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*Swami Paramananda in Moscow, 1990. Photo: BP.*

## IN SEARCH OF TRUTH

MY EXPERIENCES WITH  
SWAMI PARAMANANDA

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A YOGI IN THE WEST

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# LIFE TOGETHER WITH PARAMANANDA

## *Journey to North Norway*

In the second half of May we embarked on a journey by car to North Norway with Torleif and Anne Siri, up to Lofoten and Vesterålen. We drove up by the scenic coastal road, and down by the main inland road. Shortly after the departure from Os, while driving in Haltdalen, Torleif, who was driving, expressed a little worry that we might end up in a road accident. But Paramananda assured him that it was not in our destiny to meet any accident on this journey: "It is not in The Divine Plan", he said. After passing through the third largest city of Norway, Trondheim, we made a stop at Stjørdalen in the County of North Trøndelag at relatives of Anne Siri and Torleif, and thus we celebrated Norway's national day, the 17th of May, there. We also stopped at Innerøya by Steinkjer in the same county, to visit friends of Torleif and Anne Siri. At the coast of Brønnøysund in Nordland County, we visited the famous Torghatten, which is a mountain formed like a hat with a hole right through it. It was made by the sea long ago when the water level was much higher than it is today.

The next day we visited Alstadhaug the home of the famous priest and poet Petter Dass, passed the famous mountains named 'The Seven Sisters' and came to Sandnessjøen. While we were waiting for a ferry by a ferry landing somewhere along the road, an arctic fox came up quite close to our car, and that was the first (and so far the only) time I saw this rare, near extinct animal in Norway. The destination for this day was visiting friends of Torleif and Anne Siri in Jektvik outside Mo i Rana, who lived at a solitary place in the forest. While staying there we also tried sea fishing from land using fishing rods. I was lucky and caught one, but when Torleif was to bring it up from the water and release it from the hook, he managed to lose it and thus it escaped back into the water.

The next day we drove through a spectacular landscape underneath The Black Ice, which is the only glacier in Norway's North. Somewhere we passed by an open mine with the most beautiful marble of a rosy hue. I immediately recognized it from Carrara where they import it from Norway and sell it as the most exclusive and expensive marble on the market there. Quite funny – the most expensive and sought after marble in Carrara is Norwe-



*Bjorn, Paramananda and Torleif by the sea-side at Mo i Rana.  
Photo: Anne Siri.*

gian! After seeing the famous Saltstraumen, which is regarded as the strongest sea current in the whole world, we camped somewhere in the forest by a small lake, in tents. There, Paramananda found plenty of ferns and taught us to cook soup with them, just as he had done himself as a boy while in the Himalayas.

The next day we stopped at Hamarøy before crossing Vestfjorden by ferry from Skutvik to Svolvær in Lofoten. From there we continued to Henningsvær where we stayed overnight in a fisherman's shack. The next morning Paramananda said he had not slept the whole night. During the night he had seen how several long ships in olden times had come from the sea, landed there and



*Top: Camping in the forest by a lake. Photo: Torleif Sund.  
Above: View at Hamarøy. Photo: Anne Siri.*



slaughtered all the male inhabitants of the local settlement, while taking all the women and children as slaves. Most horrible and gruesome scenes, and he heard the fearful screams of all the terrified victims. Such powerful, past happenings would make a deep impact and “hang on” to the place and “pollute” the atmosphere there, he said. He would tell us of similar experiences at other places, too, in the course of this journey.

From Henningsvær we drove to Stamsund, on to Melbu and Sortland, and from there to Stø, farthest north west in Vesterålen. We had hoped to see the Midnight Sun there, but at midnight it was too cloudy and we could only see a little glow from the sun above the sea to the north. But Stø was an old location for religious ceremonies and, Paramananda told us the next morning, during that night in the fisherman’s shack, which was our accommodation, he was visited by the spirit of a “witch”. This was the northernmost point of our journey, and after just one night there we turned and headed southward. This time we crossed Vestfjorden from Lødingen to Hamarøy, and from there we entered the main inland road. This road was much faster than the winding coastal road, so we didn’t need so many stops on the way. However, we made a major stop at the Polar Circle Centre, which is situated exactly on the Polar Circle. Outside it there were some big snowdrifts where Paramananda was photographed in the snow, and he told us that he had already seen himself in that situation.

*Above: At Henningsvær in Lofoten with traditional fishing boats at the harbour. Below: Paramananda is looking for the midnight sun at midnight, Lofoten. Next page: Paramananda in the snow at the Polar Circle. All photos: Torleif Sund.*



Later, we again stayed overnight with the friends in Jektvik outside Mo i Rana. There were also lime-stone caves nearby, formed by subterranean rivers in the past, so the next day we went on a cave safari. The particular cave we visited had only quite recently been discovered and was in no way suitably adapted for such activity, so we entered the pitch dark cave at our own risk, equipped only with headlights and hand held torch lights. It was quite adventurous and included climbing and crawling through pencil slim openings on all fours, only to come out in great halls on the other side. I followed closely behind Paramananda, who was wearing a headlight. At one point, after a little climbing, he suddenly stopped dead in his tracks, and when I came up beside him I looked down into a deep chasm just below our feet. We were literally standing on the edge of an abyss, and if we had taken one more step it would probably have been our last in this life. I felt a little shock and we turned and went back to the cave entrance.

Just before leaving Jektvik, while sitting at the breakfast table, Paramananda suddenly started to accuse me very roughly of things that seemed to come from out of the blue and directed lots of harsh criticism at me that also seemed quite groundless. All the others present felt very uneasy and became quiet. The only one who didn’t feel affected was me. Naturally I was very surprised, espe-

cially because it happened in front of strangers and we were their guests, but otherwise nothing he said about me touched me or made me feel bad.

Something like that had never happened before in our relationship, and later, when we sat in the car and continued our journey back to Alvdal, both Torleif and Anne Siri expressed, in Norwegian, their confusion and utter dismay at what had just happened. They wanted to know why it had happened and how I was coping with it. I answered only that I took it as a test of my ego and my self confidence, and then it was not mentioned again. All the close company with him had surely made me much, much, stronger than I used to be before. Paramananda meant so much to me that if it so happened that he really would be mad at me or reject me in any way, I would not have been able to bear it. I had been thinking about that a lot. If anything like that would have happened I would have just jumped into the abyss immediately without thinking, if an abyss had been there. That is how unbearable it would have felt to me. This, of course, Paramananda knew very well, without me ever giving expression to it. Now I experienced that he tested my limits. Thank God I never experienced him angry at me in any way or even irritated, and that single episode was the only one of its kind in our relationship in which he seemingly behaved in an almost aggressive way towards me.



Anne Siri (pregnant with Sandra) and Paramananda in front of the cave just before entering. Photo: Torleif Sund.



Bjørn and Anne Siri deep inside the cave, discovering a perfectly shaped ice shivalingam. Photo: Torleif Sund.

### Lost manuscript

We were back at Shantibu on May 26th, and only four days later we closed up the place and went to Oslo to start the journey back to India. Actually, we had loosely planned to return to India by the Trans-Siberian Railway through most of the Soviet Union via Ulan Bator in Mongolia to Beijing in China, and on from there to India. How we should proceed on the last part from Beijing to India was not clear, but for some reason or other the whole of this long journey and great travel plan did not come to fruition. Nor did another plan: Shortly after arriving in Alvdal, Paramananda had expressed the wish to visit the Inuit people of Greenland. "They are a very divine people", he said. Several times I investigated the possibility of us going there, but for some reason or other also this did not happen.

When Paramananda packed his luggage at Shantibu before leaving, I warned him that he had to pack his manuscript, which he had been working on throughout his stay in Norway, and other valuables, in his hand luggage

and on no account in his checked baggage, as he would keep full control of his hand luggage at all times during the journey. But he seemed quite unreceptive to this advice and only gave me a look that made me understand beyond doubt not to interfere and to mind my own business. So I said no more and dropped it. By experience I knew, naturally, that checked luggage was always vulnerable to being lost in transit.

We left Norway on June 5th after being together there continually for about eleven months. On the journey back to India we were also accompanied by Kari Ada the naturopathic doctor from Lyngseidet in Troms (North Norway), who until now had been living at Røros. Several months earlier she had met Paramananda during his many visits to Torleif and Anne Siri at Os, just south of Røros.

Again we travelled via Moscow in what was still the Soviet Union, but this time we knew in advance that we would have to spend a night there before continuing to India the next day. These forced and involuntary overnight stops at airport hotels in Moscow, which I had experienced many times before, were always somewhat prison like, where we were guarded, counted and locked

in all the time. But this time, for a change, we were offered sightseeing by bus, which we gratefully accepted, and for the very first time I was able to see a little of Moscow. We were even allowed to disembark from the bus at a couple of places, including outside the walls of the Kremlin. The river Volga ran through there, and Paramananda went down some steps to touch the water. We also stopped at Red Square, but Paramananda did not want to enter the famous mausoleum containing the mummified body of Lenin.

As we had booked our tickets with Aeroflot all the way to Calcutta, our checked baggage did not follow us to the hotel but remained at the airport completely out of our control. The next morning we continued our flight and arrived at Calcutta on June 7th. When we went to pick

up our luggage from the baggage carousel, Paramananda's bag with the manuscript and lots of books that people from virtually all over Europe had given him, was not to be found – it had most probably been stolen at Moscow airport. We filed a case of missing luggage at Aeroflot, but it didn't result in tracing the lost bag, only in Paramananda, after a long while, receiving a small sum of money as "compensation". The manuscript written by hand in Bengali would be useless for any Russian. It is therefore most probably completely lost. I do not know for sure what it contained but I have reason to believe that it was about *baul* and probably much of the same content as he talked about to me and which he told me to write a book about in the future. Essentially it is, therefore, perhaps not entirely lost after all. But, sadly, all the poems that he wrote at Shantibu are unfortunately lost.



Paramananda in Moscow in transit to India: Red Square (above); together with Kari Ada (right); in front of the Kremlin (bottom right); and touching the water of the river Volga (below). All photos: BP.





*Paramananda and Anne Siri enjoying the view at Hamarøy, North Norway, May 1990. Photo: Torleif Sund.*



*Paramananda on his way down to the river Volga to touch its water. The Kremlin in the background. Moscow, June 5th 1990. Photo: BP.*

Continuation follows in the next number next week.