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Swami Paramananda in Romsdal, August 1989. Photo: Torleif Sund.

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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LIFE TOGETHER WITH PARAMANANDA

The Truth about Anandacharya's Rebirth

Whenever Paramananda and I were alone at Shantibu, as we often were, I used to give full expression to my many frustrations about life. Really, I complained to him from the very bottom of my heart at those times and I would leave nothing out. He would sit and listen gravely and patiently to everything I said until I had finished – completely finished, because at that point I nearly cried.

“Guruji”, I would say, “I feel this creation is extremely badly arranged and actually completely meaningless! What is all this suffering meant for? It is horrible how innocent people and animals always have to suffer in this world! And why all this ignorance? The Law of Karma – the law of cause and effect – is logical and natural, and gives meaning. But it is only actual because we are ignorant. It is completely insane that we have to be born into this world fully ignorant of our own Self, and that again and again, in life after life, we have to strive the whole life to gain that same wisdom which has actually been there all the time! What is the purpose of all that? It is terrible that again and again we are foolish and doing wrongs that we have to suffer lots for because of karma just because we are ignorant and are forging strong emotional ties.”

Like this I would whine and lament all of my deepest sorrows and frustrations from this life, and God knows, maybe from so many other lives, too. And I would continue:

I know everything about Vedanta – the most incomprehensible and obscure, abstract philosophical matters are now clear as daylight to me, and I have no headache whatsoever about any of these questions or ideas – all of this is now exceedingly simple and obvious to me. But this *lila*-thing and “The Divine Plan”, I cannot understand at all! I absolutely do not understand anything about the purpose of this creation. All of that seems quite hopeless to me.

At those moments Paramananda used to sit quite close to me on the couch and look very intensely at me, while, patience personified, he listened silently to every word without interrupting. When I had finished he would gently pat my head and back with his hands, like a father or mother caresses their loving child, and in the most sympathetic and compassionate voice anyone could have he would say:

Bjørn, you do not understand it now, but you will understand it in the future.

He didn't answer my questions then but he did calm me completely because I trusted one hundred percent that what he said was correct and that it would happen just as he had stated.

But anyway he did explain something. He said that in many ways a creation (*kalpa*) can be compared to a theatrical play. An author writes a play in many acts, which in turn is translated into many languages and is performed on many different stages all over the world year after year. A performance in Japan will be completely different from one in Norway or in the USA or Argentina or Australia, but the play is still the same – the author and the text is always the same. Even two basically identical performances at the same theatre will differ if the actors are different, because of their different individual role interpretations. Even the same performance with the same actors, performed night after night for several weeks will be a little different every night due to the actors increased experience in solving their tasks.

And it is just like that with our lives in this creation. The play is already written and the performance is going on, and all have their roles to act. But how we interpret these roles, is entirely up to us. And it is here that man's so-called “free will” comes in, because we are always faced with choices in our lives – there will always be a minimum of two choices in those situations we constantly meet – and what we choose or how we choose, is completely up to us, fully our own choice and our own decision.

As to *why* we are in this and *why* it is happening, he answered most elegantly:

The children only play and play, they never ask themselves *why* they are playing! Can you ask a child *why* it is playing?

Another thing he was explaining to me was about re-incarnation. The various life-forms are born again and again to gain necessary experience. It is that which is called ‘evolution’. With humans it happens in this way:

Man consists of three “bodies”, i.e. physical body, mental body (subtle or astral body) and causal body (identity and ego). When man dies, it is only his physical body that ceases to function while the two other bodies are still very alive. Our physical body is connected to our waking consciousness, while our mental body is connected to our subconscious (dream sleep) and our causal body with our unconscious (during deep, dreamless sleep). In this way we understand how our three bodies are connected with our three stages of consciousness that every human being is experiencing every single day throughout their life. It is the waking consciousness that we know the most and that we identify with, but the subconscious and unconscious are ‘exposed’ during night when we sleep and they constitute equally important parts of our lives.

Thus, every night we are experiencing a kind of “light death”. When the physical body dies and the waking consciousness disappears, our individual lives continue to live on in the two other bodies with their stages of consciousness, exactly in the same way as during sleep at night. We may say therefore that our mind continues to live after death and alternates between the two stages of consciousness, dream (subconscious) and deep, dreamless sleep (unconscious). The physical bodies are worn out by illness and old age, and have to be exchanged, just as in the same manner we are throwing away old, worn out clothes and getting new ones. But the mind is more ‘eternally young’ and full of unsatisfied wishes, desires and projects, together with the impressions from actions and deeds (karma) in the previous life which have not yet reached their fulfillment (*prarabdha*).

All these factors result in the necessity of a new platform or field where all these things can be played out, and this “field” must necessarily be a new human body, precisely because all that is unfulfilled has its root in the physical world and is connected with it, and because mind and identity thus can only connect to a physical body. Because nothing in this world is more valuable than a physical body, and all who live in the physical world, value their life above anything else. All life always wants to continue living – none really wishes to die or to vanish from life.

Consequently, quite soon the process for a new physical life starts from the mind. The most common length of time from when a person dies to being reborn is from three to four years, but this interval will, of course, depend entirely on the specific condition of the individual. The mind is independent from and stands above the five physical elements, earth, water, fire, air and ether, and is, therefore, also not bound by gravity or any other physical laws. As a “spirit” the mind is thus free to experience the infinite astral world for a while, according to the kind of

wishes, expectations and imagination of the individual. But the wish for physical life will always be the strongest and therefore draw the attention towards the earth and the physical, to which it thus has to connect and bind physically.

Therefore, starting with ether, which is the most subtle and mind-like physical substance, it gradually proceeds towards more and more coarse physical substance, through the air and fire and water of the thunder clouds, which condenses as electrically charged rain falling on the ground. This water mingles with the earth and is sucked up by plants which are being harvested as food for man and animals, and the essence of this food makes semen in a man's body, which is stored in his testicles. Thus, the identity of the human being therefore comes by the male body, while the egg of the female body provides for the food and the division of cells which develops a new physical body.

During all of this stage of the process the individual is in an unconscious state, and the mind is inactive. Then about four months into the pregnancy, when the whole of the spinal cord with all the limbs and organs is in place in the embryo, one day the individual suddenly switches to the subconscious dream state of mind, something that is clearly felt by the mother. Then the mind has also changed from inactive to active. After around nine months in total the foetus is ready to be born. At this point the individual wishes to wake up to enter waking consciousness, and that triggers the delivery because waking consciousness is only possible outside the womb after the child has been born into the external physical world. And then, after birth, the individual continues to alternate between the three stages of consciousness throughout day and night, so that from that perspective, death only appears as an extra long and sleepy night. In that way life lives “eternally”.

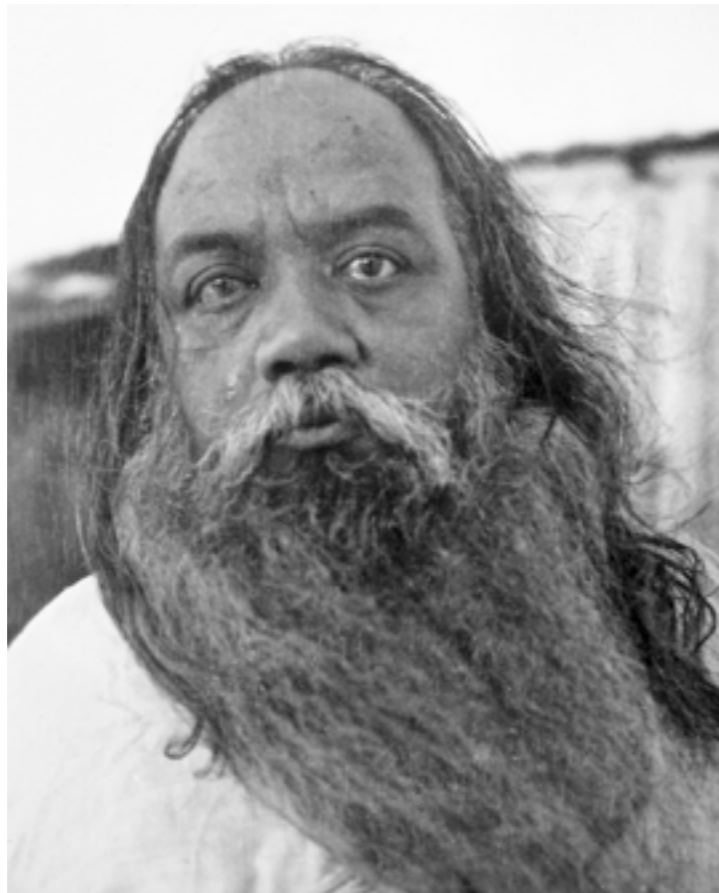
There is nothing strange or unnatural about this. On the contrary, by minute observation, we can see that all of this is quite correct and that everything is very logical and natural. For how else can one explain that no children are true copies of their parents, but are all individual identities, often with very different personalities and nature than their mother, father and siblings, with totally different impressions, experiences, views, understanding and destinies, often visible even from childhood? And how does it come about that life just unfolds itself in front of us in a continuous series of happenings, which we are forced to face, but for which we know for sure we are not the cause in this life? Or how do we explain that, sometimes, provably, we haven't been in a certain situation or place; or met a certain person earlier in this life, but still we feel completely familiar with that situation or that place or that person in front of us? Such and other

similar things happen to almost all of us once or more in life, and thus they are not unfamiliar phenomena. However, Paramananda's incarnation is very special and very different from this process. So too is the process the Seven Rishis are undergoing, because they appear neither by natural evolution nor as a result of karma.

One day, as we were alone at Shantibu as usual, we had a huge confrontation. Actually not between the two of us, but in myself, caused or provoked by Paramananda. This day just had to come, and that it should happen was one of the main causes of Paramananda's visit to Norway and spending nearly a whole year here together with me. He actually had to "prepare" me – both for me on my own part, and also on the part of my surroundings – not least for the work that would be waiting for me later. Suddenly, without any warning, he came up very close to me while we were both standing in the middle of the floor in the living room, took a firm grip with his hands around both of my shoulders, while he looked straight into my eyes and said with much emphasis:

Bjørn, you were Anandacharya in your previous life!

He knew that in my heart of hearts I already knew it myself, but could not accept it and was suppressing it, and now he wanted me to confront it and to accept it once and for all. Ever since I had come to Alvådal in April 1978



*The portrait of Anandacharya which made me recognize myself!
Photo: Einar Beer, about 1926.*

and visited the village's book store, already on the day before I met Einar Beer, I had had an intense experience about just this. There, inside the book store, I had come across a small booklet written by Einar Beer with a photo of Anandacharya on the front cover. I had already seen some photos of him in other books which I had bought in Oslo shortly before going to Alvådal, but this photo was different in that it was a portrait in which he looked straight at me. As soon as I saw the photo and looked into his eyes, I got a shock and I heard myself exclaiming to myself in English, greatly appalled:

It is me! It is me!

I actually recognized myself at once in the picture! But it was impossible! I was only 22 years of age and all this was totally strange to me! And I had never seen this photo before! Immediately I put the booklet away and did not wish to think any more about it – and I banished it to my sub-consciousness. But after that – after I had moved into Einar Beer's small cottage then called "Solbu", from the very next day – hardly a day would pass without something happening that would remind me about that incident in one way or another.

One thing was that I felt that I recognized everything that Anandacharya had written – that these were my feelings, my thoughts and my words – together with those dreams I had about him at night, but another thing was those



The bust of Anandacharya outdoors in the yard of Shantibu, which was commissioned by Einar Beer and erected in 1953. Photo: BP.

innumerable times that visitors remarked on my physical similarity to Anandacharya. At that time I had a long beard and hair, just like Anandacharya used to have in the 1920s at Tronsvangen. It even happened that a woman, a so-called clairvoyant and a medium who we didn't know previously, visited unexpectedly, and as soon as she entered the living room where we were, before we were introduced, immediately sat down in 'trance' and stammered forth words which said that now a young man was living here who had been Anandacharya in his previous life, and so on. This was all the more obvious when people who had actually known and experienced Anandacharya remarked about it, like when old Marit Tronsvang of the neighbouring farm where I used to collect fresh cow's milk every other day, could say things like: "My gosh, how you look like Baral [the local name for Anandacharya, which was actually his family name]! You have just the same forehead, the same hairline and beard." And so on.

These remarks always made me feel a bit shy or embarrassed, and I did whatever possible to ignore them. Worst of all was when people who were completely unfamiliar with the story visited during the 1980s when I was living alone at Shantibu, and thought that I, in all modesty, had made a bust of myself and erected it in the courtyard of Shantibu! But that bust had already been made in 1953, two years before my birth, and placed at Shantibu by Einar Beer in memory of Anandacharya. In that way there were constant reminders about my relation to Anan-

dacharya, but which I completely denied and refused to contemplate. My respect and admiration for him was far too great even to consider any such relationship, and at the same time I was only too aware of the more or less miserable and highly flawed Bjørn Pettersen from Moss.

How in the world should it be logical or even practically possible for any such connection to exist?! In my consciousness it wasn't only doomed to start speculating about it – it was really a non-theme. The nearest I had come to a kind of approach or confession to the deep inner feelings that I had, after all, was when I had met Paramananda for the first time and we were together in Ranchi. Then, on one occasion, I had referred to the swami in Rishikesh who had also said that I had been Anandacharya in my previous life. I had then remarked, a little feigned or overconfidently, that I had definitely not been Anandacharya, but when I saw the stern expression of disapproval on Paramananda's face, I lost my courage and confessed that I felt that I was a part of him. In one of Mr. Beer's notes I had once read an utterance by Anandacharya that a great rishi could split his soul up into many individual identities. And that had become a sort of solution for me that my relation to Anandacharya had to be in that way, and that *perhaps* I was such a part-identity of him – and in that case only a very small and insignificant one. "That is okay", Paramananda immediately replied, and then there was no more talk about it. Not until he now confronted me about it at Shantibu in 1989.

I reacted with great anger! Not because he finally wanted me to confront it, but because, in a double perspective, it implied that my whole life and everything that I had believed in up to now, appeared as totally meaningless. I knew Anandacharya so well – through his own books and notes, through his disciples’ notes, and, not least, through the oral tradition from Einar Beer’s 30 years’ co-existence with him in Norway. I knew that he had lived like a very perfect yogi and that he had left his body in *nirvikalpa samadhi*. All of this was well documented. On top of everything I knew from Einar Beer that Anandacharya had said that this was his last life and that it would not be possible for him to come back to this world in the future. So, if I was the same identity as Anandacharya it meant, in my understanding, in plain words, that my whole life as Anandacharya had been a complete failure, and that *nirvikalpa samadhi* was not at all any guarantee for freedom from rebirth. Because Bjørn Pettersen had surely been born again in ignorance of his Self just like everybody else, and had to fail and learn while growing up exactly like all others. What then was the use of practicing *sadhana*? Why all this toiling – all this unending effort for spiritual insight and Self Realization? Everything I had read, learnt and understood up to now about spiritual life and eternal truths, suddenly seemed completely useless and nonsensical. It was this that made me so angry and deeply despondent, and which made me react almost aggressively towards Paramananda.

In the meantime we had sat down on the couch together. I looked intensely at Paramananda with a mixture of anger, frustration and resignation, and exclaimed almost desperately:

“But Anandacharya left his body in *nirvikalpa samadhi* – how is it possible?” “Yes, I could just have given you a little push that time and it would have happened”, Paramananda replied smilingly, and made a symbolic sign with his thumb and index finger nearly touching each other: “It was so close!”¹⁾

This statement completely astounded me. Here he showed me that in a way he was present at that time when Anandacharya was in *nirvikalpa samadhi*, and that he was in full control of it, and at the same time he made me understand, beyond any doubt, that Anandacharya actually had not been able to complete his *nirvikalpa* and therefore could not leave his body in that way! Therefore, cause and identity were still present which could cause rebirth. What Paramananda said then made tears instantly pour from my eyes and stream down my cheeks in a flood:

Bjørn, you will be born again and again into this world in the future. I need you here to do my work.

I looked and looked at him completely speechless with a gaze that expressed the greatest disbelief. In my wildest dreams I could not have imagined this. It was like an unbelievably heavy burden had been laid on my shoulders which I had absolutely no strength to bear. I well knew that Anandacharya’s life had been far from easy, just as my own life had been far from easy, and that I always had to work and strive hard for all the things that I wanted to accomplish. And all of that testing adversity that both Anandacharya and I had experienced in our lives, felt completely energy draining when I allowed my thoughts to go back in time. Suddenly very huge perspectives had entered the scene with Paramananda’s last statement, and now he envisioned for me that I would be bound to live countless lives again in the future – with the rebirth into forgetfulness and ignorance and all the frustration and mental pain that causes for an innate truth-seeker like me. At that moment it felt almost unbearable to me!²⁾

Paramananda, who always understood me and felt my innermost being, naturally was fully prepared for my great agony, and started to do his utmost to comfort and encourage me.

“You can enjoy this life”, he said while he patted my head and back, and continued: **“Bjørn, I love this life!”**

What??? Was it really possible? Now I looked at him with the greatest astonishment and near disbelief, because never before in my entire life had I heard him say words like these, or read these words in the utterances of wise sages or divine incarnations in any literature. Life has always been something that you should beware of so that it will not swallow you up – something that one should only try to go through as uninjured as possible, in order to come out to something better afterwards. All of the four great world religions – Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism – are like that, no doubt about it, and these are the impressions that a truth seeker gets through culture and tradition in the society of man, past and present. In Judaism, Christianity and Islam – the Semitic religions have the Old Testament and Genesis in common – life in itself is almost a sin because man is born a sinner, and a great conflict between man and God reigns. It is obvious that one is impressed by these concepts that to the highest degree have contributed in shaping our societies for the last three thousand years or so. But here, in front of me, was a human being I loved above all else on this Earth, who I respected above any other source of wisdom that I knew of, and who told me plainly in the most sincere and trustworthy way that he loved this life! It was almost incredible to listen to this, but at the same time it was exactly what I needed to hear, because I could do nothing other than accept it coming from him, as a very longed-for gift. And Paramananda continued:

Realize yourself and enjoy life. This world is wonderful! When you have realized yourself you will no longer feel any problem and you can freely enjoy this wonderful life which never ceases to amaze us.

Well, perhaps I could live for the rest of this life in that way, but the thought of having to be born again in forgetfulness and ignorance of the Self, was still completely unbearable. After some further comforting from Paramananda I therefore said:

All right, *perhaps* I can consent to being born again for *you* only (and not for anybody else!), but one thing I cannot do, which is absolutely certain: I cannot again be born in ignorance of the Self – that is absolutely impossible!

This was an absolute ultimatum on my part, in which I laid all the sincerity and truthfulness of my being, and Paramananda was quick in establishing the following:

Very well, Bjørn, in your next life you will know your Self from birth!

Phew! There came the total relief! These were the magical words which spontaneously wiped away the whole burden – this was the blessing which dissolved all worries for good pertaining to my life and my future, and which finally made me feel free! Now I felt ready to accept anything that would appear in my life! After this we conversed calmly and Paramananda put my life in a wider perspective by saying that I had come into this life by descent and not through the ascent of evolution, or through the “plus-world” and not through the “minus-world”, as he would call it. As usual I did not ask him any further about these things, but only listened silently. Then, in the end, to give a little extra credit to the life that I had lived, he said:

I would not have managed to be born and grow up here in the West as you have done. And also you had no good friend who could support your nature or inspire you or guide you.



The bust of Anandacharya at Shantibu. Photo: BP.

FOOTNOTES

1) This is a most fantastic, almost impossible event in my life! Paramananda told me this about Anandacharya at Shantibu in 1989, at which time I knew nothing about my authoring of Anandacharya’s biography nearly 29 years later, in spring 2018. In the chapter “Samadhi and burial on Mt. Tron” I have quoted the following words from Samvida’s notebook (page 282 in Bjørn Pettersen: *Sri Ananda Acharya. A forgotten Son of Mother India. His own story. A biography and anthology.* Mt.Tron University of Peace 2019. 2. edition by Amazon 2020 – ISBN 978-82-690326-3-5): **“Those who were round Guru [Anandacharya] the last days distinctly saw He was held in Divine arms and it was clearly said by that one who held Him: ‘I am holding Him in my arms that He may not perish’.** For this reason we did not believe the samadhi was final.”

I had stored these notes by Samvida (one of the two English ladies who stayed with Anandacharya at his Gaurisankarseter in Alvdal) in a very orderly and nice way in a big safe at Shantibu all these years. But I had never read them. I had only sorted the material and arranged it nicely, and taken good care of it until one day I would make use of it, which proved to be not until spring 2017, when finally I sat down to write the biography of Anandacharya. By then my experiences with Paramananda had practically already been written, in spring 2015. I was therefore enormously surprised when I came across these lines from Samvida’s notebook, because it refers exactly to what Paramananda told me at Shantibu in 1989, at which time I knew nothing about it! This clearly shows the authenticity of Paramananda’s life and work. Absolutely fantastic! At least it shows his relation to me!

2) I think that the sub-conscious shock of being born again into this world, from a state (*nirvikalpa samadhi*) that normally cannot cause any rebirth, made the dominant lack of self-confidence in my life as Bjørn. From my early childhood I was always very shy, bashful and embarrassed in social settings, especially with strangers or those I did not know well. And I always felt that this world is mad and crazy. The town of Moss was pretty small when I grew up, but still I could not understand how people could live like that, in all the hustle and bustle and noise, where everything seemed unnatural. I grew up in the countryside of Jeløy Island among forests and farms where things were natural and nice. Thank God for that! I did not really like people very much, I felt they were only too complicated and two faced, but I loved the innocent animals and everything natural.

Otherwise there were several “Indian traits” in my nature from childhood which distinguished me from all the other children: I would always run about barefoot in only shorts, and disliked suits and tight clothes; to my father’s great dismay I would always wear my shirt outside my pants and not tucked inside them; when I first tasted boiled rice at the age of three, I felt it was the best food I had ever tasted; I enjoyed standing on my head (headstand) and could keep balanced like that for a long time, and when I first saw an Indian “fakir” at the age of five, at a local fair, doing many very difficult yogasanas, especially with his stomach (uddiyana, nauli), to load gasps from the audience because at that time nobody had seen anyone doing yoga before, I could repeat all of them with ease.

And with regards to the “inheritance” after Anandacharya, I was quite occupied with horses in my childhood and would ride them as soon as any opportunity arose (actually there was a riding school just behind the house where I grew up, which just happened to be at Tronvik at Jeløy, Moss, Norway!).



Anandacharya riding his white horse “Bålkari” (“Valkyrie”) at his property Gaurisankarseter, Tronsvangen, Alvdal, Norway, around 1930. We see all the symbols of the Kalki Avatar. The horse and all the rest of the equipment were gifts from various people over the years. None of it purchased by Anandacharya for himself. Anandacharya cleared the road for the real Kalki who appeared later, without displaying any of these outer symbols. Photo: Einar Beer.

GLOSSARY (simplified)

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

Guruji – loving address to spiritual guide. See *guru*.

Kalki-Avatar – the tenth and last divine incarnation in Hinduism, who ends the *Kali Yuga* with dynamic spirituality.

kalpa – ‘creation’.

karma – ‘action’; ‘deed’; popularly known as the ‘law of cause and effect’ in relation to man.

lila – ‘divine play’; the term for God’s active participation in his own creation.

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*; also known as “opposite *samadhi*”, completely different from all other forms of *samadhi*. After complete *nirvikalpa samadhi* there is no more cause for rebirth. See *samadhi*.

prarabdha – that form of karma that everybody has from birth, which starts to unfold from birth and continues for as long as you live, originates from previous lives and which decides the present life (“fate”), which is the direct cause of this life and from which none can escape or free themselves, i.e. it has to continue until its end (= your death). See *karma*.

rishi – ‘seer’; Self-Realized sage; the highest level attained by humans through evolution, who manifests love and wisdom; (in plural) ‘the seven (original) rishis’ did not come through evolution, but by divine incarnation, and are the mind-born sons of *Brahma*, who were created for the protection of all living beings, including gods and men, and who are always living among the people on earth (through continuous rebirth) to fulfill this task.

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. See *nirvikalpa samadhi*.

Vedanta – ‘where the wisdom ends’; the philosophical part of the Vedas, which represents the very essence of the Vedas and of Indian thinking, which deals with the inquiry into the nature of the Absolute; the last of the six major philosophical systems of India.

Continuation follows in the next number next week.