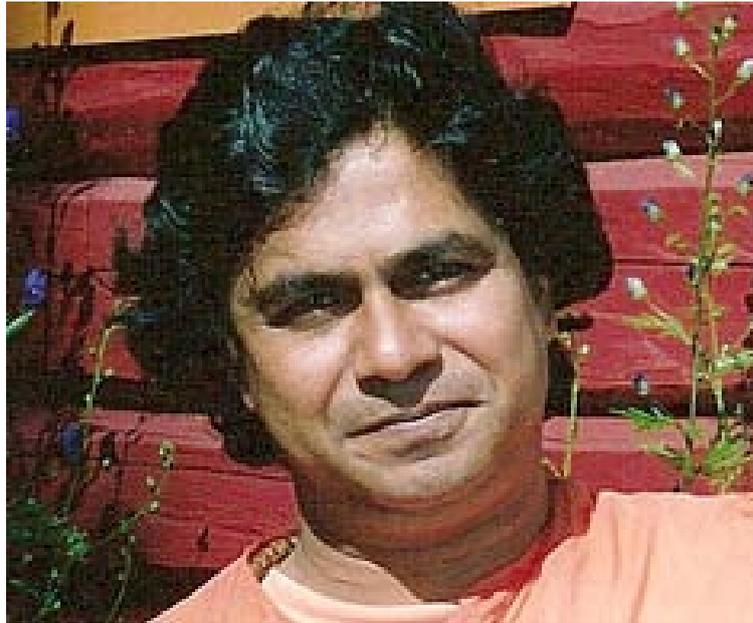




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Swami Paramananda, Shantibu, Norway 1993. Photo: BP.

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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Asgeir's passing away

A horrible tragedy befell us this time in India. At the crack of dawn on December 14th Asgeir fell down from the roof of the office building and broke his neck. He was all alone when it happened and there was no witness. I woke up at the same time from a horrible nightmare to the sound of my own screaming. Immediately I saw that Asgeir was not in the room, and when I looked out I spotted him on the ground just outside. Biplob, who slept in the adjoining room, had been outside to urinate, and rushed to the spot when he heard the sound from the fall, but Asgeir himself had not made any sound. When I saw him on the ground, Biplob was already there and tried to help him up. He could not imagine that anyone could have fallen from the roof, so he just thought that Asgeir had slipped on his crutches and perhaps had fallen down the few steps of the veranda. Asgeir too didn't say at once that he had fallen from the roof. Paramananda was not then in the ashram as he had already left Banagram on November 25th for his ashram in Azim Ganj, Murshidabad District, where he used to celebrate his birthday at Christmas, and where Asgeir and I had planned to join him shortly.

At first nobody realized the gravity of the situation – that Asgeir had broken his neck – we thought that the paralysis of his body was only temporary and that perhaps the nerves in his neck were only pinched, not severed. It was only after two days, when we had managed to get Asgeir into the back seat of a taxi and driven him the long and tortuous way to a hospital in Calcutta, that we got the shocking message from the examining doctor that there was nothing to do – Asgeir had broken his neck and would be paralyzed for the rest of his life! It was really a horrifying message!

Asgeir was admitted to hospital and put in a bed by the side of a window on a ward on the fourth floor. The walls were thick enough and the window big enough that there was just enough space for me to sleep on the window-sill beside Asgeir at night, and thus I could stay with him all the time. The next day Paramananda arrived at the hospital. He had travelled in haste from Azim Ganj as soon as he had received the message about the hospitalization. With a grave face he stood for a long time by the side of Asgeir with his right hand on Asgeir's brow, now and then exchanging a few quiet words. Afterwards Paramananda went to stay with Sobbo in Seoraphulli to await the prognosis of Asgeir's condition. The same morning the doctors had screwed two bolts into Asgeir's skull and arranged a

kind of brace with strings and a weight to keep his neck tightly stretched. And like this he had to lie quite still while very soon the nurses were facing a big challenge in treating his ever developing bedsores. The entire stay in the hospital was more or less a nightmare from day one, with all the faults and shortcomings, horrendous work routines, rigid hierarchy, cynical corruption, etc., that one probably has to expect in an undeveloped country like India, even though it was said to be the very best hospital in Calcutta.

Two days after Paramananda had appeared at the hospital, I went out to see him in Seoraphulli at night, while Biplob took over my role at the hospital looking after Asgeir. Paramananda was very serious all the time and didn't say much. He said to me that we all felt much mental pain now and that we could only pray for Asgeir. However, I knew from Asgeir that he didn't want to live any more – he had been quite clear about that when he confided it to me. Almost four years earlier, Asgeir had lost his leg, in what was a very serious blow to an otherwise very healthy and sane and active 25 year old young man. He had suffered greatly both physically and mentally during those four years, and now, on top of that, faced with the dire prospect of life-long paralysis in all of his body, it became too much for him, and I guess he gave up all hope of living. But for all those around him it was natural to think that as long as there is life, there is hope.

So from the next day Trishan and I worked untiringly in Calcutta to try to arrange for a quick return to Norway. We had a little hope that if only he could get back to Norway to better medical treatment and conditions there, perhaps there might be some better prospects for him. Three days later, after endless difficulties and visits to innumerable private and public offices, all the way up to the chief minister's office, we finally managed to make an agreement with an airline about an ambulance service for Asgeir for the next day. But while we were there in the office, suddenly a call came from the hospital saying that something had happened to Asgeir and that we ought to go to the hospital immediately. We had no idea what had happened – the person on the phone had given no details – so we rushed back to the hospital, very anxious and uncertain about what was awaiting us. When, half running, we reached the sick bed, only Asgeir's dead body was lying there. Asgeir left his body at about 10:30 a.m. on December 23rd 1987. At that moment we had become as if paralyzed and the whole thing seemed unreal.

After that Trishan and I encountered tough days dealing with arranging all the practical matters concerning the re-

patriation of Asgeir's body in a sealed metal coffin by air to Norway. In India there is no automatic procedure from the public authorities concerning these things, and also no kind of service or free benefits. We had to find out for ourselves about everything, and that was far from easy in the rather chaotic city of Calcutta. But eventually we managed to arrange for a post mortem, which is required by law in India at the death of any foreigner and which was an incredible experience in itself,* and we took care of all the other usual requirements for hypothermia, coffin and the like with a Christian undertaker, and arranged the air ticket, embassy notice and everything else required. Asgeir's coffin was brought by air to Norway in the new year and the funeral took place on January 6th 1988. I left on the New Year's night and arrived in Oslo on January 2nd. Trishan, Tripti Ma, Purnananda and Biplob had come with me to Dum-Dum airport in Calcutta for my departure from India and taken leave of me with a heavy heart.

A few days before my departure Trishan brought me to a friend's home at Sodpur outside Calcutta, so that I could get a weekend's rest in between all the rigours. The house had been built by the colonizing English long ago and had a unique architecture. It looked mostly like a small cathedral or church with very high ceilings, and it felt like a very quiet and peaceful place to be. I had very good rest there, and reflecting on all the enormous changes which had taken place in my life for the past few weeks, I wrote a small piece which was later published in "Charaveti":

Thoughts of Intoxication.

The whole world is intoxicated. Creation is a kind of intoxication. When the disturbance of the original equipoise of the *Triguna* starts, intoxication begins. That is why all the people want to get addicted to some kind of intoxication and habit of intoxicating themselves with wine, tobacco, betel-nut, coffee, tea, drugs, food, or any other things. *Jagrata*, *Swapna* and *Sushupti* are all intoxications. *Iswara* is completely intoxicated by His own creation (imagination) and cannot give *Mukti* to anyone. Mother *Kali* drinks the blood of Her slaughtered demons and dances a most ferocious, intoxicated dance on the breast of the sleeping *Shiva*.

All this is mental – and mind, even though it be Universal Mind or Super Mind, means intoxication because the sugar and yeast of name and form have been added to the transparent water of pure mind which in itself is absolutely nothing. So all people are intoxicated by their own minds and it makes no difference whether they be turned to religion or high idealism.

Who wants to be sober? Where is the one who is longing for realization?

Turiya at Shantibu

Back in Norway at Shantibu in Alvdal, life went on as usual with meditation, studies, correspondence, friends visiting, and short trips in the Eastern region of the country. Besides, throughout 1988, there was a lot of activity at Shantibu related to getting everything ready for the coming of Paramananda. Several times friends gathered to lend a hand. Buildings needed repairing, painting and insulating. Rooms needed cleaning and curtains fitting etc. And firewood had to be collected for the winter. At the same time all formalities about his stay – his residence permit for one year – had to be in order. On August 5th I received the first of two letters from Paramananda that year, in which he said that he had already delivered his visa application to the Royal Embassy of Norway in New Delhi, but was awaiting my coming to India so that we could travel together to Norway. A few days later, I received a message via a contact in the Foreign Directorate of Norway. Paramananda's application had been granted. But Paramananda's application had given the date of entry into Norway as June-July 1989 and a granted permission had to be used within six months of the date of issue. Therefore, on August 27th, in my letter of reply to Paramananda I let him know that his permit would be too old for summer next year and that instead he would have to make a new application later. And then I continued:

I shall come to you in India as soon as any opportunity comes, but at present my financial position is on the minus side. Surely I need very much to go there soon and I may stay up to even half a year, but I shall not return back here without you then! Otherwise I will not go: To come back here from India always means to "fall down" it seems. Moreover, I cannot face my friends here once more without you coming along in your physical body. ...

I want to know what is really meant by a 'pure mind', as I feel bewildered on the matter.

After my return from India everything had been going on well in the beginning. I had been a bit worried whether my consciousness would come completely down again like it had always done before, so that I would start to feel too much of sexual consciousness again. And questions arose in my mind: Had that which happened in Banagram only been a "one-off"? Of course I knew that what I had experienced and realized would never go away, but to what extent would I be able to "feel" that with the "usual everyday waking consciousness" – with an outwardly directed awareness and full consciousness of body and mind?

While I was standing by the big soapstone stove in the living room of the old house and reflected on this, my

thoughts brought to mind that memory and took me back to that unforgettable day in Banagram. And all of a sudden I am beyond my mind, and beyond absolutely everything – I am in *turiya* – at Shantibu in Alvdal! For how long I really don't know – that is impossible to say – but it gave me the absolute certainty that I would never again “lose myself” in this life, and that just by the help of memory I would be able to “come to myself” whenever I so wished. Several other things also became perfectly clear to me then. I already knew that I, as a non-Indian, physically speaking, would not be able to go in and out of *samadhi* frequently without severe physical consequences, so that to live that way in the future was out of the question. But most importantly was that immediately after “coming back” from *turiya* I said to myself: “If I cannot feel THAT here, then THAT has no value!” So if I, with my regular waking consciousness in daily life, like everybody else's, cannot “feel” that which I realize in *turiya*, then all of that realization would be worthless!

I wanted to investigate that, so with that hypothesis as a guiding star I decided there and then that I should live like everybody else yet nobody would understand anything about me. I would live and behave as was common, just like everybody else, and take part in everything just like all others. But even though I would live anonymously in that way, I would never “lose” myself or “forget” my true identity, or at any time feel any confusion again about that. All would feel that I am one of them but still they would come to me for help and guidance, exactly because I am one of them and right in their midst at any time, for they would feel the safety from my always identifying with them. That became my decision for my own life from then on, which I decided there and then, and then I thought no more about it.

This happened during the day on *shivaratri* in February. Less than two months later my consciousness came completely down and I started to feel difficulty about sexuality again. I felt that my body had won over my mind, and after fourteen continuous months (that was a new record!) my *brahmacharya* was broken. Why? How could that happen? In my naivety I thought that now, with my foundation of experience, such a situation would be practically impossible – at least that was the impression I had got from reading traditional Indian literature on the subject. But there were many things that I still didn't understand about these things, so I became more and more eager to find out about them.

Earlier – on account of that reading, together with the influences of Christian tradition, with all the traditional prejudices from both sources – I had viewed everything concerning sexuality as an opponent and enemy of spiritual life and development. I had therefore earlier always tried to escape from it, as I experienced it as an unsolvable problem which hindered me and took me away from my goal. But now I was forced to confront it, because this was also truly a part of me.

In India, my mind had always been soaring high, so it was never any cause of worry. But as soon as I came back to Norway the problem had been revived. However, in my intense *sadhana* period at Shantibu the year before, it went on well for nearly a whole year, but periods are just that and do not last forever. So now I felt that I could not any longer endure this “roller coaster” of energy-directions, provoked by my travels between the West and the East and the resulting start and end of periods. Also, every time, I would fall from a greater height. I therefore started to search actively for more alternative and progressive literature on the subject, which could help me. After a while I found two or three books that I felt were good reading and that was helpful to me, and more than ever before I was eager to solve the riddle of my own sexuality. What kind of mad and enormous power was that which could arrest me in this way? I didn't want to escape from it any longer or to try to avoid it – I wanted to meet it face to face!

As usual, throughout the year, I had innumerable dreams about Paramananda, and these only became more and more vivid and intense as time went by. Many of the dreams were about the said problem, and often Paramananda came to me to cheer me up or to inspire me. He would often embrace me, and then immediately I felt that I was transformed physically. On one occasion especially this was felt very strongly. It was the night of Saturday November 12th. Then I felt that my body transformed like in deep meditation, and all my senses were completely indrawn. Suddenly I became fully aware of it as a physical reality in the dream, i.e. my mind changed from the state of dream to the state of “pre-conscious”, as Paramananda used to call it – a kind of intermediate state between dream and waking which occurs in deep meditation. Consequently, my mind had passed from dream to deep meditation by itself, before I woke up to my usual waking state of mind and thereafter, as usual, noted down my nightly experiences.

At the end of the year it was clear that I could go to India again. On November 26th I wrote once more to Paramananda, and this time I could give him the good news that soon I would be on my way to him in Banagram and that I would arrive in Calcutta in January 1989. My Italian friend Alex would send me money for more than half of the cost of the ticket and I reckoned I would be able to collect the rest from family and friends. Further I wrote:

It was very mind-clearing to read your “Thoughts of Baul” about Mother *Kali* and *Parashakti Mahamaya*, Tantric philosophy and tradition, etc., in the last Charaiveti. I was searching the whole summer and autumn for a new conception as I felt kind of deceived by my old one – and that made me feel adverse to almost everything I had believed in before regarding *sadhana*, etc. But now I have more or less lost interest in building any conception or jump readily at any sort of conclu-

sion. I feel I cannot accept anything without first testing it or understanding it. Besides, I feel stripped of everything – my purity, my strength, my wisdom, etc., and I feel very discouraged because every sincere effort proves to be a failure. But somehow I have to collect myself again – my mind has become too much spread – but not by the same methods as I practiced before (it is not acceptable to me any more just to plunge myself into stern meditation and renunciation in the same way as before – it gives no meaning any longer). You asked me always to live in the *ajñachakra*, but you also asked me to ‘feel’. How to combine it? Feeling is like warmth, but the *ajñachakra* is cold as the ice on the North Pole! Am I right or am I wrong? Hope you will enlighten me on the subject.

I received a letter from Paramananda on December 20th which was dated December 6th, but it was evident that it had crossed with my letter to him. He only asked me when I was coming to India. So I answered it quickly, and briefly, to confirm all of my itineraries. And then again it was time to go to India.

”... how the Rishis breathe”

I arrived in Calcutta via Moscow and Bombay in the afternoon of January 19th 1989 and was met by Trishan and Biplob at the airport. When we arrived at the Banagram ashram I was lodged in the same room where Asgeir, Glenn and I had stayed in 1984. Before leaving for India I knew that Paramananda would be in South India at that time, and it felt kind of weird to stay in the ashram without his physical presence. During the well over one month that passed before Paramananda suddenly one afternoon returned from South India, I spent my days much like I had done in Norway, with meditation, letter writing, conversations with friends, and a few short trips to Seoraphulli, Singur and Calcutta. I also met two more of Paramananda's sannyasins for the first time, Swami Chidananda and Swami Satyananda, and then Babu Chatterjee from Azim Ganj, who now stayed in Banagram.

Since I left Banagram ashram the last time, when we left for the hospital in Calcutta with Asgeir, I had again used white clothes. Just before we entered the taxi to Calcutta that time, Trishan approached me with a set of white clothes and asked me to wear them as he thought it more appropriate for me in Calcutta as a foreigner. That was surely right, but I never again dressed in gerrhua after that. For my own part I had found out that I really didn't want any kind of uniform. When my goal was absolute freedom I also wanted to be free from *sannyasa*, which also was a kind of bond. More-

over, it was both unnecessary and impractical for me as a Norwegian. Unnecessary and impractical because the institution of *sannyasa* is very much a part of Hindu tradition and culture, but completely foreign and strange to Norwegian culture. So it was therefore no problem for me to go back to the white dress again, even if many people asked me where the orange dress had gone. In India one doesn't just stop wearing this kind of dress without any cause. But there was also another aspect to it. By wearing the *gerrhua* dress I had felt a new ego rising – the feeling that I was ‘something more than others’, and that feeling was not good. It probably arose because I had put on the dress without going through the three day intense and beautiful ceremony of the age-old *sannyasa* ritual.

By the middle of February I witnessed the *Saraswati Puja* for the first time. It was a very thought-provoking experience. *Saraswati* is the goddess of wisdom in India who presides over all higher learning, and this was the time in the year when she was publicly celebrated and worshipped during a three day long festival. I watched the concluding part of the third day from the roof of the school building of the orphans of the ashram, while the people of Banagram came from the village towards a pond in front of the ashram. They were dancing and singing as they followed a carriage which was being pulled by several men, and on which had been placed a beautifully decorated and painted clay statue of the goddess. In this way she was escorted to the pond into which she was ritually thrown. It felt strange to observe this, and I felt as if transported a thousand years back in time. Because at that time, all over Northern Europe, exactly the same thing happened in the worship of several of the Nordic gods and goddesses – in almost exactly the same manner. “Just think”, I said to myself, “a thousand years of difference between India and Europe!” Furthermore, I thought to myself, here they had personified wisdom, and they emotionally worship and celebrate *Saraswati* shouting her name aloud but she is really not here! She is in the West where education for all, science and research really is placed on the seat of honour and favoured. Whereas here half of the population of the entire sub-continent is illiterate and superstitious. Alas, the inherited conservative love of tradition has made them stand perfectly still!

On Sunday February 26th Paramananda finally returned from South India and already that night we were in his hut together filling in the various application forms that I had brought with me from Norway, and we conversed till late in the night. For the next ten days I spent almost every night with Paramananda in his hut. We talked about our travel plans, about Norway, about social problems in India and about the difficulties I felt in my *sadhana*. As a result of that my sex consciousness disappeared completely and my mind again rose to the lofty spheres and became very meditative.



From the roof of the office building, which by now had gained more floors, looking south. The big, open yard with the banyan tree (right) and the “dispensary” behind. Behind the trees on the horizon is Banagram village. Photo: BP.

At sunset, while in Banagram, it was always my habit to walk in silence by myself in the big field by the old banyan tree. At that time I was almost continually in a deep meditative state, and during the daily strolls in the evening my mind was that much absorbed in meditation that I actually felt difficulty moving. It was particularly difficult talking to others and I used to deliberately steer away from outsiders who wanted to approach me and talk to me. Another thing was that lately I had noticed that by itself my breath had changed its rhythm completely. As I was walking in the field one evening, Paramananda, who also used to take a stroll there at the same time, approached me and started to talk about meditation and breath, and without me saying anything about myself, described most accurately the special rhythm of my breathing. And then he added: “That is how the Rishis breathe.”

On the day of *Shivaratri* my Italian friend Alex came to Banagram for the first time to meet with Paramananda. He was lodged into the same room as I was living in. Four days later Paramananda told me to start an intense meditation in my room from the next day. He told me to sit continually in meditation and only leave my seat for meals and the call of nature. And thus I sat for six days. During those days the annual *Baul Mela* commenced in the Banagram ashram, which I experienced for the first and only time, and which I could only observe very briefly as I was walking to and fro for food or to go to the toilet. It continued for 24 hours from daybreak to daybreak on March 14th and 15th that year and many thousands of people had gathered in the ashram. There was song and music continuously, mainly from the fantastic *baul* singers. The *bauls* or *baul* sannyasins are a group of sannyasins who are only found in Bengal and who are a part of Bengal folklore. They are traditionally regarded as vagrant mystics who spontaneously sing with the most intense fervour devotional songs of a mystic character.



View from the roof of the office building looking north. Unending paddy fields! We spot a cart road leading to a small banyan tree under which Paramananda had his first, small clay hut, and where Saswati stayed during her stay in the ashram in 1983. Photo: BP.

They wear orange coloured garments like other sannyasins, but often mixed with other colours or a variety of patterns, like artists, and often play an *ektara* or a *dotara*, which are the simplest of string instruments. They sing wonderful songs, often very high pitched with powerful voices, and often also spontaneously composed. Such *baul* singers used to be invited to the Paramananda Mission’s annual *Baul Mela*, but several of Paramananda’s disciples also were good *baul* singers and participated in the festival. In addition there were also other types of traditional songs and folk music from Bengal, accompanied by other types of musical instruments. It was a most fantastic and unforgettable experience. But even if the festival was enormously popular among both performers and the public, it eventually grew too big for the ashram, and after a few years more the event had to be discontinued.

On the sixth day of meditation my inner absorption came to an abrupt end when suddenly and without any forewarning I was visited by the bank employee Saini from Faridabad outside Delhi. He had come to attend the *Baul Mela* and was now to return to Delhi. Paramananda therefore urged me to take the opportunity to go with him to Delhi, so that I could stay with him while arranging for our air tickets and Paramananda’s other travel documents for Norway in the coming summer. I was to deliver Paramananda’s passport and application for a one year residence permit in Norway to The Royal Norwegian Embassy in New Delhi. We were to travel from Delhi as Paramananda wanted to avoid the inevitable huge mass of people who would gather at Calcutta airport if he was to depart from there. That also meant that I would have to change my ticket since my return flight had been booked for Calcutta. So I took leave of Paramananda and went with Biplob to Calcutta on March 16th. The next day I met with Saini and Trishan on Howrah Station, and together with Saini I rode the ‘superfast’ Rajdhani Express train to Delhi, which arrived

16½ hours later, about seven and a half hours quicker than an ordinary express train.

I needed nearly a whole month to arrange all these things, for in India they are not easily done and usually take a long time. Almost daily I had to take the local train from Faridabad to Delhi for various urgent errands, but in between there were also some free days for relaxation. During this time I met with a few of Paramananda’s devotees in North India for the first time, like the most sympathetic school teacher Kailash Chandra Tyagi (known simply as “Tyagiji”) and another very friendly man, doctor Sudhir Gaur, both of whom lived with their families in the suburbs of Delhi.

I was also introduced to another man who was single and who was known by the special name of Sri Bhagavan. The man himself was rather special, too, and had – like many other North Indians – the bad habit of unconcernedly farting loudly while eating his meals, which, of course, made people move as far as possible away from him during mealtimes. He was an intellectual who was interested in politics, but he was also a devotee of Paramananda. Once, when he was visiting Saini, and he and I sat in the living room chatting a little he suddenly asked me, with a sleazy smile on his lips, as if he wanted to hear some gossip: “So, what do you think about Robin?” I took it that his slightly disrespectful use of Paramananda’s boyhood name was to give me the impression that he had known Paramananda for a very long time or was very intimate with him, or that he actually placed himself on an equal footing with Paramananda. As I didn’t like his attitude I gave him an appropriate, fully Vedantic answer, but no less honest and spontaneous directly from my heart: **“I feel that he is the perfect expression of my own Self.”** These words completely gobsmacked Sri Bhagavan and he was struck speechless. I took the opportunity to hurry back to my room to sit for meditation as usual.

Saini’s son, Bhupender, and I became good friends during my stay in their home. One day he and two of his friends, Ajay and Sanjay, took me on an impulsive motorcycle ride to Brindaban, which is the home of Krishna worship in India. The evening and night before I had been bedridden with high fever from acute food poisoning after eating half a papaya which had been cut and stored uncovered in the fridge. But the next morning I was again fit for the fray, and even if the many hours’ riding was tiring on the dusty, polluted, sunny and overcrowded, bumpy roads, we were on an enjoyable tour and had fun. When we finally arrived at the noisy temple and ashram town of Brindaban, I had become terribly sunburnt and was as red faced as the god *Brahma*. To me the town looked like a dubious mixture of stock market and cathedral, and I cannot say I felt very well there. That, in addition, I was refused entrance to the main temple due to my Western origin, didn’t exactly remedy the situation. But I didn’t bother too

much because temples and statues had never felt very interesting to me. I saw Sri Krishna’s birthplace and where he grew up, and that was the most important thing to see there. But as one who has never had an urban disposition I found the forest on the other side of the river Jamuna, which runs through there, more attractive. Before we left Brindaban we witnessed the common behaviour of a rhesus makak (monkey) who first terrorized an unsuspecting lady and then straightforwardly robbed her, disappearing up on the temple roof with her handbag, without anyone lifting a finger to help her. And this, I learned, happened all the time, because here there were veritable criminal gangs of these red faced monkeys, and they were allowed to do exactly as they pleased. Because here, apparently, monkeys were more holy than men.

In the evening we lodged in a room in Gobardhan village in neighbouring Mathura, which is also historical in relation to Krishna. The next morning we were greeted by the loud calls of innumerable, wonderful and beautiful, peacocks, which were to be seen everywhere in that village. And then we continued our tour on the two motor bikes to the Keoladeo National Park Bharatpur, which is a big world famous bird sanctuary. It was a wonderfully beautiful and peaceful place with marvellous wild life. But as I had neither binoculars nor a field guide book for bird identification, it was only a short visit in which the overall impressions dominated. After spending about three hours there during the middle of the day, we travelled farther, via the historical town of Fatehpur Sikri, to Agra. There we visited the famous Taj Mahal and Agra Fort. Taj Mahal is, of course, a splendid feast for the eyes – an immense marble beauty – but it has quite an empty atmosphere and in the basement, where the sarcophaguses are placed, it is really horrible. With regard to the history of how the building was made, it appears as a huge paradox.

The same day, April 16th, I went back to Faridabad by train alone, due to my sunburn, while my three companions returned by road on their bikes. Back in Faridabad, Tyagiji took me to his newly constructed house in Brij Bihar in North Delhi. The family had not yet moved in, so I could stay there alone and meditate undisturbed for two weeks, at the end of April and the beginning of May. Those were good days in deep absorption, and later, when Paramananda visited and the Tyagi family had moved in, he said that because of my meditation there a *mahatma* (“great soul”) would be born in that house in the future.

On May 4th I went by slow mail train back to Bengal. Tyagiji’s son, Babloo, came with me to the train station in Old Delhi. There, with terrified wonder, I had watched an express train heading for Hyderabad in South India, that was so overcrowded that not only the roofs were crammed with people, but people were perched even on the shock absorbers and couplings between the coaches!

It was sheer madness! Thirty wakeful hours later I got off the train in Seoraphulli to have a good rest in the house of my good friend Sobbo. My train had been pretty overcrowded too, if not at all to the same extent as the train to Hyderabad. But I had only barely managed to squeeze in between noisy families with crying babies and restless children, and a huge variety of hawkers constantly elbowed their way through the mass, announcing their various goods. In addition there were beggars, shoeshiners, sweepers and others who would compete for your attention. To go by train in second class in India is an experience which you probably will not find anywhere else in the world, and it is a great strain even for those who are accustomed to it. But in the middle of this hot and dusty, noisy chaos, I partly withdrew my senses and spent most of the time in a semi-meditative state. The environment did not at all feel like a problem and I enjoyed the long journey through the Indian landscape.

Through the state of Bihar the heat was extreme, but it was worse still in Bengal with its high humidity. April and May are the two months of summer in India when the heat reaches its climax before the monsoon finally bursts forth in a relieving rain in June or July. I spent two weeks with Sobbo because he had an electric fan on the ceiling, but also because there I had the opportunity to live mostly on fruits, which was by far the most comfortable food to eat in the extreme heat.

I spent only one night in Banagram ashram. It was my intention to stay there longer, but this was long before they got electrical fans there and Banagram became too hot for me. Paramananda was also not there at that time – he was in the ashram at Azim Ganj in Murshidabad district. In agreement with Trishan it was therefore decided that I should go to Paramananda’s ashram in Baniketh in Himachal Pradesh in the Himalayas, where the climate would suit me better. Also it would be in Paramananda’s programme to go there before leaving from Delhi for Norway. Trishan, therefore, went to Calcutta to arrange for the ticket, which in India has to be booked far in advance. In the meantime I was to visit Paramananda in Azim Ganj.

While I stayed with Sobbo, on Norway’s national day itself, May 17th, I received a letter from Norway with the message that Paramananda’s application for a residence permit had been granted. Two days later Babu Chatterjee came from Banagram to Sobbo, and the next day, on the full moon day of *Buddha Purnima*, we went together by train to Azim Ganj. There, Paramananda gave us a hearty welcome to the ashram “Conscious Spiritual Centre”, which was idyllically situated on the outskirts of a small village and had a huge garden of mango and jackfruit trees, with the Bhagirati river, a branch of the Ganges, flowing just beside. Swami Satyananda was in charge of this ashram at that time. Wonderful days with

Paramananda in Azim Ganj followed over the next days with huge amounts of delicious mangoes to eat every day. Summer is the mango season in India, and to the Bengali the mango is the fruit to eat above all others.

Every evening and night I spent much time with Paramananda in his room where he told me many interesting things, among them how the ashram had originated. He told me how as a boy he had come there and seen how the people suffered. They were tribal people who had migrated from Bihar and who were very poor and neglected. Full of compassion for them and their hopeless situation, Paramananda already then had decided to come back one day and build a welfare centre for them. Now the ashram had both orphans and a dispensary with free medical aid and free medicines.

After five days Paramananda, Tapi Ma and I travelled by train to Kalna and on by bus to Banagram. I always used to sit on the roof whenever I went by bus in Bengal, because it was airy and comfortable compared to being packed like sardines inside the overcrowded bus full of dust, heat and sweat. Paramananda also used to sit on the roof of the bus, so he accompanied me. On the way we passed Krishnadebpur village, and Paramananda pointed in the direction of where he had been born and grew up as a little boy.

Safely back in Banagram, I was lodged in a room on the roof of the office building which had gained an extra floor since Asgeir and I had been living there. There it was a bit airy and therefore regarded as more suitable for me in the heat. It really proved to be very airy indeed, because we got a touch of a big cyclone which was wreaking havoc in the Bay of Bengal just then, and Burdwan District, to which we belonged, was just on the fringes of the great storm. So the next day the wind became so strong that I actually had to move down, and Murari (Swami Nishkamananda), who always slept on the veranda of the ground floor, amused himself by making me aware that “what goes up must come down!” But it didn’t last and by the next day I moved up again.

I think it must have been on one of those days that I came from the village alone early one afternoon when, from a good distance, I eyed Paramananda standing outside his hut and beckoning me to come near. There were no other people to be seen, because everyone was resting after lunch in the exhausting midday heat. When I came close he immediately said:

“Bjørn, there is no one here to continue after me, so I think I shall have to extend my life with another life cycle.” (The first time I met Paramananda in 1983 he had already told me that his life cycle in this life was 47 years, so that to extend it meant to add new 47 years to his own life). I immediately answered: **“But will not Vivekananda continue after you?”** (At that time I knew

about three of his nearest disciples who each thought that they had been Vivekananda in their previous life, as they were so close to Paramananda in this life and as Paramananda in general was regarded as having been Sri Ramakrishna in his previous life). **“Yes”, Paramananda replied, “but he is not yet reborn - still I am waiting for him to take birth.”** Neither of us said anything more, and then we each went on.

From that time on gradually people started to pour into the ashram from all directions, to spend some time with Paramananda in the last days before he would go to North

FOOTNOTE *

The morgue in Calcutta, where the autopsy of Asgeir’s body took place, was an almost alien place. Hidden behind tall and thick brick walls was a small building inside a rather big area, where the smoke and ashes after an open cremation was the first thing that met us. So far so good. But close to the building wall, outside, there were huge piles of half rotten, naked bodies of people of all ages, in which the rats had eaten a network of holes through which they were running

India and a little later, on to Norway. I always felt uncomfortable with many people around, and together with the exhausting heat, these were the two factors that made me decide at night to escape to Sobbo as soon as possible. So early next morning, before daybreak, while it was still dark and before anyone had got up, I went my way. Only my good friend Tarun happened to be up, so I asked him to pass on the message to Paramananda about my sudden departure. Interrupted only by a visit to Tripti Ma in Bally, I remained with Sobbo in Seoraphulli for five days until I set out on the long journey to Baniketh in the Himalayas.

about. The stench was indescribable and unbearable. These were the poorest of the poor people who lived and died on the streets of Calcutta, and for whom the authorities did not want to pay for firewood for their proper cremation. Inside the building we waded in ankle high blood and water, and it was just as horrible there as outside. I shall therefore not go into further detail about our experiences there.

GLOSSARY (simplified)

ajña-chakra – the seat of mind; popularly known as the “Third Eye”; the sixth centre of the astral body, corresponding to the pituitary gland in the ‘endocrine orchestra’ of the physical body.
baul – philosophy with man at the centre, physically, emotionally and spiritually; practitioner of the *Baul* philosophy; wandering, mystical truth-seeker and musician/singer in Bengal.
Baul Mela – gathering of *Bauls*.
Brahma – the principle of creation; deity in the trinity *Brahma-Vishnu-Shiva*.
brahmacharya – apprenticeship (period of training), or the first of four stages in a Hindu’s life; self-discipline, especially in relation to sexuality.
Buddha Purnima – the full moon in the month of May, when the Buddha was born, enlightened and died.
dotara – two-stringed, folk musical instrument.
ektara – one-stringed, folk musical instrument, which is often associated with the *Bauls*.
gerruha – Bengali name of the saffron coloured robes used by sannyasins.
guna – ‘constituent’ or ‘quality’ of nature; that characteristic which makes us able to discern and differentiate one thing from another.
Iswara – ‘The Creator’.
jagrata – ‘awake’; one of three states of mind and levels of consciousness which all people experience daily throughout life, in which we are conscious with an active mind. See *swapna*, *sushupti*.
Kali – the goddess *Kali*, a form of *Shakti* who is *Shiva*’s partner in mythology. When they are depicted together *Shiva* is lying on his back, sleeping (static), while *Kali* is dancing on his chest (dynamic). See *Shiva*.
mahatma – ‘great soul’; honorary title of certain, special truth-seekers who stand out from the others.
mukti – final liberation (from samsara – the unending circle of death and rebirth).
Parashakti Mahamaya – “The Supreme Mother” (Tantra), identical to *Parabrahman* (Veda) or “The Supreme God”, and is both *nirguna* (attributeless) and *saguna* (with attributes and manifestation).
Saraswati – the Goddess of Wisdom and *Brahma*’s (the Creator’s) partner, who presides over higher learning, the faculty of speech and oratory. See *Saraswati Puja*.
Saraswati Puja – festival in which the Goddess *Saraswati* is worshipped and celebrated during the full moon in February. See *Saraswati*.
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; the “king of the yogis” and the origin of all yoga (i.e. the first yogi).
shivaratri – ‘*Shiva*’s night’; the new moon of February when *Shiva* is worshipped and celebrated, traditionally accompanied by fasting and meditation, the sannyasa ritual is most usually performed on this date. See *Shiva*.
sushupti – ‘deep, dreamless sleep’; one of three states of mind and levels of consciousness which all people experience daily throughout life, in this one unconscious and the mind is inactive. See *jagrata*, *swapna*.
swapna – ‘dream’; one of three states of mind and levels of consciousness which all people experience daily throughout life, in this one sub-conscious and the mind is active. See *jagrata*, *sushupti*.
turiya – “the fourth state of consciousness”; the transcendental or super-conscious state, beyond the three ordinary states of consciousness – waking, sub-conscious and unconscious; the “Rishi state” or realized.

Continuation follows in the next number next week.