

Lama Foundation was founded by Steve Durkee, Barbara Durkee, and Jonathan Altman. Steve and Barbara were visionary artists who had lived in a commune named USCO in an old church in Garnerville, New York. They had been involved in the psychedelic movement of the sixties, along with Tim Leary and Richard Alpert, and staged some of the first light shows. They had also reached out spiritually to Meher Baba, the silent avatar of love. Baba told them to get off drugs, and they took his direction. A vision began to form in Steve's mind, first of all of a school, an esoteric school, a university of higher studies, then of a landed community. They left psychedelics behind and headed west.

The Durkee family shared a household in California one winter with Richard Alpert and explored blueprints for spiritual community. Richard Alpert left for India. Steve and Barbara packed their family, three young girls with a fourth yet to come, into a school bus and headed for northern New Mexico, spending the next winter camped on pueblo land and searching for land to buy. They were consulting with a man named Herman Rednick who was a reclusive, visionary artist and mystic spiritual teacher in Taos. He said that he would help them start this spiritual community if they would observe certain guidelines. These guidelines were:

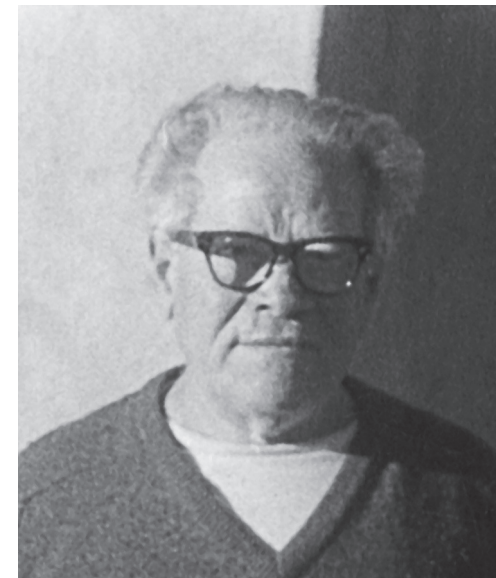
1. Daily meditation
2. No drugs or alcohol
3. Fidelity in marriage

These were the primary requirements. He also recommended regular daily meals and a daily dose of food for the mind as well, initially half an hour of silence, then half an hour of discussion. Herman often said, "The essence of spirituality is practicality at all levels."

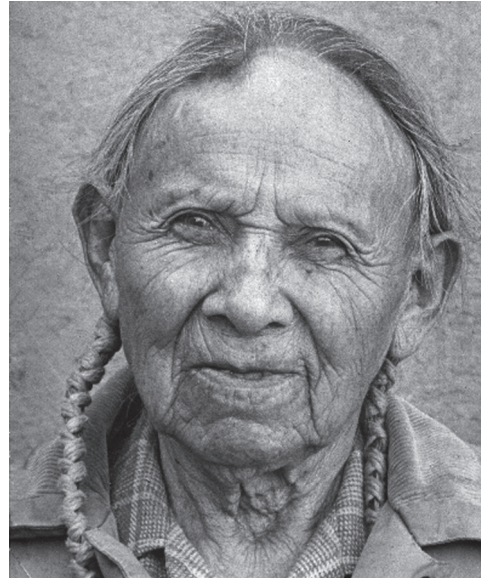
They thought they had found the right land to buy. They came to Herman with this land they had found and he said, "I don't think so. That's not quite right." A few weeks later, he called and said, "I just learned that this piece of land is going to be on the market. I think you should go look at it." They came up and looked at this land above the village of Lama. There was a spring on the land. There was an open meadow. There was an endless landscape spread out to the west.



Meher Baba



Herman Rednick



Little Joe Gomez



Herman Rednick

This land, this place, we later found out, was a resting place on the Kiowa trail, which was a peace trail between the north and the south on which pilgrims and traders could travel in peace, no matter what the conditions of conflict and warfare between the tribes. The spring here was a resting place for stopping the night. They had protected this sacred, safe space.

As soon as we were on the land, the people from Taos Pueblo came up to check us out. They wanted to know what we were doing. They are the caretakers of this land. They wanted to know our intentions. They said they would help us. They did help us build all the adobe buildings. They did invite us to participate in the Native American Church. They have been our friends. But they said at the beginning, “Don't try to follow our way. Our way is not your way. You have to find your own way.”

Steve and Barbara Durkee first visited the land in the summer of 1967. Lama Foundation was incorporated, with a full set of By-Laws, on February 26, 1968.

The three conditions Herman proposed were agreed to and adhered to in the beginning. Of the hundreds of friends who were interested in Steve and Barbara's proposed community, only one remained after learning there would be no drugs or alcohol — Jonathan Altman, who came to join them. There was no alcohol, no drugs permitted, and smoking tobacco was forbidden on the land, which presented a challenge to the smokers. The compromise was to go “over the fence.” There was a barbed wire fence around the land to keep the cattle out of the land. The barbed wire fence was not exactly on the boundaries of the land, nevertheless, if you went over the fence, you were considered off the land and you could have a smoke. Of these three conditions, fidelity in marriage was the first to go. The family structure at the core of the original community dissolved, and people who had planned to spend the rest of their lives at Lama found they could no longer live there. The prohibition on drugs was abandoned soon thereafter, although there would always be a strong presence of people committed to sobriety. Only the first condition, daily meditation, remained unbroken down through the early years.