

Lee Conklin

FIRST BARDO
THE PERIOD OF EGO-LOSS OR
NON-GAME ECSTASY

He who is not busy being born
Is busy dying

—Bob Dylan

Chaos all around me
With its fevered clinging
But I can hear you singing
In the corners of my brain

—13th Floor Elevator

*An interview with Baba Ram Dass
by Gerald Pearlman*

Gerry: Can you talk a little about the radicalization of Timothy Leary? What do you think were the specific reasons for his departure from previous commitments toward consciousness of non-violence and spirituality?

Ram Dass: Timothy is an extraordinary high mystic visionary but not yet a realized being. There is work to do on himself before all his seeds of attachment are cooked. And thus any statement that comes from Tim just like any statement that comes from me is only as pure as where we are at the moment. In some way, it reflects where we're not. From

the time of the bust in Laredo which was not a pure test case, and Tim was told that, Tim felt that he had to carry the standard and in a way was perfectly conscious of his legend and it fit in, with very much harmony, with his whole way of relating to authority and to establishment and to law. The article we wrote back in 1961 or 62 in the *Harvard Review* called "The Politics of Consciousness" really defines exactly what Tim saw as the choice. And he said, "The visionary will be closer to the prison than the professor's chair." Because he saw that change involved overthrow. There are other ways in which evolution occurs than overthrow and in a way Timothy has been living a self-fulfilling prophecy, because to be busted once, he had the choice then of making a test case or not. He chose to make it. Then being busted again and again and again merely shows a total disregard of the system or at least a definition of himself as a very powerful model role, perhaps martyr, perhaps not. But a very strong role. Tim's letter, Tim walking out of jail, felt to me knowing Timothy, as an exquisitely pure act, done beautifully. It was awesome that the sheriff

or whoever runs the prison said when Dr. Leary left, there was no violence and no property destroyed, and that he did it so exquisitely, that all of us, Allen Ginsburg, Wavy Gravy and all the people that I talked to that have been doing this merry dance, honor Timothy for the high-flying act which is walking out of prison. He served six months he asked for parole, it was not granted, and he walked out. At the same time all of us that lived with and knew Timothy had a feeling of trepidation. From then on his game must be so exquisitely disciplined that any one flaw in the whole thing and he either ends up dead or in prison for the rest of his life. Because when they get him this time they throw away the key. Maximum security. All of us who know Timothy know that one of the qualities where he isn't really cooked is discipline, that his mind is beautiful but it moves very wide-ranging and rapidly and he drops and moves and changes. Perhaps what he could have done as a disciplined being was disappear into the woodwork and become somebody else since he had just published a record with Douglas Records, saying "You Can Be Anything This Time Around." He had the option of becoming somebody else, which could have been done.

Gerry: By somebody else do you mean that while out of prison he could have assumed a different identity?

Ram Dass: A different identity and then either build a whole thing on the new identity or then through the underground, release material and just become a secret word appearing and all the time living in the world like somebody else. That's the dance I think I would do if I were in his predicament. Now in some way my interpretation of Tim's letter is that Tim wanted to continue to build and influence and work with the dramatic changes that are occurring in this culture and he saw that the major two high energy fields at the moment, although a third coming up fast on the rail is a spiritual one, the two major ones thus far are the government and the radical movement. And I think what he attempted to do by that letter was to pay his dues to gain membership into that club, into that high energy field. Now there are two things about the letter that are important. One is that though it advocates violence when you read it you do not feel violent. And that leads to an

understanding that there is no act in and of itself that is significant, it is who does the act and the consciousness of the person doing the act.

Gerry: And the consciousness of the person reading the act.

Ram Dass: But that also is a function of the person writing, you see. In other words whether Tim adopts karma for advocating violence is a function of Tim's attachment when he writes the letter. And if Tim isn't attached, the letter doesn't make you violent. It's much more subtle, the way the whole thing works, the vibrations of information, and Tim's letter didn't make me feel violent. Yet at the same time, it felt like he was making some kind of pact with the Devil to beat the Devil, because in the world of polarity every time you identify with one polarity you strengthen the other. But the added point is, Timothy is not a violent man. He's a very conscious man and I would like very much to have people like Eldridge Cleaver and Huey Newton and Seale and all these people hanging out with Timothy Leary rather than just with each other because I would like to have conscious beings involved in each end of the polarity. In a way, Timothy may be doing more of a service to the West in just becoming maybe the resident poet for the Black Panthers and that the letter may be his dues. I've also noticed the amount of discontent, the upset and confusion that the letter has created and I appreciate that very much because that kind of confusion is good healthy work for individuals because they have Timothy in one bag and Eldridge Cleaver in another bag and they're forced now to deal with a Malcolm X phenomenon, of a really beautiful being who is still saying very radical things.

Gerry: They are forced to it and as you say Cleaver and the socialist countries that he will be visting will be exposed to Timothy Leary now. It will be very interesting.

Ram Dass: Exactly. Timothy may get caught in spinning out in this scene and he's doing a very funny dance now. I mean this latest thing with Lebanon and Palestine and nobody wants him and Algiers doesn't want him back. That's the latest I heard from his son. And you know Tim never defends his back on these things. You see that's the exquisite part of a high dancer like Timothy. They often burn up like shooting stars, they burn up going across the heavens. You know

there's Wilhelm Reich and Ezra Pound and there's lots of beings around as models of what happens, how fierce the whole trip is. And I just read Cleaver's, "Conversations with Eldridge Cleaver," in Algiers and it's no picnic. Tim's shit trip is no picnic.

Gerry: I would imagine that people do discover that here, even despite certain repressions, is still one of the freest places in the world.

Ram Dass: I had a long talk with Tim's son yesterday who talks about the pigs at the same moment he owns Tim's house. Right? I said, well then you certainly don't mind if I come take your house away. He says, well I'm not a pig. I say, how do you know you're not a pig? You own a house don't you? Aren't you a landowner? And it's such a delicate thing, the amount of energy that's available in a society and how we only use old models and when you have more energy it's just the son cutting the balls off daddy. Then he gets in the position of running the ship. Like he becomes the new daddy. And there are few radicals that I would like to serve under in terms of having them for my government because there aren't wise men at either pole at the moment.

Gerry: You said something about a self-fulfilling prophecy in Timothy Leary's life but one of his lawyers, Joe Rhine, kept emphasizing how bugged he had become in the past few years with this legal hassling and that this was one of the main reasons why he had reached this type of decision. That it was not something he was trying to bring on himself. And he said that in this last incident, in Orange County, the evidence was planted by police.

Ram Dass: Well, that well may be and I think that part of what's happened is a combination of . . . The history I'm working out of is, I remember being called in to the Department Chairman's office at Harvard and them saying to me, look, you're a close friend of Tim's. We love him and know he's a great intellect but he's completely screwing up the system and if you don't control him, we're going to have to get rid of him because we can't handle him, because he's too disruptive of all the structures of the games. It's as if any structure at all is too much for Timothy. I mean I lived with years of bounced checks, but that has nothing to do with it. You don't have to be against the banking system. When you write checks you don't have money for, that to me doesn't feel good, doesn't feel

good vibrationally. I don't think that's economic radicalism. That's not being willing to play any game. And I feel in a way that Timothy was hassled tremendously, there's no doubt about it and Tim is right in the sense that this country guarantees freedom and the right to happiness and privacy and he is very obvious in his reiteration of Thomas Jefferson, really, the Jeffersonian ideal. But how much has been lost in the shuffle? And he had an exquisite possibility of doing a very high dance in his running for governor in California in the whole reiterating Thomas Jefferson thing.

Gerry: What happened to that?

Ram Dass: Well, he got into so much legal hassel, he got put in prison, and then he couldn't do it.

Gerry: James Kearny ran for mayor.

Ram Dass: Of course, we know James Kearny well. And in a way that's what I mean about lack of discipline. Because Timothy's power didn't necessarily have to do with the way he was living. There were few people coming through the gates of the ranch or the places that were getting busted. That was just Tim's own looseness of living because he was going to live it, his life was going to be a model and that is something that—he kept losing his degree, he kept losing the cards in his hand every bust he'd get. If I'm Timothy Leary I don't cross into Mexico carrying pot. That to me is sloppy. I mean I'm a game player. I was an LSD smuggler for years and I know how to play exquisite games and Timothy's game is sloppy.

Gerry: But aren't the games of prophets always sloppy? They're always getting killed, aren't they?

Ram Dass: Not necessarily. Only the ones that get killed, get killed.

Gerry: They're the ones we remember best.

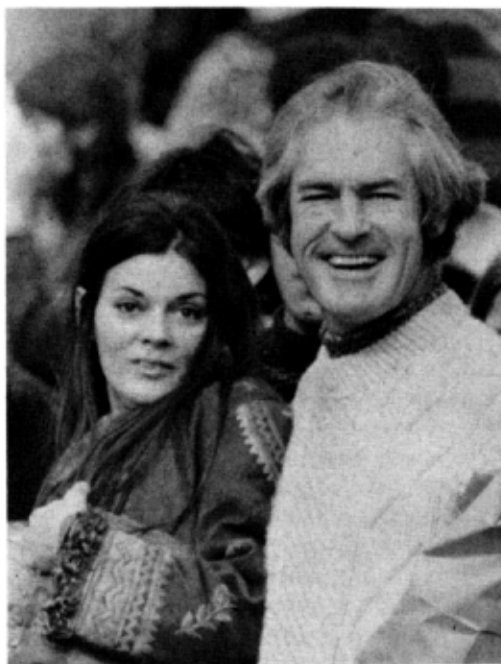
Ram Dass: Well, we remember the killing. But you don't have to turn the tables over in the temple unless that's your trip, if you happen to be the table turner-over, and that's who Timothy is. See before Timothy took any drugs at all, at West Point, he spent nine months where nobody at the Point would talk to him and he would talk to nobody because he had broken one of the rules and he wouldn't leave and he demanded a public apology in the dining hall before he would leave and after nine months of "I'll beat the system" they publicly apologized and he left. But let's just say one more

thing. At the other end of the coin is that Tim's life is becoming a very powerful statement about those freedoms and to the extent that it is pure it will serve to help us check back into our baseline. To the extent that it wasn't pure, that it was an ego act of Tim's, it won't, because that's the way communication works. Communications come through as high as the beings who communicate. There's a whole other level at which the game is played so that as I go around the country all the hundreds and hundreds of people who come up and say, "Hey, where's Timothy Leary at" and when I say "Why do you ask" they say "Well, he writes such beautiful stuff but there's something about him." Well, that is true, there is something about him and everybody that's ever lived with him has said the same thing. There are places in him where he doesn't work on himself and whether he can't or he doesn't or what, this is the way it is. All his wives, his children, me, I mean all of us have shared that feeling and I had many acid trips with Tim and I've been inside his head really deep. Timothy and I had a great evening about a year ago in Berkeley, sat around and he said "I hear you said this" and I said "Yeah, I heard you said this" and we kept doubling the game and getting farther and farther out, it was a beautiful thing, because we'd been traveling in these separate overlapping spheres for years.

Gerry: This is your own, in a sense, radicalization from that previous stage of your life where you and Timothy broke the ground for the cultural revolution.

Ram Dass: Well, in all fairness let me point out very clearly that Timothy broke the ground. I was the student. I was co-faculty member and I took care of the kitchen, the children, the relations with the administration and the bank statements and the neighbors and the garbage and the dogs and the whole thing that Jewish mothers do but man, his was the vision. His was the consciousness and I rode his coat-tails through the whole psychedelic thing. The Tibetan Book of the Dead was his book. He just put my name on it because I cleaned the kitchen well. That's really been our role. In fact, I defined it in 1961. I said to myself, I've never met a great man before and this is one of them and it is enough for my life merely to serve such a being. I'm perfectly happy to just do it. And for two years I kept doing that until sud-

denly I saw that there was a destructive quality in Tim's game and no matter how beautiful it got, it kept being converted into some horror all the time. And then he kept saying, "That's the way it's gotta be" and in my heart it didn't feel like that's the way it had to be. We didn't have to have police and bill collectors and lawyers and the whole thing and all this chaos all the time, chaos. So at that point we split apart and once we had split, my life just started to flow out and for about six months I was in traumatic shock, really, feeling well. I was working as a computer programmer and I thought I'll just do my gig and maybe I'll become a chauffeur or something and I'll just mind my own business because I've had enough of the trip. Okay, I did it. And then I suddenly started to see that I had a consciousness too. I mean that was the first time that I ever started to redefine what my role was to be, only in 1965 or '66 when I did the book with Sidney Cohen. That was the transformation for me. And then when Tim and I got back together again in 1967 he said, Why don't we join forces again. I said, Tim, we're finished. We've done the thing. Our karma is completed. We don't have to do it anymore.



Raymond Centanni