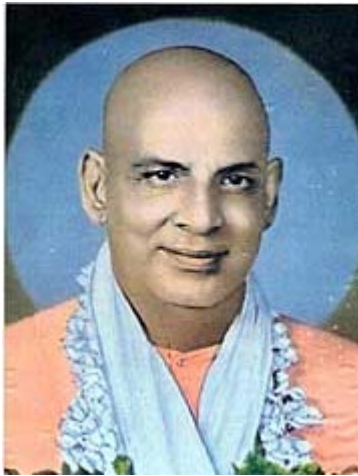


THIS MONK FROM INDIA

By

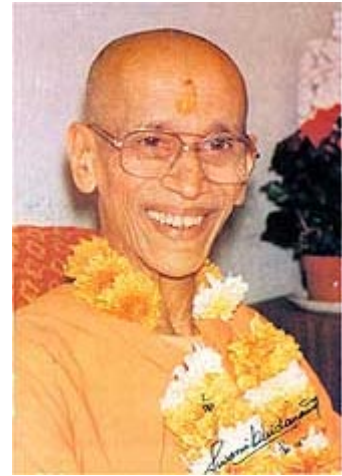
YVONNE LEBEAU



Sri Swami Sivananda
Founder of
The Divine Life Society



SERVE, LOVE, GIVE,
PURIFY, MEDITATE,
REALIZE
So Says
Sri Swami Sivananda



Sri Swami Chidananda

*Chidananda is a Jeevanmukta, a great saint,
an ideal Yogi, a Para Bhakta and a great sage.
Swami Chidananda is all this and much more....*

He was born to fulfil a great mission.

He is the torch-bearer of my mission.

—SWAMI SIVANANDA

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DEDICATED
TO
MY GURU

His Holiness Pujya Sri Swami Chidanandaji Maharaj
and through him
to all the Gurus
who in an unbroken line
for the past many millennia
have transmitted to mankind
the spiritual heritage
of the holy land of India.

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

This book by Yvonne LeBeau, a spiritual seeker from France, is in the nature of a tribute to her Guru or spiritual mentor, Sri Swami Chidanandaji Maharaj. An interesting aspect of the book is the light it throws on the encounter between the occidental mind and oriental philosophy. Another aspect of the book—and an equally significant one—is the insight it gives into the various struggles which every spiritual seeker has to undergo in traversing the path of Yoga or conscious spiritual evolution. It speaks volumes for the magnanimity of the author that she has been motivated by an earnest desire that the message of this book, viz., the message of Yoga-Vedanta, should be broadcast far and wide, especially in the Western world. May God bless her with health, long life and many more years of spiritual service and illumination too!

The present edition is enriched with fresh matter that the writer felt would add to the value of the book. We are grateful to Dr. Anil Suchak who sponsored the publication of this book in memory of his brother, Dr. Ashok Suchak, who was called back to his Heavenly Abode in March last year.

Shivanandanagar,
March 3rd 1989

The Publishers

THE ORIGIN OF THIS EDITION

It is the good fortune of my family and myself that Gurudev Swami Chidanandji Maharaj's blessings have been with us for the last several years. On a number of occasions we have had the proud privilege of serving Swamiji and coming close to him, and also having his discourses and attending his Satsangs. On yet other occasions Swamiji pulled us out of the mire of despair in our personal problems, and showed us light where we could only see darkness.

But sometime back, quite by chance, I happened to lay my hands on a book called *THIS MONK FROM INDIA*, written about Swamiji by a foreign devotee, Mrs. Yvonne LeBeau. After reading the book, I was amazed that everything I had experienced earlier and known about Gurudev was, as it were, re-lived by me in the course of going through the writing of the author. It was indeed a revelation to have an intimate glimpse into Swamiji's life, and it was almost as if Gurudev himself had been talking to me.

Ever since, I have recommended this book to many friends, who have read it and have been similarly drawn to Gurudev afterwards. Subsequently, I tried to obtain copies of the book from the Ashram as well as from devotees etc., but was unable to do so. This gave birth to the thought of publishing another edition of the book and thereby spread the message of Gurudev. Here then is a new edition of the book, which will not only delight those of us who know Gurudev, but will also prove a source of inspiration to countless others who have not had the good fortune of knowing Gurudev and deriving invaluable guidance from his life and thoughts.

Ever longing for the blessings of my GURU.

8th March 1989

—Dr. Anil N. Suchak

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

After coming to Sivananda Ashram and into contact with Pujya Sri Swami Chidanandaji Maharaj, I have received many letters from devotees and friends asking me to put down in writing, for the benefit of all, some of the stories I had told them on different occasions. Some said, "If you can't write, tape record them and we will write them. We have been so inspired by them and everywhere we relate them, people have the same reaction. Those stories must not get lost and forgotten, for they depict Swamiji's saintliness better than words of devotion could ever do. And for Westerners, for people who are new to Yoga, those stories show what a Guru like Chidananda really is. They show how he can protect, teach and guide the disciple who has faith in him, and how faith can work wonders."

“Relate your own experiences too,” they said, “for though we can read such things in books, it is so inspiring to see it happening to one of us, someone we know, one who led a very happy life and who was very much attached to everything, to everyone around her, her husband, her children, even to her country, and her security, and possessed no special qualities whatsoever.”

But as I found myself unable to speak in front of a tape recorder, I started to write in long-hand. At first I was a little apprehensive as I tried to describe the wonders of Swamiji’s saintliness, his awe-inspiring greatness; for, how could something which surpasses human understanding be put into words? Also, how could I speak of a philosophy I knew so little about? Was not my way of Yoga more a way of acceptance and experience first, with knowledge coming slowly afterwards?

But, as I went on with my work, a great joy came over me; for writing about Swamiji meant I was in his invisible presence all day; his grace guiding me, help coming from all sides.

When the book was practically finished, some Indian ladies, great and sincere devotees of Swamiji, told me, “You should not have been so short in the description of how you met Swamiji and of your own experiences. For us Indians, it is the most inspiring part, especially as you are a Westerner.”

So I added a few pages, where I tried to describe the role of Chidananda in my life and the wonders of his guidance, which I was then made to realise anew; and a song of gratitude, a song of joy welled up in my heart. If I had been reluctant to write about my sufferings and trials, I was now made to be happy because I realised that it would bring a message of hope to all the suffering ones. They would know forever, as Charles de Foucault expresses so beautifully, that “the darker the night of suffering, the more radiant the ‘life’ of pure love and joy that emerges from it”.

Now I must say a special thanks to Sri Ananthanarayanan who took the responsibility of editing, planning and supervising the production of the book in all its stages.

I shall never forget the day of the celebrations of Swami Chidananda’s jubilee when he arrived from Delhi only just in time to give me the book so as to present it to Swamiji. He was exhausted after the many troubles he had to get the book printed because of the many strikes in Delhi. And the way he rushed up the hundred steps of the mountain to bow and offer his work at the feet of Sivananda, his beloved guru, moved me deeply. I will never forget the way he had the patience to decipher the pages about my son’s death. I had written them for myself. The mechanics of writing and the profuse tears that I had shed while doing it had seemed to relieve me and keep me alive. But the tears had wet the paper and made it practically impossible to read what I had written.

Ananthanarayanan often had to put the sheets of paper against a light so as to be able to read my words.

The feelings he felt for the book, the intuition he had that I could write and transmit them, and the perseverance with which he infused courage into me to publish the book afterwards is also something rare. So if the book has helped many a seeking soul, it is in great part to him that their hearts should turn to in gratitude.

I would also like to say a very special word of thanks to the Brahmachari who took the trouble to type the few additions people had asked me to write for this new edition. And this in the midst of all occupations, and in spite of the difficulties my very bad handwriting was to be for him. When I proposed to ask someone to help him, but he refused and I was made to understand that he wanted to do it as a labour of love for his Guru.

As I write this last sentence, a thought comes to me that from the start this little book has been coming into life, into the hands of love. First of all, from the people of the different countries in the West who persevered in asking for it, even sending letters to ask Swamiji to make me write it. From Indian people themselves, and somehow always from the most truly and sincerely spiritual ones. I shall never forget the way one day Brigadier Sabherwal stopped a convoy he was leading and came down from his turret to ask me about the book. When I told him I had not started it and did not feel capable of doing it, just the way he climbed up again into his turret without a word broke my heart. Back in my kutir, I started to write and never stopped until it was completed in time for the celebration of Swami Chidananda's Jubilee.

I shall never forget how the Commander-in-Chief, General Raina came with his wife and some of his staff "to meet the French Lady who had written *THIS MONK FROM INDIA*". When Swami Chidananda told me about his visit, I proposed to go and meet him in Delhi so as to save him the trouble of coming to the Ashram with the display of security that it meant. He refused and said "he wanted to honour the woman who had written *THIS MONK FROM INDIA*". I shall never forget my apprehension at the idea this big event that his visit was to be for all the ashrams around here, and how this apprehension vanished when I saw his simplicity, his sincerity, his directness and his humility. I shall never forget his wife either. They were both so alike, and it was such an unforgettable joy for me to meet them both. I was so sorrowful to see them go, and even as I write this my heart goes out to them both, and to God who allowed me to meet such people, people who give one such faith in one's fellowmen, and even expands one's heart into God.

I shall never forget the Indian ladies who came to me in my kutir. They themselves had lost their sons; and they had only recovered their faith in God, their faith in an after-life, after reading the story of my son's death, that they came to tell me their joy. The way they had had to travel, sometimes three days in the most uncomfortable conditions, just to come and thank me is something that ever moves me anew.

Sivananda Ashram,
July, 1988.

SWAMI CHIDANANDA (b. 1916) is the President of the Divine Life Society founded by that illustrious sage of modern times, H.H. Sri Swami Sivananda. Swami Chidananda had his education in the Loyola College, Madras, and this training in a Catholic institution left an indelible impression in his mind of the Christian ideals of compassion and service. Service of the sick is a passion with Swami Chidananda, and his pioneering work in the field of leprosy relief in the Garhwal region has earned for him the praise of both the Government and the general public. Acclaimed by many as a great Saint and Yogi in his own right, Swami Chidananda has been travelling extensively all over the world disseminating the healing message of his Master, Swami Sivananda. A linguist and orator, he is also the author of a number of books on the life spiritual.

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1

THE GURU COMES INTO MY LIFE

All my life, suffering seemed to be my way. I seemed to accept it. What else could I do?

But when my nearest and dearest ones were in agony, I lifted my fist to God and shouted in revolt. This revolt, however, did not last. My arm fell down, and, moved by a mysterious impulse, I fell on my knees and with bowed head said, "Thy will be done, Oh Lord...I want nothing." Then everything started. My breathing, for instance. The movements of my body were not my own any more. Mudras, Asanas and Pranayama came to me spontaneously, automatically. I watched it all in perfect composure. I seemed to forget food and sleep, but my half-paralysed body slowly began to recover movement and strength. My mind did not ask any question, but a holy man spoke to me and said, "Mystical fervour can burn you up. Now you are in touch with God. Ask for health and strength." He was a knowing man, so I obeyed. I knelt down. But even before I could start praying in the manner advised by the holy man, a mysterious soul whisper came to me, "Don't you think I know best? Didn't you say 'Thy will be done'?" I did not talk anymore to anyone. I knew that I knew best and I was at peace. My body had hardly begun to recover movements and strength when Chidananda came. I left everything without a glance backward. I knew nothing about Yoga and he was the first Swami I had ever seen. But I knew that I knew him from beginningless time. After the Satsang, I was the only one who did not ask questions. Swamiji noticed it.

"You have no questions?"

I bowed my head in response. My heart was full. And to the Presence within me I said,

"Crucifixion seems to be my way,
but if this be the quickest way
to Thee, my Lord,
I thank Thee for Thy mercy.
Didn't Jesus show us the way?"

In Lyons, I was staying in the home of M., a great devotee of Swami Sivananda, when one day a Swami, who was also a devotee of Swami Sivananda, asked me, "You are so blissful, so radiant, though you are new to Yoga. How did it all start with you?" I answered, "Oh, I don't know, it just happened." But everyone insisted, "You must try and remember. Tonight at dinner, you must tell us. It would be so inspiring. It would renew our faith."

That afternoon I did a lot of soul-searching, when suddenly I realised that a new kind of joy had come into my life.

When had this begun? Then I remembered, and that night at dinner I told my friends, "I know when everything really began. It was the day when I first revolted against God and lifted my fist and shouted at Him. Then I fell on my knees and I was made to say, 'THY WILL BE DONE, I WANT NOTHING.'" I had hardly finished saying this when the door bell rang insistently. It was

dark then and the gate was a long way off in the garden. M. went to see who was there, and we all looked up as she came back. She was very pale and grave. She held out the “Divine Life Magazine” she had in her hands. Showing me the cover, she said, “Read this.”

But I answered, “I have not got my glasses. You read it, please”.

M. read aloud:

“Thy will be done,
I want nothing—
The key to Yoga:
So says Sivananda.”

I said, “Oh, what a coincidence! This is just what I was saying.”

“There are no coincidences with Sivananda,” said M., “You are new to everything, you don’t know.”

And M. continued, “Then the strange postman, too....When I called him, he ran away. And the postman never rings the bell. He never comes at this hour. Besides, I am just back from India and I have not had the “Divine Life Magazine” for ages.”

It was in the London Centre where I was waiting with some others for Swamiji. The doorbell rang. An Indian lady came into the hall. We all heard her say to our hostess, “Excuse me, I don’t know why I have come. I should have phoned, it was some sudden impulse. I was in the middle of a Hatha Yoga class and I suddenly felt impelled to leave and I found myself coming here.”

She was brought into our room. Just as she was passing in front of me, she stopped. “Oh! I know now why I had to come. It was for you. You want to go to Rishikesh. You will. Do not worry. Sivananda sent me. He acts often in this way. He appears to people in visions or dreams and these people get a strong desire for the life spiritual. The desire grows and gets fulfilled. Sivananda sees to it.”

In the Divine Life Centre in New York, it was going to be meditation time. Swami V. was singing when suddenly my voice spoke out clear and loud, “Are dead people still active?”

A long silence.

Everyone was startled at this interruption at such a holy moment. But Swami V. was clear in his answer. “More than ever,” he said, and resumed his singing.

Again my voice came out, “Can they initiate people?”

Swami V.’s voice was very stern this time. “Yes, through their students.”

“But can they directly?”

“Oh, you have doubts. So you are not....”

“No, I have no doubts, but how could this happen to me?”

“Oh, you are humble! Then you deserve to be initiated.”

“My mind keeps interfering, asking questions.”

“It is the nature the mind.”

I knew Sivananda was my master, this dialogue confirmed it. Why then did I follow Chidananda with such love and devotion? As an answer to my question, this vision came to me.

I had been walking for a while. It was very hot. In the distance I could see mountains and water gleaming. The ground was flat; it was a big plain. There was no road or path. I seemed to be walking across bare fields. As I was walking, I saw two profiles silhouetted against the sky—a tall big man with a shiny bare head and a very thin man. They stood close to each other, as if waiting. As I came up to them, I could distinguish their features. It was Sivananda and Chidananda. I bowed to their feet. They looked down upon me for a while, then turned back and started to walk slowly away, towards the mountains and the water. I followed; then I tried to walk exactly in the footprints they left on the ground. But which footprints should I put my feet into? There were two tracks, and I decided to walk in the middle. But I was not satisfied. I wanted to fit my footsteps exactly into theirs. Just then I looked up and saw the big man slide sideways and disappear into the thin man. Only one man, Chidananda, was left for me to follow—one man’s footprints into which I started to fit mine, very exactly, as I walked on and on behind him.

A realised saint, a friend of Swamiji, had said to me in Amsterdam, “Forget your reincarnations, do not go to India, it will develop the emotional side in you too much. You need the cross of the bishops”. And although I tried to cling to the memory of the Indian lady who had told me in London, “Sivananda appeared to me, he told me you will go to Rishikesh”, some fear was there at the back of my mind. One evening a Swamiji showed us a film of Rishikesh. I could not see because of the tears in my eyes.

Just as Swamiji was going up the stairs, I suddenly ran to him, and without any explanation I blurted out, “I will go to Rishikesh, everybody can go! Why shouldn’t I go?”

Swamiji answered coldly, “Of course, anybody can go to India, but you will go only when you are ready.” And, after a little pause, he asked, “You know Swami Satchidananda? It took him two years of reflection to make sure he could leave Ceylon and go to America, and he is a little bit more evolved than you, don’t you not think?”

The people who were there laughed. “He sure does not look for disciples,” they said.

I realised what a long and terrible struggle lay ahead of me. But Swamiji's promise was enough for me. With that promise I could overcome all obstacles.

When we were in London, Swamiji one day told me, "I think you should go back home for a few days. Someone in your family may have a desire to see you before you leave for America. Up to now we have been travelling in Europe, and a few hours by plane could have brought you back to them. But America is a long way off."

I tried to argue. I said, "But Swamiji, I know they are happy to be without me. They must be feeling free. I was a nuisance to them with my never-ending illness. When they went out golfing or boating, they had remorse because they left me alone. I spoil their pleasure. If they stayed with me, they were frustrated. And so at times I used to go and live alone in a mountain hotel. I pretended to be happier that way. So they are used to being alone, and they are well looked after. I prepared everything with my maid before I left. She writes to me, she is so good."

Swamiji appeared unconvinced, but I insisted. "Besides, they know Yoga is improving my health. I was condemned by the doctors and they never expected such a miracle to happen!"

Swamiji smiled.

"Yes, all that is true. But when you bake a cake, you put a cherry on top of it, the finishing touch to a perfect cake. In Yoga, you must not hurt anyone. If even one member of your family has a desire to see you, you must put his or her mind at rest. They may have heard strange things about Yoga. I am told some Swamis use all sorts of methods to draw devotees, even hypnotism. I do not know, it may be so. The papers speak about it sometimes. Think how worried they might be if they read such things. If they see you for a few days, they will have no doubts about your equilibrium and the general improvement in your health. But do not stay more than three days."

Swamiji was leaving London that very day. We all went to the airport to see him off. In the airport a customs officer came to me, "Are you Mrs. LeBeau?"

I was so surprised. In all that crowd, how could he know me?

"Come with me. A suitcase has been here for sometime. The address is rubbed off."

We never understood how that customs officer came to me. My friends waved off the problem saying, "It is Swamiji's doing"!

In the suitcase was a letter from my daughter. She was begging me to return "just for two or three days, please, so that I can see that you are all right. We hear such strange things about these Swamis and Yoga, and America is so far".

I went to see my people for three days, then I went to America, Canada, wherever Swamiji sent me. My health was all the time improving. I was able to travel alone, book my reservations. I was sustained by a mysterious strength. And all the people back at home who had predicted my quick death when I left started to wonder. Many said I must never have been really ill, that the

doctors must have made some error in their diagnosis, although I had consulted the greatest professors of medicine in all the years my illness lasted.

While I was waiting in the airports, in all the noise and bustle around me, as soon as I sat down my eyes would close by themselves and Pranayama would come to me automatically; a relaxation, a great peace and a certain cessation of the activity of my mind would follow. In the beginning I tried to fight against it because of the fear that I might miss my plane. But soon I surrendered, and confidence came to me for I was always brought out of that peaceful state just at the very moment preceding the loudspeaker announcement of the arrival of my plane. This Pranayama came to me every night, no matter where I might be. I slept very little, sometimes not at all. Very often I did not eat. I was very thin no doubt, but I was getting stronger every day, and when all the young, healthy people who had followed Swamiji for only two or three days were exhausted, I was often the one to help them. My Mantra repetition was always going on, mentally, as a background. I did not know how my Mantra had come to me, but I never questioned. The Mantra was for me a living presence which gave me joy, peace and strength. But nearly two years later, when I was living in the Ashram, I learnt about “Diksha” (Mantra-initiation) and I suddenly wondered if this Mantra was really mine. I went to Swamiji and told him about my doubts. Swamiji said, “Your Mantra came to you because of your Samskaras, your previous births.”

And a few hours later in the morning Darshan in the Bhajan Hall, he sang my Mantra again and again until every cell of my being seemed to be vibrating with joy. It was as if His voice was calling me, calling us all to the realm of bliss eternal in which He lives, and my heart was full of wonder and gratitude.

Every day my health improved and I was able to walk a little more. I was able even to carry my suitcases. In fact, sometimes I even forgot to put them down while waiting.

Swamiji, always watchful, told me once, “Why waste energy? Put your luggage down.”

But in my foolishness, wanting to show Swamiji how strong I was, with the fear that he might not allow me to follow him any more if he thought I was tired, I answered, “Oh, I am not tired.”

But Swamiji’s stern and quick admonition, “Obedience is better than devotion,” made me obey quickly.

I remember the following incident, among many others. Swamiji had told me to be in New York for Easter. During the eight-hour-flight to America on Easter morning, there were very few seats occupied, so all the passengers were able to put the back of their seats down and rest. As I was lying under my blanket, automatic Pranayama came to me and helped me to overcome a serious trouble and a severe pain, and I arrived in New York cured and full of energy. I seemed never to do anything with my own strength even if I was travelling alone.

Once in the plane going to Germany, I chose the middle seat in a row of three empty seats, leaving one vacant seat on either side of me. Beautiful music was being played. My eyes closed and I saw Chidananda and Sivananda sitting on either side of me. The hostess came, touched me on the

shoulder and asked, “Are these two seats occupied?” pointing to the empty seats near me. I looked at her with surprise and said, “Yes, of course. Can’t you see!”

She looked at me for a while and went slowly away, puzzled. When we arrived at Koln, I had an unmistakable feeling that I was under special observation.

As I stepped out in the snow and frost of the severe German winter, I wondered where I should go. I remembered how in Paris they told me that Swamiji was not in Koln; they had phoned to confirm it. They said he might be back in India already. Everyone had tried to dissuade me from going, for they knew I was so ill and so terribly weak. But imagine my joy when I saw Swamiji’s secretary waiting for me with a friend! I was so surprised.

He told me, “Swamiji arrived just a few minutes ago.” He gave me Swamiji’s phone number.

The next morning I went to telephone. I lifted the receiver, but before I could dial Swamiji’s number I heard a voice saying, “Hello, Chidananda speaking, come and have breakfast.”

No more words were spoken. But after a few weeks, when Swamiji asked me, “You have nothing to tell me?” I just answered, “I feel you know everything.”

Everything seemed so predestined. My faith in Chidananda was total, absolute. Yet, after a few months I started to examine him, day after day, every instant, searching, ceaselessly searching for a flaw. Then one day I started to blame myself for what seemed to me an excess of criticism. All my life I had been like this, searching for perfection, never fully satisfied. I could not reconcile my total surrender with this attitude of mine. One day, just as I was thinking about all this, Swamiji called for me. I went. Just then, Mike, a young Australian boy, came to see Swamiji. It was his first interview. He was twenty and had the face of a child and a very tall and big body. He walked up to Swamiji, planted himself in front of him and said, “I want you to be my Guru.”

Swamiji smiled, put up his hand. “Wait, wait. No. When you want to marry a girl, you don’t just throw her over your shoulder and walk away. You court her, you get to know her, she gets to know you, then you make a decision. She also has to make the decision whether to accept you or to refuse you. It is the same with the Guru. You have seen me for the past month or so, you feel attracted to me, you feel elevated, happy, that is good. But you must wait, and after a good, thorough study of me, then you will decide.”

And I was made to wonder. I remembered someone telling me, “He is the only one I know who does not look for disciples.” Others said, “Swamiji says he is not a Guru. And when he gives an initiation, he says, ‘I do it in the name of my Master. Now Sivananda is your Master’”.

That very evening Swamiji gave a most beautiful lecture on Faith: “Faith should be unconditional, but it should not be blind. The ideal faith must have discrimination at the back of it. Only such a faith can stand all tests”.

Ma Ananda Mayee Ma has been heard to say: “The One, assuming himself the shape of the Guru of his own accord brings about his manifestation or becomes manifested...”

I remembered this one day when I related something which had happened to me to Swami Abhishiktananda (Dom le Saux). I told him how one night I woke up to see a horrible monster with evil eyes, long teeth and hands like claws stretching their long pointed nails to at my chest. But before I had time to be frightened Chidananda had appeared and the monster vanished.

Swami Abhishiktananda said, “It is God himself who came to save you, and if you ask Swami Chidananda about it, you will see that he is not even aware of what has happened to you. God often acts in this way to those who love and who have surrender to Him. God, being invisible, takes the shape of the Guru to come and help them but also to test them.”

As I write this I remember a test God sent me, a test I shall never forget. (The editors wish to note the purely spiritual nature of this vision.)

I was lying on my bed, my eyes closed, when I heard a knock at the door. Without opening my eyes I said “come in.” Though the door was locked and barred, Chidananda came in. I “saw” him walk softly and silently toward my bed. I did not turn my head, I did not open my eyes. I just lay there, feeling the peace of his wondrous presence. Everything seemed to be silence, time seemed to stand still. An indescribable joy filled my heart. I had found the love I had always dreamt of, the most unearthly love, the love beyond the realm of this earth-plane, the peace beyond words. But suddenly, though I did not move, I “saw” myself getting up and softly turning towards him, and made him understand that he must leave. He walked toward the door and I followed him step by step. I opened the door and he went out. I closed the door quickly, putting my back to it as I stood there shaking. I wanted to call him back...I was giving up the love I had searched for all my life. My heart was breaking.

I heard his footsteps getting fainter and fainter, each one pressing on my heart. He went into the street. There was still time to run to the window and call him back, but I stood there in my terrible loneliness. I do not know how long my agony lasted when suddenly a great joy burst upon me. Although all this was mental, my joy was as real as my sorrow had been.

I washed quickly and hired a taxi. The sun was just rising, red over the white snow. The salutations to the sun that came automatically to me every morning came to me, but mentally, in the taxi. The taxi driver had told me that no flower shops were open at that hour, but I saw a man carrying two large buckets filled with spring flowers. I bought them all. The water and the earth were dirtying my clothes, but I did not care. I was celebrating! I knew something most wonderful had happened to me, but I did not know what it could be until Swamiji spoke to me a few minutes later.

When I told him, he said, “Indeed this is most wonderful.” And showing the sleeve of his orange robe, he added, “This is Maya, illusion. This body is Maya, but people do not seem to know it. This is the greatest trouble we have, we Swamis. People get attached to us and they start to think of reincarnations...So many imaginations come into their minds...It is the greatest hindrance on the spiritual path. You are indeed fortunate.”

And that day at Satsang, as I was sitting in the front row, I was suddenly blinded by a wondrous light. Swamiji was not there any more; he was that blinding light, made of intensely brilliant little moving particles of light. I closed my eyes tightly. I put my hands over them. I thought I had gone blind, that my eyes had been burnt. Swamiji's secretary who was near me asked, "What is the matter, Mother?"

"I am blind!" I said. But at the same time, I opened my eyes unwillingly, and once again I saw Swamiji in his orange robe. Swamiji's secretary smiled and said, "Swamiji has great powers, Mother."

It was all so astounding, but I did not ask questions. There was never time for questions. Things were happening so quickly. But when I opened at random the book Swamiji had given me that day, I read, "I withhold my light from thee, lest I should burn thee"!

In the many countries we visited, I attended the night lectures, the meditations and the Satsangs. My heart was full. But after six months, my husband wrote. When I showed his letter to Swamiji, Swamiji said, "You must go home. You can serve God in your family also. You must tell your husband, your son, your daughter, 'I have come back to serve you if you want me to'. Even if one of them says 'Yes', you must stay."

I was peaceful. I was so sure God would help me. But, in Val Morin airport, when Swamiji was leaving, he called for me and said, "I have been thinking that you must stay with your family for good." I advanced towards him with clenched fists. He took one step back, but I walked on, and looking fiercely into his eyes I said, "Nothing will stop me from going into Yoga. Not even you. I will go without you if it has to be."

I was so close to Swamiji. He looked like an innocent, surprised child. I walked away, when, suddenly turning back and rudely pointing to him over my shoulder, I said to all who were there, silent and shocked, "Then he is not God. I thought he was, but if he was, he would know that God has told me, 'you must be ready to leave your father and mother, your husband, your children, your brothers, your sisters; you must not think even of your own life. The one who cannot carry his cross and who does not walk by My side, cannot be My disciple. The one who cannot leave all he possesses cannot be My disciple.'"

I went down the stairs, and as I thought then, out of Swamiji's life. But in the airport itself, a shop was opening. All things Swamiji could eat were there on a tray in the shop window. I thought, "What will he eat on his journey? Has he had time even to have his breakfast this morning?" I bought the whole tray of goods and went up the stairs, all smiles. It was only when I saw the people of Swamiji's party that I remembered my behaviour.

I gave my armful of goods to a newcomer who agreed to hand them over to Swamiji. "Don't say it comes from me," I said. I watched him as he gave the tray to Swamiji. I stayed. I was happy and peaceful. Swamiji's plane was very late. We had a long Satsang. Then as I passed in front of Swamiji, someone told me, "It was a test, Mother! You will come to India. You showed strong determination. Swamiji is happy." Swamiji himself gave me a *Mars* chocolate bar and said, "With strong determination, even going to Mars might be possible."

With all that, I went back home, possibly pushed by Swamiji's sankalpa. But when I reached there, I felt terrified. It took me a few days to say, "I have come back to serve you if you want me to." But with one voice they said, "No, we don't want you. You are so changed. Only your body is here, your mind is in Yoga. We are nothing to you, you have become so impersonal, you seem so detached."

My son said, "For years, every night before I went to sleep I was frightened, because I thought you would leave us and go into a convent one day. That was why I used to get up and come to you in the night. You used to laugh at me. You said it was the last thing you would do, but I knew. Now I am used to this idea. It is your way. We cannot do anything about it, and if you are happy, I am happy".

I stayed for one year three months. Their desire to see me go increased every day. They said they preferred a clear-cut situation and an end to their suffering. If I relate all this, it is to show the wisdom of Swamiji. It brought me such peace to know I had done all in my power to serve my people and they had begged me to go. I was so reluctant to obey Swamiji, but he made me do it. I bowed to him in gratitude and wonder. So, that is how I left my family for good and joined Swamiji and his Ashram.

Soon after, one day, as we were all waiting outside the Bhajan Hall of Sivananda Ashram for Swamiji's morning Darshan, someone asked me, "How did it all start with you? You look so blissful!"

I answered, "Oh, I don't know, it just happened."

"Please tell us how."

"I don't know. Perhaps my suffering—it is said suffering is a blessing."

"Oh, that is not so easy. I have suffered too, and yet..."

I reflected for a while, then I exploded joyfully, "Oh, I know. Surrender is the thing, just surrender. It is so simple, and yet it is like a secret. It is very easy really."

Swamiji was seen in the distance. We all went into the Bhajan Hall. After the usual prayer, Swamiji opened his eyes and said, "Surrender, surrender, surrender...".

Everyone turned and looked at me.

"Very easy" went on Swamiji. "Once it is done. Yes. But it is the culminating point. What hasn't one to go through before one comes to it!"

Once more I wondered. The Guru knows all about his disciple. But a thought came into my mind. If surrender is the culminating point, where does self-effort stand then?

Swamiji said, “Self-effort is made in order to know that no self-effort is necessary.” Again, “Self-effort is made in order to know by our own effort we cannot attain God. We come to know that God’s grace alone can save us. We become like the kitten chasing its own tail and cry to God in all meekness.”

“The Guru comes when the pupil is ready.” That is how Swami Chidananda answered the questions of a visitor about me. Pointing his finger to a sculpture of his Master Sivananda, and then to the sky, Chidananda exclaimed, “He and He sent me to fetch her, because she was ready.”

To a further question, he answered, “She is staying here because she wants to, and because it is the Will of God.”

“She is mad?”

“Yes, she is mad. Some are mad for women, some for money, some for alcohol. She is mad for God. There was a great saint called Ramakrishna. People said about him also that he was mad. He was also mad for God.”

When I look back on the events of these past few years, I am filled with awe and wonder. I see the love of God in His works, the perfection of His plan—and the Law of Karma becomes so real for me. My faith grows every day, my faith in my Guru who came as the messenger of God in my life; everything pointing to the perfection of his realisation, his eternal wisdom.

For him there is no past or future, it is all present. He has the same power as that of God. Only such a one could have come at the right moment and known how to protect me, strengthen me, so as to meet the terrible events that were to come, giving me back my physical strength, and what is much more, helping me to get detached to be better able to help and to serve my own people. But how could they really understand this at the time of their suffering? I did not understand it myself, but I let my Guru guide me and that was all that was needed.

2

DEATH UNFOLDS ITS MYSTERIES

One evening, in Sivananda’s kutir, as I was leaving, I suddenly turned back and said, looking at Sivananda’s photo, “Oh Lord, why do you wait so long? I have given up everything, I want nothing but You. Kill me, crush me. Take everything from me, but let me see You. Even my children are nothing to me now. Even that wonderful son that you gave me.”

My son died at that very moment, back in France. (In reality my son has passed away it the very time I had said to God, “Take everything away from me, even that wonderful son that you gave me.....

DEATH UNFOLDS ITS MYSTERIES

When I received the news of his death. With the fear that my intense prayer had been answered, I sent a telegram to his father. "Please tell me the exact time of Christian's death".

The answer had devastated me when I remembered the difference in time between the East and the West, and I was crest fallen. Christian had passed away at the very time I had said my prayer.)

I was sitting in the Satsang in the open air, when, suddenly I found myself back in France, in my daughter's flat. The street lights were lighting up her bedroom, and I could see her lying on her bed, her little boy in his cot nearby. As I looked at her, a prayer came to me with a terrible intensity, "O God! She will soon wake up..., she will hear the terrible news of her brother's death....give me her suffering...she won't stand it...she is all alone, I left her..."

But suddenly everything seemed to be silent within me, the silence of terrible solitude. What's that secret presence within me? Was the life of my life leaving me? I fell on my knees, "O God! forgive me. Who can know better than I that suffering is your blessing? Don't let me steal it away from her."

A little while later my daughter wrote to me: "I woke up at two...I felt your presence...How strange that, now that you are away, you seemed to be closer to me."

And further on she wrote: "After Christian's death somehow I could not suffer. I was like a witness to everything...people were shocked...they thought I was heartless...suffering came to me later on in small doses...just what I could stand perhaps."

When I tried to tell Swamiji that my son was dead, my voice failed me, tears rolled down my face. Swamiji took the telegram which was still in my hands, unfolded it. Suddenly, as he read the word 'accident', I felt a sharp pain go through him. His body quivered. My tears stopped. I suddenly wanted to cry out, "Let me suffer it all...Oh! I should not have come...Do not be so hurt ...Forgive me." But I only said, "I am not a worthy disciple...I still have attachment...After all your teachings, after all the pains you took with me...I am crying."

But Swamiji remarked, "We are human. Even Rama cried when Sita died."

I started to speak. I described the accident in detail.

Swamiji said, "How do you know all this? The telegram says merely, 'accident.'"

I did not answer, but I knew...had I not seen...?

Again I could only wonder how God in His infinite mercy granted me my wish both ways?

Had not my daughter had the blessing that suffering can be, but no more than she could stand?

The next day I went to T.M., who was our teacher in the early seventies. I told him what had happened to me. I was worrying because God had told me never to use the Siddhis. He smiled, but I insisted. Then he said, “What does Chidananda himself say when people seem to reproach him for his lack of Siddhis? Doesn’t he say ‘May God work miracles according to his choosing through this body we call Chidananda’”?

Swami T.M., always smiling, said, “Well, it is the very way it has happened to you, spontaneously, according to His Will. Can’t you see it?”

People were waiting. Several times a Brahmachari came in with Swamiji’s food. Swamiji waved him away each time. I kept on talking about my son. He was only nineteen. He was so spiritual. He had written, “I am coming. I understand now. I have no more anger against you because you broke up our home. My love for you was selfish, I am detached at last, I will be your spiritual son.”

“O Swamiji,” I cried, “he was so sweet. I would not even raise my voice at him. His name was Christian, but when he was small, people called him ‘Little Jesus’ spontaneously, everywhere.” I went on endlessly. “He was handsome. He was brilliant in all the sports, in his studies, without any effort. His brilliance, his fearlessness and his car driving won him the admiration of all his friends. Yet he was so humble. At home the servants loved him. He always helped them. He went and washed the dishes, made the beds, cleaned the house and prepared food for a woman whose husband had been amputated. She was in a very depressed condition, and this for months. I did not even know it at that time. Christian was always ready to serve others. He had such understanding. He was my Guru.

“At the age of six he saw the agony of calves being driven to the slaughterhouse. They were mooing pitifully. He asked me, ‘Where are they being driven? Why do they cry?’ ‘To the slaughter-house to be killed,’ I answered calmly. “His voice shook. ‘Oh, but why?’ ‘To become meat for us to eat.’

“Christian was horrified. His face became pale. ‘Oh, mother that meat you give me to eat comes from animals? Oh...mother, mother, how could you?’

“He put his head out of the window of the car and vomited. That was how he became a vegetarian in his young days.

“He would not let me kill even a fly. He would say, ‘She is my little cousin’. He loved animals and the animals loved him. They gathered around him, so many different animals in perfect friendship.”

When at last I managed to leave Swamiji, he went to the Ganges bank and prayed. He was leaving the station that night, but with all that, he called me again at seven o’clock. He found time. I had already changed a little. My gratitude, my love for Swamiji was so great. His compassion, his sympathy were my support, and of course, his wonders were there. Otherwise, how could I have borne my terrible suffering? I would not have been able to live on if this had happened to me in my home, for no mother and son were ever so close. There was telepathy between us.

Sometime after my son's death a memory came to haunt me. It was becoming an obsession. I could think of nothing else and again I went to Swamiji to call for help. I told him my story.

My son was about three or four years old at the time and he was to be operated for tonsillitis.

I had gone to my doctor friends enquiring about the best, the kindest surgeon, for the operation was to be without anaesthesia. I was told how they occupied the child's mind; how they blew balloons, played with the toys, etc. I explained the whole thing to my son and he seemed peaceful. In the car going to the clinic he even played with the new little cars I had brought him. I felt secure. I had done my best.

But everything was to be very different from what I had told my son. The surgeon seemed to be nervous, in a hurry. He took us to a back room, not the lovely children's operation theatre I had seen. He tied Christian brutally to the table without a word, his eyes and face very hard. The speculum was hardly put into Christian's mouth before the operation started. I don't know how Christian managed to lift his head and look at me for his shoulders were tied to the table. He looked at me. Then my voice broke.

"Oh Swamiji! His look was telling me 'Thou hast forsaken me' as Christ had said to his Father as he was on the cross. You see I was everything for him, Swamiji. Now I see that look everywhere. When I came into Christian's room to give him the usual ice cubes to deaden the pain in his throat, he turned his face to the wall and would not look at me."

But I had hardly finished speaking when Swamiji's voice broke out, terribly hard, stern, cold, angry. "But how could you do such a thing? How could you!"

Even now, as I write this, I cannot remember the other words he uttered, but his meaning was clear. He was horrified, he did not even want to look at me. He was throwing me out! I had stopped crying. I was like a dead person. My mind seemed to have stopped.

I stood up and slowly went down the steps. Like an automaton I walked back to my kutir. As I closed the door I saw the small altar I had made. Swamiji's photo was there, and as I looked at it, I came to life and in a fit of revolt I took the photo in my hands and turned its face to the wall.

With a terrible violence I said, "I never want to see your face again, Never, you understand!"

I dropped down on the floor; I sat down. A few minutes passed. Then I suddenly said hesitatingly, "Perhaps it is because I don't understand...all right...but until I understand I won't want to look at your face!"

I was still sitting on the floor and peace was slowly coming. I did Japa day and night and peace came to me, though slowly. Then one day I received a letter, a most crucifying letter: "Your son was our idol...we can never be the same for having known him". Another letter said, "He was light that will never go out." It described how a crowd of young people, of all classes of society, went to cut and take the pieces out of his car as souvenirs. Some wrote on them, some made crosses out of them. Then came a most moving telegram from his father: "My only friend, our son,

Christian whom you adored is no more. Please pray for him. I feel your prayers will be listened to...no mother and son were ever so close.”

My voice shook when I read the telegram to Swamiji. Yet I found myself saying, “I am very happy.” I listened to my own words with surprise, but I realised I was smiling and that it was true. I was happy. “Thy will be done” had never ceased to be my prayer, but now I was nearer to an understanding of the real meaning of it. Every adversity, every pain, moulds you little by little into the image of God. If we hold all things as happening for our good, we are happy. If we think that certain things are not for our good, we suffer. So it is merely an attitude of the mind. Mind makes a hell of heaven and a heaven of hell.

But how would I feel about all this if it was not for my Guru’s grace? In what way can I express my gratitude to him? His power, his mercy, his forgiveness and his unbounded love for all. If I think of his qualities, I go into ecstasy.

The first night after my son’s death, as I lay sleepless in the dark, I said: “Oh Lord, when in Sivananda’s kutir I told You, ‘Why do You wait so long, O God? Kill me, crush me, but let me see You. I have given up everything, even my children are nothing to me, not even that wonderful son that You gave me.’ When I said that, I was very presumptuous. But, O Lord, now that I really know what suffering is like in its most terrible acuity, I would still say it a hundred times. I would say it even if I had a hundred sons like Christian. No price is too big to pay to know you.”

Before this I had often spoken to God, offering sacrifice; but there was always another part of me clinging with fear and trying to argue, ‘stop, you will suffer, you fool’. But this time, no fear was in me. I was one. The other part of me was silent.

A little while later, I thought of all the mothers who had suffered the loss of children. I remembered my mother-in-law first. A prayer came to me, “O Lord, let me live her suffering. I had no real compassion. O forgive me, now I know I was hard-hearted.”

I remembered my son saying to me once, “Mother, you are not normal.” I begged him to explain. He could not find words. I insisted. “Well, you have too much of everything, too much of love, too much of compassion, for instance.”

How mistaken he was! Now I know how small my heart really was.

I said, “Oh Lord, let me live the suffering of all the mothers for whom I had no real compassion, so that the tears of my suffering may wash away the hardness of my heart.”

I remembered my mother-in-law. I became her. Her son (my husband’s brother) was sitting at the table with her and his father. He said to her suddenly, “Mother, if you do not let me marry Miriam, I will kill myself.” His mother looked up, and firmly said, “No, never.”

Henry got up, went around the table and threw himself out of the window. She never recovered. Only death liberated her. I went through all the sufferings that she underwent until death came to her rescue. I went through every detail of it. I do not know how long my agony lasted.

When I came out of it all, another memory came back to me. Andree, a friend of mine, had a little three-month old girl. One day, when she put the child to bed, she heard her crying loudly. But the child was capricious and spoilt, and Andree had been told to be firm with the child and not to give in to its whims and fancies. Nevertheless, my friend went in to see if every thing was all right. She came back satisfied. The child again screamed. The cries then became fainter. Andree thought the child had gone to sleep at last. But when she went to wake her up for the next meal, the baby was dead. I heard afterwards that she had slowly been burnt by the electric blanket, but I never really knew and I did not dare to ask. Andree became mad. She went into the street hugging the dead baby in her arms, singing a lullaby.

Other memories crowded in. I loved them all relentlessly. Then, hours after, I said, "Lord, I have not suffered all. All these sufferings were not real sufferings because I lived them with my faith in you. My faith is deep-rooted that I forget its presence, for it has become as material as my breathing. I want to live again the suffering of my mother-in-law; she had no faith to sustain her."

God granted my wish again. But this time it was so dark and everything in me went blank, life seemed to stop. I do not know what would have happened if Chidananda had not come and taken me by the hand. Now, even as I write this, a memory comes to me.

It was during the war. The battle was over, and as I was leaving the tent where the wounded lay, I heard a woman's cry; her son was dead. My heart cried out and I went and sat with her. The moonlight was bright and I could see the cornflowers, the daisies and the poppies in the cornfield. But their sight brought me no relief. I was made to wonder about the Will of God, about this cruel war, about all the women who were crying over the death of their sons, about all the widows who were now alone, about all the children who were made orphans. And I said to myself, "That cry is only one of all the cries on this earth. The whole earth is but one cry." My heart was heavy within my breast and late into the night I cried. But now I know that that mother's cry was a great illusion, for in the light of the new knowledge I have gained from Swami Chidananda, I know that death does not end life. It is only a prelude to another birth, like darkness preceding dawn. And, the darker is the night of suffering, the brighter is the light of dawn.

I picked up Sivananda's "Bliss Divine". I opened the chapter on 'Death' and started reading: "Death does not end your personality. It merely opens the door to higher form of life. Death is only the gateway to a fuller life".

But I could not be consoled. I had a terrible feeling that my son was calling me, that he was in agony, and I went round, enquiring about what happened to a person after death. A Swami told me, "When transition is sudden, the astral body has no time to detach itself properly from the flesh body, so the person does not know he is dead and he still has the wants of the body. He tries to communicate with his dear ones, but no one sees or hears him."

I read in Swami Sivananda's "What Becomes of the Soul After Death" -When the departed souls are sinking peacefully and when they are ready to have a glorious awakening in heaven, they are aroused into a vivid remembrance of the mundane life by the weeping and wailing of their friends and relatives. The thoughts of mourning people produce similar vibrations in their minds and bring about acute pain and discomfort. And the uncontrolled grief of their relatives drags them

down from their astral planes. This may seriously retard them on their way to the heaven-world. This produces serious injury in them.”

So I did Japa day and night and it worked wonders. I had even acquired some control over my thoughts. And then one day, my son had been dead for quite some time and as I was resting on my bed during the hot hours of the day, suddenly I felt something uncanny, but no fear was in me. I saw someone, his hand shading his eyes, trying to look through the screen-door behind me. My bed was in the corner of the small room; my eyes were closed, my back was turned to the screen-door which was shut, and yet I saw. It was my son. When he saw me, he leaned back against the wall as though with a sigh of relief. His body crumpled down against it as if he was exhausted. There was such heartbreaking despair in that movement that my heart cried out. I should have got up and asked him to come in in the strange way I was communicating with him, spontaneously, without words. But, full of the idea that I must not keep him near this earth-plane, I said, “Oh! Christian, you do not belong here any more. You must go where you belong now. Forget this world where you suffered so much. Go to your real abode where you will be happy. Forget me.”

I saw his body sink lower. I felt his terrible suffering. I felt it in my flesh, and I was there shaking in my anguish when suddenly I thought of the Ganges, the Ganges which had once given me such a wonderful experience of the oneness of life, the Ganges which always brings me such peace. And I said, “Christian, go to Mother Ganges, she may help you. She may tell you what you should do.”

As I watched him go slowly away, his whole body expressing a terrible despair, I sobbed, putting my fists in my mouth. I wanted to call him back. I wanted to take him in my arms, to give him some solace. But would he have the strength to go, to leave me?

When I went down to the Ganges Ghat at six o'clock to do Japa at that auspicious and most powerful hour for the peace of my son's departed soul, as I had been doing every day, he was there looking so forlorn, sitting on the step I always sat on, and people seemed to be walking through him! I sat near him and prayed until dusk came. But a little while after, when I was back in my room, I saw he had come back and was again leaning against the wall of the verandah. I thought “O God, perhaps in my subconscious there is still some selfish attachment which I cannot see and which is keeping him here.” So I did not dare to ask him to come in and I lay there suffering his suffering. I was his last hope. He had searched and searched for me to get some relief, some solace, some help. We were both in agony. Then one day I told him to come in. I still did not dare to ask him to sit down. There I was lying on my bed, and he standing, leaning against my cupboard, always looking so tired. But as the days passed, I relaxed my vigilance; and one night I said, “Why don't you sit down, Christian?” He sat on the floor facing me, and we ‘talked’ endlessly every night. I was relaxing, so was he, and peace was coming slowly to us. Then one night, I made room for him in my bed and I asked him to lie down near me. I felt I was nursing him again and there was such an unearthly love between us, such an unearthly peace. I was giving life to him again, and this filled me with a peace that I felt I was expanding endlessly. Then he faded away. I did not even notice when he left me and even now, if I try, I cannot remember.

Christian's last wish had been to come to India, and to know about Yoga, about God. He had written to me: “I must come and see you. I am detached at last. I will be your spiritual son. I feel the

futility of all things on earth, even my studies become insipid to me, medicine is so limited. I am more and more attracted by all eastern philosophies, the real meaning of life is there...Life is short. I know I am only nineteen, but I feel that I should not waste a minute. Sitting on my chair, studying for hours as I do, I may develop my memory, I may become a great professor of medicine, I know I can. I know the medical profession is still one of the best, and to use it enables one to serve and help others. If I still have some heart in it, it is only because Chidananda's parting words to me were 'Be a good doctor, Christian' when he gave me the Prayer of Francis of Assisi.

"Also, did you not tell me once when you were at home that even to become a great professor of medicine was not sufficient, that the real values of life were not there? And, mother, the feeling that I must not waste time increases every day. Somehow I know....But perhaps it is only a feeling"

But I had written in reply, "Do not come now. Finish your studies first."

Time had passed since Christian had left me, and I was doing my Japa regularly with joy, the joy of still helping him, when one day I received a letter. A small photo of my son was in it. I screamed, my mind went blank. All my peace, my control, was thrown to the winds. The photo was alive. My son was there, his mouth so soft, the mouth of a child, so sorrowful too. His eyes were calling me and that call had such an intensity! I stood up and walked around my room, the photo hidden on my breast. All sorts of thoughts came into my mind: "You left him, he was so young, he needed you, he was in despair. After you left, he went into seclusion for two months, he prayed, he had remorse, he did not eat. Then he revolted, but he could find no pleasure in the things of the world." I remembered the morning I left my home to join Chidananda. I was packing, as if in a trance, when my son came into my room. He asked, "Why are you packing? Are you going away?" I came out of my trance and I was surprised also. Why was I doing that? I had no definite purpose in my mind. So I truly answered, "No, I am not leaving." But he came back and gave me a very tiny parcel. I knew straightaway what it was and my heart cried out: "Oh no, Christian, keep it. The saint who gave it to you told you never to part with it. It is your talisman." I do not know why, but I opened the paper which contained the four-leaf clover. It was so old, so brittle, yet I lifted it, and it broke. I never forgot the pain that went through me then. Was it a premonition?

These recollections made my suffering almost unbearable. I felt I could not control myself. I felt that I would bring my son back to me, back to this earth-plane where he would suffer again, for the intensity of my pain was such. So I suddenly stopped my work and said, terribly hard and threatening, "Now, my mind, you will obey me. I never want to see that face, that photo, again. *Never*, you understand! You are not going to trick me into this." My mind obeyed, and even after Satsangs, when I was blissful and not hardened into watchfulness, if the vision of that photo ever tried to come, I still managed to keep it away.

I kept that little broken clover-leaf clover always with me until the day I had the courage to part with all my son's letters, his last words, his watch, and the little heart made of gold with a pearl in the centre where were still the marks of his baby-teeth. I gave it all to Swamiji. One year thereafter, on Mother's Day, imagine my surprise when he gave it all back to me, tied up in an orange handkerchief I had embroidered for him years before! I was so moved and I wondered how he could keep so carefully such things as that poor handkerchief, so badly embroidered.

Swamiji took me down to the Ganges. There, standing on a rock, he prayed for my son and gently put the parcel in the water with a stone to weigh it down. He scattered some orange-coloured flowers on the water, and as I watched the flowers drifting away, I felt the last link broken. Christian was free at last.

After a few days, I remembered the time my son came to me after his death. At that time I had gone to Swami K. He had looked distressed and said, "It is your attachment which is keeping him here. You must do more Japa and control yourself."

But I had asked, "At least, will he be benefited by being in the Ashram, learning about Yoga, coming to the lectures?"

Swami M. who was there said, "Yes, he will be. In the scriptures there is the example of a man who died and who in his astral body heard a lecture on the Gita and realised on the spot."

This had brought me some relief and some joy. If my son could not leave this plane, yet was it not better for him to be in such a holy place than back at home? But Swami Chidananda gave me the final answer when he told me, "Yes, you should not have been so hard with him in the beginning, that was your ignorance. It is past, never dwell on the past. But he came to you not because of your attachment but because you were the only one who could help him. He had not the necessary strength to depart and he needed the addition of your spiritual strength. He could not come to me."

I have always wondered why Swamiji said those last words. But I understood finally that God's ways were perfect, if we but knew. My son was to die at the very second he died. It was his Karma, and God, in His mercy, had brought me to the Ashram and through Chidananda had helped me to evolve enough so as to be able to help my son after his death. If I still cry when I speak of my son, if I still cry even as I am writing this, it is because of his spiritual beauty which moves me and inspires me even now, and in my heart I always wonder, how could God have given me such a son? When I mentioned this to Swamiji, he said, "Now God is only taking away what He Himself had given" and I felt gratitude for the wonderful days I had lived with Christian. But if I was made to feel this gratitude for God, was it not because Swamiji transmitted this feeling to me?

I remember Swamiji's quick answer the first day I told him, "My son is dead". Swamiji had then said, "There is no death." I had always believed it so, but now I knew. And my determination was not to lose a minute of my life in wasteful pursuit grew stronger. Had not my son said in his last letter, "Life is short"? (I was very reluctant to publish this section about my son after his death, but some very sincere, very spiritual friends wrote to me and insisted. They said, "Why be so narrow? We ourselves hold spiritism as something not at all advisable and even dangerous, but even spiritism can be good inasmuch as it helps people to know that there is something beyond. And, then, this is far from spiritism. It is a rare experience. You must share it. Think how it might change the outlook on life of the people who may read it! How it might bring solace to them!")

On that fateful evening, in the spontaneous, irresistible prayer I had said to God, "Even the wonderful son that You gave me is nothing to me now." I had also said, "Take everything away from me." And God never forgets.

Six months after my son's death, my mother passed away. She had said she did not want to live any longer, her heart was broken. On the night of her death, in the Bhajan Hall of the Ashram during Satsang, I smelt a perfume that evoked memories in me. I searched in my mind, it was something so sweet, but I could not remember until I heard, "Do you remember the honeysuckle?" and I felt my mother's presence. Then I remembered. Such a long, long ago memory. I was a very small child, we were walking on a country road. My mother was holding me by the hand when suddenly she stopped, and plucking some honeysuckle, she smelt it and gave it to me to smell. Then she said, "It is my favourite perfume. Men are so foolish to try to imitate the perfumes of Nature. Only God can create such perfection, and every time I smell honeysuckle I feel Him near"—and for the first time I was struck by her great beauty and the beauty of her smile.

That was how I knew she had passed away, even before I got the letter and the telegram telling me about it. She was peaceful, happy. She understood my new way of life at last and she was even thanking me for it, for she seemed to realise that my presence here in the Ashram was helping her. When I did the temple ceremony for her, she was there and so happy that a great peace came over me.

Swamiji told me, "She had a very big heart."

It was so true. In spite of her extreme sufferings, she never complained, and she was so selfless that I feel ashamed when I think of my behaviour with her. I wonder at her love; I wonder at God's mercy on me.

But God did not stop there. I had said, "everything....".

My daughter put me out of her life totally, and all my other relatives and friends turned their backs on me. They could not understand me; they blamed me for the death of my son also. I understood them so well, but what could I say? Then a newspaperman wrote such strange made-up things about me and he ended his article by saying, "Evidently the poor woman is mad".

But Swamiji said, "Some people are sometimes so narrow-minded. They do not like to see Yoga spreading so much. But we must remember that the general tendency is not like that, a unity is coming." And I prayed that people might soon learn to know that Yoga was not a religion, that it was a science of all religions. And as Swamiji says, "All religions are, as it were, the flowers that make the beautiful bouquet we offer to the Lord...God delights in revealing Himself as Christ, as Buddha, as Krishna..."

They specially blamed me for having left my children. They could not understand. Neither could I really until one day I read the story of St. Jeanne. She was married to the prince of a small kingdom. The young couple was radiantly happy and everyone rejoiced. After a while it seemed to be proved that the young couple could not have children. The parents of the prince did everything in their power to separate their son from his wife and marry him to another woman who could give a heir to the throne. They threatened the young prince that they would take the kingdom away from him, but he preferred even that to being separated from the woman he loved. The princess, his wife risked her life many a time to have a child. This lasted for years, when one day she at last gave birth to a son. The little boy had all qualities, health, beauty, intelligence, and he was so extraordinarily

good and loving to all. The whole kingdom rejoiced. One day, when her beloved child was only six, the princess left everything and retired into a convent. Everyone thought she had gone mad. When asked how she could have done such a thing, she answered, "When God calls, that call is so strong. I would even have walked on my little boy's body if he had put himself on my way."

Some years after I was again made to remember my son's death when I had a strange experience. Mastram Baba was a realised sage who lived in a cave on the Ganges bank. I often went to see him, but at that time I had not been able to go to him for quite a while. As I came and sat under his tent, I saw a dead woman lying on a stretcher near him. She seemed very old, no hair at all, her face so terribly wrinkled, and she was so terribly thin, a real skeleton. She was dressed in a very dirty long white dress. Her pale eyes were open. I thought they must be going to lower her body in the Ganges. After a while the thought came that they might be waiting for me to go so as to do the last funeral rite, so I left.

I came back the next day. The dead woman was still there on the stretcher. No one was paying attention to her and little by little I enhardened myself to look at her. I saw that her eyes were always fixed on Baba, never seeming to waver. But at one moment I thought I saw her eyes shift slightly when Baba moved. Was she alive? Just then Baba spoke to a lady who translated this to me.

"Baba says you can go near N.," showing me the woman on the stretcher. I was astounded! That old woman my friend N., how could it be?

N. came from Wales in England. She had been a great disciple of Baba for many year, and she had reached very great spiritual heights. N.! I went near her. I was very moved. I had to wait a while to steady my voice. I spoke to her. Something below her face seemed to come to life. But her eyes never moved from her Guru's face. I went every day. Baba said I was doing N. good. But one day I received an invitation to go to Almora where Ananda Mayee Ma was to spend two months alone with her attendants. Such an incredible grace! But how could I leave N.? Nothing was sure yet. Baba had said to N., "Death is near but be at peace, I will help you to pass on."

But N. clung to life, to her Guru... how could I leave her? Hadn't Baba said I was doing her good! every day more! Then, one day Baba told us a story:-Two friends were going up a mountain. They wanted to go right up to the peak, to the very summit. But one of them fell in a deep precipice. The other one looked down and saw that his friend was alive, that there was even a chance of his getting him out. But there were also quite a few chances that he could not save him, that he himself might even lose his own life in the attempt. So this man left his closest and dearest friend and climbed alone, right to the very summit. I understood what Baba was telling me. If one reaches the summit one can help people, help them in the only real way. I left for Almora. Baba had left me free to choose as he had left N. free to choose. Just as God does with all men.

Remembering this sometime later I wondered: In coming to India had I not chosen the ultimate good of my own people? I remember Chidananda saying about my son after his death, "He came to you because you were the only one who could help him. He had not enough spiritual strength to go where he belonged. He needed the addition of your own spiritual strength." And remembering my mother's death, I thought of Chidananda who had once said in a lecture, "If we

realise God, we help seven generations before us and seven generations after.” I was happy if, at last, I could repay the sacrifice that her life had been and that I had so often failed to see.

3

AM I A HINDU?

One day in France, Swamiji showed me a book. Ma Ananda Mayee’s photo was on the cover. He said, “She is a wonderful woman, you know.” That very night, and ever since, Ma came to me in my meditation, and when I came to India, I went to see her. One day, as I was alone with her and her attendants in her bedroom, Ma said, speaking about me, “Who is her Ishta Devata? Christ?” I blurted out “Oh! no.” And then, more slowly, “As a matter of fact, I am all mixed up. The first time I heard the name of Krishna, in France, I cried all night, my pillow was wet, yet I had never heard of Krishna before. And later on, at the mere mention of His Name, Mudras would come to me. Still later I thought it was Rama, yet I had started with visions of Christ.” I felt Ma’s attendants were smiling. I did not understand. But that night in my meditation Christ came to me to stay.

The next morning, a monk coming from France brought me a parcel. He unpacked it and slowly turned towards me the portrait it contained. A spontaneous Pranayama moved deep in my body as I looked at the picture of Christ, the controversial photo made of the Shroud of Turin (the cloth that wrapped Christ’s dead body and on which the impression of his face was revealed by some scientific means). And I knew. But Krishna and Rama never left me and my devotion to them grew all the more. Swamiji had brought Ma to me and together they had made me find my way. They had taught me that God is one but delights in revealing Himself in different forms.

Swamiji once said, “God sends us dreams not only to test us, but also to guide us.” But I was blind. Sometimes the experiences of the previous births which are lodged in the causal body float out during the dream state. It was long before Swamiji came to my house. I was very ill, and it did not seem that I would last much longer when one night I had a dream. I was so struck by it that I got up and wrote it down, although even the effort to do so was exhausting for me. The next morning I read it to my husband, my son and my daughter. I asked them to interpret it as I was trying to do myself but with no success. Everyone had a different interpretation, but I seemed to know that that dream had a message in it. My husband was driving. It was a road on a cliff overlooking the sea. The road was very narrow, very stony, very dangerous. Suddenly the road seemed to give way and we fell into the sea. My husband swam out to the shore. I was alone, sinking deeper and deeper into the sea. Fear was paralysing me. I was choking and dying when suddenly some thought came back to me and I realised that the thin, black-veil scarf that I had round my neck had spread out in the water and was covering my face. I tried to lift it off, but it had got into a knot. The knot was very difficult to untie for it was wet and the veil was thin. But I seemed to think that if I untied the knot I would see more clearly where I was, where to swim, where to go. So I struggled and struggled. I was choking and bursting, the pain was unbearable. But still I struggled. Finally, the black veil drifted off my face. I could see. I put my arms up and went to the surface. The sun was shining on the small silvery ripples of the sea. I floated there in peace, and the sea seemed to become calmer and calmer, the ripples seemed to disappear. The sea surface was like a mirror reflecting the sun; I could hear a far,

far-away sound, some strange music. It seemed a long, long way off. Gathering all my strength I swam towards it. It was a tremendous undertaking, I was so weak, the music was so far away. Then I saw a peninsula sticking out into the sea. The music came from there, that wonderful music, that wonderful singing. The cliff was stiff and abrupt. It seemed an impossible undertaking again, but the voices and the music were drawing me towards them. That music had a strange quality in it, and I started the long ascent. Stones rolled down; the earth gave way under my feet. My nails were torn, my feet and hands were bleeding, but the voices and the music were calling me. I could think only of that. When at last I reached the peak, I lay down on the green grass under the sun, which was shining on all the bright flowers. But I soon got up. I felt I must not stay there in all that incredible beauty, where even the colours were of a beauty I had never seen before, had never dreamt of before. So, on I went, towards the far-away place where the voices and the music came from. And as I approached, I could hear it clearer and clearer.

When I first came to the Ashram, it was on Christmas night, just in time for the evening Satsang. When I heard the singing, I seemed to remember the tonality of the voices and the sounds of the words in a language then unknown to me; and when I heard the Veena, I was filled with wonder and an indescribable joy surged into my heart. Before I went into bliss, I heard a Swami say, “It comes from her previous Samskaras.”

In the Ashram, a priest came to me one day. He was very grave.

“Can I come in? I would like to say a prayer for you.”

“Oh! Thank you. Come in, I am very honored, very happy, indeed.”

In no time we were on our knees. For a moment I watched his beautiful ascetic face as he knelt with closed eyes. Then, as he began, I too closed my eyes.

“Oh Lord! Hear this prayer from Thy devoted servant. This child of Thine, Yvonne, who is praying with me today, has great devotion. Her intentions are pure. Her courage is great. Her story could inspire countless others. But she has gone astray! It is so difficult to find the real path to Thee, my Lord! Forgive her. Give her a sign that she may find her way back to Thee, our Lord, the only true Lord.”

My eyes opened in surprise. My fan was not working and it was so hot. My host was wiping his face with a big handkerchief. He had taken the trouble to walk up the ninety-five steps leading to my kutir to bring me a message. His beautiful face was stern and sad. I felt suddenly how we were all caught up in the mire of Maya (illusion), how there was no sin but only error on the way. I remembered others who had come and spoken of the hell that was awaiting me. The Indians converted to Christianity were the worst in their fanaticism. I remembered Tolstoy and so many others—Tolstoy who was excommunicated for teaching that God was no cruel punishing tyrant, that God was good, for God was love, that He did not send to hell the unbaptised, that humanity’s true advance was on the path of love. And my heart sang with joy when I thought of the beauty of Yoga which teaches us that all paths lead to the same goal and is very disappointed if we try to leave our own religion, because our birth, our background have conditioned us into it. It is therefore easier for us to follow the religion into which we are born.

A wave of gratitude came over me for Chidananda, for Yoga, also for Hinduism, which, being the grandmother of all religions, is all-patience, all-tolerance, as grandmothers are wont to be with the children who, proud of their new learning, come to teach them. I remembered a story, the story of a Hindu, who, after having been taught for some years all about Catholicism by missionaries, had a very revealing reaction when he went to be baptised. The water of the river was very cold, the man shivered and he said “Ram, Ram, Ram!” The old faith, the old ways were very much alive in his subconscious.

I thought of Chidananda, who invokes God sometimes as Christ or Krishna, at other times as Moses, Mohammed or Buddha, for he knows that God has delighted and will ever delight in revealing Himself in different forms. He says: “By religion is not meant the institutional religion where the real ideal of religion is lost and only a poor external structure remains, from which the great ideals exemplified in the lives of the prophets are lost.”

He further writes: “All religions have the same process in their essence, whatever be the differences in the ritual or ceremonial details.”

If we go to the Source and look at the great and inspired lives of Jesus, Mohammed, Zoroaster, Buddha etc., and examine the great fountainheads of the various faiths in the world, we will find that by their practical example, through their exemplary lives, the prophets have shown us what is the very soul of the religions which they have given to mankind. They demonstrated the practical living of the religions which they later on gave to their followers, and in these personal living demonstrations they were all one.

It was a Sunday, and in the hall of the New Delhi hotel, a Protestant prayer meeting was taking place. All the devotees seemed to be Indian. I sat in a corner and listened to the hymns and psalms that the minister and the different devotees sang in turn. The minister was American. He gave a sermon, and when he finished he looked around and came over to me, all smiles.

“You seem to be the only Westerner at my prayer meeting. You belong to our Church?”

When I told him I lived in an Ashram, it all started. I should not have answered, but I saw it too late when he stood up and severely said in a loud, clear voice that many could hear, “May God, in His mercy forgive you for forsaking Him and going to those idol worshippers”!

I reflected for a while. I wanted to explain to him his misunderstanding about ‘idol worship’. But how? I thought of Swami Chidananda; I wished he were there. I had a book on my lap which had been given to me a few hours before at a Satsang. It was Swami Sivananda’s *Practice of Bhakti Yoga*. I opened it at random and was struck as I read the title of the Sections. “Philosophy of Pratima”. What a miraculous coincidence! I read it quickly. This is what I read:

“A reputed baron of New York came to me one evening for an interview. During the course of conversation the baron said, ‘Swamiji, I have no faith in image-worship. It is all foolishness. The private secretary of the baron who was also with him had a photo of the baron in his pocket-diary. I took the photo and asked the private secretary to spit on it. The secretary was struck aghast. He hesitated and looked at the baron. I again commanded him, ‘Go on, spit at the picture. Quick’. The

secretary said, 'Swamiji, the baron is my master. I serve him. How can I spit at the picture? This is his image. I cannot do this ignoble act. I respect him in this picture'. I said to him, 'This is only a paper. This is not the real baron. It cannot talk, move or eat'. Then the secretary said, 'Anyhow I see my baron in this picture. This mean act would affect my feelings as well as wound the feelings of my master. I cannot spit'. I said to the baron, 'Look here, my friend! Your secretary loves and respects your photo. He associates your presence with the picture although it is just a bit of paper. Is this not image-worship? Even so the devotee associates the attributes of God with the image and feels His presence or immanence there. He finds it easy to concentrate his mind on the image. The mind wants a concrete prop to lean upon in the beginning stage of practice. Do you see the point now, my dear baron? The baron replied, 'Revered Swamiji! You are quite right. My eyes are opened now. I am quite convinced. Pray, pardon me'".

As I closed the book, I was wonderstruck and sat silent for a moment. Then, on a sudden impulse, I opened the book again. This time it seemed to me that Swami Chidananda was speaking as I read the following writings of his peerless Master:

“Worship differs according to the growth and evolution of the individual. There is nature worship. Parsis worship the element fire. Hindus worship the Ganges, the cows, the Aswattha tree, etc. In the Vedas there are hymns to Indra, Varuna, Agni and Vayu. This is nature worship. There is hero-worship. Great heroes like Sivaji, Napoleon are worshipped even now. In hero-worship, the individual imbibes the virtues of the person whom he worships. Birthday celebrations of great persons and anniversary celebrations are forms of worship. Then there is relic-worship. Hairs and bones of departed souls are also worshipped. Then there is the Pitru-worship or worship of forefathers.

“There is worship of Gurus, of Rishis, of Devatas. As man evolves, he passes from one stage of worship to another. The lower stages drop down by themselves. A man of a higher stage should not condemn his brother who is in a lower stage. One should not forget the underlying, indwelling, interpenetrating, one essence or Intelligence when he does worship of any kind. The fundamental object in worship of any kind. The fundamental object which permeates all these names and forms, by developing intense love.

“All are worshipping the one basic Reality, Iswara or God. The differences are only differences in names and forms on account of differences in the worshippers. Worship of Lord Jesus or Lord Mohammed or Sri Guru Nanak or Lord Buddha or Lord Mahavira is really worship of Iswara only. These are all His forms.”

When I had finished reading, I looked up in wonder, and just then the man who was sitting in the corner laughed aloud. “You sure are a cool one. This man was so angry and you sit there reading and smiling!”

I gave him my book with the two marked pages. “Read, you will see the coincidence.” He took the book and read. I had taken him to be an Indian, but he told me he was a Black American, a well-known singer. When he had finished reading, he was very grave. He pointed to the sky and said, “No coincidence, honey. He has got everything in His hands. He sure has got you, I will follow the lead.”

He stood up and went to the middle of the room with the book still in his hands, and bowing slightly to the minister, asked permission to sing. He started the well-known Black American religious song "He's Got The Whole World In His Hands". His rhythm was wonderful, his voice incredibly beautiful and trained. Everyone was singing and smiling. The whole atmosphere was changed. But imagine my surprise when he started to read the two marked pages of my book. He read so well everyone listened intently. When he had finished reading, he smiled all around and started to sing again. First a humorous song "All Ways Lead to Rome". People laughed. Then he sang "Jesus Loves Us, Buddha Loves Us, Mohammed Loves Us, Krishna Loves Us". He sang this last song in his extraordinary deep voice with so much love that everyone was spellbound. The whole hotel seemed to have become silent. We could hear only the cars in the distance.

As he came back to give me my book, he said, "Don't look so moved. I know that minister quite well. I have done him good. He is not responsible, he is ignorant. Forgive them, they know not what they do. But is there anything more ridiculous than our missionaries coming to this country, of all countries, to teach about God, about spiritual life."

He said, "I met Chidananda in New York. I was very impressed. I have read a little about Yoga since then...not much...but he has put a balm on my heart. Colour, creed, nothing counts for him...I thought of him when I sang "Jesus Loves Us, Krishna Loves Us". I did not know you knew him. He has made me feel the Reality of God. You are lucky to be with him. He is not in his Ashram now. But if he comes out in the West, I will try to see him again. I feel I will, although I am always on the go."

The next morning, as I was leaving early to catch the first bus to Rishikesh, an Indian lady came with me. She said she was also going to the Ashram. She was a devotee of Swami Chidananda. She told me, "I was there in that hotel last night. I heard your conversation with the minister. You should not answer at all in a case like that, not even to say you are living in an Ashram. Swami Chidananda helped you. Truth is all right, but Ahimsa is better. You must never hurt anyone's feelings. This is the first thing in Yoga". (What my Indian friend said was so true. I had felt so sorry for the minister when the Black singer was reading out the passages of my book, but events had been taken out of my hands somehow.)

I told her how much worse I used to be before, how I used to talk endlessly to anybody and everybody about Yoga and the wonders of it in my life. Swamiji, who is very much against indoctrination, must have known how foolish I was, for he once told me, "When someone is not thirsty and you go on trying to make him drink, just because you yourself have found a particular drink very good, he will first refuse politely; but if you go on insisting, he will send you away rudely and say, 'Don't you understand I am not thirsty? Leave me alone.'"

When my new friend and I got into the bus station, we met a young Swami whom I had known earlier. He was also going to Rishikesh. We sat together and my friend told him the events of the night before. He laughed and said, "You must know who to speak to and what to speak about and then speak little. Thoughts, words and acts must tally. Of course, spontaneity is a wonderful quality, but to think aloud, as you seem to do, is not good enough. Yoga is perfect balance, perfect equilibrium. It is very difficult, of course."

It was Sunday night and in the New York Centre we were waiting for the Satsang to begin. An Indian devotee who used to give us lectures came to me. He was holding a little pink paperback in his hand. He held it out to me. I could not see the title on it for he held it the wrong way, but my eyes closed and profuse tears rolled down my cheeks and my heart seemed to stop. I felt everyone was looking at me, but I could not move. The man knelt in front of me and put the book on my lap. My joined hands went up as if afraid to touch the book and the whole hour my arms stayed in that position, but I was not conscious of it. I was only conscious of the book on my lap. It was not that cheap little book so badly stitched together and printed on such inferior greyish paper. It was as I had never seen in a book. It was something indescribable. My mind had stopped working. There was only a great feeling of wonderment, of awe. I was beyond myself. Something in me seemed to remember. When the lecture was over and everyone had left, I was still there, the tears quietly rolling down my cheeks. A man touched me on the shoulder and said, "We are closing, you know." I opened my eyes but I could not look at the book. I made an effort and brought my arms down, but I could not touch the book. However, as the man insisted he was closing, I took the book slowly, with reverence, and keeping it in my joined and open palms and far away from me, I walked up the stairs. Everyone made way and turned back to look at me in silence. Once in the cloakroom, I looked around but could not find any suitable place to deposit the little book. Finally, as the man was still calling, I put it in my handbag and quickly put my coat on. Once back in my hotel room, I fell on my knees and deposited the book gently on my altar and fell into meditation for long hours. When I woke up the next morning, I was back to my normal consciousness and my first thought was, "Oh, someone has given me a book." But I was calm, as if I had forgotten the events of the previous evening. In my eagerness, without reading the title, I opened the book. But I fell on my knees, tears blotted the pages and I could not read. And every time I tried, for many days to come, it was the same, until the day it became my favourite reading. That book which something in me seemed to remember with such wonderment, such awe, was the Bhagavad Gita.

4

MOTHER INDIA

I was waiting for Anandamayee Ma's Darshan near the Ganges. Four or five middle-aged women came there. They were hot and tired. Their faces, their hands, their big fat bodies spoke of toil and pain, and sufferings patiently borne. They went into the water, their petticoats clinging to their bodies. They shivered; the sight was pitiful. Suddenly they held hands, formed a ring and started to sing "Krishna Krishna". They jumped in and out of the water, the song growing in volume. Their faces started to smile. I did not see their ungainly bodies any more. They were young, carefree, happy, radiant. The Name of Krishna worked wonders.

I lived their love, their joy. The whole atmosphere was full of it. This moment, however shortlived, would leave its mark in their lives. The memory of it would live long in their hearts and transform them. Is it not said that even a single thought of God, a single thought of pure, child-like, spontaneous love is answered and benefits all? India is such that wherever I go, something spontaneously happens which moves me and makes me feel the presence of God everywhere, and everywhere I see the love on Chidananda's face when he says, his voice full of reverence, "Mother India!"

And I am made to wonder: Is it this feeling of the oneness of all life which their scriptures proclaim that has given the Indian people their love, their tolerance? Is it the Law of Karma which teaches them their patience, their tolerance, their smile, their acceptance of everything? Is it so deeply embedded in them?

With a new understanding, I read what Chidananda says about the Law of Karma: "If properly understood, the Law of Karma is a law which gives infinite hope. It says that a man's destiny is in his own hands. It says that he shall depend upon himself. He is the one to decide on the pattern of the experience to come.

"He is the master of his destiny. He is the architect of his fate. He has nothing to fear in this universe, nothing except his own wrong actions and thoughts. He has to say: 'Who has the power to give me any experience that I do not choose to select for myself? No one on earth has the power to injure me, to bring sorrow upon me, to inflict destruction or evil upon me'.

"Thus man takes infinite courage. He is determined to guide his own life into a future containing bliss and radiance. The Law gives him an inducement to sow the right type of seeds and to fashion all his activity along ideal lines.

"It is this Law which upholds the moral standard of this universe. Had it not been for this Law, there would have been no inducement either to avoid evil or to embrace good. Both these lines of action spring out of this glorious Law. Man knows that if he does not avoid evil, he will sow weeds and thorns. He knows that he should do good because he will be the blessed enjoyer of the fruits of those good deeds.

“According to this view, the Law of Karma is not a doctrine of fatalism. On the contrary, it is a doctrine of high orderliness, serving as the basis of the moral order in the whole universe, and the attitude instilled into man by this Law is fearlessness.

“It fills man with fearlessness and infinite courage and a great urge to be ideal, good and lofty in all his thoughts and activities.”

While I was writing this, I remembered the story of an old French lady who really believed in the Will of God and in Karma in the most wonderful way. It was during the war. The bridge was blown up. We could not go any further. We could see the village nearby where only two houses seemed to be left standing and not a soul was to be seen anywhere, when suddenly, a little old lady came out of one of the two houses. She was bent in two and walked with a stick. She was very neat and tidy with her black skirt and white bonnet. She walked across the street to the other house. Just as she went in, a shell fell on the house from which she had just come. The dust was terrible. We were still lying on the ground when, to our utter surprise, the little old lady came out of what was now the only house left standing and walked across, blinded by the dust and rubbing her eyes. When she came near the ruins of what had been her house, she went round it as if she could not believe her eyes. Just then a shell fell on the other house, the one she had just left. The impact was tremendous. The old lady was thrown to the ground, but she braced herself up, and seeing our lorry, came towards us. When we managed to get across to her, she showed us the two houses and said, “You see what destiny is. I came out of each house just in time...see...see. If our time has not come, we cannot go. Everything is His Will...I told them all when they left the village, but they would not listen. Why be afraid of anything? Why bother so much about what is going to happen? Why not live in the present? Jesus said, ‘Enough unto the day is the evil thereof,’ didn’t he? But these young ones...Nowadays they study too much that they forget the essentials.”

We took the old lady in our lorry but very soon had to stop. The road was impracticable. I looked at all the desolation around me. The silence had a strange quality in it. I was listening to it intently when suddenly I thought I heard a baby’s cry. I came down from the lorry to see where the faint cry could be coming from. I came upon a ditch. A lovely young woman was lying at the bottom of the ditch with a baby in her arms. I went near her. She was dead and the baby was still holding on to her bare breast, crying. Suddenly I felt a presence behind me. I turned around. The old lady was there. She was very pale. Her hands were joined as if in prayer. The tears were running down her face. She came down in the ditch and slowly went near the young lady, and knelt and prayed. Then she tried to close the eyes of the young lady. I did not see if she succeeded. Her tears, her prayers were breaking my heart...As she turned to look at the baby, her face softened. She took him in her arms and with a low, shaky voice she tried to murmur soothing words to him. As the little one started to look at her, he calmed himself and started to suck his thumb. Then after a last look at the lovely young woman, the old lady turned to me. “She is my daughter,” she said.

We helped each other out of the ditch and we came back to our lorry. When we arrived at the small town nearby, we heard that all the people who had run away from the old lady’s village had been locked in a barn nearby, then the barn had been set on fire. The ones who had tried to escape had been shot.

The old lady was listening with head bent. All her children and grandchildren were dead.

Later in the lorry, when I saw her lips moving in silent prayer with her chapelet (mala) in her hand, only stopping now and again to put the baby's thumb back in his mouth, her face suddenly so tender, her voice more and more peaceful as she tried to sing a lullaby to him, I wondered at such a wondrous faith and acceptance of His Will. The memory of it never left me. Had it unconsciously inspired me when so many years later it was my turn to say, "Thy will be done," although my surrender had only come after a most terrible revolt against God. What was more, it had been His work, not mine.

One day, years later, a Brahmachari gave me a prayer which had been printed by a great devotee of Swami Chidananda.

O All-merciful Lord
Friend of the weak and helpless
Through Thy Grace and Will—
Whatever has happened
has happened for the best
Whatever is happening now
is happening for the best;
Whatever is to happen in the future
will happen for the best.
Bless me that I may accept Thy Will.
And make my surrender pure,
perfect, complete and unconditional.

I thought then of the old lady. Hadn't her way of living shown me the deep wisdom of this prayer, and had it not shown me, in an unforgettable way, that the secret of happiness, the secret of peace, the very secret of all life was in that very prayer.

Two of the officers under whose orders I had served during the war and who had read my book scolded me when I met them here in India.

"Why on earth did you not write the whole story about this old lady?"

The Americans had ordered that all the Allied armies must evacuate the region, for the winter was so terribly severe that we had to amputate the frozen legs of too many soldiers. But the French people of the region had helped us when we had come to liberate them. And the Germans, under whose rule they had been for five years, declared them traitors, and they were to be shot at sight. That is why De Gaulle, the French General in Chief made us go back to help our countrymen, and we succeeded in throwing the Germans out and, thus, stopped the holocaust that it would have been in two or three of the most patriotic regions of France. Instead of our being punished for our disobedience, very soon everyone seemed to congratulate us. Perhaps the prayers which were said everywhere in silence and amongst us had a lot to do with it.

The two officers continued. "It would have been the best demonstration of the reality of what this monk you call your 'gourou' tries to express when he says: All religions have the same basis. It is only the man-made dogmas of the different creeds which separate men from each other.

And also, why did you not relate a few stories about the war? Lived experiences are the most potent you know...And war is the best field of action for God. No money competition, death at your door every day and night, solitude, time to think, to be silent, to be alone in front of oneself.”

When I learnt there was going to be a new edition of my book (1988) I was happy that I could do perhaps the last act of obedience to my officers. No wonder they loved Chidananda in my book. They themselves knew what putting religion into practice is meant to be. They put it into practice in such a selfless, courageous, noble way, that as I write I am feel gratitude to God who gave me so many “gourous”!

And I remember how Swami Chidananda once said: “If we only knew that what God does is always for our good, we would be like the kitten and not like the baby monkey. The baby monkey hangs on to the mother, and when the mother jumps from branch to branch, sometimes it loses its grip, falls down and dies. But the kitten lies down in one corner and cries for the mother. The mother cat comes and takes it away. There is no chance of the kitten failing down.

“We would know that self-effort is made only in order to know that no self-effort is necessary and we would surrender. ‘Thy Will be done’ would always be our prayer.

“But we are like the man who was travelling in a train for the first time. As the train was going uphill it slowed down, and the man asked his friend why the train was going so slowly. His friend answered, ‘Well, we are very heavy, you see, with all our trunks and our luggage’. The man reflected over this. Then he stood up and put his heavy metal trunk on his head and sat down. When all asked him what he was doing, he answered, ‘I am helping the train by relieving it of the weight of my trunk’.

And I remember the words of a sage of India: “O fool, to try to carry thyself upon thy own shoulders! O beggar, to come and beg at thy own door! Leave all thy burden on His hands who can bear all, and never look behind with regret”. (Gitanjali)

In Europe there is a country famous for its cleanliness and its perfect honesty. A French writer has compared it to a rose tree, very strong, very healthy, with no thorns...but without roses. In India the thorns are many. But who would fear the thorns when the roses are of a beauty and fragrance that fill our hearts with ecstasy?

It happened in the Foreigner’s Registration Office. I was helping a friend who could not speak English very well. Her haughty attitude, her brief answers, and her visible annoyance with the man who was questioning her rendered the atmosphere somewhat difficult. I understood that the officer was only doing his duty. He had questioned me very thoroughly also two years before. He had asked me many such questions, asking me even about the personality of my children. I had told him proudly how good my son was, how when he was small people would call him “Little Jesus” because of the sweetness of his face. I did my best to pacify my friend. But the officer interrupted me severely, “You should have brought her earlier. It is too late for her visa. Why have you come so late?” I said, “Yes, I know, but my son died eight days ago.” As I said this, I could not control my voice. The officer asked, “What ! Jesus is dead?” Such pain was on his face and in his voice, all the men in the office stopped their work and were silent. As I felt their sympathy and their love, tears

came into my eyes. They brought me a Coca Cola, but I could not drink it, my throat was so tight. Then they brought me a fruit juice, a soda water. They did not know what to do to show me their sympathy. The officer took us to the taxi-stand, debated the fare with the driver, and all the time his face, his eyes showed me his compassion, his kindness.

How wonderful to find in men, who in the execution of their work are made to be hard and severe, such quick heart-felt response, such warmth of heart? And again I was made to love India for her tolerance, her patience, her gaiety, her smile—and mostly for her love which is everywhere so vibrant.

In our journey back in the taxi, seeing my emotion my friend questioned me. I was impressed to tell her something much more moving, which had happened to me in Delhi, at the Government house, at the beginning of my stay in India. I told her how the love Mother India has for her spiritual heritage was to move me in a way I shall never forget, and how the prayer I had then was still vibrant in my heart. Two months or so after my arrival in India, I was going to leave, as my Visa had been refused. I said goodbye to everybody and left for Delhi. But Swamiji had told me to give a letter to a friend of the Trustees of the Ashram, and I went and met him in his house.

He asked many questions, endless questions. I wondered about what seemed to me to be only curiosity. He seemed such a cold man, so indifferent to everything. I was going to leave when he suddenly looked at his watch and said, “Come with me.”

He took me to the Parliament House. I will never forget the beauty of the place. It seemed to have always been there. The India of the past revived in my heart as I looked at it. We went in. Inside were long passages with gardens here and there through which one could see the lawns outside, and the beauty of the Indian women walking on the vast green lawns made the colours of their sarees shine all the more in the bright sunshine, and made their supple way of walking apparent to me for the first time. I was so new to India. I had seen so little of her! I was enthralled and forgot my worries and my sadness about leaving India, the India I had dreamt of for so long. My companion took me to an office. An official was there behind the desk. My companion just barely introduced me. The official asked me many questions. I answered in the same vein as I had answered my companion when he had questioned me in his house. The official suddenly said, “So you could not submit to what has become a general habit all over the world to get your Visa? Why?”

The Gita says “No corruption of officials.”

My companion was silent the whole time. The official gave him a note. “Take this lady to...”, he wrote a name, the name of another official. We left. Same procedure...the questions were different, my answers were the same. It seems to me now that from the start they had decided, each one of them, to let the next one discover me as they themselves had done. This new official read the note, looked at my companion who was silent, and he seemed intrigued. The questions went on, when he suddenly seemed to make up his mind. He rang a bell. A man came in with a very big book. The official opened it and read a passage out of it. I was very moved, tears came into my eyes. It was so well written. It was such a wonderful way of speaking of the wonders of the Gita. The man closed the book.

“My grandfather wrote this book,” he said. He looked at my tears, smiled and giving me his hand he said, “Come with me.” I stood up and followed him. He took me into a very big room with wooden seats in a circle all around. I was introduced to a few men and I was shown to a seat. It was a government session. At first I wondered why the official had brought me there, and after awhile I started to look around me. The ceiling was a dome and terribly high. I seemed to be sitting in the very middle of the highest part of it. As I tried to see how high it was, I had to bend my back so much that I was cut in two at the waist. When I saw the highest peak I instantly felt that I was in the very heart of India, and a sudden prayer came to me spontaneously, “O God! Let this land of the Rishis lead the whole world back to Thee!”

I closed my eyes and stayed for a moment in that posture, forgetting everything. Some of those men must have seen me bent in such a way and for quite a while. Some of them came around me as we were going out. The official who had brought me asked, “What were you doing bent in such a terrible way and for so long?”

Forgetting all the people around me, I answered, “A prayer came to me: ‘Let the India of the Rishis lead the whole world back to Thee, my God’! And I forgot the world around me.”

They were all silent.

A few days later, in a party they invited me to, they told me their sorrow, their failures and their hopes. I wondered at the way they were so open with me, so true. When I told them my surprise they said, “If love begets love, Truth must also beget Truth, don’t you think?” My eyes were opened. I was beginning to see myself as I really was. I had lived with heroes of legend during the war. I came myself from a “do or die” race. Had not my officers written on my papers “Very good in emergency, she jumps before she looks”? Hadn’t my heart hardened into that attitude? And the words of my new Indian friends brought me to remember the words of Chidananda. “Life without Love is only dreary waste.”

And when I saw their simplicity, their humility, I again remembered some words of Chidananda. “Pride is our worst enemy.”

This is how I got my visa. It is also how my heart began to change. As I write this I realise anew, even more than I did at the time, how the Indian people, in spite of everything, in spite of all appearances that sometimes might seem to prove the contrary, how all of them are attached to their past, to their culture, to God, and how deep, how indelible it is in their hearts. Because of that I feel that even my prayer might come true. Because if they do not always “turn their eyes to the sky in a silent appeal, which is sufficient for the forces of God to come down upon Earth”, as Chidananda once said, “their hearts are always doing it and with a great fervour.” My prayer had been so intense, so terribly intense, that for a while I had forgotten the world around me!

And doesn’t Ananda Mayee Ma say, “When a thought reaches its full intensity its physical expression will invariably follow.”

And I remember Swami K., who in his kindness often seemed to worry about my unpredictable reactions. Swami K., who did not know this or even half of my adventures with my

visa during the nine years of my continuous stay in India, how he one day said to me, “You should write an epic about your visa.”

But Chidananda had the final answer about it all one day when a young French woman, D., had come to see him. She herself wanted to stay in India and was trying to find a way to do it. She did not know me, but I was translating for him. “How does Mother Yvonne stay in India so long?”

Swamiji replied, “Because she wants to.”

“Yes, Swamiji. But how does she get her visa?”

And Swamiji, lifting his eyes up and pointing his finger to the sky said, “Because it is His Will.”

To Sivananda, love is not just an emotion, a sentiment. It is the very basis of life. The great sage says: “Love is the law of life. To love is to fulfill the law. And to fulfill the law means eternal peace and everlasting happiness.

“This world has come out of love. It exists in love. It finally dissolves in love. Love is the motive power of the universe.

“Love is life. Love is joy. Love is warmth. Love is the golden tie which binds heart to heart, soul to soul.

“Love is constructive and creative. Love binds and builds. Love is the principle of regeneration. Love is an actual, subtle substance which you can use with confidence for healing and helping others. Love is a positive concrete thing.”

This is what Chidananda writes about India—India which alone in the history of the world has made Self-realisation the goal of human life, and this for perhaps the past many thousand years in an unbroken line. “This holy land (Bharatavarsha) with its lofty culture has been uniquely blessed by a continuous and unbroken stream of spiritual teachers, saints, devotees and savants to guide and uphold the arduous march of its men, ever reminding them of the true goal of life and preventing mankind from slipping into erroneous tracks at each critical moment. Look at India’s ancient history, you will find not a single generation which has been deprived of God-sent men who would ever hold high the banner of truth along with their clarion-call to humanity to remain ever vigilant and never forget the real purpose of life.

“They never proclaimed anything as a conclusion of mere intellectual activity and labour of the thinking faculty, but they did so on the basis of the profound authority of direct intuitional realisation of the Absolute. So whatever these ancient sages and Rishis have proclaimed in the Upanishads, it is from their direct experience in the core of their inmost spiritual being. They did not care to adduce any argument in their support or to induce acceptance. They just stated boldly what they *Knew As Truth*. And what is it that they have declared? It is this: ‘O Children of Immortality ! You are not this perishable physical body, nor this ever-changing mind, nor this reasoning intellect. But you are the master of all these, the Supreme Conscious Being, the unattached, witnessing Spirit

or Atman, beyond the reach of the mind and the intellect, different and distinct from body, mind and intellect. Realise this fact and live in the awareness of your true spirit'. They have also shown the path that leads to this grand experience. We, as true devotees of our ancient Rishis and as worthy sons of Bharatavarsha, should never lose sight of the great purpose of life which can be nothing else than God-realisation. Let no one be deceived by an alien culture in the name of the so-called material prosperity. The goodness of a tree is known ultimately by its fruits, either bitter or sweet. The past two great world wars bear testimony to the destructive horror of the so-called advanced civilization under the most modern scientific knowledge. I would like to bow down from a pretty far distance to such deceiving knowledge and prefer one thousand times to be called ignorant and cling fast to my soul-uplifting culture and heritage which guarantees me purity, manliness, divinity, character, integrity, unselfishness and love for mankind. Be careful, brethren, that scientific knowledge devoid of religion and spirituality will quicken only the world-doom since it provides in the hands of the all-devouring brutal instinct of the degenerated man another addition to the deadly power of self-destruction. Therefore, neglect not the foremost duty of building up character, nobility, Godliness and love for the search of your true nature.”

As I write this, I pray that soon may come the day when Chidananda’s untiring efforts will make the prayer of Rabindranath Tagore come true:

“Where the mind is without fear and
The head is held high,
Where knowledge is free,
Where the world has not been broken up
Into fragments by narrow domestic walls,
Where words come out from the depth of truth,
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection,
Where the clear stream of reason has
Not lost its way into the dreary desert land of dead habit,
Where the mind is led forward by
Thee into ever-widening thought and action,
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.”

5

THE POWER THAT PROTECTS

My friend and I were staying in a hotel in New York. It was the nearest to the Yoga Centre and as such it was recommended to us by the devotees. I felt very uncomfortable in that hotel. The atmosphere was most horrible. For the first time my friend was not there that night and I was alone in my bedroom. It was nearly two a.m. when I woke up, tense, listening. Some loud music was being played in a room nearby. I could hear voices and laughter. Then I heard a noise that seemed to me like the opening of a garage door. At the same time, I saw my room window being lifted, and a black man in a black tight sliding in, supple and silent. A knife shining in his hand. There was a light in the room opposite where the noise had come from. I could see the silhouette of the black man, slim and tall in his black tight. I got up silently and stood up in my night-dress, facing him. A big,

involuntary Pranayama undulated through my body and a loud voice came out of me. It was such a strong, calm voice. It sounded like a man's voice. It had such a strange quality about it. "Help! Help! Help!" The man just turned back and went swiftly out. I walked behind him to the window and saw him go by the fire escape into the window of the room opposite where the noise was still going on. I put my head out of the window and again this strange voice of mine shouted "Help! Help! Help!" It made a tremendous echo in the yard. My voice was like thunder, but no one moved. I locked the window, and opening my door, shouted again down the long corridor "Help! Help!" But everything was silent. So I came back into my room, closed and locked the door. I put on a dressing gown. Sustained by a mysterious strength, I was calm, taking time to fasten all the buttons. I took my clothes on my arm but left my shoes behind as they were hurting me. I locked the door behind me and walked to the lift.

Down at the reception area I told my story. The lady receptionist laughed.

"Well, you are a funny one. You say all that so calmly. How could a man come in through your window? You are on the seventh floor, aren't you?"

I answered, "Yes. But he came in through the fire-escape."

The black night-watchman was in the office close to the desk. He was listening. He asked, "He was a short fellow, wasn't he?"

"Oh no, a very slim, tall man!"

"You say you saw him going into the room opposite. Now if you come with me, we will be able to catch him, you are the only one who can identify him."

I said, "But he was all black. I could not distinguish his features."

The man insisted. "Now, how can we establish order if people refuse to cooperate? Come with me."

I walked to the lift with him. Until then I had been speaking in a flat, calm, impersonal voice, my eyes down as if in a trance. Once in the lift, I looked up. The man's face was all horror, nothing human seemed to be left in it. The yellow eyes in his black face were dead. I seemed to wake up from my trance. I knew I should not have come. But I was calm and keenly alert. When the lift stopped, I let the man go out first and walked behind him one step, then quickly I was back in the lift alone and pressed the button. I wondered if he could stop the lift half way when he realised that I was not following him, so I kept my finger on the button until I was on the ground floor again. I was now very vigilant, very alert. I decided to spend the rest of the night near the reception desk and in front of the big glass door where I could be seen from the street. People came in, strange people. In a few hours I saw a lot of the underworld of New York. The night-watchman kept insisting that I should go and dress properly in my room, but I knew it was the last thing I should do. As his insistence grew, I asked for the key of the cloakroom nearby. He led me to cloakroom around a corner of the corridor, but as he opened the door, in the mirror opposite, I saw him turn round and nod his head to a tall, slim black man. I saw only the top of the black man's body. He had on

close-fitting long black sleeves. Was it a tight? Without a word I backed out, turned around and walking away quickly came back to my seat in front of the desk. Time passed. The receptionist had gone away. I was left alone with the night-watchman. He offered me a Coca Cola, then later on a fruit juice. He himself seemed to be drinking all the time, but intuition told me I must not accept. Once while he was away settling a quarrel between two drunken men in the hall, I managed to put on my skirt and my blouse.

Time passed. The hotel seemed to be quieter. My companion was reading a pornographic book. He showed it to me, but it was all like a dream and nothing seemed to shock me. He asked me several questions. I answered truly, but it was so unwise. Was I all alone in New York, a stranger, no husband in my country? But somehow no fear could come to me now. I was peaceful and strong, just a witness to everything that happened. The man said to me suddenly, "I can't make you out. There is a strange quality about you." Then, "You remind me of my little girl, back in Louisiana. She was kind of nice. She believed in God and all that stuff. She died... See her photo...Somehow I am kind of silly about her."

He talked about his daughter for a little while. He told me how she had been patient with all her sufferings, how she would always smile when he came in, how she would put her arms round his neck. I forgot my vigilance, we were becoming friends. I accepted a Coca Cola. He seemed moved. Then, suddenly leaning forward, he said in a low voice, "Listen, I'll be going off duty soon. When I leave, just go and tell them at the desk, 'My friends have come to fetch me, they are at the door. I am going'. Once you are out, you just walk in the middle of the street. Walk fast. You have no shoes, that is good. Your Yoga Centre is near, I know where it is. These Yoga people always wait before it, sitting on the steps, you can call them even from here." Then again, "Next time you are in a fix like this, don't shout 'Help!' Shout 'Fire!' You won't be alone, you will see. This is a hell of a place. If I could go abroad, I could write such things, but it is no good, they would catch me. They never let go..."

Again, "Don't come back for your suitcase, send two men. Your money is on you. You should not carry so much with you. Go to the bank first thing in the morning. They saw you through the window the other night when you counted it..."

He asked me to write to him. He said, "Well...you know...it might bring me luck...."

I kept my promise. I wrote "To Harry, with love." I meant it. I felt love for Harry, the father of the pretty little girl who believed in God and died so young, for the Harry who had been caught up in a maze he could not get out of.

When I arrived at the Centre, my joy was evident. People asked me, "What's happened? You look radiant." I answered, "A black man came into my room through the window, with a knife." They laughed. "Well, is that what makes you so shining? Or is it the relief?"

But one Swami said, "It was the test of fear, that is why you feel so happy."

I said, "I lied. I told them that my friends were coming to fetch me."

“Oh, no, you did not lie. A friend came all right, and such a friend too! He was there from the beginning to the end...When you say ‘A big Pranayama came to me’, it was He too. Nothing can happen to a sincere seeker. The Guru will always be there to protect him.”

We went in, and during meditation time I thought about it all. Someone had said, “The Guru knows your subconscious as you will never be able to know. He teaches you that you have to take obstacles as a help to spiritual growth. He gives you the very tests that will help you to overcome your very faults.”

How true it was! In that experience I had to face my uncontrollable fear of knives, which used to be so great that I closed my eyes when I saw a knife in a film-show. It used to be so great that I always put the knives out of sight even in my kitchen. And then my fear of black men....they seem so mysterious to me. And most of all, the easy way in which I am repulsed by things or people who seem ugly to me.

Swamiji often says that repulsion is lack of love. “Don’t find fault with the world outside, find fault with your own weaknesses. If you surrender to God, He will free you from all the lower emotions which result from a lack of love. When you overcome obstacles, you will develop will power. The obstacles themselves will thus turn into opportunities for improving and developing your will and you will progress faster. If you see the expressions only, if you see the manifestations only and not the underlying Reality, then you will have likes and dislikes, love and hate, good and evil. When you see the One in the many and all the expressions as expressions of God, then your attitude towards everybody becomes alike. Ignorance alone is the cause for separation.”

I came to see that I was not treading the path with my own strength. How could I have overcome my fears, my very terrible weaknesses in that experience? I thought of Chidananda. He had taken me by the hand, and there was no turning back. I had surrendered to him, how could there be any danger, any fall? But the very next night I was made to realise that I was yet far from being the ideal devotee. Now, this is what happened.

In the Yoga Centre I was told, “You better disappear for a while. Harry will change, he will see by now that he has spoken too much.” So I went to the country Centre that very afternoon. And when night came, I was overcome by fear as I saw a black man in the corridor of my isolated bungalow. I asked a friend to come and sleep in my room. As I lay on my bed reflecting, I came to realise that the night before my strength had been great as long as I was upheld by the strength of the Guru, the strength of Infinity. But now that I was left to the strength of my own individual personality, I was not fearless anymore. I began to feel that I must not waste time anymore. I had been so near to death. I realised that life could end at any moment. Then I remembered the story I had heard Chidananda tell:

“A man was asked to go around the world and to come back and tell his Guru what was the most extraordinary thing he had found in the whole of creation. After years, he came back and said, ‘The most incredible thing I have seen is that men everywhere see death around them and yet they never think it will happen to them one day, and they forget to prepare for the journey’.”

Swamiji quoted Sivananda, who said, “When you want to go on a holiday, you prepare everything in advance. You buy clothes, you wash, you clean everything, you pack your suitcases, you set on the alarm clock so as to wake up in time for the bus. This life is given to us to prepare ourselves for our passing away, for a timeless journey. We know it is a rare grace to have a human birth and very difficult to obtain such a birth. Yet we forget to prepare ourselves for this journey.”

I was wonderstruck again when I read how men drew up their plans and schemes each day. They wander driven hither and thither by Maya. They wander in darkness. They seem to say, “Let us enjoy today. We shall think of God tomorrow.” Alas, they know it not, but tomorrow may never come, for the body is perishable and may drop down dead at any moment...Let me think of God tomorrow?...No, let me think of God *today*. Let me think of the Soul, let me think of my true welfare, *without delay*. When the house is on fire, how foolish it is to wait!”

While Swamiji was away, I stayed on in the Centre. We had meditation every morning in a room in the basement. One morning, as I came in, I was surprised to see a circle of chairs, because it was usual with us to sit on the ground. The chairs were already occupied. My hostess said, “You are the purple colour, the seventh chair is yours.” I sat down. There was only a dim light coming from a red lamp high in the wall. I tried to look around, but my eyes closed automatically and Mudras came to me. My arms were moving of their own accord, but I was conscious of everything.

I heard the lady on my left ask questions, “Please tell us, who is the lady on my right.” A strange voice with an Arab accent answered, “I cannot see anyone.”

“Look again. She is dancing. Don’t you see her?”

“She is overshadowed.”

“Who is overshadowing her?”

“Perhaps an Indian. Oh! those big black eyes, such a light, such a light, I cannot look at them....”

Then a long silence. The man’s voice faded as he said, “Such a beautiful blue dress, such a blue...such a blue...with a silver border...and...there was such a love between these two long, long ago...”

He sounded so tired...his voice faded away. When I related this story to friends, I was told, “You were innocent of such practices, so you were protected. The Guru is always there. You need never fear. Surrender to Him. He will always help you.”

Why know our previous births? It will only add to our attachment, it will only add to our sufferings...and we interfere with the freedom of the departed souls that we contact, we keep them near the worldly plane. We will have to pay for it. The law of Karma is there. It is impartial...it is God’s law. If we interfere with it we get a reaction; every action brings about a reaction. God’s Law is always for our good.

I went with a few friends to meet Swami Chidananda at the London airport. At that time I was ill and condemned by the medical board. I was so sensitive that the sight of any suffering upset me deeply. We were all talking happily in the car about our meeting with Swamiji when suddenly my body became as still as a rock, my eyes closed, my face became very still. Everyone stopped talking and were looking at me in wonder when suddenly there was a terrible shock, a silence, then cries for help. No one in our car was hurt, not a scratch was there, but in the other cars people were wounded, people were killed. I did not come out of my meditative state until we reached the airport, and I heard nothing about the accident until the evening. I realised that everyone was much more struck by the miraculous way in which I had been protected than by the accident itself. They all told me, "Swamiji protected you, he protected all of us," and they were very much moved.

One day I slipped and fell on the wet mossy ground. As I stood up, I did not feel the pain in my shoulder and in my wrist, but was worrying about my clean beautiful white embroidered, newly ironed dress. To Swami T., who had come to help me, I said, "Look at my dress!" He laughed and said, "Never mind the dress, what about your body?" I answered, "Oh, my body knows how to take care of itself," and I went away to change my clothes.

As I came into my room, my first look was for Sivananda-Chidananda on the altar which was just opposite the door; and before I had time to close the door, my injured arm, which seemed to be hanging loose and seemed paralysed, started to move upwards in strong revolving movements and I felt my shoulder come back into the right position. For weeks, during my Asanas which always came automatically, new movements appeared. I was putting all my weight on my damaged wrist, but felt no pain. In the end I was even doing what I thought must be the peacock position, and my damaged wrist became stronger than it had ever been.

Swamiji does not like to go anywhere empty-handed. When he travels, he always carries with him a bag full of sweets and some leaflets for distribution. As I was leaving the Centre one night, he handed out to me some pamphlets and said, "Distribute them in your hotel."

My hotel was a very modest one, and some men were there drinking at the bar as my friend Inge and I went in. We were having our meal in the very same room when suddenly I remembered Swamiji's leaflets. Inge did her best to stop me.

"Not here, don't you see they are gross people, drinking too much?"

But nothing would stop me. "Swamiji told me to do it.. He knows..."

"They will be rude to you. Don't obey so literally. Have some discrimination. You don't know what these men can be like."

But I only answered, "Swamiji told me. I must do it."

So up I went to the bar. The men's surprise was great. They looked at the pamphlet then at me, frowning, and put their glasses of beer on the counter. There was a silence. They discussed among themselves in a low tone. I could see the face of the man behind the bar. He was jeering while he read from the pamphlet.

Inge wanted to go away, but I continued to eat peacefully. She waited for me. Everyone was now looking at me. Two of the men came to our table and asked, “Who are you? Where do you come from? What’s this? We do not understand.”

But they were serious, grave and very polite. I felt very friendly. We did not speak much as Inge wanted to go. But the next morning, as I came down very early for my breakfast, some of the men were there. They had the pamphlets in their pockets. They had read every word of them and they wanted to know more about Yoga. So that night I brought some books for them. One of the men was the proprietor of a taxi business. He drove me to the Yoga Centre. When I wanted to pay my fare, as I did not know the German money, I just told him to pick up what he needed from my purse. He stopped the car and started to talk to me. “Now look here, you must not behave like that. You will get into trouble. It was a wonder last night, you know. Talk of God nowadays...We are so fed up with all these hypocrites who do not live what they preach.”

He then showed me a passage of the book I had brought him the night before: “Hatred brings hatred; love begets love; fear breeds fear—this is the immutable psychological law. It is the natural right of love, the power of God, to prevail upon this earth, conquering all the forces of hate and evil.”

He then told me his story. He was from Poland. He was a Communist. His wife and children had been shot during the War. He could not get over his sorrow. With every client he transport, if he suspected an ex-Nazi, his hatred overpowered him. He often had to stop work for a while. Bad dreams came to him; he was always killing the ones who were responsible for the death of his wife and children. Hatred was poisoning his whole life. He then left his taxis in charge of a friend and went to live in the mountains and took up some studies. He was just feeling his way out when he read the passage he showed me. He said he saw a sign in it. He came in to see Swamiji.

Swamiji said to me, “Give his address to the Centre. Tell them they must always phone to him when they want a taxi.”

It was my first distribution of pamphlets, and when I saw Swamiji distributing them in the airports, in the airplanes, to the hostesses, everywhere he went, I felt so happy. I knew how right he was when he said, “God fulfills Himself with books.”

And I always remembered how my friend the taxi driver said, “They are all hypocrites, they do not live what they preach.”

In Gurudev’s *Bliss Divine* I read: “Preaching has become the livelihood of man, while practice has become his object of scorn. Many preach Buddhism, but no one gives up desires and Himsa. Many preach Christianity, but no one practises love and forgiveness. Many preach Islam, but no one practises the brotherhood of man. Many preach Hinduism, but no one realises the divinity in all.

“Real religion is one, it is the religion of the heart. It is the religion of service, sacrifice, renunciation, of goodness, kindness and tolerance.”

Chidananda is all that and much more. With him we feel that Truth is neither Hindu nor Buddhist nor Christian. We feel that Truth is one. My friend, the taxi driver, had said he was a Communist. And Swamiji said, “I have a certain sympathy for the people who do not believe in religion. How could they love religion when they have an erroneous notion of what religion is in reality? Religions have dogmas which separate them from one another, so they do some harm in spite of themselves.

“Those who taught religion in the past have often made the mistake to say that religion is a thing which concerns the other world, that it is not concerned with our every-day life in this world.

“All these mistakes have been made by preachers of all religions—Christianity, Judaism, Islam and even Hinduism. They all committed the same mistake when they said that to think of God is not the same as to think of the world. There are some materialistic philosophies which say that consciousness comes from matter. They do not believe that consciousness is superior to matter. They say that matter existed first and that consciousness came after. But how can they know that matter exists unless consciousness be there already?”

6

WITH SWAMIJI IN THE ASHRAM

Chidananda says, “The secret of all happiness and joy is indeed in wearing oneself away in selfless love and loving service.” Because of this bhava, he moulds himself in the pattern of Mahatma Gandhi, who accomplished a feat unparalleled in history, the freeing of a vast nation from foreign rule without firing a single shot, solely by the power of his non-violence or Ahimsa.”

Chidananda firmly believes that all service ranks the same with God. There is no act of service, ever so trifling, that one could be justified in passing by. Chidananda never feels any work to be below his dignity. With the Ashram servants he has carried buckets of water to the kitchen from the Ganges and washed the kitchen utensils. With the masons, he has carried bricks and stones on his shoulders. With the inmates, he has shared in the work of despatching magazines. At the Mandir, he has done puja to the Lord. In the Bhajan Hall, he has taken part in the Akhanda Kirtan of the Mahamantra. Even now, sometime, we see him picking up waste papers, cleaning refuse, cleaning gutters. We never forget. He always teaches by being and doing.

Swamiji never fails to celebrate Gandhiji’s birthday. That day he performs worship of (the Lord in the form of) the poor. He serves the sweepers himself; he puts garlands round their neck. It is unforgettable. He breaks down the barriers. No one else could bring home the truth to all in such a simple way. And as a Westerner who was standing beside me on one Gandhi Jayanti Day said, “All this could look like a ‘patronage’ day and somewhat ridiculous if it was not for his doing it.” When we saw him washing the feet of the sweepers (it is the Indian tradition to wash the feet of an honoured guest before serving him food), a great silence fell upon us; and I thought of Vaswani’s unforgettable lines:

“He washed their feet and smiled,
He washed their feet and rejoiced.
He poured joy upon His lowly task.
It was more than an act of sympathy,
It was illumination, ecstasy;
It was not pity,
It was yearning, Bhakti, self-abnegation.”

Sri. S., a follower of Mahatma Gandhi, has taken a vow not to accept conveyance of any kind. He walks miles into the hills, into the Himalayas. He has found isolated villages whose inhabitants were totally cut off from the outside world. He helps them, teaches them. One of his main occupations is the vigorous propaganda that he carries on against the destruction of the beautiful Himalayan forests. The hills are bare already, and in the rainy season floods and landslides destroy everything. There is so much of forest wealth in the Himalayas, but it needs to be preserved with care. S. comes to Chidananda for help and guidance.

A delegation of women came one day to see Chidanandaji and asked for his help. Their complaint: alcohol was being propagated and sold in their villages for spinning quick money and their men spent all the family income in drinking. Swamiji provided them with food and clothes and went with them into the interior mountain villages to speak and help. In these remote parts of India, the women suffer a most pitiful condition. They do all the work; they even till the soil.

Swamiji often walks at the head of a procession with these simple hill folk. He gives them courage. They have such faith in him that they lift up their heads. They do not feel alone any more. God is with them. God loves them. Thus, a fresh hope has come into the lives of these hopelessly abandoned people.

Chidanandaji furthers the work of his Master who wrote: “Can you do magnanimous work if you bother about trifles? Can you protect religion if you break your heads over petty questions of food and drink? Just imagine how ridiculous it looks! If there are ten Brahmins in a Dharamsala, there will be ten different kitchens. One sub-caste will not eat with another sub-caste. Break down all such senseless barriers ruthlessly.”

To reclaim the untouchable, to banish illiteracy, to strive to educate and train even the lowest—these are some of the services that Swamiji wishes to do for society. In some inexplicable way Swamiji enters fully into sympathy with the lowly and the downtrodden and takes upon himself the weight of their grief. In his presence the grieved ones begin to feel the load lifted from their hearts and find a new strength and solace flowing through them.

Many a time Chidananda is chagrined when he sees that all his activities and his travelling to broadcast spiritual knowledge do not allow him to spare himself more fully and intimately to those about him. Day and night, every moment, his heart is full of concern over our well-being. He never fails to visit his devotees, the inmates of the Ashram, when they are in hospital, always finding time. He says, “You must love another, not because the other is a relation of yours, but because you and he are one in Spirit.”

It is said that he never refuses a request. He will even note a man's need before it is expressed. Once a request is made, he cannot rest until it is fulfilled. With a Swami who was very distressed because he was not able to get up from his sick-bed to touch Swamiji's feet and bow to him, Swamiji laughed, sat down and put both his feet on the sick man's bed.

A well-known French writer came to see Chidananda. He had never met him before and he knew practically nothing about yoga. This Frenchman came to my kutir after his visit to Swamiji. He said, "I was waiting in the verandah to see Chidananda. There was another monk waiting there too. He was very friendly and talkative, charming, very courteous and very simple, yet quite a philosopher. The time passed quickly and when I heard the clock strike, I said to him, 'Thank you very much, you are very knowledgeable. With you I forgot the time, but I have an appointment with Chidananda. I have heard a lot about him and he is said to be a very great saint. Perhaps you can tell me how to behave with him. I have never seen a saint before'. Just think of my confusion when he answered 'I am Chidananda' and bowed to me. But no sarcasm was there. His smile was all love and understanding as he gave me some sweets."

I laughed when my friend told me of his discomfiture, but he was serious. He said, "Chidananda speaks in such a simple way. Being a writer, a poet, I am always conscious of language, of words, of the beauty of it all. I must say I was a little put off by the way he expressed himself at first. But I was made to wonder when he spoke to a new visitor, who had just come in, in such a very Shakespearian English, in such a very severe, very noble, elevating way too. I suddenly became conscious of my pedantry. His simple way of expressing himself was so beautiful and penetrating too.

"I was made to wonder if we convey the real meaning of things if we are not simple, if we enjoy too much the grandeur of philosophy, the beauty of words, the force of our intellect, if we 'listen to ourselves speaking', if we take pleasure in our intellectual gymnastics'.

"Perhaps that is what he calls the 'ego', and perhaps it is that which separates us from the people we want to convey a message to. O God! He has opened up such horizons for me! There is no end to it! A spontaneous artlessness becomes apparent even within a short time in his presence, that contrasts with the philosophic depth of his mind, making at times a disconcerting blend of the sage and the child in him. His hospitality, eagerness to serve and his solicitude are beyond words. His love and courtesy charm everyone and facilitate in furthering the work he wants to do."

Every contact with Swamiji is a practical teaching, an unforgettable teaching. Swamiji was leaving that night for a tour. We were all waiting in the dark to see him off. As he came out of his room, a few people ran spontaneously to touch his feet, but Swamiji backed away.

"No, no, you will all cause a chain reaction." Then he swiftly came in the midst of us and knelt down on the ground in a long prostration to us all. We fell to the ground as one, and a great Silence fell on us. Our feeling was indescribable. After he had left we all went away in our different directions, silent and wondering. He seemed to say: "You do not bow to this body. You bow to the Divine Principle in me. It is equally in you. Unfold it now. Be up and doing...I bow to that Divine Principle in you. We are one, All is One."

Wrath never conquers him. We are all so used to this that consternation spread in the Ashram one day when a monk came, very disturbed, and said, "Swamiji is angry. He is shouting at someone on the steps." The story spread quickly and the consternation deepened. One of the senior Swamis left his work and went to see, very moved and anxious. No one dared to approach Chidananda, but as the senior Swami went nearer, Chidanandaji turned and said to him, "He is so deaf! I am quite exhausted."

On a different occasion, as Swamiji was leaving, to someone who was closing the door of the crowded car he said with a bewitching smile, "Be careful now, do not crush my royal robe." It brought home to us the simplicity of his attire, his plain cotton dhoti.

The dignity of all the attitudes of his thin ascetic body gives his features more nobility than any royal robe could ever give. Ma Ananda Mayee Ma has been heard to say, "Every attitude of the body is a Mudra. Swamiji's attitude, even when he is still, is a most beautiful Mudra". His gestures, his hands, express care and love. Even when he folds a letter, his hands seem reluctant to hurt the paper, he does not crease it, he folds it just enough so that it can go in the envelope.

When he blows away the ants which come out of the garlands devotees put round his neck, he almost smiles at them, smiles with love, as a mother would smile at her children's pranks, but yet force them to better behaviour. Even his perfect simplicity, his total humility, his child-like nature cannot hide, cannot overshadow, the extraordinary nobility of his features. A Frenchman came to see Swamiji. He had come unexpectedly. "Five minutes only, please" said he; Swamiji's secretary, N., asked him to wait. "Swamiji would finish his interviews at 12:00 noon" said he. At 12:15 the Frenchman began to fret, he burst into N.'s office. N. listened patiently to his complaint and went on with his typing smilingly.

Fifteen minutes thereafter, the Frenchman came back, very red. "You said 12:00. It is now 12:30" he said, showing his watch, and then, coming close to N. who was calm and silent, he shouted, "Do you understand English, do you hear what I am saying?"

Just then Swamiji's door opened. The man went in still fuming and perspiring. When he came out, N. asked him, "What is the time now?" The man, all smiles, "Why, it is 1:15".

N., "I thought you were going to stay only five minutes and you have stayed forty-five minutes . . . Do you understand now?" When devotees tell Swamiji to learn to put people out and to learn to say 'No', he humbly excuses himself. He says, "Nothing is my own, not even my time; it belongs to you all, it belongs to God."

We all laughed when one day an American sent Swamiji a cardboard on which was beautifully printed a big 'No'. A note was with it, which said, "If you can't say 'No', just put this on your chest and walk around with it. "We laughed, but in reality we knew that Swamiji always knew how many were the despairing ones who found hope again and were saved because he alone found time to listen.

A man came to see me one night. He had a heavy bag with him. He unpacked carefully the many papers which were wrapping the big blue parcel inside. He told me, "I have carried this all around India, looking for someone I could feel like giving it to. Please give it to Chidananda."

He was silent for a while . . . Then he said, "My journey to India was my last hope. My wife and my four children have left me. I am a failure in my work, in everything. . . I turned to God in my sorrow. But the priests have no time. Nobody has time.

"I read about Indian Gurus. I came to India, but I found no one. I made up my mind to commit suicide. I wrote my last letters, I gave all my money away, I was on the Ganges bank when someone said to me, 'Do you know Chidananda? . . .'

"I don't know how I came here. I don't know what he has done to me. . . I do not know how long I sat with him. Once I made a move to go, but he smiled and said, 'You are not in a hurry, are you?' People came in and out. I was hardly conscious of anything, but peace was coming back to me. He gave me something to drink and life seemed to come back to me. Now I know I will go back and face the world again . . .

"Please give this to him. Tell him. . . just the way he gave me time, just the way he had patience. . . You see, no one has time nowadays and men can be so alone."

It breaks our hearts to hear Swamiji excuse himself so humbly when he comes back from his trips outside the Ashram. He is doing his Master's work, the propagation of Yoga to all, to the utmost of his capacity, but the people of the Ashram are not happy to see so little of him; the different Divine Life Society Centres are not contented either. The people in the West clamour for his presence; the lepers' villages live in the hope of seeing him. If anyone is dying, the family begs Swamiji to go to them. The monks want him to do the last funeral rites for them in the Ganges . . .

Swamiji does his utmost to satisfy all: he is so conscious of the demands around him.

His programmes are incredibly crowded, in the west as well as in India. People who travelled with him in the West were exhausted after two or three days, yet they did not have to give lectures and endless interviews.

Swamiji very often takes in hand the organisation of his journeys and of the journeys of the people around him, to the last detail, and no one else seems to be able to do it as well. His Master once said of him, "He is a practical idealist and an admirable realist".

In his utter devotion to serve others, Swamiji often forgets to take proper care of his own physical self and to keep himself physically fit. We wonder at this, for like his Master before him, Swamiji teaches us not to make of asceticism a fanaticism. He believes in keeping the body in a good state of health. He is a firm believer in Hatha Yoga in which he excels.

Swamiji is against the theory that one should not take medicine in case of illness, for times have changed and the physique of man has degenerated. You cannot stand on one leg and eat grass, these days, like in the days of Valmiki. So he exhorts his disciples to take the middle path so dear to

Buddha's heart. His Master put him on guard against the ferocious asceticism that had shattered his own body constitution.

But, Swamiji exhorts us to steer clear of indulgence and luxury. He himself sleeps on the bare floor. He just pushes away the books and letters, puts his Dhoti over his head and goes to sleep. A devotee offered him an air-conditioner which was installed in his bedroom, but Swamiji seems to forget it and never turns it on.

Swamiji frequently undergoes very long fasts, for fasting is the only thing that seems to relieve his liver condition. But even while fasting, he goes on with his programmes. (Once in the West, after a very long talk during one of his fasting periods, Swamiji fainted and fell; but very quickly gathering himself together, he got up drank a little water, excused himself for the interruption and went on with his talk.)

The doctors were all very impatient with him in the West. The greatest ones said, "No one could have enough energy left even to digest food while doing the work he does." And they added, "Talking is what requires most energy too". They wonder at him.

We would all be very much worried if we did not realise that it is divine energy that is pulsating through him. In the Ashram, we are privileged to see him as much as we do. But we sometimes fail to see him in the proper perspective, because he is so near us, because we are so used to the daily miracle of his presence. However, each time we progress spiritually, our outlook changes and we realise his perfection a little better.

We must rise up to a greater height, only then will we be able to make an attempt to see him in all the glory of his perfection, and only then will we fully appreciate the grace that is ours, to be allowed to participate ever so little in keeping things going in the background to help him in his most glorious and tremendous task. But we often fail to put it into practice.

When I see Chidananda, forgetting the applause for the brilliant lecture that he knows so well how to give, when, when I see him ceaselessly talk about the basis of spiritual life: the "serve, love, give" of his master I wonder at his patience, at his love. He cannot fail to see how we store words in our memory, as an acquisition we are proud of and how we forget to LIVE them.

I remember the St. Seraphin de Sarvo, a great saint of early Russian Christianity, predicting our times:

"Will come the time of the great thirst. . . . the thirst for Truth.

The West shall go to the East. . . . but they will not find it because they will search for it with the reasoned and reasonable faith . . . with the intellect."

One day tears came into my eyes as I saw Swamiji walk slowly away after his morning lecture. The very way he walked seemed to express the sorrow he was in. He had wanted to share his joy with us but we had closed the door. We had passed the joy of God, the joy he was in, the joy, the laughter of which Ananda Mayee Ma speaks when she says, "Making the INTEREST OF OTHERS

YOUR OWN seek the refuge of his feet in TOTAL SURRENDER, you will then see how the laughter that flows from such a heart defeats the world.”

Chidananda knew what a long suffering we would all have to go through before we would come to know that “Pride is our worst enemy, that erudition is a worst obstacle on the way to God than sin itself.” For the sinner had lived with the thought of his sin, even if it was buried deep down in his subconscious and the sinner may have remorse at the time of death and be saved

The Cure d’Ars was a priest in a small village in France: (there were great celebrations for his canonisation about a year or two ago). . . a man and his wife came to see him one day. Their son had committed suicide and they were in great sorrow. The Cure d’Ars who was well known for the extraordinary compassion which made him suffer so acutely the suffering of others that, somehow he took them on himself.

The Cure d’Ars closed his eyes for a moment, as if in the deepest of sorrow. Then he opened them and with great joy he said to the father and mother, “Your son is all right for JUST AS HIS HEAD TOUCHED THE WATER he thought of God and he asked for his forgiveness.”

And the memory of a story Swamiji once told us came to me: A painter one day told his friends that he was going in seclusion for a while for he wanted to do a great painting. Days passed, weeks and months passed the friends of the painter wondered. When one day he, at last, called them. They all came and as they saw a big screen in the painters workshop they asked him about it. He, then, went and unveiled his painting. On the painting the Lord Jesus was standing in front of the door of a house, with a lantern in his hand. They looked They could not understand, when suddenly one of them said, “There is no handle on the outside of the door.”

But the painter said, “This door can only be opened from the inside.”

7

SELF-RESTRAINT: THE FOUNDATION OF YOGA

Swamiji always says that self-restraint is the foundation of Yoga and that you cannot build an edifice without a strong foundation. He writes, “Nothing that is worthwhile is to be achieved without undergoing a corresponding amount of pain and suffering. No enduring idea can be attained without toil and sweat. The seed splits and perishes to bring forth the plant. The flower lays down its life to give place to the sweet fruit. It is in the furnace that gold emerges from the ore. “

Nicholas Tufoy lives in Bucharest, Rumania. He is a graduate in nuclear physics. He had a normal, happy life, when he suddenly fell ill of poliomyelitis. The illness progressed very rapidly. He then learnt how society can reject you when you are no longer useful to it.

By chance he found a book on Hatha Yoga. Books on Yoga were not freely available then, because Rumania was under Soviet rule. Unfortunately, the book was in English and Nicholas did

not speak English. He started translating the book word by word, with the help of a dictionary. It was a Herculean task, but he had strong will-power. Once he had translated the book, he started practising the Asanas described in it.

His spine was blocked. After unending efforts he succeeded in loosening it, in making it supple. Then the work really started.

When he came to the Ashram, he was cured. He could read and write English fairly well, but he could neither speak nor understand it as he had learnt it in such a peculiar way. He patiently came to all the functions, to all the lectures, and when he left, he could express himself fairly well.

Swami Chidananda personally assisted at a demonstration of Hatha Yoga Nicholas gave us. He read out the message Nicholas had written, where he told us that to obtain these results, he had lived a life of self-restraint, even of asceticism

“During my youthful age, when ending the university studies and I was ready for beginning my way of life, I caught the dreadful poliomyelitis which affected my legs, my vertebral column and my left arm. After a three months’ stay in a hospital, where I benefitted from the best medical attendance, the further evolution of the disease was stopped; but it had already left its terrible mark on me and I had to use crutches, I inspired pity in surrounding people.

Desperate, I took the known treatments recommended by specialists for such cases—treatments like medical gymnastics, conscious auto-suggestion (Method of Emile Coue), education of the will (Method of Jules Paiot), etc. I resorted even to books of religion, with a view to finding a little consolation for my troubled soul.

During these efforts of mine to find a solution to my illness I came across a booklet entitled “The Light of Asia” (The Life of Gautama Buddha). This was the beginning. Thereafter, I entered upon books of Krishnamurthi, Tagore, Kalidasa, Blavatsky, etc.

The disappointment I gained in the wake of my polio now left me little by little and, to the same extent, I regained belief in myself. After a short time, I discovered Yoga—the great revelation which actually was to prove my salvation. Paying caution, I assimilated step by step the techniques of Hatha-Yoga (Asanas and Pranayama). Then, still more attentively, I began the practice, keeping rigorously to the Yama and the Niyama principles as well as to the progressive advancing of the exercises.

Six months later, I was in a position to leave aside the crutches and to stand on my own legs.

For a beginning, I covered short distances, and then, gradually, I undertook small trips. Thus, after about only two or three months, I was able to do excursions in the mountains, reaching heights of more than 7500 ft., and sometimes being on the move twelve hours in a day.”

B. was an economist. He also came from Rumania. He started the practice of Hatha-Yoga with a group of friends, all very much impressed by the recovery of Nicholas.

Very thrilled by the results of the Asanas, they got another book “Pranayama” and started to follow the instructions full of confidence. One of them became mad and had to be hospitalised. Then they began to notice several disorders in themselves, which they imputed to the practice of Pranayama. They all got the money together and sent B. to the Ashram so that he might learn there the, proper practice of Pranayama.

He was very surprised and very disappointed when he was told of the dangers of the practice, of the necessity of self-restraint and of the spiritual, ethical basis of Yoga. He was conditioned into materialism, for his country had been under the Soviet rule for over twenty years and for him and his friends Yoga, Asanas and Pranayama were only a means to health and increased powers. Not even the thought of the dangers could convince him about the imperative necessity for self-restraint. But he listened with pleasure to all the lectures on Yoga. He became keenly interested after a while. B. said one day, “God, Christ—it is not a legend then. Religion is not the opium of the people? . . .”

Another day he would say, “I cannot eat, I cannot sleep, a revolution is taking place inside me. I feel the truth of it all. All these monks I see here, men of great intellect, what life is theirs, according to our standards! Yet they look so happy, so radiant, they have such peace.

“I feel the truth of it all. Yoga is the most thrilling adventure. I am enamoured of it; I see my life in a new light, but all my past weighs on me. Swamiji says, ‘Forget the past’, but it is not so easy. I am moulded into such a pattern. Perhaps you should not waste so much time on me, you should not trust me, I cannot trust myself”. He was, at the time, very tempted to give in to the proposition of a Swami who came to the Ashram to recruit Westerners and promised them all sorts of wonders if they would go and learn Pranayama with him in his own small Ashram. B. was left free to choose.

But again God warned him, for one of the young Westerners who was propagating for that particular Swami began to have various mental disorders and had to be sent away.

Then B. was made to read the story of a certain Swami R. who insisted on doing long Pranayamas in order to awaken Kundalini, here in the Sivananda Ashram. Swami Sivananda warned him, but that Swami paid no heed and went on with his practice, behind locked doors. One day some monks noticed he had not been seen for three days. They went to his Kutir. They knocked, but as they received no answer, they broke the door open, Swami R. was sitting in deep meditation, absent to all the world around him. Swami Sivananda came and brought him back to his normal state.

Everyone thought Swami R. must have attained illumination and waited eagerly to see the signs of his new wisdom. But very soon everyone noticed that if Swami R. was changed, it was only for the worse. He got into violent tempers and his comportment was becoming stranger and stranger.

Then he went to live alone in some other Kutir. One day some of the Ashramites noticed the strange behaviour of the dogs, standing a long way off R.’s Kutir and growling. They went to see, reciting Mantras as they advanced. As they came near to the Kutir, the smell was unbearable. When they broke the door open, a strange sight greeted their eyes. Swami R. was sitting in Padmasana,

dead. When they tried to lift his body to throw it in the Ganges, it all broke and dissolved in their hands. They had to throw buckets of water and brush away the strange mess that was left of Swami R.'s body.

B., after reading this, was totally convinced and he went back to Rumania to share his new knowledge with his friends. He must have been convincing, for we get many letters asking for books about Yoga—the spiritual Yoga, as they call it. They say that they live in the hope of seeing Swami Chidananda come to visit them.

The women are specially eager to see him. They are very happy to see a renewal of spiritual life and they are often the only ones who still go to church.

Like his Master before him, Swamiji says that the practitioners of Yoga are so enamoured of the glowing descriptions that are given of the state of one advanced in Yoga, that they are impatient to get at that state, but not willing to abide by the conditions prerequisite to it. The slow processes of preparation and purification are ignored, or negligently skipped over, and consequently they come to grief. And then they seek to lay the blame at the wrong door. In Yoga, the instructions regarding Yogic discipline, dietetic restrictions, moderation, purity and self-restraint are all actually meant to be followed to the very letter.

Swami Chidananda says that Brahmacharya is control of the senses and that Brahmacharya is not for bachelors and monks alone, but for married men and women too in its broader aspects of moderation, purity of motive and outlook, and restraint. And as such, it does not get restricted to a particular period of life, but is more a guiding rule for the whole life.

The not well-informed, especially those from Western countries, consider that Asana and Pranayama, along with a few Kriyas of Hatha Yoga, constitute the means to the achievement of supernormal powers such as levitation, thought-reading, clairaudience, clairvoyance and the like. And they wrongly imagine that these powers are the end of Yoga.

Swamiji explains that if you practise any other path, then also, the Kundalini rises and reaches the Sahasrara Chakra at the top of the head at the time of Illumination. This happens in the case of all Yogas. And because it happens spontaneously when the practitioner is purified and ready, there is no danger in such a case. . . because there is no forcing of the Kundalini as in Hatha-Yoga.

Swami Chidananda also warns the student about meditation. He says, “The present-day aspirant starts meditation as soon as he reads some books. Actually, Dhyana or meditation is almost the last stage of the Sadhana. It is on the very threshold of the Kingdom of Heaven or realisation.

“If your mind has become completely purified and you are established in self-control and your nature has become Sattvic, then the process of meditation is not difficult. You have only to intensify the practice. The process goes on smoothly. But if you want to jump to the top all of a sudden, you will find that you are nowhere.”

“Many aspirants who have not had the proper grounding in ethical science and who take to silence and forcible meditation have their nervous systems weak with desires and passions. There is, therefore, a disturbance in the proper adjustment in the psyche and the persons turn queer and eccentric. If by sheer force you try to meditate upon things which you are not fit for, serious consequences may result. The mind may become unbalanced and depression might follow, because the lower nature is there, it has not been converted.”

“It does not mean however that you should not start meditation until you have reached a high stage of purification. You must have a proper balance of view. You must take the advice of your Guru. “

“Try to convert your nature from evil to good, by means of selfless service, all sorts of menial service. No service is menial for a man who employs service as part of his Yogic technique for purification of his mind. You should not wait for someone to call you and tell you to do a job. You should serve with a feeling of absolute humility, feeling ‘I am not worthy to do it, but I have been allowed to do it by the Divine Grace’.”

“The current of meditation should never be absent from your mind. Even during your active life, the current should be maintained. If we constantly try to keep up the current of our meditative ideal, if we sit for meditation, what thought comes? The same thing as the mind was having constantly during the daytime. So, this process should be developed as a technique by the practitioners of meditation. “

“The type of tenacity that is required of an aspirant is hinted at by the Upanishads in a very beautiful way. A small bird that used to stay on the sea-shore found that the tide was about to wash away its nest. It therefore resolved to empty the ocean with a blade of grass. See the determination of the bird! Similarly you must decide you will keep up the effort at any cost and will not care for the result”.

8

PAULA: ABHISHIKTANANDA: KARUNANANDA

Paula was a German lady who met Swamiji in America where he visited her home. She left everything, sold everything and came to live in the Ashram where she built her own apartment. She was totally devoted to Swamiji and did a lot of selfless service for him.

Her faith and her courage were a lesson to all. She was not young, but she bravely faced the Indian climate and the various discomforts of Ashram life. This impaired her health.

Her love for dogs was well-known. When they suffered from scabies, she nursed them with great care. She caught scabies herself and could not sleep. The doctor told her that if she stopped all contact with the dogs, he could very easily cure her. But she paid no heed.

“Let it be” she said, “When my time shall come, all I want is to be put in the Ganges by Swamiji.” Finally, Paula had to be taken to a hospital in Dehra Dun. Swamiji, who used to see her every day in the Ashram, went to see her in Dehra Dun also. Although he was very busy, he found time for this act of kindness and compassion.

And then one day, as I was coming down the steps, I saw her. She was lying on a stretcher, dead. Her eyes were open, one leg was bent, knee upwards. Her old-fashioned grey dress was too short and I could see the ulcerations on her legs. The uncombed, short, grey hair on her head was standing on end. I could see the white hair on her chin. There was no expression either on her face or in her pale open eyes.

Many Ashram inmates were there, in their bright orange or yellow robes, laughing, talking. They paid no heed to me. It was all so strange. I looked at them, I looked at Paula. I wanted to cry, but just then Swamiji turned back. I had not noticed him in the crowd. He looked at me and I controlled myself.

Two Brahmacharis took hold of the stretcher and started to walk down. Everyone followed. I wondered where they were going and if I would be allowed to follow. But they called me. They all went down to the Ganges, laughing and talking all the time. Paula’s body was placed on the step by the riverside. Swamiji sprinkled holy Ganga water on her, prayed, and spread an ochre cloth on her.

It was all so informal. People were chatting, laughing. The atmosphere was contagious. I suddenly found myself smiling. I could see Paula watching us. She was looking at her ugly old body. She was so happy to be free from it. She was floating above us, young, peaceful and so happy, free at last.

The body was put in a bag, some stones were put in to weigh it down. Paula’s head was sticking out of the bag. I could see her pale eyes looking at me. A Brahmachari shook the bag. I could still see the stiff short grey hair for a while. Then the bag was tied up and put in a boat. Swami Chidananda and several other monks climbed in and the boat went down the Ganges, where the body was lowered into the water with the usual prayers. There were only some orange flowers left floating on the water.

All this was so strange and could have been terrifying to a Westerner like me, but the atmosphere, the feeling of love, and most of all, Swamiji’s presence. . . My whole attitude to death underwent a change. We shed the body as we shed an old coat. We are born anew to peace and joy and eternal life, if we have shed ignorance and lived this life in the proper way.

I was happy for Paula, so happy. I felt her happiness all around me. She had the reward her great devotion had earned for her, the rare privilege of being lowered in the Ganges by her beloved Guru, with flowers and prayers. Living in the presence of a saint is such a grace. He somehow transmits his own feelings to us. Otherwise, how could I have felt such peace, such joy, for all this would have seemed so strange, frightening and heartless to me with my Western conditioning.

Abhishiktananda was a French Benedictine monk who had spent twenty-five years of his life in India. He had put on the ochre robe and taken on Indian nationality. He had learnt Hindi,

Tamil and Sanskrit. . . Sanskrit, because it is the language of the Soul, the divine sound which gives it all its mystical meaning. The Upanishads had become Swami Abhishiktananda's very life-breath. He used to say, "Why do people run here and there, trying this religion, this other religion, or trying to add to or change already existing ones, trying this master, this other master? Why not keep to the teachings of the Upanishads and of the Rishis?"

One day he said how his master Gnanananda had talked to him about the introduction of superstitions and rituals into the Hindu religion by interested persons for their own selfish ends and for moneymaking. I told him the story I had heard Swamiji say.

A man was sent to see what was the most useless of things in creation and bring it to his Guru. After looking around everywhere, he came to the conclusion that excreta was the most useless of things in the world. He was going to pick up some of it, when a voice arose therefrom:

"How dare you? I am not useless. I fertilize the soil, vegetables grow out of me, fruits, beautiful, fragrant flowers. Go back to your Guru and tell him what I think."

"Man is the most useless of creatures. He is not only the most useless, he makes a mess of everything. He has made me what I am now. Before man ate me, I was a beautiful mango." Then another dung shouted, "I was a pink and white ice-cream with wonderful flavour. See what I am now!"

Then another one joined in, "I was the honey the bees had made from the white jasmine".

Then they all cried, "See what you men have made of us! See what men make of the most beautiful things!"

Abhishiktananda laughed and said, "It is true. Man makes a mess of the most beautiful things. What has man made of all religions, all over the world? How has he treated his saints, his prophets? Hinduism is not the only one to have gone astray. . ."

I told him how I laughed once when I heard Chidananda's answer to an American who made a very honest criticism of the Hindu religion. Chidananda said, "Yes, it is true. But when a baby has dirtied itself, you don't throw it away, do you?"

Abhishiktananda was very frank. His purity, his humility, his simplicity, the joy that radiated from him were wonderful to behold.

I had not seen him for some time, when one afternoon, at 3 o'clock, a sudden impulse drew me out of my room. I found myself rushing down the steps leading into the street. It was the hour when I should have been starting my Kirtan in the Bhajan Hall of the Ashram. I argued with myself, wondering where I was going. But it was no use. Something in me, stronger than my will or reasoning power, was driving me, and on I went down the steps, down into the street. A taxi was there, as if waiting for me, with its door open. I got in. I just said 'Rishikesh', still not knowing where I was really going. I did not even ask the fare as I usually did.

In Rishikesh, near the Hardwar taxi stand, I stopped my taxi on a sudden impulse. As I came out, I saw a man in front of me. He was half-naked; he had no shawl and his Dhoti was indecently falling off his hips. He was all wet and dirty with perspiration and rain. His face was livid and twisted in the most frightful manner. No sound came from his open mouth, but such a wild intensity was in his eyes as he looked at me. He seemed to have no hair or beard, for they were stuck to the skin with the rain.

I felt afraid. The taxi driver and two other men came to me. They pushed me back into the taxi, making me understand with signs that the man was dangerously drugged. But, my personal fear and my fear of discrediting the Ashram did not last.

I opened the door of the car, pushed the men and made my way out of the hostile crowd. I felt the man's eyes were calling me. I was there just in time to stop his falling down, and as I put my arms round him, I heard his voice, "Yvonne!" And I knew it was Abhishiktananda.

I made him lie on a doorstep nearby. From that time on, everything went like clockwork. Authority came to me. Everyone obeyed, everyone was kind and helpful. Telephones were set ringing, boys left their shops to go and look for the doctor even though it was the rush hour. The bank manager himself left his office and brought the doctor in his own car. The crowd kept away, silent, ready to help.

Abhishiktananda was very still, eyes closed. His face was grey, he had a very thin, erratic pulse which suddenly seemed to disappear. But just when I thought he was leaving his body, he opened his eyes and whispered, "Chidananda is the pearl the pearl of India" I tried to stop his talking, but he went on with an unforgettable look of joy in his blue eyes, "With the body or without the body, what matters? Why do you worry?"

Then a while later, "It is not my heart disease that is killing me, it is joy. That week my disciple and I spent with Chidananda was too much for me. A human heart cannot hold so much joy. My heart was not big enough. . ." Then again, "Tell Chidananda to put my body in the Ganges."

But his hour had not yet come. The doctor came just in time. When I rushed back to the Ashram to ask Swamiji what to do, he asked, "How was it you were there at that hour?"

"Oh, just by accident" I said. He did not agree. There are no such things as accidents. You were God's instrument."

From that time on Swamiji took charge. Abhishiktananda was put in a quiet room in a small hotel nearby, meals were taken to him from the Ashram, and a student, Nirmal, stayed with him day and night nursing him with such love and care as no one could dream of.

Swamiji found time to visit Abhishiktananda ever so frequently, although the Ashram was full to overflowing with Sadhana Week guests and Swamiji was kept busy all the time.

Abhishiktananda was so joyful after Swamiji's visits and he would speak endlessly about Swamiji. Once he said, "I have known all the great saints of India of my time. Aurobindo, Ramana

Maharshi They are no more. . . . But Chidananda is there”. Then after a while, “I wonder what his Master must have been like to have given us such a disciple.”

When Abhishiktananda passed away a few months later in South India, Chidananda said in his prayer, “Our beloved Abhishiktananda was the example of a perfect Sannyasin; he had reached very great heights.”

Swami Karunananda was an Australian. He was a Gurubhai of Chidanandaji. He lived on Dattatreya Hill, near the Ashram, with four of his disciples who looked after him. Chidananda took complete care of them all.

Karunananda was an example of fortitude personified. His speech, deglutition and arms were paralysed, yet he was always in bliss. If ants or insects crawled over him, he could not even remove them and he needed someone constantly with him.

As he could not speak, he had worked out a way of communicating with others. With his foot he showed letters on a board made for that purpose, one after the other, and his disciples put the letters together and pronounced the words. It had become quite a quick way of communication. They were so devoted to him! In that way he even wrote articles and some poems which Swamiji got published in the Ashram. In one poem, Swami Karunananda wrote:

“I was an artist,
a scribe,
and He takes away my hands.
I was a Yogasana enthusiast,
demonstrator,
and teacher,
and He takes away my arms.
I was a singer,
a lecturer,
and He takes away my voice.
But oh! What does He give me?
He gives me simplicity,
the ability to weep as others laugh,
and laugh as others weep.
He makes me scratch my back,
scratch my head
on tree-stumps,
rocks and temple corners,
like wandering cows.
He makes me signal others
to scratch inaccessible places
like a group of sunning monkeys.
He shows me the perfect picture
He is constantly painting
on gnarled tree-trunks,

on crumbling walls,
on the shadowed jungle floor;
in the twinkling silver
of sun on waving leaves,
in the blue haze of distance.
He scribes for me His Scripture
in the clouds and stars,
the everflowing waters of Mother Ganges,
and the footprints on Her sands.
He teaches me His Yoga
of continuous Being
so that now I hear His Singing
in the gentle summer breeze,
the roar of the approaching monsoon,
busy humming of bees,
and twittering of tiny honey-eaters.
He constantly lectures me,
first guiding me to sit on a rock,
to be filled with His babblings
at a many-pooled forest stream,
but soon leading me into His Silence
Now He lectures me so sweetly
seated in my very heart.
When God gives me this
in return for hands, arms and voice,
what more can He give
when He takes this body?"

Chidananda visited Karunananda very often. To see them together, to see their love, was a wonderful, unforgettable experience. Karunananda's face radiated devotion when he spoke of Chidananda. He would not stop talking about him, although it must have been a very fatiguing process for him to express himself.

When Karunananda passed away, Swami Chidananda did all the Ganges ceremony. With bare feet and short Dhoti, he walked beside the chair where the body was kept, stiff and pale, and performed all the funeral rites till the body was lowered into the Ganges. And that night at Satsang he told us joyfully:

"Today is a very blessed day, for today a realised soul, a Jivanmukta, has cast away his body".

Karunananda had come back from Australia, so that his body might rest in the Ganges and so that Chidananda would be the one to see him off. He had had many disappointments in the last years of his life; but he never worried because he knew Chidananda was there and he knew Chidananda would never forsake a friend.

9

THE REDEEMER

One day in Amsterdam, Swamiji sent us all to have lunch in some vegetarian restaurant. We felt he wanted to be alone.

That evening at Satsang, a lady came and sat next to me. Her eyes were red. She had been crying. I smiled at her. She came closer and said:

“This afternoon I saw Chidananda enter the . . . Club. I was so shocked. It is such an evil dangerous place, the worst drug place in the city. I followed him, I went in. How I managed to get in, I don’t know. Chidananda was standing on the platform, alone. I went nearer. No one was looking at him. He was looking at all the drugged young people in front of him. It was a most terrible sight. His lips were moving, he was praying aloud. Then I saw his eyes. Such love, such compassion, I was drowned in it. Then, suddenly, I felt his suffering. It was so intense within my heart, tears rolled down my cheeks. I was choked. I saw Christ on the cross. The reality of his suffering struck me for the first time.

“One of the young people noticed Chidananda. He stood up and went near Swamiji. His eyes were mad with drugs. A few others joined him. They jeered at Swamiji. Their words were so gross. I was trembling. One of them took Swamiji’s bonnet off and put it on his own head.

“Swamiji never stopped praying, his face always so full of that wondrous love. His eyes were shining.

“But just then I was pushed out and I found myself in the street again. But my fear had left me. He was Daniel in the lion’s den. What could happen to him?”

A lady that I knew was listening. She was very pale.

The next morning she came to see Swamiji. She was very quiet; she held a little bouquet of Lily of the Valley in her hand. The Lily of the Valley was the favourite flower of St. Francis of Assisi. She did not know it, but we knew and many of us were moved because in the West people call Swamiji “the St. Francis of India”. We were all struck by her attitude. She was not her usual aggressive self. She walked very slowly, head bent, unaware of her surroundings. She sat quietly in front of Swamiji and waited, eyes down, and only when Swamiji spoke to her did she offer her bouquet.

She gave an envelope containing all the money she had received for the rent of all the Yoga people staying in her house. For her it was a great sacrifice, for she was a widow and depended on that rent to live. She said very little and every word was so simple, so true, so moving. She said, “I went to Church this morning, the first time in many, many years. . . . You have made Christ alive for me”

We were having a Satsang with only four or five devotees in a boat-house in Amsterdam. From all the windows we could see the river and the wild ducks flying by. Everything was so peaceful, and as I looked at our hostess, I thought she was peace itself. Swamiji just then smiled and said, “Yes, peace comes from the peaceful.”

It was not only peaceful, but so beautiful. Swamiji was sitting in Padmasana, a tall white lily reaching up to him by his side, his bright orange robe shining against the background of the dark green armchair. A pyramid of wonderful purple lilies and a huge basket of oranges as bright as Swamiji’s robe, were laid out on the dark green carpet.

I was looking with all my heart, when Swamiji said, “Yes, God is beauty also. . .”

In all that peace and stillness, we suddenly heard the loud noise of a motorcycle, recklessly driven. The door was flung wide open and a tall young man stood there, with his helmet still on his head. He lifted his hand to Swamiji and shouted, “Hi you”. Swamiji put up his hand and answered, “Hi you, too”.

The young man came amongst us, whistled a while, but slowly quietened down. After the Satsang, he came to see me and told me how he had met Swamiji in the . . . Club, how he could not stand to see him reviled, how he had stood up for him. He came several times. He was so moved by Swamiji that he stopped all drugs then and there.

Nearly two years after, just as I was leaving for India, imagine my surprise when I got a long letter from him, telling me he was coming to see me in France. He had taken up his studies again, had successfully passed his examinations, and was reconciled with his family. His mother had joined a letter, a most moving letter. She could not come, said she, as she was paralysed, but she wanted to know about this monk from India who, in working such a change in her son, had brought back happiness and peace in her heart. She said that the photo of Swamiji which I had given her son was always by her side, near the image of Christ.

She spoke very wonderfully about Yoga, she had read so many books. She said, “Yoga says all religions are paths which lead to the same goal. I am reading a lot about Christian Saints and the Sufis all what I can lay my hands on, but through it all, I am getting nearer to Jesus Christ every day”

“My son wheels me into the empty church and we sit there together. Such peace has come to me through this monk from India”

Swamiji worked wonders everywhere he went. He dried the tears of a fallen girl. Now she writes to me:

“I am reading the life of Lord Buddha. He is alive for me, because I see Him in Chidanandaji. I remember his eyes of compassion. Everything is changed for me “When angry people are around me, I cannot speak a word of hate or retaliation, for I remember how Chidanandaji forgave me, how he understood. I remember the look of love in his eyes, the love, the compassion. I feel faith and adoration for him and my heart is full of peace and I answer not.

“Although I am alone now with my two children and I work hard to earn my living and study at night, hope is ever with me. Before my meeting with Him, I was all bitterness with the world, which always threw me out when I tried to change my ways of life. I retaliated and sank lower and lower because of my despair. “Now I accept and bow my head and pray to Chidanandaji and people seem to change.

“I remember how he said, ‘You are a child of God and you are so precious to Him. God sees no sin but ignorance on the way. You are a mother. Would you stop loving your daughter if she failed, if she failed in the terrible circumstances which brought you to such a life?

“He said, ‘Your suffering can become a blessing if it helps you to understand others. You will be enabled in little acts of kindness, in little deeds of love in the seemingly unspiritual things, the common duties of life, to serve the poor with tears in your eyes’.

“I have read in the Gita:
‘When you have no lust
and no hate in your heart,
you may safely walk
among the things of lust and hate’.

“This day will come for me, it is coming even now and all this because of his compassion and love. . . he is the incarnation of compassion!”

In an ancient book, we read of a servant of humanity—a servant of the poor and the lowly—at the threshold of the heaven-world where he stands one day when he hears a voice. It cometh from a corner of the earth. The voice says, “In anguish am I. Is there none to help?” And the servant says, “Not for me the joy of the heavenly world. Back to the earth. . . let me go. . . for a brother or a sister is in pain!” When I read this, I thought of Chidananda who, like Buddha, is a heart of love and compassion and I was made to wonder. . . I remembered hearing Chidanandaji say, “There is a holier music in silent service of the poor and the lowly, than in all the gorgeous chanting of the temple priests.”

Once a Brahmachari came to me. “Mother, there is a Frenchman who does not speak a word of English. He has not registered, he does not come out for meals. He shuts himself up in his room and he smokes all the time. Could you come and tell him that it is forbidden to smoke in the Ashram, that if he can’t do without it he can go and smoke on the Ganges bank?”

When I knocked at the man’s door, an angry voice came out, “Peace, peace, I want peace. . . What is the matter with you all? Can’t you leave me alone?” He was shouting. I did not know what to do. I sat on a bench near the door for a long time.

But his voice suddenly came out, “What are you waiting for? Why do you sit there? What do you want?”

I said, “Oh nothing, but I was told to take you to the reception to fill in the forms”.

The door opened, “Forms to fill? I don’t believe you. This is an Ashram, not a hotel. What are you trying to do? Spy on me?” And his hand came out; he pulled me into his room and he locked the door.

As I looked at his face, I felt the anguish he was in. I sat on the floor. He walked round and round me, smoking so quickly that he lit one cigarette from the other, throwing the half-finished ones carelessly on the matting where they had already burnt many holes.

When he let me speak, I explained to him why he had to fill in the forms and that he must come with me because I was the only one who spoke French in the Ashram. I said, “You won’t be allowed to stay in the Ashram if you do not submit to this.”

After filling the forms, I asked him to come and have lunch with me in my Kutir, for I remembered how I had been told he did not come out for meals. But on the way I remembered it was Thursday, so I told him I must introduce him to Swami K. who was just coming out of the Samadhi shrine. Swami K. looked at the man and asked, “What do you want from us?” I translated, but my new friend scornfully looked K. up and down and said, “What have you to give?” and turned away with a sneer.

I do not remember what I said to K. to explain, to defend the man, but it must have been very short, because I felt I must run after the man. I took him to my Kutir. He ate hungrily, he seemed to relax and he went out in the jungle (at my back-door) where he lay on the ground, smoking. Suddenly he called me, I sat near him. “You are not afraid of me? You are living here? How long? What are you running away from? Is it escapism? Is it cowardice? You look happy and serene though. . .”

It all started when he said, “It is easy to be happy when nothing happens to one, when there is no temptation, no sorrow. . .”

I do not know how it came about, but I was surprised to hear myself talking about my son’s death. It was the first time I was doing it in such detail, and while I was speaking, I thought to myself, “Why do you speak about yourself? He wants to be listened to, he may want to confide in you. He is in such deep sorrow. . .” But my voice was going on and on. . . now I was speaking about Swami Chidananda.

He was listening intently.

I said suddenly, “Swamiji says, ‘There is nothing like a mother’s love, for it expects nothing in return’. He also says, ‘There is nothing like a mother’s suffering. One cannot know it unless one goes through it’”

As I said this, the man suddenly threw himself on the ground and his body was shaken with violent sobs. I had never seen such violence in human suffering and I sat there in great sorrow, when he looked up suddenly and said, “I have run away, I have left my mother to face it all. She will have to sell her property; she is so attached to every stone, to every tree of the park, to her traditions. . . But I can’t give myself up. It is not so much the hardship of the prison, but the shame, the opinion,

the way people will laugh at me. I was so proud, you see. I do not care for anyone, for any woman, but my mother, oh my mother. . .”

The bell rang, but I did not go to the lecture. We spoke for hours. I felt only Swamiji would have been able to help my friend, but he was on tour. I went to N. and asked for Swamiji’s programme. I gave it to my friend. He left the next day and I wondered. . .

I prayed for him, for his mother. . . Their suffering was so alive for me. Time passed. I had forgotten about all this, when one day I received a letter from his mother. She had sold most of her properties, she lived in a small cottage but she was happy. Her son had given himself up, but he had been graced because of the *circonstances atténuantes* which the French law admits for a *crime passionnel*.

She added, “Please send me some photos of this monk, this Swami Chidananda. How wonderful to think such saints can go out in the world preaching and teaching! “Our monks—shutting themselves up in monasteries, as they do—make us feel that everyday life has nothing to do with God. I am deeply moved by the little I know of Yoga. It does not want us to believe in words without any substance behind them. It seems to be a way of life. It has changed my attitude to everything I feel a new harmony coming within me, in my dealings with others. . . It has brainwashed me. . . I was so conditioned. . . We all are. . .”

“This reincarnation, for instance, what a difference it makes to everything, what a gleam of hope! It is such commonsense too. And this Law of Karma . . . All men would understand it, if only they were told. They would automatically come to a more righteous way of life if they knew that it is only their action that brings a certain reaction. It is all So rational, so scientific!” Quite awhile after, I received a letter from her son:

“My mother died on the 24th of December. She was very peaceful. . In her last moments she told me: ‘Write to this French lady in India. Tell her she must write all that she told you about Chidananda. . . Tell her, especially, to write about her son coming to her after his death. It has made me believe there is something beyond, it has changed everything for me. It is because of that I have spent my last years in such a different way, it is because of that I am so peaceful now’. And at her very last minute, she opened her eyes and said, ‘Tell Chidananda, please tell him. . .’ As her son bent forward to catch her last words, he only heard, “Tell him” and she passed away. . But I had no time to tell Swamiji. So many letters come. . . They are often so moving, so inspiring . . . I am always struck at the way people understand Yoga so quickly. They often say, “If only we were told. . . if only God was explained that way to us. . . but we are lost in total ignorance . . . It is so dramatic to think so many pass by the wonders of these Revelations. . .”

Many a time I translated the letters I received so as to read them to Swamiji. But where would he have found the time? And I know so well what he would say. I have seen him so often point to the sky and say, “He is the doer! May He work miracles according to His own choosing, through this instrument you call Chidananda. . .”

10

THE DIVINITY OF WOMANHOOD

Swamiji, travelling in the West, was going to pass by a swimming pool, full of women in bikinis. His secretary tried to persuade him to take a different path. Swamiji asked the reason for the sudden change and the secretary was obliged to say, “Swamiji, this place is full of naked women.” Swamiji looked up. “Naked mothers, you mean!” he exclaimed. Chidananda reveres womanhood. And he reminds us, “Almost all present-day saints are believers in the divinity of womanhood. They revere womanhood greatly. They hold that women too have a great, prominent role to play in bringing about a spiritual regeneration in the land.”

But knowing that mind takes advantage of the least sign of weakness in the aspirants, Chidananda advises them, “Let the aspirants who have perforce to move with women in daily life begin to view them as manifestations of the Divinity in Its aspect as World Mother. Thus, the cultivation of Devi-bhava becomes an important and effective method, acting as a veritable shield to the individual.”

And in this as in other matters, Swamiji himself sets a shining example for others to follow. The people from some Yoga Centre abroad had asked me to come with Swamiji the next time he would visit them. Receiving no answer from me, they wrote to Swamiji himself. Swamiji showed me the answer he was sending them, “My Master made me promise to have no woman near me.”

I was so happy! The problem was solved and in accordance with my secret wishes. And who could doubt the wisdom of Sivananda? He had a vast experience behind him, experience of both the secular life and the Ashram life. But some misunderstanding spread. It was again only misunderstanding. For Swami Chidananda is the last person to hate women. He reveres womanhood. There are not many who are so patient in hearing women’s troubles, who are so sincere in coming to their help, in suggesting solutions to their worries and problems. All women feel this and their devotion to him is unequalled.

A lot of misunderstanding has spread in the West about what people often call the misogyny of Hinduism. If Swamiji, like his Master before him, advocates the cultivation of a Sattvic Bhava in regard to women, it is for the spiritual aspirant. Swamiji’s writings in this regard are so lucid and convincing that they are well worth quoting in detail if only to dispel prevalent notions about the supposed misogyny of Hinduism. Writes Swamiji, “You might have read about a class-mate of Swami Vivekananda, a monk of great renunciation and determination who, after years of admirable self-control and Nishkama Seva, finally became hopelessly entangled in a woman’s wiles.

“It is not a question of being pure or impure. The very proximity of persons of the opposite sex is dangerous, however pure and well-meaning those persons may be. Moving with women unleashes a primitive force, quite beyond the easy control of the human being. The woman herself might be spotless, but the Lord’s mighty power of Maya may work through her unawares. The hidden power of lust in the heart of men begins to manifest in feminine presence and proximity.

“For an aspirant, all contact with women should be avoided. It is needless to say that this implies a similar discipline for women aspirants to be exercised by them with regard to men. The modern mind, with its aesthetic appreciation of the world’s greatest lovers, its conception of platonic relationship and its poetic fancy of the ‘beauty’ of youthful passion may revolt at this extreme expression of asceticism. It may accuse the saint of misogyny. But it is not so. This caution is necessary.

“How supra-human beings like Brahma, Narada and Viswamitra succumbed to the influence of sex is vividly brought out in the Hindu scriptures. To the spiritual aspirant, these scriptures therefore advocate, in unmistakable terms, the avoidance of all contact with the opposite sex.

“This is not at all meant to foster and encourage mutual hatred or fear between sexes. This only points out the necessity for each sex viewing the other in the right perspective, leading to an attitude of respectfulness through the realisation of the inexplicable power the Lord has invested sex with.

“It is no use attempting to ignore the fact that, in the vast majority of people, the sexual craving is very intense. Hence the necessity for such an uncompromising attitude and such drastic advice. Individual Sadhaks stand to benefit much by trying to live on these lines.

“For, in truth, spiritual life is for eternity. It is not like a period of work giving place later to a nice vacation. The same high pitch of purity and discipline has to be maintained if spiritual life is to mean anything at all. No relaxation of rigour and caution can be afforded, for the mighty power of Cosmic Illusion is not a trifle to be toyed with. A fit of passion is enough to blow away the result attained by years of slow, painstaking effort. Remembering this, let the aspirant ‘be ever watchful unto prayer’ as the mystics have said.

“It is well to keep before our mind the example of a certain saint of Madurai, of whom it is narrated that, while he was passing aimlessly through the streets of that city, he was accosted by an irreverent and arrogant merchant, who jocularly asked the saint which was the superior of the two—the beard on the saint’s chin or the tuft of hair on the tail of a donkey! The saint looked up silently at the questioner for a few moments and quietly resumed his wanderings.

“Several years had passed away when the merchant was one day summoned urgently to the saint’s presence. The waggish merchant, having long forgotten all about his sacrilegious humour of bygone years, went wondering what the matter might be. He found the venerable saint on his death-bed and, at his approach, the dying one raised himself up slowly and whispered to him thus: ‘My good man! You asked me a question several years ago. Well, my beard is superior to the donkey’s tuft: so you have your answer, and forgive me for my delay’.

“The now thoroughly mortified merchant asked the saint why, after years of silence, he chose to give an answer to the impertinent query now, during his last moments. “The saint, with great humility, replied: ‘Precisely because these are my last moments. Doubtless, I might have even then answered you, as I do now, but I dared not. My dear brother, so very mysterious, so incomprehensible is the Lord’s illusive power that I knew not what I would do or be the next

moment. Man's achievements are of no avail before Maya's charms. She reigns supreme on the stage of the divine play. None can dogmatically say that he is beyond all temptation. It is the Lord's grace alone that not only makes a man pure, but also keeps him pure to the end. Man, on his part, is but to exercise a constant humility and an active vigilance. . . . These several years I have striven to keep myself spotless and devout, putting faith in His love and mercy to maintain my purity. I have now but a few moments to live and there is no chance of a slip; therefore, with my last breath, I answer you confidently'. And the saint sank back and gave up his body.

“The examples of the saints are well known. Sri Ramakrishna did Tapas for years until his flesh was overcome and every woman became to him an image of his Mother. Rishi Dayananda practised austerities for years before he went upon his mission as a teacher of modern India.

“One saint assailed by temptation threw himself over a block of snow, unmindful of catching pneumonia. He rolled himself in the snow until his body became cool, bereft of passion. St. Benedict rolled himself in clumps of thorns and briars. His body became one big wound; but he put down the flame of passion”.

Women in the West are more spiritual than men and they wonder when they hear about the so-called misogyny of Hinduism. But Chidananda's attitude always sets things straight for them. Swamiji is a broad-minded leader of Hinduism. He stands up for women's rights, he even celebrates marriages without dowry. He never forgets his Master who said, “If your daughter is born with definite Samskaras of dispassion and service, then give her a good education, train her up, let her choose her own line of life. Do not force her into wedlock. In such exceptional cases, you must be bold and rational. Do not always be a slave to social customs.”

A group of seekers, newly arrived from France, came to their first lecture in the Sivanandashram. Some of the women were in mini-dress. At the end of the lecture I could not help speaking to them. They were surprised, “Why, what is wrong? It is the fashion!”

I explained, “This is an Ashram, a monastery, although it may be called the Yoga-Vedanta Academy. Just think, these Brahmacharis, these monks, must succeed in having not even a thought, not even a dream of sex. They should not even mix with women. It is only due to Sivananda that such an Ashram is open to us.”

Their reaction was wonderful. They wanted to go to Rishikesh, then and there, to buy Saris, but there was no time. So they all came to my room, where I dressed them all in blue Saris, as I had only blue Saris at that time. An hour or so later, the lecture hall was all blue. Swami K.'s surprise was evident when he looked at his interpreter, who a short time before had been in a mini-dress and now looked so very Indian with her hair back and wearing a Sari. Swami Chidananda, who came later, had also to look twice before he recognised the women of the group, because they were all so changed now.

“Look not with the eyes, but with the heart” says Chidananda. When Mother M. and the people of the Divine Life Centre in Paris asked Swamiji about his stay in . . . he did not speak about his very successful lectures. He only answered, his face suddenly drawn and very sad. “I saw a

mother suffering every conceivable suffering because of her eighteen-year-old daughter who has disappeared for nearly a year now”.

I can never forget the way Mother M. (who was relating this) closed her eyes and said with a hushed voice, “Chidanandaji, Chidanandaji, he is love incarnate. I have seen many saints, but he stands out for his heart of universal love.” Then she said, “After his train journey he was so tired, but he asked us all to come with him to Lisieux to have a Satsang for invoking God’s mercy on the suffering mother and her daughter.” Going to Lisieux took perhaps three hours going and three hours coming back. It ought to have been quite a tiring journey, yet it was the first thing that Swamiji did. He always says, “There is nothing like a mother’s love. It is what is nearest to God’s love, for it expects nothing in return”. He also says, “There is nothing like a mother’s suffering. Unless one has gone through it, one cannot imagine it.”

Because of this heart of love, Swami Chidananda never turns a deaf ear to a mother’s suffering. It was in Koln in Germany. The Satsanga was finishing, people crowded around Swamiji. Many were in tears. They were perhaps never going to see him again. The atmosphere was very tense.

We were all looking at our watches. Would Swamiji miss the plane? The time was getting short when suddenly an elderly lady burst in. She went up to Swamiji. She bowed and said, “Oh Swamiji, you are still here! Thank God! My mother is dying, she has no peace, she is asking for you” Swamiji stood up. Everyone made way. The old lady was very weak. Swamiji knelt and bent down over her. The dying one opened her eyes, “Oh, I knew you would come! . . . I am dying, but I cannot pray. I cannot say, ‘Jesus!’ I can only say, ‘Chidananda!’ I cannot think of God. I can think only of you. Tell me, please tell me, I want to die as a Christian.”

Swamiji bent very low. We heard, “It is all the same thing. It is all one”. But the big watchdog started howling and crying as dogs are said to do at death’s bed. If we could not hear, we could see the peace coming slowly over the old lady’s face; and we could see radiant love in Swamiji’s eyes and once more we felt that we were in the presence of God.

The plane was late, so Swamiji did not miss the next Satsang in Switzerland.

Swami Chidananda knows no rest. He is ever on the move to reach suffering souls This is what Diane Dufault writes from Bellflower, California:

“Swami Chidananda’s tenderness towards children and his authentic selflessness were made apparent to me on a very personal basis. My niece, Molly, had contacted spinal meningitis at the age of three months, had been hospitalised, and although she appeared to recover from the grosser manifestations of the disease, medical personnel suggested that there might be residual effects, that the child could have brain impairment or mental or physical disabilities of one sort or another. Swami Chidananda was visiting Los Angeles and I had suggested to my sister that we take the child to him for a blessing, feeling that any additional sort of higher energy or positive love could only be beneficial. Due to circumstances it happened that we missed the Los Angeles meeting with Swamiji, although considerable effort had been made to meet him. As events went, Swamiji had a very, very busy schedule of activities, including nightly lectures, interviews, and a retreat.

Yet, on the final Sunday of his visit, a day when he had just completed a morning lecture ending the retreat at a Camp ground, some distance from the city, and was scheduled for both an afternoon and an evening programme each at different places in the city, he took time out to travel the considerable distance (Bellflower is a 60 miles round-trip from Los Angeles proper) to come to give a tiny five-month old baby girl his blessings and well wishes. My sister who had never met him was somewhat apprehensive at the thought of having to greet this rather famous personage. Yet, she says, as Swami Chidananda entered the room it was as though light itself entered, literally dispelling all anxiety and doubt from the atmosphere.

The baby sensed that someone strange was to hold her and was on the verge of crying, yet as Swamiji picked her up and put her in his lap, she too lost all tension and fear and appeared very comfortable and calm with him. “Practically five years have passed since Swamiji’s visit, and the little girl has, from all appearances, a good deal of charm, beauty, and original expression and wit. It still seems quite wonderful and really greatly kind and thoughtful that this extraordinary monk from a far-off, out-of-the-way village in the foothills of the Himalayas in India—Rishikesh—should find his way to America, to an equally obscure suburb on the outskirts of Los Angeles—Bellflower—to a rather humble apartment to visit and grace a tiny baby”

Swamiji loves children. He believes that the training of the individual should start prior to birth. He says that the impressions strike deep roots in the brain of the foetus that dwells in the womb. If the pregnant woman does Japa and Kirtan, if she studies religious books and leads a pious life, during pregnancy, the foetus is endowed with spiritual Samskaras or impressions and is born as a child with spiritual inclinations or tendencies.

Many are the women in the West who, following his advice, have a very peaceful pregnancy, and leaving aside all drugs and doctors, give birth to their children with the aid of Yogic concentration, Pranayama, relaxation and prayer.

Swamiji says also, “The minds of children are elastic and plastic, when they are young. They can be moulded nicely without much effort. The impressions that are made in the young minds last till death, they cannot be erased. So, moral education and ethical teaching should be imparted in childhood”.

Swamiji says that the perception of the deep beautiful truths underlying life can be given only to the growing soul, before it is warped by the fact of selfish and competitive living that is the pattern of life on earth. He says, “If people were to speak in terms not of ‘my good’ and ‘your good’ but ‘our good’, then the question of the right education of the generation in the making, which will lead the world of tomorrow, would have been solved at least partially”. Swamiji tells the parents that if they live what they teach their children, only then will the children obey them, because example is the greatest teacher.

11

CHIDANANDA AND THE CHILDREN OF FATHER DAMIEN

Sivananda says, “If you see a man lying on the road and you do not go and help him, do not say it is his Prarabdha. Even if you are starving, you must give your cup of milk to that man. In this way your heart will expand”.

Chidanandaji found a leper lying on the road to Hardwar. He carried him on his shoulders, right to the Ashram. Most people in the Ashram were afraid of contagion, so Swamiji put him in a tin-shed over the hill. The leper had open ulcers and was suffering from advanced, galloping leprosy, with the flesh falling off the limbs, and bones protruding out of the palms in place of fingers.

Chidananda had to feed him eight or ten times a day, even as a mother would feed a child. No one dared to approach that leper, the barber refused to cut his hair and Chidanandaji himself did the job. He even cleaned the leper’s excreta. Service of lepers has been a passion with Swamiji since school days. From the time he was a boy building huts for lepers in his father’s garden, Swamiji has kept a soft corner in his heart for the people suffering from Hansen’s disease.

When Swamiji joined the Ashram nearly three decades ago, he was put in charge of the dispensary. He utilised this golden opportunity to help the lepers in the neighbourhood, dressing their wounds, administering medicine and giving them food. With the passing of years, he became more and more deeply involved with their well-being. As a result of his ceaseless efforts, some land was secured by donation to provide some living facilities for the lepers, and the leper colony at Muni-ki-Reti near Rishikesh came into existence.

This deep and abiding interest in the welfare of the lepers soon earned him the confidence and admiration of government authorities. He was elected first as vice-chairman and later as chairman of the Muni-ki-Reti Notified Area Committee. In 1952, a registered body, supported partly by the government, was formed to establish another leper colony at Brahmmapuri, five miles from Rishikesh. The projects of these colonies are many; to clean up existing living quarters of the lepers, to provide hospital facilities for treatment of the leper patients, and to run educational rehabilitation projects designed to make the lepers partially self-supporting so as to instil in them a sense of usefulness and self-respect. Not content with just their bodily welfare, with just giving them medicine and treatment, Swamiji wanted to give them back their dignity as human beings.

Thus began Chidananda’s long cherished work.

Sita, a great American devotee of Swamiji, was the first to propose to help Swami Chidananda with regular donations for the lepers. Swamiji knew her for a long time, because she had been coming to the Ashram since her very young days. He knew he could count on her and he started his work. Sita says:

“On my very first visit to a leper colony, I became interested in the affairs of the lepers of Rishikesh. It was then that Swamiji told me the history of the lepers of Rishikesh, and his involvement with them, which began in the 1940’s.

“During the early forties, when Swami Chidanandaji first came to Rishikesh, the road from Rishikesh to Lakshmanjhula was literally lined with lepers who did not have any quarters and who were totally dependent for their livelihood on the alms they begged from passing pilgrims.”

And so, Sita began to help.

A few other sincere devotees of Swamiji joined in with donations, but the situation was still very difficult. This difficult situation and all the efforts involved in it came to the knowledge of an English magazine, “The Sunday Times”. Photographer Richardson and reporter Ruth Yebwallee came to write a story through which funds could be raised. The story, which first came out in 1963 in the Sunday Times of London and in 1973 in the Asia Magazine, was a great success.

The response was immediate and generous. Funds were collected through LEPRO, the English leprosy relief organisation patronised by Her Majesty, the Queen of England. Francis Harris, director of LEPRO, came personally to Rishikesh in October 1973 to see the situation and to meet Swamiji and discuss with him how to administer the funds. That is how the Chidananda Leprosy Relief Fund was born.

Intimately involved in the relief work administered by the Chidananda Leprosy Relief Fund is S. C. whose life was entirely changed when she met Swamiji. She freed herself from her various occupations and started the study of Yoga. Now She makes an annual pilgrimage to the Ashram every winter, when she goes every morning to Brahmapuri, the lepers’ village, to look after the distribution of medicine. And S. C. affirms, “I can do it only because of my devotion to Swamiji. Swamiji has helped me very much in my acceptance of facts and in my relations with people. I do it as my Sadhana.”

Near the Ashram, under Swamiji’s guidance, the leper colonies are now ably administered, the lepers themselves participating in the administration. In Brahmapuri, K. is a born leader; he can already be left in charge of everything. And N. can be trusted to look after the whole dispensary. Seventy-five well-trained lepers work in this colony. News about the leprosy rehabilitation work has spread like wild fire and now, other lepers come from all over asking for work.

But Swamiji must go slowly and be sure he has the necessary money in front of him. In Dhalwala village also, nearer to the Ashram, fifteen lepers are now well-trained and teach the others.

A. a German lady, started some industries for the lepers in the Dehra Dun region fifteen years ago. P., a French boy, who worked under her for three years, is now in charge of the industries of the two leper colonies of the Ashram. He lives all alone with the lepers year in and year out. He shares their lives. He is one of them.

P. has seen so many enthusiastic workers come and go. . . None could stand a prolonged stay, even while coming only for two or three hours a day. He understands, and when asked how he himself can do it, he just says, "I don't know, it must be my karma." He does not welcome too much talk or emotionalism. People sometimes think he is cold, but he just smiles and goes on with his work. Some people who were assisting at the cremation of one of the lepers said that P. was carrying the logs of wood for the cremation fire, along with the lepers. We really had the impression he was one of them.

Swami Chidananda was once asked, "What is necessary to obtain the Guru's grace?" He answered in general terms for all present. But the questioner insisted, "To obtain your own grace, Swamiji?" Swamiji answered then, "Selfless service, Seva, is what I value most. For instance, there is a French boy in the leper colony, P. There is nothing he would ask me that I would refuse".

A. comes frequently to visit P. and help him. One evening, in Brahmapuri, A. was visiting P. A. started to sing in German, P. in French, the lepers in their different languages, when, suddenly, D. a leper who has no hands and practically no feet, started to dance with an extraordinary rhythm. He danced with his legs, his arms, his eyes, his face—his whole body danced. His poor deformed face was full of joy. In the twilight, near the Ganges, he forgot for a while.

They are all beginning to forget. They live together. They are a normal village. Everyday you can hear the clack-clack of the looms working, the laugh of happy people always ready to make the most of any opportunity to dance and sing. Swami Chidananda has worked this miracle, this incredible miracle.

A's own village in Dehra Dun is something to be seen. It is an incredible achievement, for when A. first came fifteen years ago, she had to face the same problems as Father Damien faced when he started his work with the lepers. Father Damien, who himself became a leper, had only gratitude in his heart for his Creator, for he said he was thus better able to love and to understand the lepers.

Swami Chidananda never forgets to visit the lepers on days when big celebrations take place in the Ashram. He distributes some special Prasad (fruits or sweets). He gives them a little Satsang. They sing their devotion to God. They all rush to him like children to a beloved father, they tell him their complaints. Then and there he discusses the whole thing with them, always giving the impression that he has time for everything even during the busiest celebration days.

That year Shivaratri was coming and Swamiji was not there. As I was sitting for meditation, a thought suddenly struck me, "Tomorrow Shivaratri will be celebrated and Swamiji is not here. The lepers will feel so lonely". So I rushed to Rishikesh and bought sweets for all, and on Shivaratri morning, I went to the lepers' village. As I was coming back with Dr. K. (of the Ashram) after the distribution, I nearly knocked into something lying on the ground. The doctor lifted the blanket. A leper was there. He had no arms, no legs. His eyes were closed, his face was shrunken, no nose, only two holes. I turned to Dr. K. "Is he dead?"

"Medically speaking he is, no signs of life at all, but he has made up his mind not to leave his body till Chidanandaji comes back."

“But Swamiji will be away for a long time. Can he last that long?”

“Who knows? He was such a big man, a bully too, nothing much to like about him. But his illness has shrunk him to this. For the last twenty years he has not been able to walk and go and beg, so Swamiji has been sending food to him every day.”

Back in the Ashram, I made enquiries about the duration of Swamiji’s absence. They told me Swamiji would be away for two and a half months. “So long?” I said to myself. It was 12 o’clock, meditation time again. But I had hardly time to start meditation when a sudden urge came to me. “Girdari must have some sustenance, he must eat or he will not last long enough to see Swamiji. “In no time I was in the leper colony once again. This time I had taken with me grapes, oranges, a press-fruit, a bottle of sherbet. I headed straight for Girdari’s hut. He was on the verandah. Y lifted the blanket which was covering his face, I tried grape juice, then orange juice, with no success. I opened his lips, but his face shrank under my hands; no jaw seemed to be there. The juice just came out.

Girdari’s wife, the children, the goats and quite a few lepers were watching me by now, I did not know what to do. Then, on a sudden impulse I said, “If you want to see Chidananda you must have strength, so drink this.” As I said ‘Chidananda’, he opened his eyes. He drank a little juice. Then made signs he wanted more. But I was afraid it might be too much for him after his long fast, so I stopped, I went back every day. I bought a photo of Chidananda. I got it framed and put it on the wall of the verandah of the mud hut. On the floor in front of it I put a mat and two jugs with some wild flowers. Every time I came back I found Girdari propped up against the wall facing Chidanandaji’s photo and fresh flowers in the jugs. Fresh flower garlands were made by the lepers with their fingerless hands and put round Swamiji’s photo.

Then one day Dr. K. shouted at me from a distance, “Girdari is saved! He will last to see Swamiji!” So the story of my visits to Girdari was out. Some people said to me, “Girdari has been playing on Swamiji’s feelings for the past twenty years or more. He is fooling you. They are beggars. Leprosy and begging have destroyed their minds. Once a beggar, always a beggar. All the lepers around, the place will come and annoy you. You will have no peace.” A few days later I was told, “Now that Girdari is better, you need not go, for the other lepers will be jealous of him. You will make trouble.” I was ready to disobey; but I obtained permission to go on with my visits. I felt so sure of Girdari’s feelings. No one could fail to see the terrible plight he was in and he was used to my visits now . . . How could the other lepers be jealous of a man in the condition of Girdari? Besides, I knew they were happy to see me coming to look after Girdari. They helped me in many ways.

Then the miracle happened. One evening, in the hospital, a Brahmachari told me, “Swamiji is coming back tomorrow for the leper, for Girdari.” I said, “Did someone write to him?” “Oh no, he knows. . . your prayers perhaps.” I said, “There must be another reason for his sudden return. Perhaps, but Girdari comes into the picture—we are all sure of that. You don’t know Swamiji.”

And Swamiji did come the next day. And with Swamiji’s arrival, I was at peace and there was no urge to go and see Girdari that day. But Swamiji called for me. He gave me fifteen rupees and asked me to add fifteen rupees more of my own money and go and buy a blanket for Girdari. I

was surprised at the very low price, but Swamiji said, “A very light cotton blanket please”. I knew I must obey. Once the blanket was bought, I took it to Girdari’s hut. The rest of the story was told to me by S. C. She was with Swamiji when he went to Girdari’s hut. Swamiji said to Girdari, “You can leave your body now, you can go in peace” and Girdari passed away. He was wrapped in the light cotton blanket and cremated with prayers.

Swamiji went away to resume his tour. I was busy with my usual routine, when one evening I met Dr. K. He was waving a telegram. “Mother, Swamiji is asking if we are looking after Girdari’s widow.” I could have knelt down then and there. I felt so ashamed. If I had not gone to see Girdari’s widow, it was only because I felt I was too much in the limelight and wanted quickly to find my peace again. Was it fear of public opinion? Was it not cowardice? But Swamiji knew. He was ever watchful and ready to show us our shortcomings. I went back with joy. Girdari’s wife cried. Everyone was grave. They all kept saying, “Swamiji, Swamiji!” with joined hands and bowed heads. Girdari’s wife accompanied me right up to the main road but would not come further, for she showed me the houses around. People were shouting at her in Hindi. I understood: the lepers are such Pariahs in India where people still dread the disease.

At the time this story took place, the lepers were still begging. They never begged from me, not one of them, not even the children in the camp, not even the lepers who were begging near the Ganges. There was always someone belonging to the Dhalwala camp to tell them about me. They just saluted me with a smile—Namaskar, Mataji!—bringing their poor fingerless hands together. Who can say that their feelings are dead, that their mind, their personality is destroyed, that nothing can be got out of them?

Now, I must relate a story which is even more touching.

In Dhalwala Leper Colony, a man was left alone with his two young children. His wife had left him. She was very young and she could not get used to the life among the lepers. She was afraid and she left him. Her two young children were left roaming around, crying for their mother.

Their father was sunk in despair and he was unable to comfort them. Swamiji, hearing about this, brought the children to the Ashram—a little boy and a little girl. They were in a pitiable condition.

Loose clothes hung on their bare bodies. Swamiji undressed the little boy and put new clean clothes on him. Dr. X. of the Ashram dressed the little girl. Then Swamiji said to the children, pointing to Dr. X., “She will be your mother, you will call her Mataji.”

Then, turning to X., he said, “But they will not be your children.” She understood that she must not let attachment creep in. As an illustration, he told her the story of the deer. (A mother deer was crossing the Ganges. The current was very strong. In the effort she made, she brought forth the young ones she was carrying. A saint of a high order, Jada Bharat, who lived nearby, managed to save one of the newly born deer. Then he started to look after it. It took much of his time, much of his thoughts. Some attachment crept in, unnoticed. And when the saint passed away, his last thought was about the deer, “What will happen to my deer when I will be no longer here?” And as

our last thought-condition determines our rebirth, Jada Bharat was born as a deer. A sage, passing by, recognised Jada Bharat in the deer and, brought him back to his previous condition.)

Then Swamiji offered fruits and sweets to the children and so many beautiful toys. They had never seen such wonders. Then they went to live in Dr. X's room. But nothing seemed to console them. We could often hear their heart-rending cries calling for their mother, their father. But we knew Swamiji was watching over them and we were peaceful.

Swamiji had recommended to them to keep away from all the Ashram inmates, because we could have spoiled them. They were so pretty, so appealing. He had asked them to accept no presents from anyone and it was a wonder to see that they obeyed him, even in this.

They often used to come in suddenly, during the functions, they would sit wide-eyed and listen to the music and look at Swamiji. They sometimes would even come in during the night functions and sleep on the floor near X., their Mataji. Their love for Swamiji was so moving. They used to run to him to show him their school works, for they soon went to the Ashram school. Then, when the need was gone, when the work was done, as is the way with selfless service, X. stopped looking after them. They lived with the other children. We see them now so independent, always together, happy and so pretty. Their father comes to see them. With daily treatment, the spread of the disease in him has been arrested. His face is intact. It is a beautiful face. He is now working in the village. He listens attentively to Swamiji's discourses. He sings God's Name with Swamiji and all the village. Peace has come to him. Peace is coming to them all.

12

BIRDS, BEASTS AND INSECTS

It has often been stated that Swami Chidanandaji has the compassion of Lord Buddha and the relentless reforming zeal of Lord Jesus and that he moulds himself into Gandhiji's pattern.

He is also called the St. Francis of India. Many are the people from the West who send him Crosses and statues and paintings of St. Francis. Many are the people who, in his presence, forgetting the speech they had so carefully prepared, start to speak of St. Francis.

Does not Chidananda himself say that his favourite prayer is the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi?

“Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace; where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy.

“O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved, as to love; for it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.”

St. Francis loved animals and his love for lepers is well known. The same traits can be found in Swamiji's character. Some of the stories about St. Francis that I have read are fascinating. A youth has caught a number of turtle doves and is taking them to the market. He meets St. Francis on the way. "I pray, give me these gentle birds," sayeth the saint. The good youth gives them all and Francis receives them into his bosom, talks to them tenderly, builds nests for them all!

A fisherman brings to St. Francis a water-fowl. The saint accepts the bird, then opens his hand and lets it fly away. Another fisherman brings him a great fish alive and St. Francis puts it back into the water of the lake. The saint is tender even to earthworms. Picking them up when walking, lest they be crushed under foot. He speaks to the swallows. He preaches to birds. He tames the wild wolf, calling it 'Brother'. He gives honey to the bees in winter so that they do not perish from cold.

Remembering these stories about St. Francis, I remembered how, in Val Morin, in Canada, Swamiji would walk on a stony path, a long way round, because in walking on the grass he would have killed the many crickets we heard singing all day. I remembered how when his house there was burnt, he spoke sorrowfully of "a couple of friendly spiders" who had been his companions in the room and who must have perished in the sudden blaze! I also remembered how I had once seen Swamiji save a spider that was drowning in a swimming pool.

To Swamiji, birds, beasts and insects are veritable embodiments of Brahman and not what we make out of them. This is his attitude. This is his Bhava. It is this Bhava which characterizes his attitude towards them. Once Chidananda saw a dog with a foul-smelling ulcer and served that dog with the same divine Bhav for several months till it was completely cured.

One day in the Ashram, a crow was badly mauled by a monkey. When Swamiji heard about it, he immediately had its wounds dressed up and then had it removed to the safety of the underground meditation chamber below the Dattatreya Temple in the Ashram to prevent the bird from being molested further. And Swamiji served it for many months as though it was his own child.

One day the crow was brought to him for the usual dressing. A friend of mine, an Ashram inmate, became a little curious on seeing the bird being so docile with Swamiji. And moved by sheer curiosity, he went near the bird and extended his finger to touch it. . just to watch its reaction. But even as he extended his finger, even before his finger could touch the bird, the black one turned a hostile beak towards him. It taught my friend a lesson that even birds and animals can distinguish between genuine love and indifferent curiosity! They respond to love, not to curiosity!

On another occasion, two little boys caught a squirrel and brought it to Swamiji. They had had so much trouble during their two days' train journey keeping the squirrel alive and happy. When they offered it to Swamiji, the squirrel ran onto Swamiji's shoulders, climbed onto his head, nosed around him and then settled on his shoulder. The little boys were thrilled. Swamiji and the squirrel seemed to know each other. The little squirrel never tried to run away. But one day, as Swamiji was standing beside a tree, the squirrel on his shoulder, the little thing jumped onto the tree and disappeared into the foliage. As the children were looking up, the squirrel fell down, dead. Some monkeys hiding in the tree had killed it. Swamiji picked up the little body, put it tenderly on a piece of cloth, and praying all the time, went down to the Ganges. The children followed, other

inmates joined in, for wherever Swamiji goes, everyone goes. It was the lunch hour, the bell struck, but no one paid any heed until Swamiji had offered the last funeral rites to the little squirrel, and consigned its body to the holy Ganges.

These actions of Swamiji made me realise that a mere study of the Vedantic books without practice was absolutely useless.

And I was made to see how badly I failed myself in the practice. . . . Once, for days together in the Ashram, I had been fighting against ants. They were everywhere, in my food, in my clothes, in my bed. I could not get rid of them. I washed, brushed and sprayed, but they were a never-ending stream. They were so small I could hardly see them, but my skin was blistered and I could not sleep.

I heard about Ahimsa every other day in the Ashram lectures, but the idea stayed on at the intellectual level. One morning, as I was searching to see where those ants could be coming from, I found their hole under a big stone at my back-door. There were thousands of them. They were all busy carrying something white, bigger than themselves. The thought struck me that they were preparing a home for the winter and I felt some friendship with them. But I could not sleep, I could not meditate, I carried the ants everywhere with me. I even had to leave the Bhajan Hall to change my clothes in the middle of the Satsang, but all to no avail because they were everywhere.

I pulled myself together. "I must do something" I thought. First I threw water over them to chase them away, but the water was quickly absorbed into the ground, the ants became more alive than ever. I raked the ground, I tried everything, but the ants were still there. So I sprayed "Flit" over them till nothing moved.

When all was finished, I sat on the doorstep. I was suddenly feeling very sad. And when I went into the Bhajan Hall for the Darshan of Swamiji, imagine my surprise when he said:

"To gauge your spiritual progress, see the way you behave with the little ants on your doorstep!"

But among the many stories which show Swami Chidanandaji's love for animals and their response to his love, there is one which touched my heart so much that I can never forget it.

Lasco was a very ugly dog, always fighting, always unhappy, always dirty, always rolling himself in the cow-dung and so smelly. But B. loved him; she had saved him when he was a tiny puppy. And when she came back to the Ashram after a few years abroad, Lasco and she recognised each other. She fed him everyday, but never stopped scolding him about his bad behaviour. He was humble and seemed to understand and do *mea culpa*, but it was no avail, he could not change. Then he caught scabies and his temper became worse. B. had an incredible patience with him but one day, after many misadventures, she told him, "Lasco, I am tired of you. Don't scratch all over the place, I don't want to catch scabies. Don't come back to my Kutir. I will not feed you any more, you should leave your body. You are hopeless." Lasco went slowly away and for a long time we did not see him any more. Then one day, as I was waiting outside the Bhajan Hall, I heard a loud cry. B. seemed horrified. "Oh God, Lasco, go away, go away!" A door banged. Lasco came up the steps, towards me. He was an all-open sore, no hair left on his thin, raw body, one eye hanging, blind, full of pus

and blood. The smell was unbearable. With his unique eye he looked at me. So much was in that look! It was a human cry, a call for help, but I backed out horrified when he came to rub himself against me. Lasco put his head down and lay on the ground in such a desperate movement that my heart cried out, but I paid no heed and I went into the Bhajan Hall for the Darshan of Swami Chidananda.

It was no good. No Peace came to me, for a still shrill, small voice kept saying to me, “You, of all people, you should know better. Remember the time when your face was so full of sores that even your dearest ones shrank away from you and you had to go and live alone? Is that all that your sufferings have taught you?” The Satsang was over, we all came out, Chidanandaji among us. Lasco was still lying there in the bright sunshine, covered with flies, worms, pus and blood, a most horrible sight.

The smell seemed worse. He looked up at Chidananda, stood up and went up to him. Swamiji stopped in the middle of a sentence, looked down at Lasco with such a smile of love and tenderness. Lasco went nearer, his head seemed to rest on Swamiji’s knee, as he looked at Swamiji. For a long time there was a silence. Swamiji’s lips were moving. His face was so peaceful and so full of the tenderest love. All the horrified faces round him slowly changed expression. Then Lasco suddenly seemed to pull himself together and walked slowly away, down the steps. We all stood there watching him. He was not begging any more. He looked straight ahead.

B. and the children told me the rest of the story. The children had been near the Ganges when they saw Lasco and they picked up stones to stop his approach. But Lasco had looked so strange, not the usual coward he used to be. As he went between them, they became silent and dropped their stones. Lasco went down the steps, right to the Ganges, he went on and on into the water. A little boy cried out, “Lasco, come back, come back!” Lasco turned his head for one moment, then disappeared under the water.

The bell rang. It was meal-time in the Ashram. The children ran away for their lunch. I sat on the river steps for a long time. The sun was getting hot, and except for a few beggars, I was alone. I looked at the Ganges. I thought of Lasco. Tears came into my eyes.

13

LIKE UNTO CHRIST

Chidanandaji has the reforming zeal of Lord Jesus.

Christ said, “Shame on you, men, teachers who teach the Law of God. You ask men to do very difficult things which you do not practise yourselves”.

Chidananda says, “It is the most useless of things for a man to talk of high philosophy and live like a worldly man. Perfect self-restraint and purification of the mind and heart is the price the aspirant has to pay for spiritual attainment.”

They asked Christ, “Who is truly wise?” Christ said, “Not he who talks wisely, but he who acts wisely.”

Chidananda says, “Let your example speak more than your words. Reform yourself and yourself be what you want others to be. Live what you preach. Otherwise do not preach or teach.”

Christ said, “If your brother hits you on the cheek, give him the other cheek.”

Chidananda is like the sandalwood tree that grows in the forests in India. The nature of the sandalwood tree is such that, even if a man goes to it with a hatchet and cuts it, it gives only fragrance in return.

Christ said, “Love ye one another. This is the sign that you are from Me”.

Chidananda says, “The Kingdom of God cometh by love”.

Christ said, “The Kingdom of God cometh by lowliness of mind.”

Chidananda says, “To be humble is to renounce self. That is the source of greatness”. Chidananda claims not to be a leader, but a servant.

One day, Jesus picked up dust, then opened his hands. And behold, in one of his hands appeared gold and in the other clay. Then, turning to his disciples he said, “Which of the two is sweeter to your hearts?” They said, “Gold!” But Jesus said, “Gold and clay are alike to me.”

Chidananda’s attitude to wealth is a lesson to all rich men of the world. He treats wealth as a means to an end, and not as an end in itself. He advises rich men to consider themselves as trustees of the Lord’s wealth to be utilised in the service of His children.

Like Christ, Chidananda says that a man’s true wealth may be estimated in terms of the things he can do without. The richer the man’s soul, the simpler his life!

In the New Testament, Christ has said, “If your brother commits a fault, tell him he is doing wrong. If he changes his heart, forgive him. If seven times seventy in the day he sins against you and, if seventy times seven he asks your forgiveness and says, ‘I will change my heart’, you will forgive him.”

He also said, “Come unto me ye that are heavily laden, I will give you rest. Whosoever comes unto me, he shall not be cast out. The people of the world rejected you, I will not. Your manner, your vices, are hiding you from the people of the world, but they do not hide you from me. I understand that you are there behind all these things—clean and perfect, kind and true, everything that is superlative. They projected their prejudices upon you, but I do not. I will understand you truly. I will give you the right kind of treatment. Come unto me, O my beloved one. Come unto rest.”

Like unto Christ, Chidananda's mercy is inexhaustible, for "he sees all beings in his own Self and his own Self in all beings". His mercy passes all understanding.

Christ said, "I come not for the righteous alone, but for sinners."

Chidananda says, "Give love to all, to the poor, to the rich, to the saint, to the sinner, for you are all children of eternal love".

Once, someone asked Ananda Mayee Ma, "Is it true all that is said about Ashrams?"

Ma answered, "Yes, it is. In the Ashrams we are cleaning the pond (meaning the subconscious), the smells that come up are not always pleasant."

Swamiji knows that control is not always easy and that the most seemingly ugly reactions might come out of it, but eventually to subside and bring detachment and progress.

For him there is no sin, there is only error on the way. He is like Christ who said, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do", but he can also be firm and strong like Christ, as a redeemer has to be when the need arises.

Christmas is always celebrated in the Sivananda Ashram. Swamiji makes it a point to always be there, even if he has to come back from a long and tiring journey and even if he is able to be in the Ashram only for a day or two.

His presence gives a great fervour to the ceremony. The hall is decorated, a picture of Christ takes the place of Hindu saints in the shrine. A Christmas tree is lit up, Christmas carols are sung, Swamiji reads passages of the Bible or extracts of what his Master wrote about Christ, and he gives us a most moving discourse.

In 1974, Swamiji gave us the wonderful surprise of a crib brought from a catholic monastery in the south of India, Swamiji called for me and asked me to unpack the parcels. From all the straw and packing paper, I somehow got Mary and Joseph first. Just then Swamiji came, and kneeling down beside me, he straightaway picked the parcel containing Jesus.

With care and loving hands he unpacked it and smiled a most wondrous smile when he beheld Jesus. He put him to his forehead with reverence, then to his heart, and he said a short, moving prayer. He handed him over to me so that I could put him near Mary. It was my most beautiful Christmas. It is here that I learn to be a Christian, every day a little more. This is the way with Chidananda, with Yoga. Once, on Christmas night in the Ashram, many hippies came. They came early so that many of the usual devotees and visitors and children were left out of the Bhajan Hall where the celebrations were held. The hippies behaved the way drugged people do and the groups of devotees who had come from Europe swore never to come again at Christmas. It was all very natural.

But Swamiji said, "Do you think I do not know? These hippies come here for the Prasad, for the Christmas cake, for the sweets. They bargain for a piece of bread. They go without food or

clothes so as to be able to buy their drugs. How long is it since they ate cake! When I make the distribution, they come to me once, they swallow the cake quickly, they wipe their mouths and they come back for more, twice, three times until there is no cake left, sometimes even for the people of the Ashram.”

“I know all this, but this is Christmas. These poor, lost youngsters must remember Christmas at home. Christmas is a blessed time when all think of love, of Christmas trees, of home. It can be such a lonely time to these hippies otherwise.”

This is the way with Chidanandaji. When we think of order or discipline, he thinks of compassion, of forgiveness, of love.

Swamiji often reads to us from the works of his Master Sivananda who, like himself, was a universal Saint in the tradition of the Yoga of Hinduism. He reads here and there, turning the pages with a smile of love and reverence that he transmits to all.

And we Westerners are made to wonder and to be moved when on Christmas night he reads about Jesus and we listen in rapt attention. That Christmas night, he read from Sivananda’s “Bliss Divine”:

“Jesus dwelt in the awareness of the assertion, ‘I and my Father are one’, the fundamental truth of oneness of life of the Vedas.

“His divine voice is the same as the voice of the Vedas and the Upanishads, as the voice of the Koran etc.

“It is the way of denying the flesh and asserting the Spirit. It is the way of crucifying the lower self to bring about a glorious resurrection of the Spirit and the final ascension unto the infinitude and the transcendence unto the Divine.

“He taught people to change their ways, that if they would not change their outlook on life from its materialistic aspect to its spiritual aspect, they would not find happiness and freedom.

“Jesus is the embodiment of all His teachings. In Him we see perfect holiness, goodness, kindness. He said, ‘I am the Truth, the Way and the life’. He is the embodiment of all that is best, sublimest and most beautiful, most pure.”

And when I hear Chidananda speak of Jesus, Jesus becomes alive for me. I am made to feel Him, deep within my very heart.

And I wonder about the wonders of God’s plan which brought me to a Hindu Ashram to learn to love Christ, even more fully, every day, through my Guru. I pray that the oneness of all religions may unite all men in a heart of love. And I pray that not only all men but all beings may find “peace on earth” and that Christ’s mission might be fulfilled, that Chidananda’s mission might be fulfilled and that God’s Will might be done.

It was my last Christmas in the ashram. I was translating some papers when I suddenly heard some beautiful Christmas Carols. I went to see. . .

In the Samadhi Shrine I saw a group of westerners who had just arrived. They were Germans, Austrians, Swiss but they were all German speaking people. They had been asked to participate in the Christmas night celebration and they had started to rehearse straight away. When it was all over I went up to them.

They smiled at my admiration. Some of the men were of my generation. It made me think of my war time Christmas. I told them how Christmas had united us, once at the front, as it was uniting us this night, old enemies, in a foreign land. . . .

They asked me to tell them about it.

I told them how on one Christmas eve, spontaneously one of the French officers had called across to the German lines, "SS Hitler! It is Christmas night let us all be friends."

How the Germans had laughingly answered, "Yes SS de Gaulle! let us all sing this Christmas night together." How, following our example they had come nearer in the dark.

I told them how our Colonel had come to fetch us, we women, to join in. There was some very good singers amongst us especially a woman who had composed some extraordinary moving war songs, and she sang them incredibly beautifully. . . I was the last one to be asked to participate and as I could not sing I was asked to tell a story.

It was a very old German Legend which I had always loved. When I had finished, everyone was silent. Our Christmas was coming to an end. . . The zero hour was near when a young German soldier spoke out suddenly, "Pray for me Madame please. . . My mother used to tell me that legend at Christmas when I was a small boy. . . You made me feel like a little boy in the legend. He knocked and God opened the door somehow if anything was to happen tomorrow, it might not be so hard.

Didn't Jesus himself say "Knock and it shall be opened"?

I had only just finished my story when one of the men came to me.

"So you were in the war. . . where did you land in France?"

"In Cavalaire" I said.

He said he was there with his battalion trying to stop the first wave of the landings of the "Marines". He was thoughtful for a while, then he said, "It is something I shall never forget. . . this landing. I remember shooting at a medical unit. I saw a woman with a white blouse and a red cross on her chest. When I woke up I was in a tent, in a field hospital and a young French woman with a white blouse and a red cross on her chest was giving me a plasma transfusion. He looked at me.

“Just think. It could have been you. . . just think!”

“It could” I said “but you know I was not the only one, we were quite a few women doing that work.”

But the man was looking at me as if the whole world was weighing on his shoulders. . . I stood there, helpless, when suddenly it was as if Chidananda was coming to my rescue as I remembered something he had once said and I started, “Think of St. Paul!. . . He had killed many followers of Christ! Yet God showed him his light on the way to Damascus. And he fell on his knees and became a very valiant soldier of Christ. Why did God show him his light?. . . Because he was not responsible for all these deaths. His motivation was pure. . . He thought he was doing his duty to his country and also his duty to God, as his spiritual chiefs had taught him.”

As I looked around I saw that everyone’s eyes seemed to be lost in the contemplation of the vast horizon that was suddenly opened before us all.

A new understanding? a hope? a new faith?

Had I transmitted to them the hope Chidananda had given me when I had heard him say this?

But a Brahmachari was coming, “Mother” said he “Swami K. is asking why you talk so long and do not let these people come in.”

We all went in.

When it was the turn of the German-speaking group to sing, everyone was spell-bound. The air seemed to be vibrating. They were inspired! Their deep German voices were so beautiful!

Was their inspiration contagious? A vision came to me. I saw men of different colours and races parked like sheep behind wooden barriers. Each parking had, what seemed to me to be a Master. Each Master was dressed very richly. .

clothes shining with gold and silver. Suddenly the men who were extremely quiet up to then, started to move their feet a little, then they seemed to move their arms, their heads. . . The Masters were frowning, but all to no avail. It seemed to be contagious, all the other parkings were now moving also.

Suddenly a man started to make a small hole in the wooden wall of his parking. He looked through, he made the hole bigger. He saw other men, like him on the other side. He could not believe his eyes. He climbed on the wall. He saw that it was true, there were other men, like him on the other side. He smiled at them slowly. They smiled back. This spread to all the parkings. Soon they broke all the walls of all their parkings, and heedless of their Masters, they met each other.

Then they started to walk, away together. But curious to know one another, they did not keep pace and they were soon all mixed. When they disappeared in the distance, their Masters, who

had been shouting and threatening, started to look at each other with hatred, each one seeming to blame the other for what was happening. But as their sheep were disappearing in the distance, they started to follow them, separately first and with hatred in their eyes. But the road was not easy and they were automatically made to come closer to each other.

I was hardly back to my usual state when Swami K. who was giving the lecture started, “. . . . all Religions will die. . . . this ashram, everything will go.”

I do not remember all he said but it seemed to me that he was speaking like the apocalypse. . . . of the end of a time But I remember that there seemed to be a great hope shining behind it all. The oneness of all religions?

The next day I was told that when he was asked about the strange quality of his lecture Swami K. answered, “It was not my doing!” and as I write this I am made to think of the prayers of Sivananda that I have always loved best.

There is only one caste—
the caste of humanity.
There is only one religion—
the religion of love.
There is only one commandment—
the commandment of truthfulness.
There is only one law—
the law of cause and effect.
There is only one God—
the omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient Lord.
There is only one language—
the language of heart or the language of silence.

Somehow I never forgot that Christmas night at the front. I never forgot the prayer of the young German soldier. If that prayer was so moving was it because it was Christmas night? Was it because the next day he was killed?

One day a Brahmachari gave me a prayer that a disciple of Chidananda had chosen to be printed:

A SOLDIER'S PRAYER

The following verse was written on the back of a cigarette box by an American soldier killed on the field of battle in World War II, and found by a stretcher-bearer. They are as follows:

“Look God I have never spoken to you,
But now I want to say “How do you do?”
You see God, they told me You didn't exist,
And like a fool, I believed all this,
Last night from a shell-hole I saw Your sky,

I figured right then they told me a lie.
Had I taken the time to see things You made,
I'd have known they weren't calling
a spade a spade.
I wonder God if You'd shake my hand—
Somehow I feel You would understand.
Funny I had to come to this hellish place,
Before I had time to see Your face.
Well I guess there isn't very much more to say,
But I'm glad, God I met You today.
I guess the "Zero Hour" will soon be there,
But I'm not afraid since I know You are near.
The signal: Well, God, I'll have to go:
I like You lots; and I want You to know.
Look, now, this will be a horrible fight;
Who knows ? I may come to Your home tonight;
Though I wasn't friendly to You before,
I wonder, God if You'll wait at Your door.
Look I'm crying: Me—shedding tears:
I wish I had known You all these years.
Well, I have to go now, God: Goodbye;
Strange—since I met You,
I'm not afraid to die. . .

And as I cried my heart out over this prayer, I remembered some of the many such prayers that I had heard at the front. These prayers were so simple, so true, so heart-breakingly true that I was made to think that if, even I, was made to feel such love for the dying ones, I felt sure that God, being God, was opening His arms to them all. . . .

14

AS THE WEST VIEWS HIM

At first every orange robe was welcome in the West, totally trusted and loved. Yoga is such a thrilling subject. If the word "adventure" were not so misused, we could even say, "Yoga is the most thrilling adventure!" Even if the Yoga preacher is second rate, his success is great. Everyone in the West is so thirsty for spiritual values, everyone is so tired of the dullness of materialism which enmeshes all in the terrible bondage of routine.

Also, people in the West were not used to the charm, the smiles, the sweet way of talking, the patience and the tolerance of the Swamis. The exotic mystery of dark skin with often beautiful, noble features, and most of all, all the wonderful books about Yoga which are published everywhere, made them credit all the Swamis with the powers and the mysteries they had read about. They opened their arms, their hearts, their purse to all.

Hatha-Yoga having brought them a welcome discipline, relaxation and control of their bodies, they were sufficiently convinced to look further into Yoga. The Mantras, the beautiful singing, the newness of the atmosphere of the Yoga centres, of the seminars, they felt the beauty of it all. Their minds were also convinced by the philosophy of Vedanta, Yoga was so rational, such a science of God. God as the Cosmos made a distinct appeal to the Western mind tired of dogmas. The twentieth-century mind needed just that.

The inevitable instances of hypocrisy and cunningness sometimes made the people of the West feel real anger and even throw out some Swamis. But the Westerners understand everything. They often go on protecting, they go on loving, the ones who have failed through the lure of women, money or name and fame. They say, "He came to teach us, to help us, to save us. After the protected life of the Ashrams, the temptations here were too much for him. We are responsible. . . The symbol that he represents is still alive, through him for us." They suffer the suffering they imagine he is going through because he has failed. And they pray and hope he will find his way to Yoga once again.

They are so thrilled with Yoga that they do not want the good name of it to suffer. They want all to be benefited by it. They know it is the hope of the world, of the coming civilisation. They have seen many false prophets. The money-making Yogis are many, but they only harm themselves. And because Yoga is such a wondrous thing, in spite of everything the Yoga teachers do some good. Through them people at least learn that Yoga exists, and after a while they search for and find the true spirit of it. And they search for and find the real saints, the real teachers, the ones who live up to the true spirit of Yoga. The Westerners have learnt discernment. They compare and they say, "Chidananda is the truly holy one, and all eyes, all hopes are set on him". They write, "We see him live all he preaches and only such a one can move the world."

Taking recourse to the spiritual path is the major event of a life, and along with that event, is often associated an inspirational person or personage. Today that person for many, especially in the West, is Swami Chidananda. The impact of his Oriental wisdom on the Western mind, the transformation that this impact effects in the Western seeker and the mechanics of this transformation are beautifully brought out and laid bare in the following writings of Don Briddell:

"The word 'Yoga' had come to my attention barely six months before, while I was in Ecuador working as a Peace Corps volunteer. Dramatic events happened immediately after contacting these teachings. By the time I reached Canada, the world beyond the physical was a reality for me that begged for a deeper penetration. Intuitively, Yoga-Vedanta answered a whole edifice of questions that had been growing in my mind from all my years of living unaware of that which is beyond. When I met Swamiji, I felt he was a 'real one' (as they are called here). Knowing him since, has been a process of having that 'realness' develop into living direct experience of the 'Real'. At every major turn of events or in the taking of the 'next step', Swamiji was there, if not obviously, then subtly. The exact nature of his role in my Sadhana is, of course, an utter mystery to me. The pattern is that he is there and I am here and I keep running into his aura of blessedness. I may draw wild conclusions about all this, but even so, I nonetheless love that being we call Swami Chidananda and feel blessed to be in his company physically or spiritually. The course of my life has shown me that he is a master worth emulating. It was not a choice by reason as much as it was by

heart. He stands in my mind as a great one. His Darshan there is always powerful, strong and brilliantly clear.

“My link with the Sivananda line and with Swamiji was welded fast in India at the Ashram where I spent nine months in 1971. Working through all my confusion and delusions during that period would not have been possible without Swamiji’s assistance. First there was a lot of cultural obstacles to work through. The dilemmas between the East and the West pressed hard on me demanding an explanation. Nature has the curious habit of immediately presenting the areas of conflict when two things meet. Not until all the hostile elements between the East and the West had clashed with one another and eliminated themselves, could I combine their purer elements in ways that are for me awesome and beautiful. The problems faced by me as a Westerner discovering the Eastern half of my being, led to a larger journey of understanding into the relation between the physical and the metaphysical, the spiritual and the materially related doctrines and life-styles. Living in India under the wing of Swamiji was an ideal way for the nature of these two worlds to be realised. He is the finest Being I have ever met. . . unlike reading statements about a subject, Swamiji breathes life into the teachings of the East through his life. . . he is alive with it. This makes those teachings available to others in a quick and direct manner.

“It is only the ignorant elements in the Eastern and the Western modes that conflict. Each in their purity work synergistically in ways the world has just now begun to explore.

“I have heard people discount Swamiji’s authenticity by pointing to his ‘apparent’ lack of Siddhis or displays of power. Invariably they are the people that do not know him. Swamiji’s power (if I must use that delicate term) is there to be sure, no matter how he may shun its display. Obviously, it seems, he does not wish one’s calling to be provoked by the glitter of the package. He asks the kind of commitment that will withstand the periods when the soul is in the dark nights of its journey, when the strong light of day is not available. The real work to be done is with the ugly and ignorant shadows obscuring our soul, its heart and head and hand. He lends us power to work on them. The gift is precious, and unlike gold, has everlasting value. . .

“I once asked Swamiji who he was. I was groping for a way to understand him since he had baffled me at every attempt I had made to classify him. When I asked him, he took my gaze and pointed his finger down to a picture of Swami Sivananda enshrined on the altar at the end of his room. He then explained that when Sivananda was asked the same question, he would direct the questioner to the Divine Self that is God within. Sivananda was evidently consumed by (his) Divine Being and Swami Chidananda was so totally surrendered to that Divine Being known as Sivananda that he was completely identified with Sivananda’s Supreme Self. That total identification ultimately means absorption into the state of being itself. This is what Swamiji has done. *The flame of one candle when passed on to another is indistinguishable from its donor.* It is that way with spiritual realisation and Divinity. To know him that way is to know him in a manner altogether different from the way we normally know fellow human beings. He is the light and transmits that light onto others. Unless he is known as a Divine personage, he will be just a picture on the wall, another name in the book.

“Becoming a devotee simply means attempting to relate to the Divine in your benefactor, in your world, and in your own being. The benefactor, the Guru, is so important because he can

consciously direct your life through his intimacy with the Supreme, through the power and realisation of the Divine. Such perfected Beings as these are devoted to their devotees long before the devotees figure out how to devote themselves to the Divine in their benefactor. The benefactor operates in the consciousness that he is undifferentiated in spirit, in essence, from all other beings. Only one who lives in that realisation can be of assistance to us in extricating ourselves from the mess we find in our life. The realised souls see life against the background of Totality rather than through the limitations of a particular personality.

“Thus the devotees come to know when they get the eerie yet comforting feeling early in the relationship that this Being, their Benefactor, is in their mind and heart—sitting there, it would seem, watching out for their welfare in utter detachment and with infinite patience and compassion. A marvellous and precious relationship develops, one unlike any other you will ever experience.”

The above analysis shows clearly that many Westerners are now beginning to understand and appreciate the glorious worth of the fundamental concept of Hinduism, namely, the unity of Godhead.

Chidananda is a most worthy representative of that Godhead and has appealed to many as such. But he has also appealed to many more as a noble human being. As we see him portrayed in the following account of Yogi Rama, regarding his encounter with Swami Chidananda, “It was early August, 1969, at the Sivananda Yoga Camp in the mountains north of Montreal, Canada. We already had a full complement of about 200 campers and were told to prepare for another 300 persons expected to come for the Convention at the end of the month. Nothing seemed to go right. There was not enough money to buy beds and all the other equipment needed. The tension kept mounting, tempers were short and blow-ups were common among the staff.

“Suddenly, one morning, a wave of peace flowed over the camp. The word passed like lightning through the area, ‘Chidanandaji is here!’ Then it was announced that Swami Chidananda wanted to meet the staff. He sat on the dais, we in rows on the floor. He asked each his or her name and talked with each for a moment, then talked about spiritual subjects for a short time, nothing specific that I can recall, but when he finished and descended the steps, Sita and I both had an overwhelming desire to touch his feet, and were overcome with emotion. Such was our first encounter with this simple, humble, meek, loving, lovable Being.

“One morning I had to drive into Montreal to meet some of the visitors at the airport. I left before the usual 11:00 a. m. brunch, and returned about 2:00 p. m. in time to see the end of a special ceremony in honour of Swami Sivananda. As Swami Chidanandaji walked by me, he stopped and asked, ‘Have you had any food today?’

‘No, Swamiji’, I answered.

‘Go to my cottage. Nagaraj will give you some fruit’, he told me.

“I was astounded. After participating in this most auspicious ceremony, he could be concerned about the welfare of a staff member! What thoughtfulness, what consideration, what love!

“Swamiji had a small travel clock that he used to time his lectures. One day it stopped running and he asked me if I could get it fixed in Montreal. I took it to a watchmaker who repaired it, and I will always remember the warm feeling of gratification I experienced when I handed Swamiji his beloved clock. I was so glad I could have a part in helping him to keep one of the few articles for which he seemed to have any attachment at all.

“Then Swamiji invited me to have a cup of tea with him and one of my fondest memories will always be of sitting on the floor with him and talking, man to man, of many things. This truly great being had no facade of spirituality, he Is Spirit, and therefore Reality shines through the body and mind and envelops all who come within its influence.

“I would gladly have joined Swamiji, and followed him anywhere just to serve him and enjoy his Darshan, but he was not interested in gathering devotees—in having a ‘following’ as some holy men do. He is ambitious only to help others. He always has time to listen to anyone with a problem or a question. He is the epitome of unselfishness.

“After we parted, I communed with him at dawn every morning, and in a short meditation before every class or lecture. One morning I experienced the sensation of my face being close to the sleeve of his garment. I was there and he was there, wherever it was—in or out of time and space, and it was a glorious experience.

“In trying to describe this indescribable being I have told many persons: ‘He is as close to being a true Saint as anyone, I have ever met or ever hope to meet.’ He has been blessed because he is poor in spirit, because he mourns for those who suffer, because he is meek and humble, because he hungers after righteousness, because he is merciful, because he is pure in heart, because he is a peacemaker, and because men may see his good works and glorify our Father which is in heaven.

“He once told me, ‘I always consider that I am on the first rung of the spiritual ladder’; and I asked, ‘But Swamiji, where does that put *me*?’ I have a long way to climb to get on that first rung, because Swami Chidananda is the epitome of a Great Being in a human body.”

Sita, wife of Yogi Rama, voices almost identical feelings when she says, “It is a rare privilege in this physical life to meet someone who embodies all your inner ideals of virtue and spirituality. That privilege was mine when I first met Swami Chidananda.

“In that summer of 1969, I first felt the power for peace that emanates from this saintly man.

“There is a harmony and an understanding that transcends words when you listen to Swami Chidananda. What he says is important, but what he IS is dynamic and unforgettable.

“When he descended from the stage, I felt a surge of such emotion I did not think I could contain it, and unexplainable tears were streaming from my eyes. I could not speak, and I knew words were unnecessary.

“Despite the many demands upon this gentle man during those hectic days, he always had time for everyone. I remember being very impressed with his ability to concentrate his entire

attention upon a questioning student to such an extent that you felt his love envelop you and nothing else mattered. He spoke to you, and to you alone.

“We had often heard other people chanting Shanti, Shanti, Shanti, but when Swamiji spoke ‘Peace! Peace! Peace Profound to all beings!’, its holy significance became a reality that could be deeply felt physically. It was the most serene and sincere benediction we have ever experienced, and for Yogi Rama and me it continued to sustain and support us in all of our Yoga classes through the years that followed.

“Swami Chidananda personifies loving detachment and selfless service, and the Pure Joy I felt in his enlightened Presence is indelibly etched in my memory.”

The impact of being in the presence of Swami Chidananda is in itself a memorable experience. It may mean many things to many persons, but the following attempt by Mary Dean of Great Falls, Virginia, to describe her meeting with Swamiji certainly makes interesting reading:

“Not only is the grace of his every movement, every gesture of his beautiful hands, sheer poetry, but the wisdom of each word he utters strikes a deep chord in the listening aspirant’s consciousness and seems to light up areas of the mind once dim or confused. The very atmosphere of each room he enters becomes charged with vibrations of spiritual energy and love which can actually be *felt*. At times one is overwhelmed and tears of sheer joy flow from some secret pool in the depths of the heart and spill over in childlike abandon. Truly then one can say: ‘My cup runneth over.’ Joy and devotion are boundless.

“The purity, sweetness, serenity and utter equanimity of this great saint creates its own environment in which minds are stilled; then suddenly one’s mind is alert and ready to soak up his message like a thirsty sponge. Each moment is eternally NOW. There is no time; no limitations. Swami Chidananda is able to impart profound spiritual truths in language comprehensible to all who listen—even the most complex ideas become crystal clear to the mind attuned to this extraordinary teacher. He seems to be on some special spiritual wave-length and speaks extemporaneously, tirelessly, eloquently and effortlessly. And often with gentle humour.

“One feels a sense of loss—almost like losing a limb when it is time for Swamiji to move on. But that pain quickly fades in the calm assurance that Swamiji is never apart from his devotees, despite the measurements man puts on distance and on separation. Swamiji provides steady and sure support for those on the spiritual path, and his guidance can be felt in many ways.

“Swami Chidananda is a true Guru, worthy of the devotion of his followers who desire sincerely to serve God in ‘all these names and forms’, and thereby to serve Swamiji”.

Service is indeed dearest to the heart of Swamiji. He considers himself, first and last, a servant of God and his life is one long round of ceaseless and loving service. This aspect of his life appealed more than anything else to Cristine Butshek of Germany who considers her meeting with Swamiji a significant event in her life:

“Every man has stations on his personal development in the path of life. These steps are very often connected with our meeting new personalities; and the old connections which have passed their reality in life are often dissolved. One of these important stations in my life was my meeting with Swami Chidananda. Even if there is no personal direct connection in the outside seen life, his pure, clear, loving human being is always present for me. By his selfless service every man is deepest impressed and Swamiji becomes a reminding example which cannot be forgotten.

“It is with the greatest gratitude that I am thinking of my destiny which sent me the meeting with Swamiji Chidananda and all the personal goodness and purity which he showed to me”.

Because of this personal goodness and purity, Swami Chidananda lives in the hearts of even those people whom he may meet but once.

“Many years have passed since Swami Chidananda left us but he lives always in our hearts”, declares Sara Hermana of the Cooperacion Impersonal Centre of Buenos Aires, “He has given us the aspiration to become better, to purify ourselves”. Continuing her reflections over Swamiji’s visit to Argentina of years ago, she says:

“His presence raised a great enthusiasm in Buenos Aires. In the day he spent with us, all wanted to retain him at their side Everywhere he left an indelible memory. His presence is always with us and his light illumines our hearts. We cannot be the same after meeting him”.

We cannot be the same after meeting him. How true! And for this very reason, our meeting with Swami Chidananda marks a milestone in our life. And what is it that makes such a powerful impact on our life? Is it something that he does or is it the sheer strength of his spiritual personality?

For an answer, let us turn to Moo Briddell who stayed with Swamiji in his Rishikesh Ashram for a whole year. Moo Briddell writes:

“What is so inspiring and invaluable to see is such deep love and compassion for all beings, such radiant knowledge, absolute purity and utter humility, all embodied in a human individual. This is Swami Chidananda! He is a glorious, shining example of what human life can be on earth, if only we put into practice the teaching of Jesus: ‘Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect’. Swamiji is the living spirit of God in a human form. It is a continual delight to grow in knowledge and in love of someone who has reached that supreme goal of life.

“He has made all the scriptures, all the teachings of the great saints and masters full of meaning and life for me. He is like a walking Bhagavad Gita and a speaking New Testament. Before knowing Swamiji as ‘living proof’, religion had all seemed so dry and formal and so far, far removed from the process of living. Holy words and sacred words, but all only words, printed and spoken and repeated, but seemingly disconnected and without any life-force. In Swami Chidananda, as with other illumined beings, the words he speaks are uttered, not as empty blah, blah in the air, but as vehicles for conveying consciousness. As such they have gone deep into my mind-heart and I cannot forget them.

“But it is not so much what Swamiji says or even does that is the greatest teaching—rather what he is, what his being is—whether he speaks or is silent, in action or in inaction, he is always the same somehow, in all circumstances, like water which sometimes rushes forward with tremendous force, and then comes to rest in a deep, smooth pool, but never loses its essential quality of wetness. Swamiji is always what he really is.

“Once, at a small gathering in America, Swamiji looked around to see if he could find any familiar face. He said: ‘Well, anyway, I know who you are. Even if *you* don’t know who you are, *I* know who you are’.

“I once went to apply for a design job and one of the questions on the application form was: What is the most important thing you have done in the last three years? The only thing I could think of was having spent a year at the Sivananda Ashram in Rishikesh in the Holy Presence of Swami Chidanandaji. I could not think of anything else as important in my whole life, so I had to leave the question blank because I knew that that was not the answer they wanted!

“In the most hopeless moments of despair or depression, the thought of this Free Being who is ever present with me (even though I often fail to recognise Him), is a great consolation and upliftment. Even when life seems to be collapsing all around me in an avalanche of attachments and illusions, when the mind sees everything and everyone as a trap which Maya has carefully laid out in order to entangle me, somewhere in the depths of my being there is an awareness which knows it is free from all this. That awareness I call Swami Chidananda, because it is He who awakened me to it and it is in Him that I see it most perfectly and fully blossomed”.

The world needs just such a saint to spread the spiritual message of unity, goodwill, service, sacrifice, cooperation, sympathy and tolerance. During the War, I once happened to pass by a group of soldiers who were attending mass in the open air, near the front. Shells were falling all around, and they stood there, singing with their minister, the well-known hymn “Onward Christian soldiers, singing as you go”.

Many a time, as I saw Chidananda speaking to large gatherings in the open air, arms uplifted, face transfigured, “Immortal Selves, Blessed Children of Light! The time has come, be up and doing”, the memory of that unforgettable moment I had lived during the war came back to me.

Everywhere Chidananda went, people seemed to stand up and start marching on a new trail, becoming “soldiers of God”, singing Mantras, Bhajans and Kirtans as they went.

I know personally many of them. I know how their devotion is sincere, I know how some of them took up their crosses to follow Swamiji, I know how they never varied in their love, I know how they work for the spreading of Yoga, I know how their lives were changed. And the thought of their devotion always inspires me anew.

Many thousands have been influenced beneficially by Swami Chidananda’s divine personality, his exemplary life and his lofty teachings. The examples I have given can be multiplied almost endlessly, but it is unnecessary. The few typical examples I have given should serve the

purpose I have in mind, to give the reader a deep insight into what happens when you meet a real saint who embodies in himself the epitome of his teachings.

EPILOGUE

We know words are powerless to describe the glory of his perfection. Yet we try again and again. It is an outlet for our overflowing heart. His constant and total adherence to the ideal, his utter spontaneity in all his actions, utter disregard for praise or blame, his supreme simplicity as well as complete absence of egoism, make all realise the great saint that he is. He is all powerful and yet he behaves like any one of us. He loves all of us alike, whether we are worthy or not. He can take on the severe, serious, noble look of the Guru with a devotee, and in the next minute he can look free and young, joke and laugh like an ordinary man with someone else, and talk of very ordinary topics, and suddenly again change and be all-compassion and tenderness to some suffering soul, his very face and body showing how much he is suffering their suffering, his face suddenly drawn and older.

His ceaseless activity, every hour of every day of the year, is such that it would be beyond our understanding, and for us to try to emulate him a source of despair, if we did not realise that it is the universal life that is pulsating within him.

In his presence our problems find a solution. He gives us an understanding heart. In the beauty of his smile we find peace. The love in his eyes fills our heart to overflowing so that we share it with all and get all the richer for it.

He is the untarnishable source. He is the hand that holds the light to those who lose their way. His reaction is the same in the face of praise, approval or blame. Even if we go to thank him for his wondrous guidance, he just says, "You have only got what you deserve" or he points his finger to the sky and says, "He is the doer".

He works in a quiet way, seeks no publicity or applause, and half his deeds go unknown and often unappreciated.

Knowledge he has, but he is richer in humility.

He scatters all he receives. He knows that it is given, not to hoard, but to scatter in the service of God. He teaches us that, to the extent we have the Divine Being within us, we bring blessings to our task and that "saintliness does not come from occupation, but depends upon what one is" as St. Theresa, the great Christian mystic, said.

St. Lawrence, another Christian mystic, said, "With me, my time and labour is no longer different from the time of prayer. Never forget that work is an instrument of God's love in the service of a broken, bleeding world, and work offered as self-surrender to the Lord glows with the beauty of communion with God". Chidananda's life verily exemplifies this teaching.

EPILOGUE

Swami Chidananda goes round the world lighting lamps of spiritual life in the hearts of countless people.

Swami Sivananda appears in visions, in dreams, to many devotees who are prepared and ready and he guides them to Chidananda. Through many such sages Yoga is spreading and a new civilisation is being born.

For the ever-increasing number who have seen the light of Chidananda's presence, the role of the Guru is no longer in doubt, and the devotion and gratitude they feel for him is beyond words.

When one knows the importance of the role he has to play in the spiritual world-awakening, when one has seen the army of spiritual seekers which rises up after his passage, one is happy to share him with all the world. It is said that the time of books has outgrown itself. It was only a preparation for what is happening now. Now the people want to know the saints, they want to see them directly. Nowadays, when nothing can limit itself to one country, when every event is a world event, what to say of trying to limit Swami Chidananda to an Ashram, even to a country? Verily, he belongs to all. I was kneeling on the floor, very still, my eyes closed. I saw a man dressed in an orange robe. He had a beard, he was tall and broad. He looked at me, then turned and walked away. As he was walking, he became two, these two became four, the four became eight. It was endless. Everywhere I looked, I saw men dressed in orange robes. Then they seemed to fuse into one another and I could see only an orange veil spreading all over the world. I was still and listening with all my might, when suddenly I felt a far, far away movement in all the tremendous silent stillness around me. It became a very faint sound. It did not become a sound; the movement and the sound were one somehow. . . A few months later, when one day I tried to relate this vision to Chidanandaji, he said in a casual manner, "Yes, Yoga, is going to be the new civilisation !"

NOTE: The word Yoga in its real meaning which is to join man and God together.