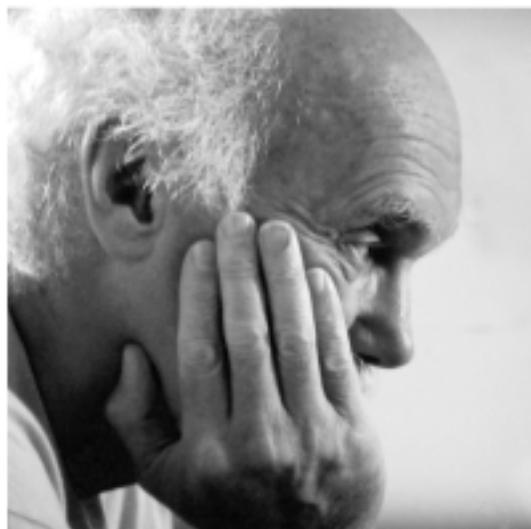


AS HERE AS HE EVER WAS



RAM DASS
FIERCE GRACE
A FILM BY MICKEY LEMLE

A ZEITGEIST FILMS RELEASE

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In the 1960s, Richard Alpert and Timothy Leary were to spiritual awareness what the Beatles and the Stones were to rock 'n' roll. As Harvard faculty members, they began experimenting with LSD and in 1963 were, famously, expelled by the university. While Leary continued to tune in, turn on and drop out, Alpert—whose father was a wealthy Jewish attorney and President of the New York-New Haven Railroad—morphed into Ram Dass, a serious and much loved spiritual leader, author and lecturer. His 1971 best-seller ***Be Here Now*** has been followed up recently by ***Still Here: Embracing Aging, Changing and Dying***. Filmmaker Mickey Lemle, who has known his subject for 25 years, balances fascinating, often hilariously funny footage from the hippie era, with contemporary material on Ram Dass, as he remakes his life since suffering a stroke five years ago.

(synopsis courtesy of Film Forum, New York)



LONG SYNOPSIS

RAM DASS FIERCE GRACE is a funny, poignant feature length documentary. It is not so much a biography as it is a film which captures the spirit and wisdom of a man who has been at the forefront of studying the nature of consciousness for the past 45 years. It shows how he has taken all he has learned and explores how he applies it to dealing with the effects of a massive stroke he suffered in February 1997.

The film begins with the stroke and the effects. Ram Dass explains that the night of the stroke the doctors and his friends all thought that he was dying. He says, "But I didn't have a spiritual thought in my head . . . all I noticed were the pipes on the ceiling . . . it showed me I had more work to do, because that's the test, and I flunked the test." Ram Dass discovered the spiritual "work" he had to do was to see the stroke as grace. The film captures him in various, often painful therapies. It witnesses him just trying to get in and out of cars and shows the painful physical reality of the effects of the stroke. Ram Dass's observations about the stroke highlights his attitude about it and how it is possible to find equanimity even if the winds of change blow through one's life, unexpectedly and uninvited. "This is not who I expected to be, because my vision of me, old, didn't have this stroke in it. The suffering comes when you try to hold on to continuity." –Ram Dass

The film then goes back to see how an individual gets to be this way. Extraordinary 16mm home movies show Ram Dass's early years. Born Richard Alpert into a prominent Jewish family in Boston, we see his first steps, his childhood on a 300 acre farm in New Hampshire, complete with a three-hole golf course. His older brother, William Alpert, humorously tells about their upbringing and of Richard's academic accomplishments, including a Doctorate from Stanford and of joining the faculty at Harvard as a professor of psychology. "I was riding high. I felt like the world was my oyster," Ram Dass tells us.

Then, Timothy Leary moved into the office next door. The two of them started to experiment with psychedelics, ultimately resulting in their being fired from the University.

Soon, the states of consciousness became more interesting than the drugs that caused them. After realizing the limitations of the drug experiences, Richard Alpert went to India to find a person who could read the maps of his consciousness. There, almost against his will, he found a saint, Neem Karoli Baba, affectionately known as Maharaj ji.

Because of his study of consciousness under the influence of psychedelic drugs, Ram Dass was able to experience spiritual and mystical experiences, while at the same time observe them and report about his findings. His book about this journey, *Be Here Now*, (now in its 39th printing), during the early 70's was the best-selling book in the English language, after Ben Spock and the Bible. When he came back from India in the late 60's he had a long beard, beads, and an Indian name - Ram Dass - (which means servant of God) given to him by his guru. His family was a bit chagrined, especially when hundreds of hippies started to arrive and camp out on their farm to hear Ram Dass talk.

When the film returns to Ram Dass in the present day, we see that he is still serving people by helping those that are suffering. For instance, a young woman who has just had her first love assassinated while he was helping indigenous people in South America. In an extraordinary sequence, we see Ram Dass take her from grief to faith, not by preaching but by sharing his humanity, humor, compassion and wisdom.

Ram Dass has been teaching about spiritual matters for over 30 years. Now, as we see how he is dealing with his stroke, it is perhaps his greatest teaching. It seems to touch the hearts of many people who are facing suffering in their own lives. In this way, as Ram Dass learned, it is truly grace, FIERCE GRACE.

After a recent screening, one 33-year-old Casting Director said, "It made me feel safe. I feel like I could handle whatever life has in store for me." A 58-year-old Art Dealer said, "It broke my heart and reaffirmed my faith at the same time." A 26-year-old Actress said, "I want 10 copies of this movie to give to my friends who think they are suffering." A 42-year-old Psychiatrist said, "Not only did I feel like I witnessed the journey of a life well spent, but I feel as if I went on a profound journey within."



RAM DASS BIOGRAPHY

Richard Alpert (aka Ram Dass) was born in 1931. His father, George, a lawyer, helped to found Brandeis University and was President of the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad. Ram Dass studied psychology, specializing in human motivation and personality development. He received an M.A. from Wesleyan and a Ph.D. from Stanford. He then served on the psychology faculties at Stanford and the University of California, and from 1958 to 1963 taught and researched in the Department of Social Relations and the Graduate School of Education at Harvard University. During this period he co-authored (with Sears and Rau) the book *Identification and Child Rearing*, published by Stanford University Press.

In 1961, while at Harvard, Ram Dass's explorations of human consciousness led him, in collaboration with Timothy Leary, Ralph Metzner, Aldous Huxley, Allen Ginsberg, and others, to pursue intensive research with psilocybin, LSD-25, and other psychedelic chemicals. Out of this research came two books: *The Psychedelic Experience* (co-authored by Leary and Metzner, and based on *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, published by University Books); and *LSD* (with Sidney Cohen and Lawrence Schiller, published by New American Library). Because of the controversial nature of this research, Ram Dass was dismissed from Harvard in 1963.

Ram Dass continued his research under the auspices of a private foundation until 1967. In that year he traveled to India, where he met his Guru (spiritual teacher), Neem Karoli Baba. Ram Dass studied yoga and meditation, and received the name Ram Dass, which means "servant of God." Since 1968, he has pursued a variety of spiritual practices, including guru kripa; devotional yoga focused on the Hindu spiritual figure Hanuman; meditation in the Theravadin, Mahayana Tibetan, and Zen Buddhist schools; karma yoga; and Sufi and Jewish studies.

In 1974, Ram Dass created the Hanuman Foundation. Projects developed under its aegis included the Prison Ashram Project, designed to help prison inmates grow spiritually during their incarceration, and the Dying Project, conceived as a spiritual support structure for conscious dying. These projects now pursue their work under

independent auspices. The Ram Dass Tape Library Foundation serves as the organizing vehicle for Ram Dass's teachings, and for the distribution of his books and tapes.

Ram Dass's interests include the support of psychedelic research, international development, environmental awareness, and political action. He has written a number of spiritual books including ***Be Here Now***, published in 1971 (over one million copies sold, 37th printing, Crown Publishers); ***The Only Dance There Is*** (Anchor/Doubleday); ***Grist for the Mill*** (with Stephen Levine, Celestial Arts); ***Journey of Awakening*** (Bantam Books); ***Miracle of Love: Stories of Neem Karoli Baba*** (Hanuman Foundation); ***How Can I Help?*** (with Paul Gorman, Knopf); and ***Compassion in Action: Setting Out on the Path of Service*** (with Mirabai Bush, Bell Tower Press). Ram Dass's latest book is on consciousness and aging, entitled ***Still Here: Embracing Aging, Changing and Dying***, which was published by Riverhead Books in May of 2001.

In 1996, Ram Dass began to develop plans for a talk radio program, called "Here and Now with Ram Dass." Seven pilot programs were aired in Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay area, and Ram Dass planned to launch the show on a nationwide basis the following year.

In February, 1997, Ram Dass experienced a stroke, which left him with problems of expressive aphasia and partial paralysis. The aftereffects of the stroke have made it necessary for him to postpone plans for his radio program, but he has been able to resume his other teaching commitments, and he is using the experiences attendant on his stroke to explore more deeply the spiritual dimensions of suffering and the nature of the aging process.

Ram Dass is a co-founder and advisory board member of the Seva Foundation—an international service organization. He works with the Social Venture Network, an organization of businesses seeking to bring social consciousness to business practices. He continues to teach about the nature of consciousness, and about service as a spiritual path.

Information about Ram Dass, including his current teaching schedule and his tape-recorded lectures, is available through the Ram Dass Tape Library (800-248-1008 or www.RamDassTapes.org).

MICKEY LEMLE BIOGRAPHY

Mickey Lemle (Producer/Director) has been making feature films, television series and documentary specials since 1971. In 1977 he founded Lemle Pictures, Inc. His film and television works have been shown theatrically, on television and at film festivals around the world. He holds a B.A. from Brandeis University. Mickey served in the U.S. Peace Corps in Nepal and currently holds the position of Chairman of the Board of the Tibet Fund.

His most recent project, entitled RAM DASS FIERCE GRACE, was completed in 2001. It is a funny and poignant film about how Ram Dass, spiritual teacher and storyteller, is dealing with the effects of a massive stroke, suffering, and the alleviation of suffering. It has been screened at many film festivals including those at Vancouver, Mill Valley, Cork and the Hamptons where it received the Audience Choice Award.

HASTEN SLOWLY: THE JOURNEY OF SIR LAURENS VAN DER POST weaves a tapestry of key moments in the life of an extraordinary writer, filmmaker, commando leader, statesman and anthropologist through his own intimate stories. Completed in July of 1996, HASTEN SLOWLY was awarded a Bronze Plaque at the Columbus International Film & Video Festival, and received a Golden Maile Audience Choice Award at the Hawaii International Film Festival.

In 1993, Lemle produced and directed the multi-award winning documentary COMPASSION IN EXILE: THE STORY OF THE 14TH DALAI LAMA. For this timely film, the Dalai Lama personally granted unprecedented access and cooperation. COMPASSION IN EXILE was broadcast on PBS and received numerous awards and honors, including two Emmy nominations for Best Director and Best Documentary, and the Grand Prize at the Earth/Peace Film Festival.

Lemle won a CINE Golden Eagle award in 1991 for OUR PLANET EARTH, a love poem to the planet commissioned by the United Nations. In 1989, he wrote, produced and directed the multi-award winning THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MOON, which was broadcast on PBS. Lemle produced and directed an eight-part series for PBS in 1982 entitled MEDIA PROBES that garnered the Blue Ribbon at the American Film Festival, a CINE Golden Eagle and a prestigious DuPont Award.

Lemle's other honors include the 1976 American Film Festival Blue Ribbon for A WOMAN'S PLACE IS IN THE HOUSE, a half hour portrait of Massachusetts State Representative Elaine Noble and an Emmy nomination for editing P.O.W. and JIM, two programs in the RELIGIOUS AMERICA series. He also directed, shot and edited segments of the Emmy Award-winning series, ZOOM, and the Peabody Award-winning series, EYE-TO-EYE.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

When I first met Ram Dass 25 years ago, one of his messages that touched me was that we are both human and divine and that we must hold both simultaneously. He would explain that if one goes too far in the direction of one's humanity, one suffers. If one goes too far in the direction of one's divinity, one runs the risk of forgetting one's postal code. So his stories and teachings were funny, self-effacing, and with an extraordinary grasp of the metaphysical. In form and content his stories are about living on those two planes of consciousness, and the tension between them.

Ram Dass has been exploring the nature of consciousness for over 45 years, and reporting about his findings in his books, his lectures and his teachings. His explorations took an uninvited turn, when he suffered a massive stroke in February 1997. Now, he has been forced to live his teachings in a way he had not expected. The movie has captured this by observing what he must deal with on a daily basis: confined to a wheelchair, paralyzed on his right side and having speech aphasia. He spends a great deal of time in various, often painful, therapies.

He uses his current predicament to help others, as shown in several sequences in the film; whether it is a couple who have lost their child, or a young woman whose first love was murdered. One can see why he is considered one of the great spiritual teachers of our time, and how he is able to see his stroke as grace, FIERCE GRACE.

RAM DASS
FIERCE GRACE

Produced and Directed by
Mickey Lemle

Cinematographer
Buddy Squires

Associate Producer
Linda K. Moroney

Editors
Aaron Vega Mickey Lemle Jacob Craycroft

Original Music
Teese Gohl

Co-Producers
Jessica Brackman Buddy Squires

Sound Recordist
Peter Bettendorf John Zecca P. D. Valson Michael Becker

Assistant Camera
John Chater Jill Tufts Deshraj Ulli Bonnekamp

Production Manager (India)
Nihal Mathur

Sound Editor
Jacob Ribicoff Planet 10 Post

Re-Recording Mixer
Dominick Tavella at Sound One Corp. NY

Additional Photography
**John Chater
Pramrod Mathur**

Assistant Sound Editor
Mike Poppelton

Sound Effects
**Dennis Leonard
Mac Smith**

Film to Tape Colorist
John J. Dowdell

Additional Editing
Linnea Hamilton

Rights Clearance
Elizabeth Klinck

Foley Artists
Aaron Lemle
Brian Vancho

On-line Editor
Greg Smith

Music

"The Night of the Stroke"

Written and Performed by
Steve Gorn, Indian Flute
Samir Chatterjee, Tabla

"Somebody Training" and "Millbrook"

Written & Arranged by Teese Gohl
Dave Ratajczak, Drums
Dave Phillips, Bass
Peter Calo, Guitar
Aaron Heick, Saxophone and Clarinet

"Intro to India" and "Meeting Maharaj ji"

Written and Performed by
Steve Gorn, Indian Flute
Amit Chatterjee, Sitar and Guitar
Samir Chatterjee, Tabla

"Be Here Now"

Written & Performed by George Harrison
© George Harrison
Courtesy Harrisongs/EMI Records
Under License from EMI-Capitol Music Special Markets

"Rachel"

Arranged by Teese Gohl
Based on themes by Krishna Das
Amit Chatterjee, Guitar

"White Rabbit"

Written by Grace Slick
Performed by Hampton String Quartet
Courtesy © Grace Slick
Published by Rondor Music

"There We Are" and "Ram Dass's Theme"

Based on Themes by Krishna Das
Amit Chatterjee, Guitar
Aaron Heick, Oboe
Produced by Teese Gohl

"Sri Ram Jai Ram"

Performed by The Sufi Choir
Courtesy SUNSEED

with appearances by

Dr. Larry Brilliant
Shana Roth
Steve and Anita Isser
Dr. Ralph Metzner
Rosemary Woodruff Leary
Carolyn Ruth Chan
Krishna Das
Dr. Ming Qing Chu
Robert McDermott

Wavy Gravy
Caryl Sircus
William Alpert
Dr. Huston Smith
Bhagavan Das
Lynne Oberlander
KK Sah
Mark Matousek
Abby Reyes

USA • 2001 • 93 minutes
Color • 16mm • 1:1.33

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