

One Week with God

By HOWARD WHITMAN

In a U.S. version of the Hindu "Ashram," men and women seeking closer communion with their Deity gather each year for meditation and prayer

MOST people reach out for God, but in a vague way. Some are more direct: They simply pack up their suitcases and go to seek Him. I went on such a trip with 208 men and women from all over America—people who journeyed by car, bus, train and plane to the lake country of Wisconsin to spend seven days with God.

Many of these were professional people. There was a liberal sprinkling of doctors, psychologists, social workers, nurses and teachers in the group. They were visiting God in a new way, a way which fused the spiritual route of Western Christianity with the highly intellectual, rarefied route of the mystical East.

This week with God was called an "Ashram" (Ah-shrum). The name and idea were borrowed from India, from the forest schools of Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore and other luminaries of the East. From ancient times in India, the followers, or chelas, of great men have journeyed to the forests and the hills, there to bask in the intellectual, spiritual and mystical light of their leaders, or gurus.

"Why not a Christian Ashram with Christ as the guru?" wondered Dr. E. Stanley Jones, noted missionary to India, who had attended the Ashrams of both Gandhi and Tagore. He liked the word "Ashram," from the ancient Hindu *Asrama* which, according to scholars, had two opposite meanings: "cessation of hard work," and "intensification of hard work." Dr. Jones took both meanings (cessation of ordinary, routine hard work; intensification of inner, spiritual hard work) and started a Christian Ashram in Sat Tal, India, in 1939. The next year he brought the idea home to America and since then, quietly and without fanfare, he has held American Christian Ashrams each summer under sponsorship of the National Council of Churches.

The one I attended at Green Lake, Wisconsin, was at a one-time millionaires' country club, where fleshy men and flashy women of the twenties had come seeking pleasure. To this fantastically lavish place, which now is the American Baptist Assembly, folks of all denominations had come to seek God.

They unpacked their suitcases and plunged straightway into what was called "the morning of the open heart." What better way to begin than by flinging the gates of their hearts wide open, telling why they had come, what they needed, what it was that nudged them out of their complacent niches back home and sent them to Wisconsin to seek God?

A good-looking, earnest woman rose to her feet and said, "I feel that I am very intolerant. I am forever assigning false motives to people. I don't want to be that way. I want to be a radiant, soul-winning Christian."

Her words floated softly through large, low Morehouse Hall, which once had been a gambling casino and now was the central meeting hall of the Ashram. Dr. Jones had begun the morning of the open heart with the simple statement, "All of us have needs. We are a fellowship of those in need. When this week is over, we'll all be different. This is an attempt to have God operate in all of us."

Spontaneously, without being called on and in no special order, men and women stood up and talked. Their sincerity was obvious and they were unashamed.

"I'm very tense, selfish and self-centered. I'm not giving my best because of fear," a plump,

gray-haired woman said. "I want to be free. I want to do what God wants me to do."

A young redheaded man with a crew cut stood up and said, "I need relief from a volatile temper and deep-seated selfishness." A youthful woman in the back row asked freedom from resentment. "I resent the fact that I resent," she said. "I want to feel kinder toward people. I want to curb my tongue from talking too much."

She was followed by an attractive, prematurely gray woman in a trim green suit, who said, "People don't like me. I'm domineering. I have a harsh tone to my voice. I want to love people. My need is to show them that I love them. I pray for it all the time."

A young minister, glad to be away-from-it-all in the fresh Wisconsin woodlands, spoke out, "I want freedom from resentments against my own parishioners. I'm always telling people how to go to heaven, but often I seem to be pointing them in the other direction!"

A handsome man in his thirties said, "I need to surrender myself more completely to Christ. Then the disciplines of the Christian life will take care of themselves." An older woman followed him, "I want to be so filled with the Holy Spirit that I don't even have to think about my actions, that my life will be a Christian life automatically." A Negro man arose and said, "I am here for the purpose of saying 'yes' to the Lord. I want my life entirely surrendered to God. So far as I am concerned life is vain without Christ at the center."

They went on reciting their needs, spontaneously, without compulsion. None was more eloquent than a little woman with deep-set eyes and a soft, lined face. She spoke but three words—"I need everything."

At the conclusion of the morning of the open heart, Dr. Jones told the members of the Ashram, "Now that we've looked at our problems, let's look above them. Every one of these problems has an open door upward."

The idea of the Ashram is to find the door, not simply the door to a specific problem but, essentially, the door to life. The Ashram is a concentrated one-week search for meaning. "We have no time for a conference," says snowy-haired Dr. Jones, who manages to look like a young man at sixty-seven. "We ask only to be agents of God, to hear His voice through our voices, not to hear the 'wisdom' of men's voices . . . We have come together to study the meaning of our coming together. Instead of trying to find an answer, let's be an answer. Let's be, *in cameo*, the Kingdom of God."

To live out their miniature of God's Kingdom, the Ashramites begin by tearing down barriers. Since in God's sight all men are brothers, they are brothers at the Ashram. Without backslapping or maudlin emphasis, they simply call one another Brother George, Brother Henry or Sister Martha, as the case may be, and Dr. Jones is Brother Stanley.

Next to fall is the barrier of race. Black or white, the Ashramites eat together, play together, pray together. In some cases Negroes and whites room together, sometimes not knowing about it until they open the door and meet their roommates—and certainly not caring. "We no longer see a person of a certain race," Dr. Jones says quietly. "We simply see a person for whom Christ died."

Barriers of class and (Continued on page 40)



Dr. E. Stanley Jones, Ashram leader, has jus



Men work hour each day. Foreman (in jacket) is James Henderson, Chicago bakery executive

Collier's for September 29, 1951



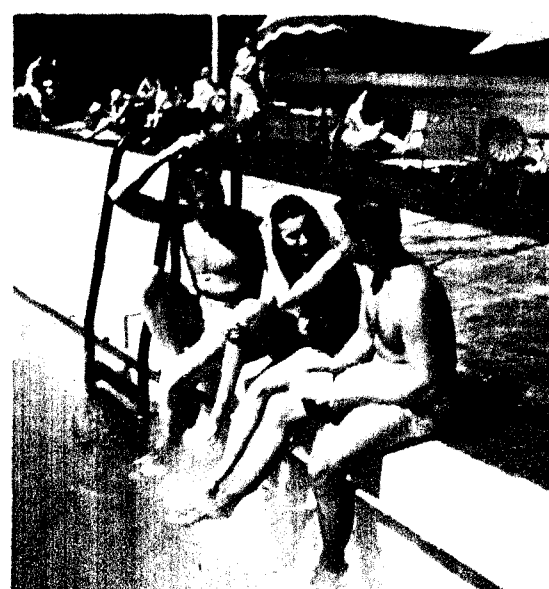
said, "The Lord has risen," and the group has answered, "The Lord has risen indeed." The meeting is held annually at Green Lake, Wisc.



Dr. Jones preaches to outdoor gathering. He brought Ashram concept from India in 1940



The Rev. P. P. Philip, Mrs. Philip, daughter Sally, of India; Mrs. C. R. Webster, Chicago



Larry Gavel (l.), Glencoe, Mo.; Jane Crandall, St. Louis; Ken Brock, Chicago, discuss Bible

PHOTOGRAPHS FOR COLLIER'S BY HANS KNOPF

A Funny Thing About Treasure

By DILLON ANDERSON

I and Claudie only bought the treasure map to help out a friend with a sick mother. When we got to studying it, we found out the gold was located near a town in *very fine print* . . .

THE hot sun was still an hour or so high, and we could already see the tall buildings in San Antonio when we had the blowout. There was a sharp pop, followed by a sour, sick whistle; and we went weaving back and forth until Claudie got our old flivver stopped on the dusty shoulder of the road. Then nothing dented the dry quiet except the husky buzz of a bull bat that dived in the still air above us. I put a stony look on Claudie when he admitted that the tire had been a little low that morning before we left Rockport.

Now, I and Claudie both had money in our pockets—folding money, too—for the first time in weeks, after breaking a crap game at Rockport the night before. Also, it was Claudie's department to keep the car in shape so as to allow me more time for bigger things like making contacts and plans. But do you suppose that big chinchy lug had spent one dime to get the tire fixed in Rockport? No, not Claudie. "It was only a slow leak, Clint," he explained, "so I got the tire extra full where the air was free. I figured it ought to last all the way to San Antonio."

"Claudie," I said, "a slow leak is a lot like one of your sins that has not found you out. It's only waiting to bust right out in the open and put a real crimp in your life."

"Well, you're the boss," he said, "so I guess you're right."

About that time a fellow came along in an older car than ours, and I waved him down. As he climbed out and offered to lend us a jack and a blowout patch, I could see that he was about the countriest-looking citizen I'd laid eyes on in the whole state of Texas. The several days' growth of sandy beard on his lean jaw just about matched his frayed-out straw hat. Some of his teeth were gone and some were gold, and on the little finger of his left hand he wore a silver ring with a big green stone in it.

I put Claudie right to work on the flat tire; then our country friend told us his name was Jonas Lord, and he was on his way to Boerne to take in the Kendall County Fair. He went on to say that there wasn't a better fair in Texas, except maybe the State Fair at Dallas.

"Where's Boerne?" I asked him.

"About thirty miles on the other side of San Antonio," he answered.

"We may see you there; we're about due for a fair," I told him as I peeled a dollar bill off of my money and handed it to him. "Buy yourself a nice treat at the fair, Jonas." He allowed he didn't want to take the money, but he didn't try quite hard enough to give it back before Claudie had our tire fixed; then he drove on ahead of us.

That night in San Antonio, I and Claudie didn't find anything that we were not ready to leave the next morning, so we drove on to Boerne. We got there before noon and went straight to the fairgrounds.

It was September and the weather was still hot and dry, but we didn't notice the dusty heat much since the place was fairly alive with cold watermelons, cotton candy, and shaved ice that had red cherry flavoring poured over it. We also found Jonas Lord, and since he seemed so glad to see us, I asked him to help us take in the Kendall County Fair. Jonas said he sure would like

to, but he wanted to be certain we'd let him pay his own way; he didn't want to impose on us.

We started off with the fat stock show and the fine poultry exhibits. We were just in time, too, for the award of the pickled-fruit prizes. We saw a good dusty rodeo and a quarter-horse race. We all threw baseballs at a target that, when you hit it, sprung a trap and dropped a girl into a tank full of cold water. Then there was a long band concert, followed by a good, loud patriotic speaking. Afterward, we saw a dead calf with two heads, and watched a weight-lifting contest that I'd have put Claudie in if we hadn't had plenty of money left from that Rockport crap game. Late that afternoon we sat twice through a dancing-girl show and stayed on for the concert. Claudie bought a button that said, "Oh, You Kid," and pinned it on his coat. Oh, we were all eating high on the hog at the Kendall County Fair.

That night Claudie just about cut the management to pieces at the place where you pay a nickel and swing the sledge hammer to make a little gadget fly up a pole with a bell on the top. Every time Claudie swung, he rang the bell, and the fat man had to give him a ten-cent cigar. Pretty soon the fat man started whining. "Come on over, folks," he said, "I can't stand this. I'm going broke." But he let Claudie swing on at a nickel a swing while the crowd moved in, and in no time at all I had my hat full of cigars.

Jonas Lord just stood there with his eyes and mouth hanging open, watching Claudie go. I knew by this time that Jonas admired us both very much, but here it was plain that my man Claudie was making a real hit with him. Jonas finally spoke up and said to me that nobody but a professional could swing a sledge hammer the way Claudie could.

"No, Jonas," I told him, "we're just having a little fun here at the fair. We probably won't even smoke up all these here cigars. Have one."

ALL this time the crowd got bigger and bigger. In spite of everything the fat man said, they were all pulling for Claudie, and it went to his head. Claudie, who had been too chinchy the day before to have our tire fixed, was buying tickets twenty at a time and peeling dollar bills off his roll of Rockport money. Finally Jonas pulled me off a little to one side and said he really could use a man like Claudie—not swinging a sledge hammer, he explained—swinging a pick.

"No, Jonas," I said. "Claudie works for me, and, besides, he's only doing this to pleasure himself."

"I need some help from a man that can read maps, too," Jonas said in a more confidential tone of voice.

"Well," I told him, "I don't believe Claudie would be worth a damn at that; he even has a lot of trouble with road maps."

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