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Swami Paramananda, Banagram ashram, India 1990. Photo: BP.

IN SEARCH OF TRUTH

MY EXPERIENCES WITH
SWAMI PARAMANANDA

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A YOGI IN THE WEST

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TRANSCENDENCE

Sadhana at Shantibu

After the return from India in the early summer of 1985, life at Shantibu throughout 1986 was a very complex mixture of various influences and happenings. The written correspondence with Paramananda was at its lowest level. After my last letter to him in August 1985 I had not heard anything from him, and I did not write to him again until October 1986, fourteen months later. He did not reply to this letter either and I wrote again that year on my birthday, December 15th. After this, finally, he sent me a reply, in February 1987. But if the correspondence by letter was not particularly active between us at that time, the mental connection was steadily increasing, and I had innumerable nightly dreams about him. These were dreams that to me appeared as more or less clear messages, which I interpreted in relation to my present life situation at the time. Often they would be in the form of conversations between us that were quite clear, at other times they would appear more mysterious, and in others it was only the contact and presence in itself that was important.

With regard to my *sadhana* and meditation, there were disturbances all the time that I felt I didn't tackle very well. That there were regular visits at Shantibu from friends and that I also frequently visited them, was in a sense all right. This contact was good and in many ways necessary for me then. What was difficult was the constant pressure from various authorities and private individuals with their direct attacks on my person and on the Trust that I administered. In addition, Shantibu was haunted by very active discarnate identities that tried to influence me mentally and which caused many dangerous situations. There were also other types of serious difficulties, but the greatest problem was myself. I didn't manage to stay collected about my task and to stabilize myself in my *sadhana*, and I had always made high demands and set high goals of myself.

I had always felt it difficult to be able to fully and completely concentrate on a spiritual life in Norway, especially after returning from a longer stay among likeminded brothers and sisters in ashrams in India. For instance, I had always had problems with sexual consciousness in Norway, which in India always automatically disappeared and was therefore never a problem there. To have a firm control over sexual consciousness and sexual energies is the alpha and omega in spiritual life and development. That I knew. I had never, though, conversed with Paramananda about these things, but only

knew about it from various literature and, of course, my own experience. However, during 1986 I had developed strong feelings for a female friend whom I had known for several years, but with whom my contact had gradually increased. This was only a kind of 'distance love', and I probably knew within myself that it would never come to fruition. Still, any form of 'falling in love' will be the expression of a felt need in oneself – a need for own fulfillment through another person.

It all came to a head on one of the first days of January 1987 when several external circumstances and events, together with the above mentioned situation, made me feel an enormous mental imbalance and I thought that I was going crazy. It was a deeply depressing and hopeless situation in which I felt that I had completely failed in my life. I felt pulled in different directions without a chance of being able to move successfully in any of them. This, of course, was a situation that had been building up over some time, and it was a particular event just that day which precipitated the incident.

The feeling of powerlessness was total. I had no more strength to fight against authorities and the public, i.e. all those third parties that in various ways tormented me and the Trust; I could not bear any more the exhausting mental fluctuations caused by the hopelessness of 'being in love'; and I could not take any more all the personal setbacks in relation to my *sadhana*. Self-Realization seemed infinitely far away and most probably entirely unattainable. Just then I saw no hope – no glimmer of light in the darkness. Only a heavy, sad abyss, and complete hopelessness – I simply couldn't take any more of anything, and I had lost all self confidence. Paramananda had written in a letter to me two and a half years earlier that faith in my own Self was the most important thing for me to have faith in, and thereafter faith in the guru. But now all of that seemed lost and the situation was unbearable.

I sat by the dining table in the living room of the old house and stared vacantly before me. Outside were the pitch darkness and freezing cold of a winter night. Deeply depressed and in despair I got the sudden thought that I should run towards the big window in the west wall with a lowered head like a bull, and when my head had broken through the glass of the window, I should just suddenly drop down so that my throat would be slit by the sharp, broken glass. I raised myself from my chair and went out on the floor to have a clear run towards the window. In that moment I am in a weird kind of mental condition where everything around me seems to be in a dark, hazy blur, and I think that I must have closed

my eyes, at least partly. Deep, deep within me there is something ineffable, resisting, not really wanting me to go through with it, but I just have to carry out this last thing that I have decided for myself – this, at least, I must be able to accomplish! And just as I am about to start running towards the window, from the deepest depth of my being rises to the surface of my consciousness – completely by itself – an intense, last prayer saying in English: "Oh, Jesus help me!" And no sooner than the words were pronounced to my inner ear – in that instant – Paramananda was there by my side and took care of me. I could most clearly feel his presence as he stood on my left side, holding my arm with his one hand and patting me dearly on my head and back with his other hand, while he led me to the couch and made me sit.

The effect was absolute. There and then all the dark, heavy, painful hopelessness disappeared and I gained full mental balance. And not only that – I also felt a most wonderful peace and tranquility that I had never before felt in my life. Paramananda had come a second time to Shantibu and saved me – and this time my very life – of that I had no doubt. During the next days I was thoughtful, but positive. The incident made an extraordinarily strong impression on me. It made me understand that I could always trust in Paramananda and that he would always be there for me. I understood that he always followed me and was ready to help me if necessary, and that, not least, he had a boundless love for me.

A month later I received a letter from Paramananda dated January 19th 1987 which contained the following message:

Absorb your mind in meditation. Absorption in meditation will help you to be forgetful of your physical body, i.e. in deep meditation you will lose the feelings of your body. Do it on and on, and at last you will realize your Self, which is the greatest attainment in life. Without attainment of Self-realization human life is invalid. Think it conscientiously and go forward. After getting Self-realization try to induce the people of your country to follow this path. Let them appreciate the real value of their life. When they will be successful in doing so, their heart will be fulfilled with unfathomable joy. You will have to convince them that passing the days in plenty is not the highest attainment in life and that they should realize their Self – which is the highest attainment. If you follow this process, it will be your real service to them.

From that day I consciously changed my entire lifestyle. After reading these inspiring words from Paramananda I automatically entered into a very good meditative mood. In his letter he had again let me understand that Self-

realization was more than only a possibility, and at the same time he showed me very clearly that I had a mission in life. I therefore started to make constructive and practical plans for how best to structure my everyday life in regard to my *sadhana*.

After a short while I established a regular rhythm which started with meditation at midnight and went on through most of the night up to about 4-5 a.m. in the early morning. After that I rested until about 6-7 a.m. after which I rose to take a shower and change my clothes. Then I sat for meditation again for around four hours until lunch at about 11-12 a.m. when I ate my main meal, which always consisted of semolina pudding boiled with milk (one litre of skimmed milk added cream, to avoid the homogenization of the whole milk), added jam and cinnamon and lots of chopped fruit on top, after serving. Milk and semolina grains were among the cheapest foods I could buy in the food store, it was very simple and fast to cook (only 10 minutes) and it tasted very good. Apart from that there was no other reason for me to choose that particular diet, but with practically no money and a natural inclination for both fruits and any pudding boiled with milk, my diet kind of chose itself.

After lunch I did various necessary housework and other practical tasks, or I read or studied, wrote notes, poems and the like, until evening. I also went for short walks in the forest during the day. In the evening I used to meditate during dusk or from about 5 p.m. to about 7 p.m., after which I had my second and last meal. This time I always ate five crackers with butter and brown cheese, and after that, at about 8 p.m. I went to sleep until midnight. Then I always awoke by myself. For many years I had been accustomed to sleep for not more than about four hours. And then a new round or rhythm would commence in the same manner – exactly the same every day. This functioned very well and really helped me on my path.

The best meditation always occurred at night and before noon after my bath. In the evening I usually felt too tired and had to fight not to fall asleep. But in the night I could sometimes easily sit for about six hours continuously. I always just sat on my bed, which was the old, simple couch in the living room of the old house. The couch stood alongside the south wall beneath the windows, so that I always meditated facing North. In front of me on the floor I had placed a small table with a picture of Paramananda – the same as I had in Omkaram in South India. Otherwise, the walls of the living room were decorated by images of persons that I felt inspiring, like Jesus, Mother Mary, Buddha, Shankaracharya, Ramakrishna, Anandacharya and Shiva. Inspiring poems and Vedantic texts were framed and also hung up on the wall, like Paramananda's poem "I", Shankaracharya's six stanzas on Nirvana, Vak's "The Self-Divine", and a couple of po-

ems by Anandacharya, which I frequently read and received great inspiration from. The whole room was open and bright, and had become like a temple to me. When I met Paramananda the first time in 1983 he had told me to change the whole atmosphere at Shantibu by my *sadhana*, and that was just what was happening.

This, my most intense *sadhana* period at Shantibu, was, all in all, a most wonderful time that changed my life completely. It built me up physically, mentally and spiritually in a harmonious way that was in accordance with my nature and my innermost wish. At the same time it laid the basis for a true spiritual foundation in my life. The wish, the will and the sincerity were there in rich measure from my side. And the tools – method of meditation, mantra, right conception and understanding – to use all of this rightly, together with inspiration – trust and love – and the possibility to put all of these into action and go forward – initiation by a *sadguru* and blessing for success – I had had richly bestowed upon me by Paramananda. So the need was only to start and go ahead, which I also did. With this right and good foundation something good had to happen, and there was no possibility for anything to go badly wrong. However, it didn't mean that there would not be any difficulties on the way, but all in all they meant little or nothing compared to the great, positive and lasting progress and benefits.

At first I suffered from enormous stomach problems caused by the *kundalini*, which could not enter the *su-shumna* rightly – I felt as if my stomach would burn up completely – and my general health started to deteriorate. But luckily, after a few days, I found in one of my books on yoga, a very advanced breathing exercise (*tribandha pranayama*) for just this rare phenomenon, which brought immediate and lasting effect after only the first try. At this early phase I had not yet become mentally stable and would sometimes feel some emotional swings that would feel like a bit of a crisis for a moment or two but which would pass quickly. Or it might happen that I felt that my meditation had not been going well, and as a reaction I felt impatient.

But as time went by and I became more and more established in meditation, these feelings disappeared altogether. However, with the gradual increase of absorption in meditation, my problem became a physical one, i.e. my head and body tended to fall backwards. And as it was impossible for me to sit for long in the locked 'lotus position' (*padmasana*; I always preferred *siddhasana*), I had to find a solution for this problem. The result was that I bolstered my body with pillows in the back, neck and at the sides so that there would be no danger of falling during deep meditation. I quickly determined that

it was much better to sit comfortably and relaxed when it resulted in my being able to sit undisturbed for long periods, than to try to maintain a more "correct" position in accordance with the yoga tradition, which would cause discomfort. The most important thing when sitting was to maintain a naturally straight spine and at the same time be completely relaxed. After a little while with adjustments this solution functioned very well.

At least once a week I was visited by my good friend Torleif, who lived at Os, fifty kilometres north of Alvdal, and who was a school teacher in the neighbouring village of Tynset, only twenty kilometres away. He brought me foodstuffs which he paid for and thus maintained my physical life at that time – he was really a very good friend. I had neither money nor any income or financial provision of any kind at the time – I only lived from hand to mouth, from day to day, by what food or money I incidentally received or not from friends and visitors. And I would never ask anybody for these things or accept any loan. I had been living like this during all the years since Einar Beer died in February 1982 and I was left alone at Shantibu, but I never worried about how I should survive. I used to think that when I was in my mother's womb I didn't have to worry at all about my food or shelter or security or anything at all – everything

I needed would quite naturally be provided by my mother as a matter of course. And now I found myself in the great Universal Mother's womb, so She had to take care of me in the same obvious way.

And She really did! During all those seven years that I lived alone at Shantibu I never really starved, and I think perhaps that I experienced only one or two days during all those years that I didn't have anything to eat. Perhaps my head was scarcely above the surface of the water, but I managed to survive nicely without suffering or distress. Of course I would settle with very little and led a very simple lifestyle (every time I washed my trousers I had to stay indoors until they were dry!), but still I managed several times to go to India. I didn't have a car – not even a driving license – and there were never any newspapers, radio or television at Shantibu during those years. So there were no disturbances from things such as these. In the beginning of my very intense *sadhana* period in 1987 I felt I needed to make provision for even less disturbance, so I isolated myself consciously from the outer world by deactivating Shantibu's landline telephone (there were no mobile phones at that time!) and always kept the outer door locked. In addition I stopped all correspondence by letter and cancelled all existing appointments. It was only with Torleif that I had contact at that time.



Paramananda's poem "I", which I had typewritten and made into a framed montage with pictures, on the wall of Shantibu, and which I read every day in my most intense *sadhana*-period. Photo: BP.

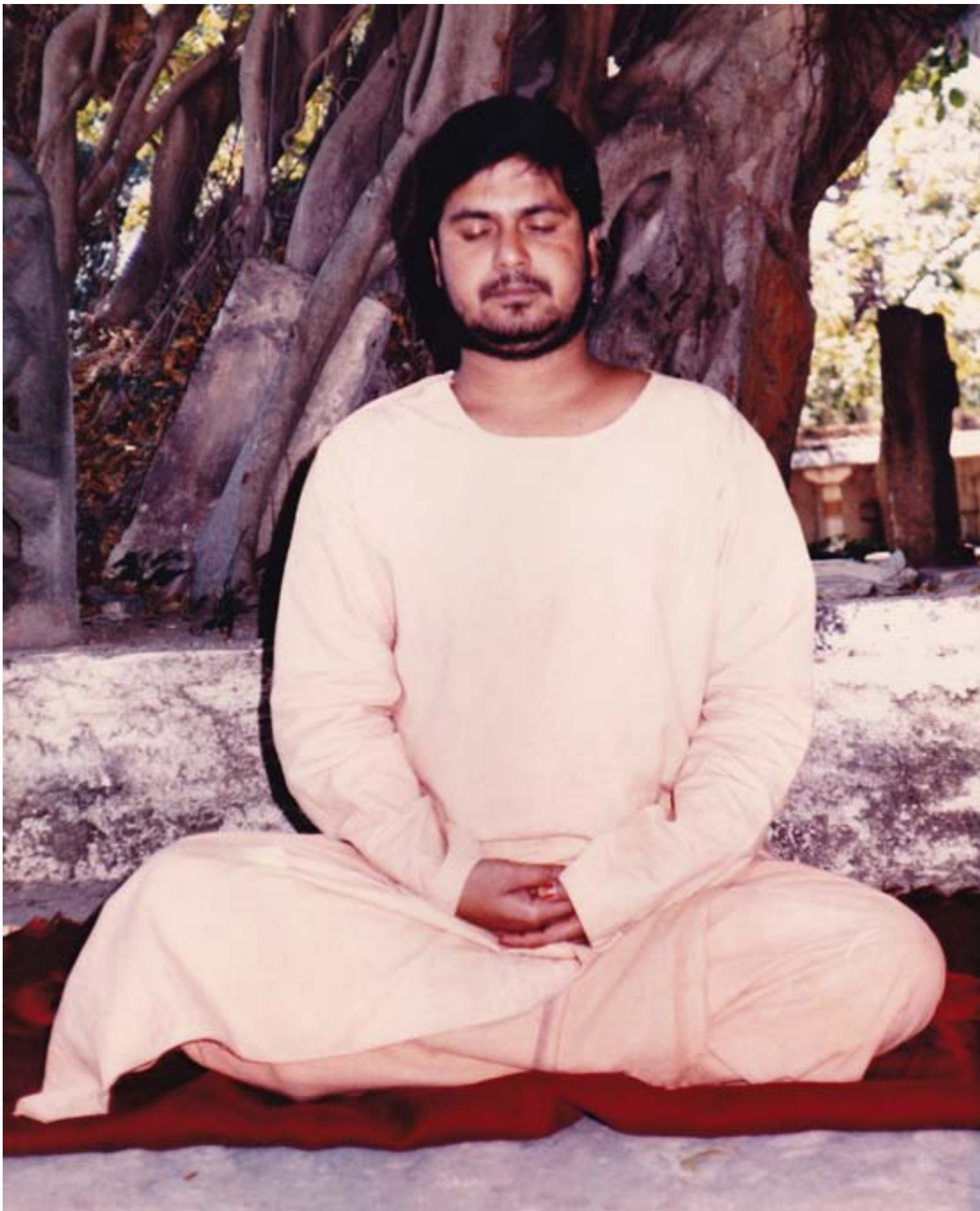


The famous poem "The Self-Divine", written by Vak, daughter of Rishi Amvrin, in the Rig-Veda, which is regarded as the first poem in the world. Written by a Self-Realized woman. Text with pictures in a framed montage on the wall of Shantibu. Photo: BP.

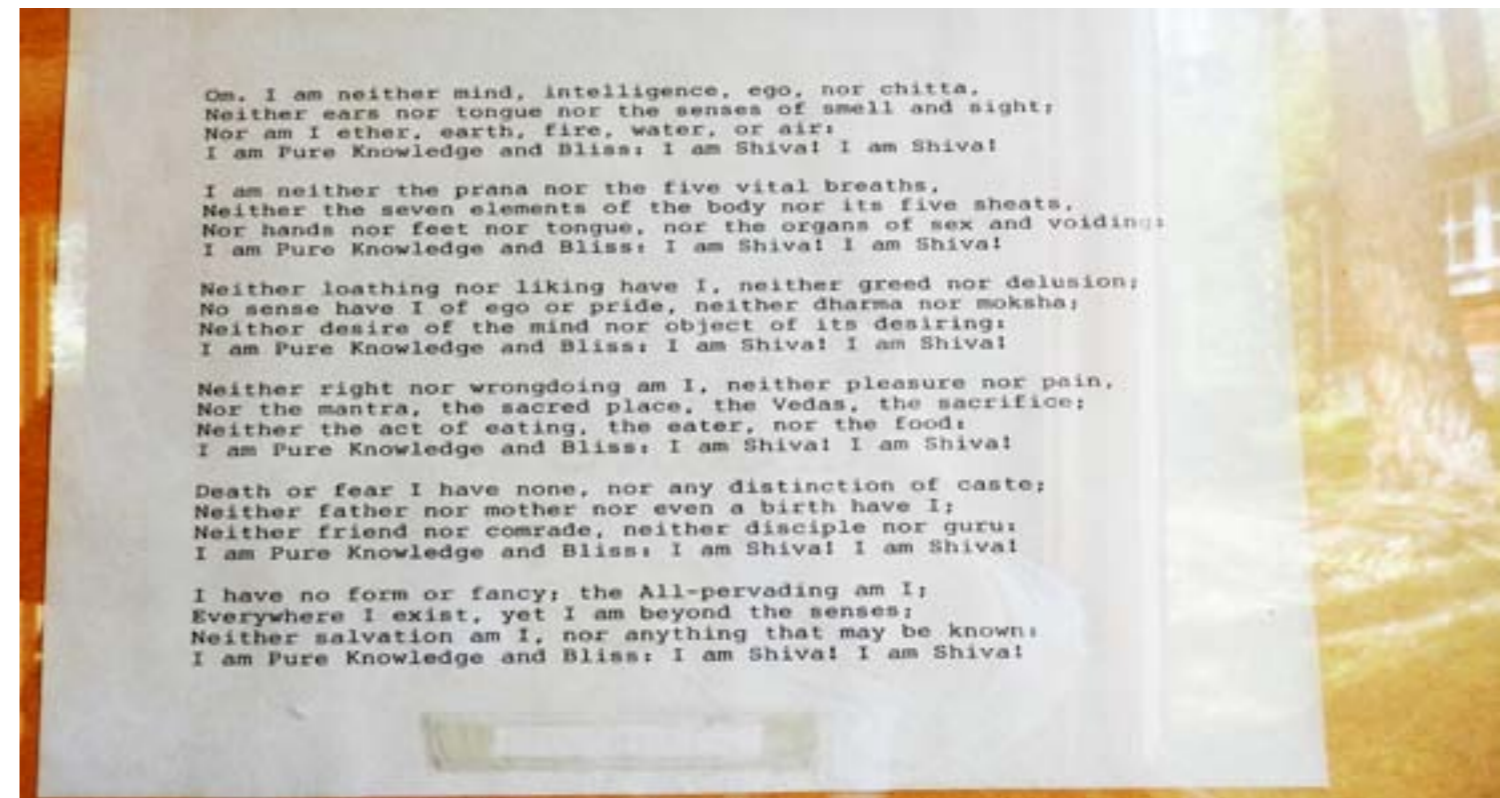


Another framed text and picture montage on the wall of Shantibu, which was frequently read by the author as inspiration to his *sadhana*.

Here is Shiva with Shankaracharya's famous six stanzas on Nirvana (see the enlargement on the last page below). Photo: BP.



Swami Paramananda in Omkaram temple at Mahanandi, Andhra Pradesh, India, 1985.
It was this picture that the author made puja to throughout his three week stay in the temple.
He heartfully worshipped his teacher's meditation when he was not able to meditate himself.
Photo: Devendranath.



Shankaracharya's famous six stanzas on Nirvana. This poem is probably the only poem which can be compared to Paramananda's "I".
Photo: BP.

GLOSSARY (simplified)

kundalini – 'coiled up'; the central, 'serpent-like', power in man which is the cause of the development of the human body (through the serpent-like spinal cord) by its descent from the crown of the head through the spinal cord, and which remains 'sleeping' (and coiled up) at the tip of the tail bone after the completion of the body, and performs (passively) all the autonomous physical body functions from there, but which ascends (actively) through the spinal cord back to the starting point in the crown of the head if, or when, the individual has a spiritual awakening; basis for all physical and mental life in the human being. See *sushumna*.

mantra – secret word or syllable of power which frees the mind.

nirvana – 'that which masters life and death'; same as *nirvikalpa samadhi*.

Omkaram – 'incarnation of OM'; another name for OM, or the pronouncing or 'uttering of OM'; name of a Shiva temple in Mahanandi, Andhra Pradesh, South India.

padmasana – 'lotus pose'; one of several sitting postures in Classical Yoga.

puja – worship by ritual, and by external objects, such as flowers, incense, food and other offerings.

Ramakrishna (1836-1886) – the most well-known Indian saint and avatar of modern times, who lived in Bengal and who by his *sadhana* united all the Indian spiritual traditions, and all the great religions of the World.

sadguru – Self-Realized guru.

sadhana – 'which leads straight to the goal'; a person's spiritual search or quest for truth (which involves personal commitment and practice); the collected effort – physically, emotionally and spiritually – for the realization of life's end.

Shantibu – name of the author's home in Alvdal for more than 35 years and where Paramananda has his main dwelling in Norway.

Shiva – 'in which everything rests'; the static aspect of the Absolute; "the transformer" and last part of the Divine Trinity, in which Brahma (the creator) is the first and Vishnu (the sustainer) is the second, and therefore he who gives mukti or liberation at death; the male principle, which is worshipped in the symbolic form of a lingam; Shakti's counterpart; the "king of the yogis" and the origin of all yoga (i.e. the first yogi).

siddhasana – 'adept's pose'; one of the four most used sitting postures in Classical Yoga.

sushumna – "the governor channel"; the central and only vertical channel of the astral body, which connects all the seven *chakras*, and through which the *kundalini* both descends and ascends; governs both *ida* and *pingala*, the meridians on the left and the right part of the body, respectively, in connection to the physical body's nervous system. See *kundalini*.

tribandha pranayama – breathing exercise in which the three "locks", *uddiyana bandha* ("abdomen lock"), *nauli bandha* ("midriff lock") and *jalandhara bandha* ("throat lock"), are performed.

Vak – name of a poetess in the Rig-Veda; 'voice'.

yoga – 'conjunction'; spiritual science that unites the individual with the universal in the human being; the second of the six main philosophical systems of India, established by Rishi Patanjali and called "Classical Yoga" or *Astanga Yoga*, consisting of eight parts or steps – *Yama*, *Niyama*, *Asana*, *Pranayama*, *Pratyahara*, *Dharana*, *Dhyana*, *Samadhi*.

Continuation follows in the next number next week.