding gurus? I saw some signs around Ibiza that said "Beware of fake gurus."

GD: Yeah, right on. Especially here in Ibiza. (laughs) But having said that, what is a fake guru? If a fake guru is someone else calling your guru a fake, if a guru is participating in your life in any way at all, that's the will of God unfolding. So, really, from a certain point of view, there's not really a good guru or a bad guru. We're all doing the same thing, which is we're all acting out the will of God.

GA: You're now 46. What are you planning for the coming years of your life? Do you have another dream?

GD: I have no more dreams.

GA: No more dreams?

GD: No more dreams. I'll take the dreams that come. but I'm not looking for anything.

GA: Will you come to America someday?

GD: I have a deep reluctance to open the door to teaching in America.

GA: Because?

GD: Because it's such a big f---ing place and there's such a huge number of total f---ing wankers (laughs). And I don't like saying no-- even to wankers.