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Swami Paramananda, Ranchi, Bihar, India 1983. Photo: BP.

IN SEARCH OF TRUTH

MY EXPERIENCES WITH SWAMI PARAMANANDA

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A YOGI IN THE WEST

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and

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PARAMANANDA'S SMILE

Mantra-Diksha

After a few days I asked Paramananda if he could initiate me into meditation with a mantra, as I had never received any before from anyone. I had read about the importance of mantra and thought it completely essential for meditation, but, actually, I did not have any idea about initiation either. "Oh, do you want a mantra?", he asked in reply, seemingly surprised. "It is not necessary, but OK, I shall give you." He at once took me into his room and closed the door so that we were alone. Then he asked me to sit cross legged in a meditation posture on the floor in front of him, whereupon he initiated me and whispered the mantra in my ear. And then he asked me to meditate on it according to the method he had just taught me. When he said the mantra I could not immediately grasp it because I was not quite familiar with the pronunciation, but I was one hundred percent focused on understanding which Sanskrit word it was, so by intense concentration I suddenly understood it and could imagine how it was written in Latin letters. I had seen it mentioned a couple of times before in the writings of Anandacharya but never knew what it meant. But now, after only a few repetitions of the word with the right pronunciation, as Paramananda had whispered it to me, which was absolutely essential, the meaning became completely clear to me. I understood my mantra only seconds after Paramananda had transferred it to me.

After this, while I was sitting there meditating, things started to happen in my body. First the right side of my body became very warm and I started to sweat profusely, and then that heat and sweating crossed over to the left side of my body. My body was clearly divided into two parts with a distinct boundary while this happened, something that I had never experienced before. All the time Paramananda sat on his bed beside me and watched me closely, and after I had opened my eyes and came out of the meditation he asked me how it had been.

I told him about the strange feeling in my body. He explained that it was *ida* and *pingala* (the central nervous system that governs respectively the left and the right part of the body) which had been working and had been cleansed, and that my body now was ready for the *sushumna* (which is part of the astral body and is situated in the middle of the spinal cord between *ida* and *pingala* and whose activity is essential to spiritual life and development) to start working. We continued talking for a while and Paramananda said many things to me to induce self confidence. When we left his room and went out to the others he told them right away that I had understood the meaning of my mantra at once, without me having mentioned anything about that to him in his room.



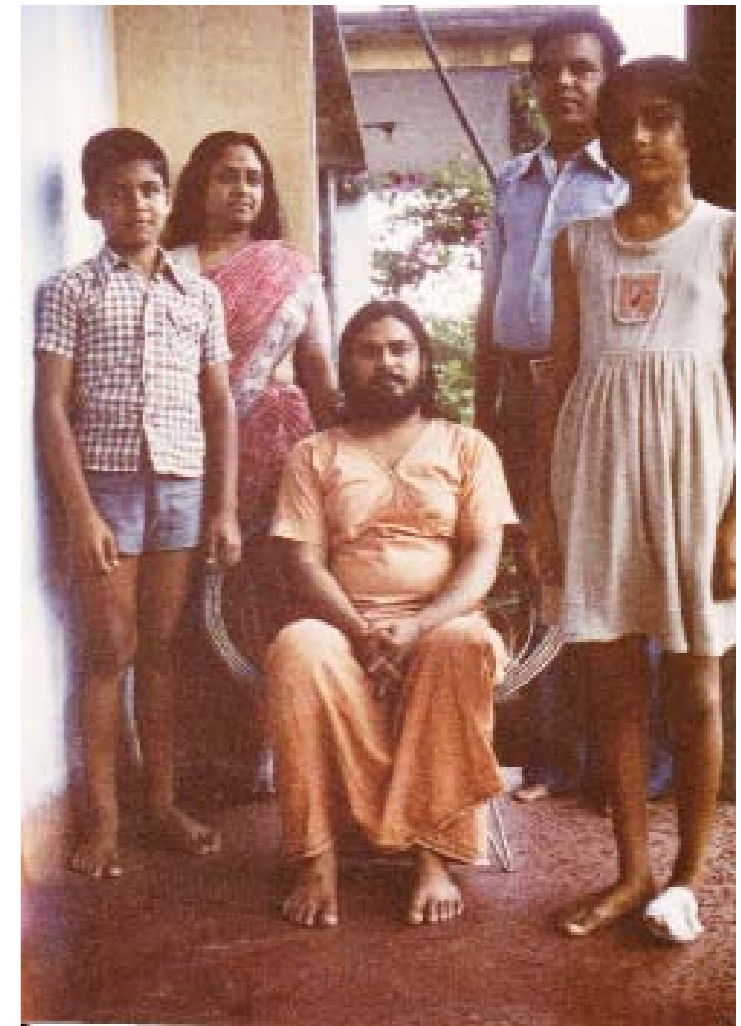
Paramananda in a meditation pose, Ranchi, Bihar, India 1983. Photo: BP.

In the evening we were all invited to a big South Indian family in the neighbourhood where we were treated to a total of some 21 different dishes of food. Since the second day in Ranchi I had been a little sick with cold and fever, and therefore had some excretion of mucus. South Indian food is often extremely hot with quite a few extra doses of chili, and this dinner was probably extra hot in honour of Paramananda.

Anyway, very soon, during the dinner, I got serious breathing problems and had to cough heavily. A huge mass of phlegm came up through both mouth and nose, and I just managed to raise my hand up in time both to catch and hide it. With my left hand I managed to jiggle up my handkerchief from the right pocket of my shirt and deftly removed all the unappetizing stuff without anyone seeing anything untoward or being disturbed. In India it is appreciated if you belch loud and long after a meal, and in some places you may even fart loudly, but at any cost you must never blow your nose. That is really, really bad. All cultures have their peculiar customs!

As I was a bit sick with fever and as Devendranath and I slept on the floor in the living room at night, Paramananda let me rest in his own bed in his room during day-time. As I was lying there I thought to myself that a situation like that would have been unthinkable in the ashram in Rishikesh where Swamiji always kept a long distance from everybody else, as if we were impure with incurable diseases. But Paramananda never thought like that – he was natural and practical, and most of all friendly and caring. When I told Paramananda about my stay with that guru in Rishikesh and various things that happened there, he shook his head and with a stern expression on his face said with an angry voice: "People like him have no conscience!"

About a year later I had a dream in which both this guru and Paramananda were present, and we were on the banks of the Ganges somewhere in Rishikesh. Swamiji had painted his face completely white and he said that if one wears a white painted face and walks with water up to the neck in the Ganges for several years, one will finally learn to move like the Ganges. This he was demonstrating inside the water for a small group of disciples. Paramananda and I, together with a few more, were standing on the shore and watching this incident while Paramananda was explaining and commenting to me on what was happening. And it struck me how superior Paramananda was to this guru, who only taught phenomena and effects, while Paramananda taught the very 'substance' – about Life in itself.



Paramananda with the Chakraborty family, Ranchi 1983. Photo: BP.

Ramakrishna Darshan

On one occasion, while I was resting in Paramananda's bed in Ranchi, I saw in a dream Sri Ramakrishna sitting in *samadhi*. Concurrently, I felt my body was extremely heavy, like a big boulder. But then, suddenly, it was divided into several pieces which gradually disappeared and lastly it was completely dissolved. When a little later I told Paramananda about this he explained that the dream meant that all my bodies – the physical, the astral and the causal, with all their sub-bodies – were now being cleansed of all their impurities. He said that I would now have purity and do very good *sadhana* in Norway. And then he added that it was very good that I had become sick there and had seen Ramakrishna in my dream, because he only very rarely showed himself to people. This event happened before my initiation and it was the first time that I had had a dream about Ramakrishna (later I saw him several times in dream).

Once I asked Paramananda if he knew about Anandacharya. "Yes", he immediately replied in English, "every time my mind goes to Alvdal I hear the sad voice of Anandacha-

rya saying: ‘Never has there come any good man to me – never has anybody understood me.’ This highly surprising answer made a deep impression on me – it reflected so accurately the pain of Anandacharya’s life in Norway as I knew it from Einar Beer and from notes and scriptures, but without these particular words having been uttered or written at any time. And it was exactly as he himself could have expressed it. So to me it was undoubtedly a confirmation that Paramananda really knew his mind and soul.

One day we talked about various types of human bodies, relating to the more immediate visual, physical features, and Paramananda commented on the bodies of those who were present. As an example he said that the ten year old daughter of the house had an “Egyptian body” (her face definitely had typical Egyptian features), while Devendranath had a “Greek body” (he looked like a Greek god!). When the others asked him about my body, he answered in English “Indian Yogi-body”.

The Chakraborty family consisted of father, Ramen, mother, Mana, a daughter and a son. Like most Indians they were very hospitable and in addition they spoke English quite well. When I arrived at their home on the first day the mother soon enquired about my favourite food. A bit shyly I said “*khir*”, which is the exquisite Indian variation, or rather original, of rice pudding. And immediately she started making *khir* for me! It was an enrichment in more than one way to stay in their big-hearted home for those days!

Early in the morning after the mantra-diksha I had to leave Ranchi for Calcutta. My plane to Norway was leaving the next day. Paramananda looked deadly serious from the morning and said to Devendranath that it was best if he were to accompany me. We left early and I took leave of Paramananda in the traditional way by touching his feet with my brow. He stood motionless on the steps and looked extremely grave. And when we left in Chakraborty’s Ambassador car, I looked at him through

the rear window for as long as possible. All the while he stood motionless and stared intensely at me. After only a few hundred metres the car suddenly lost one of its wheels while we were speeding. Luckily without any personal injury to anyone inside the car or outside on the street, which was teeming with people as always in India. We could just get out of the car and continue by cycle rikshaw to the bus station. But the whole journey to Calcutta became terribly tiresome both physically and mentally, and after a while I developed a splitting headache. We had to change means of transport several times on the way and always had to run to catch the next, leaving no time to eat anything and we had to travel mostly on an empty stomach.

When we finally reached the home of Tripti Ma’s family near to the airport in Calcutta late at night, the nightmare was over and we could completely relax. When I met Devendranath again the next time I went to India, he told me that when he had returned to Ranchi, after seeing me off at the airport, Paramananda had told him that it was in my destiny to meet with a major accident that day of departure from Ranchi, and that was the reason for the incident with the car and all the other strain throughout the journey. But if the journey was a big stress, the great accident was surely averted. Obviously, I had had to meet Paramananda at the last moment, because I had no doubt that it was he who in one way or another had helped me.

The Chatterjee family received us well with good food, good company and good rest. Tripti Ma and Saswati were already there and had been waiting for us for the last two or three days. The next morning Devendranath took me to see Swami Satchidananda, one of Paramananda’s young disciples who was staying in the neighbourhood and studied homeopathy in Calcutta. He was a wonderful man who sang many songs with a powerful voice. Like the rest of Paramananda’s *brahmacharis* who I had met, I also felt very close to him. That same evening, on Thursday July 7th, Saswati and I took leave of everyone and left from Dum-Dum airport on a flight via Moscow to Norway.



Devendranath, Swami Vishuddhananda, and Swami Paramananda, Ranchi, Bihar, India 1983. Photo: BP.



Bjørn at Tronsvangen in Alvdal, Norway, sometime in the 1980s, with dark, heavy clouds above. Photo: Saswati.

Problems in Alvdal

Hard times were awaiting me in Norway. Problems were piling up every day from all sides. They were problems and influences coming from outside that had originated in the time prior to my travel to India, and some of the most serious of these were due to the mental unbalance of Saswati. At a certain point in time when it was really bad – when all these forces united against me and the Trust that I was in charge of (The Swami Sri Ananda Acharya Trust) and I sensed danger – I prayed intensely to Paramananda for help. Saswati was in her room in the old building at Shantibu, while I was in my room in the office building. After a while I spotted Saswati through the window. She came out of the old building at speed, slamming the door behind her and partly running out of the yard and down the road, with only a plastic bag in her hand. She left – disappeared without a trace for weeks – and nobody in her family or any of her friends had seen or heard anything from her. This happened in the middle of August and I heard nothing until suddenly, one day at the beginning of October, a letter arrived from Devendranath saying that Saswati was there in India with them and had been there since the first of September!

That was a big surprise, and only many years later did Saswati tell me what had really happened at Shantibu that day of August in 1983, which was the cause of her sudden departure back to India. But first, before that, the next time I had returned to the ashram at Banagram, Paramananda mentioned this incident with only few words, but which I then could not connect to the incident and therefore not understand. As we were walking together from the village to the ashram at night he had smiled to me and said: “Oh Bjørn, you felt so many problems in Alvdal that I had to go there. I told Saswati that she had to leave but she misunderstood me and came here.” That was all he said. I was left with a huge question mark – “had to go there”? – but didn’t want to ask him anything further about it. So nothing more was said about it and it was forgotten until by chance Saswati, herself, mentioned it to me, perhaps as long as ten years after the incident at Shantibu. She told me that she had been sitting on her bed in her room when out of nowhere Paramananda suddenly appeared, standing before her on the floor in flesh and blood and told her that she had to leave Shantibu. She had become absolutely terrified by this and could not believe her own eyes, but she had understood it as if Paramananda wanted her to come to him in India.

Thus Paramananda had materialized his physical body at Shantibu, and this was the first of a total of three times that he appeared there and saved my life. For Saswati it must have been necessary for him to manifest physically, but for me, the other two times that he appeared at Shantibu, he came in his astral body.

So, Saswati was in India, but it didn’t take long before she turned up in Norway again, and the problems continued. It was a painful and intolerable situation for her and for all those around her. And just as it was at its peak, and the Trust that I was leading constantly met with threats of lawsuits and certain investigation from the authorities, all advanced on false grounds, one of my very nearest friends fell victim to a terrible farming accident in Sweden. It was my maternal cousin Asgeir who had fallen into an open manure screw in the floor in a big poultry farm where he was working. It ended up with him having to have his right leg amputated above the knee. That was in January and February 1984. I dropped everything and went immediately to Sweden where I stayed with him at the hospital for a whole month. Often I stayed overnight there in vacant beds beside him in the room where he was lying, and on one of the last days there I had a dream in which I saw Asgeir and myself, and a friend we had in common named Glenn, together in Banagram ashram with Paramananda in India. A good eight months later the dream came true.



The author's cousin brother, Asgeir, with his prosthesis (right leg), in Sweden sometime in the 1980s. Photo: BP.

Ever since my first meeting with Paramananda in India my mind – especially my subconscious mind – had become particularly active, and often I would experience wonderful dreams and exalted visions at night-time. These took place when my mind was in the state of dream-sleep, or rather in the transition between dream and waking state, which Paramananda used to call “pre-conscious” state of mind. Besides countless dreams involving Paramananda, I very often dreamt about various great saints and sages, but also about cobras and snakes of various types. These were very vivid dreams, and those which I found more meaningful I used to write down on a notepad immediately after waking up.

Once when I had ‘escaped’ to Sweden to borrow Asgeir’s small cabin for a few days in Autumn 1983, to get away a little from all the turmoil in Alvdal, I experienced one of my most dazzling dreams ever. It even happened on Saswati’s birthday in September and she was present in the dream as an onlooker, and it occurred at the end of the night, with a heavy thunderstorm and downpour of rain outside. In the dream I found myself in an opening in a forest where I observed a couple of small snakes. Probably I had been bitten, because a small wound on my foot looked just like the sting from a pair of fangs. I moved around the snakes and suddenly more and more snakes appeared. But then a strange thing happened, the snakes grew in size and turned into big cobras who were all raised in an upright position, twelve individuals in all. At first I felt afraid and wanted to get away from there, but then I realized that I was completely surrounded by the cobras and that escape was impossible. Then I noticed that every

cobra was adorned with lots of gold and precious stones, and that they had a celestial being at their side, equally shinningly adorned. One of the upright cobras and its deity stood out from the rest with their sky blue colouring, and this was the cobra that I had seen at first. That was the only one of the cobras I hadn’t felt any fear of, indeed I felt a kind of attraction to it. Its deity was the leading one and the most wonderful of all, and I realized that it was the great Krishna himself, in all his glory and splendour, who was standing before me. A most indescribable and intense atmosphere reigned – something extremely deep, elevated and divine – and at the same time utterly mystical and occult. Never before or since have I dreamt about Krishna, and I have never in this life been particularly occupied with him, so this experience was highly peculiar and surprising, and made a deep impression on me. Everything was so intensely magical!

Another time, early in April 1984, I dreamt about Kali Mata. I could not immediately understand that it was Mother Kali, but saw her more like a yogini. She had extremely dark skin with huge, long hair and was completely naked. Her nudity did not at all distract me, but felt only very natural. She was busy doing some very strange physical exercises that she wanted to teach me. I asked her if she had ever practiced *Hatha-Yoga*. “*Hatha-Yoga* is only for those who wish for power”, she answered in the negative. I protested and thought that it was impossible that she knew about *Hatha-Yoga*, and started to show her examples of these exercises. She repeated them with the greatest ease, she had an incredibly flexible body, and showed that she knew them very well. Then I performed *bujangasan* – the cobra pose – and at once she repeated it with a fantastic performance. While we were both partly raised in the cobra pose, she suddenly said: “Now I feel a goodwill is coming from that cobra over there.” And then something followed with that big cobra which I shall not comment on further, I mention it here only to illustrate how much I dreamt about snakes and upright cobras at that time. They were all expressions of my awakened *kundalini* – the primal power in man which in India is symbolized with a cobra, and whose awakening and activity is essential and decisive for all spiritual development in a human being – that now, naturally, had been awakened and activated after the initiation of a real *sadguru* or realized human being.

The next time I came to India, when I visited a private home, I saw an ordinary calendar of the kind that hangs in almost every home in Bengal, with an illustration of Mother Kali. But to my great amazement this illustration on the wall in front of me was down to the minutest detail a complete replica of the yogini that I had seen in my dream in Norway. Even down to the same features and the same expression on her face. And this representation of Kali was different from all the other, more standardized, examples that I had seen in Bengal. In a way it was

more naturally depicted and Kali wore no ornaments. While this dream played out the yogini’s presence was felt very intensely. She was mystical, but at the same time I felt her like an old friend. And a very “far away” subtle feeling – almost like a vague association – was there all the time that actually she was Paramananda.

As a small example of the countless dreams I had about Paramananda at that time, I shall recount one from the beginning of May 1984. I was in Norway and several people were present in the dream, amongst others Saswati, Trishan and Devendranath. The last two mentioned went off to fetch Paramananda from somewhere. Soon after a small group of sannyasins came walking towards me and I felt certain that one of them had to be Paramananda. However, I wasn’t able to spot him, but for fun one of them had veiled his face so that I should not recognize him. I went straight to that man and he spoke to me and said: “Bjørn, do you recognize whose voice this is?” Of course, I recognized at once the special and pleasant voice of Paramananda, and exclaimed, full of excitement: “Guruji!”, whereupon I bowed down to touch his feet in a respectful greeting. But he quickly grabbed me with both hands before I could bow down fully, removed the veil from in front of his face, and embraced me most heartily. And thus we stood for a long while and embraced each other dearly and intensely in deep, joyous reunion.

This was something that I needed just then, because my everyday life was at times extremely exhausting with attacks of different kinds and problems that were piling up one after the other. Outsiders were working untiringly through lawyers and public offices, with legal means and even with more dubious methods, to overturn the Foundation and to freeze me out from the village, while at

the same time Saswati’s mental instability and volatility could cause the most incredible effects and were a constant source of commotion. In addition I was continually haunted on the astral plane by my previous teacher from Rishikesh who by cunning tricks tried to win me back to him, and also by a variety of other identities on that plane who ravaged me terribly. Throughout this time I always kept contact with and often met my many good friends in Norway, and they were to a great extent responsible for making my life worth living, in spite of all the difficulties.

In the year that followed my second trip to India, I was frequently travelling, and only stayed at Shantibu in Alvdal between trips. I spent much time with my parents in Moss and with my cousin Asgeir in Sweden, and then I also regularly visited Glenn and other friends in Oslo and other places. The times I was in Alvdal, I was also often visited by these friends. I spent all of June 1984 with good friends in the USA, and in July of that year I went with Asgeir for a week’s visit to a big ashram in Gylling in Denmark. There we met the well-known, ageing Indian guru Swami Narayananda, who was a disciple of Swami Shivananda – one of the direct disciples from the inner circle of Sri Ramakrishna. I gained a fairly good impression of Narayananda, who was very forthcoming and gave lots of attention to Asgeir and me. I already knew several of his Norwegian disciples who were mostly sannyasins and who often used to visit Shantibu. I had also read all of his many books, which I found interesting and practically useful in many situations. However, he maintained, in harsh words, the traditional Indian view of *brahmacharya* or complete sexual abstinence in thought, word and deed. When, many years later in Shantibu, I let Paramananda read a little from his books and asked him to comment on Narayananda’s claim of



The author below a more than a thousand years old, protected oak tree in Sweden, during one of his visits to Asgeir in the 1980s.

During meditation by this ancient tree all the happenings the tree had witnessed during more than a thousand years were revealed to Bjørn - it appeared almost like a film in his mind - and when, afterwards, he opened his eyes, he looked straight into the eyes of a roe-deer who completely fearlessly sniffed at him.

Photo: Asgeir Arnesson.

being Self-Realized through *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*, he answered briefly: “I cannot think that a person who writes such about sexuality can be realized.”

In August and September of the same year Asgeir, Glenn and I prepared ourselves for going for a longer period to Paramananda in India, and on October 23rd we travelled by plane via Moscow. Asgeir was four years younger than me and had been living not so far from where I had grown up. Together with his elder brother, who was only eight days younger than me, we formed a close trio who were always together during childhood and early youth, and as such he was more like a brother to me. During his youth we lost contact for a while, as I left home for boarding schools and later moved to Alvdal, but as young adults we regained our brotherhood, even closer than before with the same spiritual interests. Like me he was also a conscientious objector to the military, but with a step further to ‘total objection’, i.e. also objecting to compulsory civilian national service, which was forbidden by law in Norway. Hence his escape to the neighbouring country of Sweden. Asgeir was big and sturdy, with a bold head and a thick, red beard. Kindhearted and generous, and always very serious in whatever he undertook. Glenn was another type completely. He was a bit of a disorderly artist, living for his music and painting, who I had known since my first year at a folk high school in my youth. A talented artist, full of humour and monkey tricks but always attentive to the deeper aspects of life.

Just prior to our departure I delivered all the case papers and documents to the Oslo City Court and paid the mandatory fee of 1,000 Norwegian kroner in relation to a case regarding the Trust in the name of Swami Sri Ananda Acharya that Einar Beer had founded in 1975, and for which I had assumed responsibility as chairman after the death of Mr. Beer. The conflict had gone that far, via the County Governor and the Department of Justice, and taken such a hopeless turn, with obvious procedural faults and crass legal violations, that I had seen no other option than to file a case against the very Government itself in the form of the Department of Justice. They were about to deprive me of control over the Trust by manipulating third parties on to the board of trustees, who were not only against me personally, but even against the Trust’s statutes. Behind all this there were persons who very actively and for a long time had directly opposed and sabotaged the Trust. Just a few days before our departure I had phoned my lawyer in Oslo, who was then very busy with a very big case and therefore didn’t have the time to help me, so in haste he only gave me a couple of simple pieces of advice on how to make a written plea and what I had to emphasize. Thus I had to be my own lawyer and compose my own written plea in this case. When I later read it out to him over the phone he answered that he could not have done it any better himself. I therefore trusted that it was good enough, delivered it to the court, happily forgot all about it, and then travelled to India!

GLOSSARY (simplified)

Anandacharya - the name Paramananda used for **Swami Sri Ananda Acharya**, and the name most commonly used in India.

brahmacharya – apprenticeship (period of training), or the first of four stages in a Hindu’s life; self-discipline, especially in relation to sexuality.

bujangasan - ‘cobra posture’; one of the physical exercises of Yoga.

guru – ‘from darkness to light’; spiritual guide who dispels ignorance and confers wisdom.

ida – the nervous system of the left side of the body.

khir – sweet rice dish boiled in milk.

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.

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

mantra-diksha – initiation with mantra from a guru.

nirvikalpa samadhi – that form of *samadhi* which is without any object in mind and which therefore cannot be explained, in contrast to *savikalpa* and other forms of *samadhi*. After complete *nirvikalpa samadhi* there is no more cause for rebirth. See *samadhi*.

pingala – the nervous system of the right side of the body.

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.

samadhi – ‘union’ (‘putting together’ or ‘bringing into harmony’); full absorption in meditation; the eighth and last step of 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 *ida*, *pingala*, *kundalini*.

Swami Narayananda (1902-1988) - well-known Indian guru with a large ashram in Gylling, Denmark, and with several disciples in Norway. He was a disciple of Swami Shivananda (1854-1934), who was a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna.

Swami Satchidananda - born 1955 in Tripura, East India; now best known as **Prashanta**; brother disciple and very good friend of the author.

Continuation follows in the next number next week.