



*Fragrant
Flowers*

(Soul-elevating reminiscences of a Himalayan Monk)

Swami Shantananda Puri

FRAGRANT FLOWERS (Soul-elevating reminiscences of a Himalayan monk)
by Swami Shantananda Puri.

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© *Publisher :*

Parvathamma C.P. Subbaraju Setty Charitable Trust
13/8, Pampa Maha Kavi Road
Shankarpuram, Bangalore - 560 004.
Ph: 6523011, 6678070

Books can be had from the publisher

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First Edition : February 2001
Second Edition : July 2002

Cover Design : C. Krishna Setty

Published by

Parvathamma C.P. Subbaraju Setty Charitable Trust

13/8, Pampa Maha Kavi Road,
Shankarpuram, Bangalore - 560 004.
e-mail : omkar@blr.vsnl.net.in
Tel. : 6523011

Printed at

Omkar Offset Printers

No. 3/4, 1st Main Road
New Tharagupet
Bangalore - 560 002, India
Telefax : 6708186, 6709026
e-mail: omkar@blr.vsnl.net.in
Website: www.omkarprinters.com

Samarpana

*This book is dedicated with veneration to
the Lotus Feet of my revered Guru*

Swami Purushottamanandaji

*of Vasishta Guha, Uttaranchal, Himalayas
and*

all the Mahatmas of the world

past, present and future

whose spontaneous grace and compassion

has inebriated me and

inspired me to

venture into writing this book.

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Satsang – a path to divinity

The word SATSANG can be interpreted at two different levels. For an aspirant at a high level, it means **constant contemplation** and thus living in the SELF or GOD, which is the only EXISTENCE (SAT). At a common level, it means the **company of and interaction with noble souls or saints**. One of the first steps in climbing up the ladder of spiritual sadhana (practice) is to cleanse One's mind of impure and unholy tendencies imprinted in the computer Memory (chitta) of the mind due to past conditioning (vasanas). It is these thoughts which keep cropping up in our minds every second and propel us to act, such actions involving us in bondage by causing a chain of rebirths and sufferings. Satsang is essential to enable us to overcome the evil effects of the wrong conditioning of the mind.

A story is current in our tradition for illustrating the benefits of Satsang. Once sage Narada asked Lord Narayana about the benefits of Satsang. The Lord directed him to go to a fly living in a crowding heap in a particular house on the earth. When Narada went to that fly and put his question, the latter told him to go to a puppy, which was to be born on the same day in a particular house in a different

town and died immediately. Narada approached the particular puppy, which was born to a dog and put his question. That puppy directed the sage to approach the calf which was to be born to a cow in another place the next day and died thereafter. When the sage approached that calf, it directed him to contact the child to be born to a particular king in the subsequent week and died instantly.

The sage was puzzled by these events. He approached the king's son as soon as he was born and put his original question. The child laughed and said "where is the need for this question now ? You have already witnessed the glory of SATSANG. I was the fly in the cowdung heap, whom you met first. It was as a result of your Satsang for a few moments that I was reborn as a puppy and again as a calf. Your repeated Satsang is again the cause of my being born as the king's son."

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How does Satsang work? When we are in the company of noble souls who are **pure and currently immersed in thoughts of God, the divine vibrations emanating from them seep through the pores of our body**, remove our bad conditionings of the past (vasanas) and purify our mind at the same time increasing our Satwa Guna (the quality of harmony and light).

From this book of my reminiscences, it will be clear how the Satsang with a highly evolved soul (Sankaracharya of Kanchi) during my childhood and later, led me progressively to an eminent Guru from the lineage of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa as earlier visualised and desired by me. The detailed narration of certain anecdotes is meant to depict graphically the progress, the ups and downs in my Sadhana, how the Guru shapes his disciple step by step (even after he leaves his own body), how unlooked for temptations assail even after a mature Sadhaka has become a monk and how the Lord / Guru reveals His own Glory by rescuing the aspirant.

As a result of Satsang, faith in the Supreme Lord gets strengthened as and when apparently complex and disturbing problems even in the material life of an aspirant get resolved in a miraculous manner. Even by reading such accounts, the faith of other aspirants grows.

These are anecdotes which prove the truth of the statement in DURGA SAPTASATI that those aspirants who depend on the Divine Mother become themselves the source of dependence for other aspirants. The places or Ashrams where the liberated souls (jivan muktas) had lived or discarded their bodies are equally holy and full of beneficial vibrations. One such example is SRI RAMANASRAMAM at Tiruvanamalai or SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM at Pondicherry which are so replete with holy vibrations that even a stranger on the spiritual path is able to reap some peace, calmness and temporary happiness while visiting such holy places. The mind gets automatically attracted to such places and a sadhana (practice) of meditation etc. in those places gives a sudden boost to our level of spirituality. Even a short stay in such places charges our spiritual battery to such an extent that we are endowed with adequate strength to face the tensions, anxieties, agitations and other problems relating to our day to day life with equanimity for several months more.

I may assert emphatically that it is my meeting with many saints, particularly my Gurudev, and visiting these ashrams which have been responsible for my spiritual progress so far. It is with this view that my autobiographical reminiscences will encourage, guide and contribute to the spiritual advancement of the readers that I have ventured to record them in this book.

With love and Om,
Swami Shantananda

Our Gratitude...

Parama Pujya Sri Swami Shantananda Puri Maharaj is a widely travelled saint and during his sojourns, he had the good fortune of having the blessings of and Satsang with a number of Mahatmas. It was the ardent desire of Swamiji's innumerable devotees that Swamiji may place on record his valuable reminiscences so that the sadhaks could have the benefit of such satsangs.

When revered Swamiji was approached for this purpose, he kindly consented to record his experiences and the present book is the result. We are grateful to him and offer our Sashatanganamaskarams to him.

As ever, we had the good fortune of having the guidance from saint-philosopher Sri J. Padmanabha Iyer of Chennai, ever helpful Sri D.N. Anand, Sri C.R. Jayachandra Setty and Sri B. Nagasundaram at every stage of the publication and for their valuable services. Our grateful thanks to all of them. Our thanks are also due to a number of devotees of Revered Swamiji for their co-operation.

Our Chi. Venkatesh Babu of Omkar Offset Printers has again brought out this book in a very pleasing manner which is the hallmark of his commitment. We bless him and wish him a bright and prosperous future.

C.P. SUBBARAJUSETTY
Managing Trustee

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Chapter I

THE SAGE OF KANCHI

1

1. I had the good fortune of having met and come into contact with many a Mahatma, all of whom were either fully enlightened or entitled to be called 'PRATASMARANEEYAS' (deserving to be remembered with love and reverence early in the mornings). When I think of them all, my head bows with reverence, my heart becomes full of love and my eyes brim with tears. My entire mind gets intoxicated with the lovely fragrance of their holy memories, which I propose sharing with all interested readers.

2. The very first saint I came across as early as in the fourth year of my life was Sri Swami Chandrasekharendra Saraswati, Jagadguru Sankaracharya of Kanchipuram, fondly called Paramachāryal (supreme among the preceptors) and commonly reputed as the 'Walking God'. Even though I had not developed any interest in spirituality at such an early age, everything about the sage of Kanchi attracted me to such an

extent that I used often to don my mother's saree covering my head as the Sankaracharya did and strut about with a long bamboo stick in my hand. In due course, many were the occasions between my sixth and tenth year when I used to be taken to the Sankaracharya whose main headquarters during that period (1936 to 1940) was Kumbakonam (Tamil Nadu). As I was studying the various Sastras: Tarka (Logic), Mimamsa (a Vedic exposition), Vyakarana (grammar etc.) in a Sanskrit College at Tiruvaivaru (near Thanjavur in Tamil Nadu), the saint of Kanchi used to make me recite some poems, prayers etc. or question me in the Sastras. **His face was always aglow with a divine effulgence with eyes full of cascading compassion and love.** Even though, ever so many persons of high status and importance were vying with one another to attract his glance towards them, the Sankaracharya used to call me towards him and sometimes make me sit very near him. He possessed the unique capacity of being always very natural and expressing the highest philosophy in simple words, so that even a lay man could understand it easily. Once when I was in my teens, Paramacharya visited the house of some gentleman (Mr. A) for Pada-Puja. One person from the audience (perhaps slightly demented) shouted suddenly "What Periyawal (a way of addressing Sankaracharya), you are also duped by these hypocrites who commit all sorts of atrocities in their daily life, drink liquor etc. but pose before you with assumed devotion and false humility wearing the sacred ash (Vibhuti) on their forehead and body!" The Paramacharya, unruffled, replied with a sweet smile on his face—"A dhobi (washerman) needs to have **only dirty clothes to enable him to wash them.** What has

he got to do with spotlessly white and clean clothes?" Yes, it is the sinner who is more in need of Satsang (the company of holy men). It was on that day perhaps, the first seed of a desire for Satsang (holy company), the main means for reaching the goal of God-realisation, was sown in me.

PADA YATRA (JOURNEY ON FOOT)

3. In 1942 (when I was fourteen years old), I accompanied my father who visited the Sankaracharya camping in some village near Tiruchirapally (in Tamil Nadu), who was touring all over Tamil Nadu by foot with a big entourage of devotees, scholars, pundits and so on. The sage ordered my father to leave me with his entourage for a month (it was vacation time in my school) and to collect me later. What a beautiful experience it was to walk in the holy company of such a great saint! I was committed to the care of one Swamiji (Nerur Swamigal) in the entourage and everyday Periyawal used to enquire from the former Swamiji about my welfare, where I ate and how and where I slept etc. I used to float in an ocean of inexplicable bliss sleeping on some days in some temple premises, sometimes on the verandahs of some houses en route, eating whatever and wherever it was available along with Nerur Swamigal who used to be either invited along with me to some houses for bhiksha or used to beg alms from three houses en route (known as MADHUKARI BHIKSHA). Paramacharya used to walk long distances listening to the reading of some spiritual texts and discussing them with scholars. In some temples where he used to camp for performance of Puja and lunch etc., he would talk to an assembly of local villagers

about **Scriptures, Dharma, Right conduct, God** etc. This was all perhaps a training for me devised by the Almighty for my future life as a wandering monk in my later years. Perhaps, it was this close contact with one of the greatest saints of the 20th century that earned for me the ochre robe in later days. What a beautiful Divine scheme to train me in the path of self-realization and what a Grace!

TRAINING IN KARMA YOGA

4. In 1987, when I went to see the Paramacharya at KANCHI, he had become quite old (in his nineties). Suddenly he spotted me out and commanded me to refurbish my knowledge of Vyakarana (grammatical cun spiritual treatises) and to teach Sanskrit to people in Madras and Bangalore. Just a year earlier I had retired from Government service and I was fully engaged in doing spiritual Sadhana (being settled at MADRAS) and had absolutely no intention of spending my time in teaching Sanskrit to people. But the words of a saint are infallible. Within a week's time of my returning from Kanchi, I accidentally (was it by design) met the Director of Hindu Seva Pratishthanam—(now succeeded by Sanskrit Bharati) – an institution dedicated to spreading the knowledge of Sanskrit in an easy and modern way throughout the world. I was forced by circumstances to join them as a volunteer and was trained for a fortnight in the modern and visual methods of teaching Sanskrit at a special training course conducted at Horanadu (Karnataka). For a period of nearly three years till I left home for taking Samnyasa I was conducting speaking courses and reading courses, taking contact classes for various Sanskrit

examinations etc. both at Madras and at Bangalore. Perhaps this was the training in KARMA YOGA devised for me by the Universal Being in order to cleanse my mind of impurities before I embarked on the life of a full fledged monk. God always works through saints who constitute His body—

दृष्टिः सतां दशनिस्तसु भक्तनूनां (Srimad Bhagavatam X-10-38)

SIVA SAHASRA NAMA

5. It was about 1989. I was in Madras (now known as Chennai) and was taking Sanskrit classes mainly for a number of housewives. One day, a few devotees of Kanchi Paramacharya headed by Mr. J (a Postmaster General) walked into my house and requested that I should translate the SIVA SAHASRA NAMA (one thousand names of Lord Shiva) found in Linga Puranam, in order to enable them to publish it as ordered by the Sankaracharya. There was already a more popular version of the Siva Sahasranama found in Anusasana Parva of Mahabharata. The Sankaracharya had told them “Nowadays there is a lot of enemy, hatred, violence and illwill in individual houses as between husband and wife, father and son, brother and sister, between neighbours etc. At the national level too, communal clashes take place often. At the international level too there are misunderstandings between nations/countries. **Even if a small percentage of people recite this Siva Sahasranama (of Linga Purana), all this violence and enemy at various levels will come down substantially.** You may get this published in Sanskrit and Tamil and the person who teaches Sanskrit to the ladies in

Kotturpuram (in Chennai) may be used to translate the meaning into Tamil". I was aghast at this prospect as all Sahasranamas contain a lot of esoteric significance and the meanings have been written by divine inspiration great men like Adi Sankaracharya (for Vishnu Sahasranama), Bhaskaracharya (for Lalita Sahasranama) etc. My protest was of no avail and the matter was entrusted to me. I searched in all the libraries of Madras but no copy of the Linga Puranam (which contained the Siva Sahasra Nama ibid) was available for reference. One day while I was coming out of the Oriental Library near the Marina beach in sheer despair, a gentleman coming from outside accosted me and asked me as to what book I was in search of. He was (as he later on told me) an Assistant Librarian. When I unburdened my heart to him, he said that in the University there was one Professor V who had done his Ph.D. by submitting a thesis on Linga Puranam. He took me on his scooter to Dr.V who gave me a copy of Linga Puranam for my perusal in his office room. Incidentally, he gave me the address of a person in Madras who had a copy of Linga Puranam along with an ancient Sanskrit commentary by one Ballala. It seemed as if some one had offered me amruta (the divine elixir of immortality).

6. I got the commentary and before the book came to be printed in Tamil, I had to correct the proof copies from the printing press four times. In all, I was compelled to go through that Siva Sahasranama a dozen times at that time. It was all a Sadhana prescribed for me by my Gurudev and how beautifully

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he equipped me with the things necessary to accomplish the task! Later on, that book got published in Hindi, Telugu and Kannada.

7. In 1993, as a monk, I visited KANCHI MUTT. I had gone without taking any offering in my hand for the Acharya. The sage was sitting quietly in a chair underneath a tree unaware of the world around him. He neither spoke nor made any sign. The attendants were taking baskets of offerings of fruits from the hands of the devotees, just touched Paramacharya's hand with a fruit or two and returned them as Prasad to the respective devotees. I was regretting my negligence and failure to carry some offering. Suddenly Paramacharya's eyes lit up and he was gazing directly at me in the midst of the huge crowd. He whispered rather loudly "There is a monk standing there. Ask him who he is". I just mentioned that I was Shantananda Puri from Vasishtha Guha. He extended his hand to one of the baskets of offerings before him, took one big apple and got it passed on to me. This was compassion galore. My delight and gratitude knew no bounds. A Brahmachari Gurubhai of mine (Mr.S) was standing just by my side. I did not want to share this unexpected Prasad with any one else. I surreptitiously dropped the apple into my bag, to be savoured and eaten by me leisurely in solitude.

8. Next year (1994) I heard the news of the Mahasamadhi of this great Saint. This was the Saint who directed the famous writer and journalist- Mr. Paul Brunton - to his future Guru- Bhagawan Ramana of Tiruvannamalai.

Chapter II
THE INIMITABLE
SWAMI SIVANANDAJI MAHARAJ
OF RISHIKESH

9. In April 1950, when I had my first posting in Government service at Meerut (U.P.), my spiritual antenna remained in its embryonic undeveloped state. I had no idea about God or Sadhana (method of practice) for attaining self-realisation. By God's design, I happened to see a book "The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna" by 'M' with a neighbour of mine and just by a cursory glance over the pages I was entranced by the magic of the book. The same month, I procured a copy of this book from my first salary and began to devour it page after page. It was my first Guru which opened my eyes of ignorance. I used to weep while pouring over the pages. Every sentence went deep into my heart. Till today I revere it as the best book of the world.
10. Slowly it began to seep into my mind that **Satsang was a sine-qua-non for any spiritual progress**. I came to hear of

SWAMI SIVANANDAJI MAHARAJ of the Divine Life Society, Rishikesh. In answer to a letter of mine, he sent me a Tulsī Mala, a book named “Mind, its mysteries and control” and some printed forms of a spiritual diary. By October 1950 or so I began to visit his Ashram at Rishikesh, occasionally. Swami Sivanandaji was a realised soul, having a magnificent and loving personality with a lot of wit and humour. One day when a young man came to Swami Sivanandaji, the latter asked him “Are you an M.A.?” The young man answered “Yes, in Economics”. Swamiji nodded his head in dissent and told him— “No, No, it is not possible. M.A. means Master in Avidya (ignorance)”. He used to be immensely pleased with even a little spiritual inclination shown by young people. He used to make me talk in Sanskrit in his Satsang sessions at night. He had given me plenty of his books. He used to sing Bhajans in the most beautiful and melodious voice.

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MY BELOVED GURU DEV OF THE CAVE

Chapter III

FIRST STEP

11. One day he took me in the evening (6-30 p.m. or so) to his kitchen along with two of his attendant Swamijis. While taking food, suddenly he pointed me out to one Swamiji and asked him “What do you say, shall we give him Mundan Sanskar (ritual shaving of the head, say while giving Samnyas).” I, of course, intervened and said “Maharaj, not now. I have a lot of responsibilities in my house and I am the main earning member in the family”. He laughed and kept quiet. There was another reason for my refusing him, which will be made clear in the forthcoming chapters. As often as possible, whenever I got some holidays in my office, I used to rush to Sivanandashram. My spirituality began to sprout in the garden of Sivanandashram. Those days are indeed memorable.
12. This is a chapter on my Guru Dev, who out of his compassion, drew me unto himself from the opposite corner (south) of India. I owe him what all I am today. But for him I would have remained wallowing in the stinking gutters of worldliness, lost in the bewildering wilderness of the wily coils of Maya. Oh my beloved Lord and Guru, I prostrate before you again and again. I never wanted to write any book which will be of an autobiographical nature and it is you, my Guru Dev, who are writing this through the instrument of my hand.
13. In 1952, during one of my visits to Sivanandashram at Rishikesh, I came across a Digvijaya Souvenir where Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj had mentioned in an article that even in those days there were Mahapurushas (great men) who had seen God face to face (i.e., self-realised)— for e.g. Krishna Prem (Ronald Nixon) Maharaj of Uttar Brindavan and Swami

Purushottamanandaji Maharaj of Yasishtha Guha. I became very happy because if only I could find one of them I should be enabled to get all first hand knowledge of God straight from the horse's mouth instead of meandering to find out a competent Guru. Yes, Sivinandaji Maharaj himself was no less realised but my eyes were blinded. Each Mahapurusha comes to this world with separate lists of people who are to be uplifted and my name was not, perhaps, on the list of persons entrusted to the care of Swami Sivinandaji. There was another vital factor too.

14. In 1951, after reading 'The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna', I used to weep daily about my misfortune of having not been born in the days of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa (to be referred to as Thakur) and become one of his disciples. I never knew or could never even guess what a tremendous austerity one should have done in previous births in order to earn the enviable position of becoming even a speck of dust at the feet of such a great Master as Thakur who was a special incarnation (Avatara Varishtha), meant to inspire the modern world. Everyday, I used to spend hours looking at the photo of Thakur and opening out to him mentally all the anguish of my heart in not being able to have a proper spiritual guide. Side by side with it, all worldly and base desires for wealth, comfort etc. were also equally flourishing at another corner of my mind. My mind was a battlefield—a real Kurukshetra.

15. In mid 1951, I made a resolve that I will have no Guru unless he be from the lineage of Thakur. My Guru should be utterly desireless and established in Brahman (the Supreme reality)—

श्रीत्रियोऽवजिनोऽकामहतो यो ब्रह्मवित्तमः ।
ब्रह्मपुत्रतः शान्तो निरिन्धन इवानलः ॥

(VIVEKA CHUDAMANI-Slokas 34-35)

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16. He should possess no wealth or Ashram buildings nor should he have a bevy of Sannyasi disciples organised into an administrative institution, one being Accounts officer Swamiji, one P.R.O. Swamiji, one Quartermaster Swamiji and so on. He should be one who would go into Samadhi once a while, as Thakur used to do, while hearing songs about the Divine Mother. I never thought for a moment as to what qualifications I myself possessed to deserve such an eminent master. When I think of it in retrospect, I hang my head in shame for my rank foolishness. Still it is a miracle how the Divine Mother fulfilled my desire in this respect to the last word. I only prostrate to the Divine Mother in inexpressible heartfelt gratitude and intense love.

17. In 1952, even though I came to know of the two living Self-realised saints from the souvenir of Swami Sivinandaji Maharaj, nobody could give me any information about their location. I continued with what I considered as Sadhana—keeping complete silence on all Sundays, daily meditating on Thakur and the Divine Mother, chanting the names of Gods (Narayana, Govinda and so on) loudly in the evenings, occasionally chanting the sacred texts of VISHNU SAHASRANAM, LALITA SAHASRANAM and SOUNDARYA LAHARI (of Adi Shankaracharya).

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

18. At last, it was in September/October 1957 that when I was going by bus from Meerut to Rishikesh to spend Puja holidays (Navaratri) in Sivandashram (the only reliable place for

Satsang known to me), I fell in conversation with a young gentleman, Mr. P., an Executive of Escorts Ltd., seated next to me. All of a sudden Mr. P shocked me by asking whether I would care to accompany him to Vasishtha Guha and spend a couple of days or so in the holy presence of SWAMI PURUSHOTTAMANANDAJI MAHARAJ. What an electrifying bliss it was to hear the name of my future Guru, a name kept treasured for so many years since 1952 in the recess of my mind. I reached Vasishtha Guha and at last, saw my Guru Maharaj looking at me with a radiant laugh. What a surging happiness did I experience at that moment! It was love at first sight. I became his bonded slave from that moment. His compassionate glance was a subtle DIKSHA (initiation). He greeted me asking “How many years is it since you have known me and how long has it taken you to come here?” I could not believe my ears. I stood dumbfounded after prostrating on the ground. How had he known that I had read about him as early as in 1952? Was he hinting that had my longing for him been deep and intense enough, I could have been brought to his holy feet much earlier? For two or three more days I stayed in the Guha enjoying Maharaj’s conversation with various devotees from morning to evening, sometimes playful, interspersed often with childlike laugh and sometimes serious—mostly in English.

19. Maharaj used to talk very little and that too in pithy sentences with deep undertones. Once a devotee asked him “What is the difference between Gyan Yoga (path of knowledge) and Bhakti Yoga (path of devotion). My Gurudev replied—“**The one who knows Him will come to love Him. The one who loves Him will come to know all about Him.**”

20. In another instance, someone asked Guru Maharaj as to what was “Sahaj Samadhi”. The latter answered—“See Me”.

21. He had a unique way of dealing with administrative problems too. His personal attendant complained to him one day that the Brahmacharins in the Ashram were eating away the cashew nuts and almonds offered by devotees and kept lying on the platform inside the cave (there being no other store room etc.) for the exclusive use of Gurudev and refused to heed the protesting pleadings of the attendant. At that time all the Brahmacharins were sitting before the Maharaj. The latter coolly replied—“More often, the greater the sin, the costlier are the offerings. If somebody wants to eat and transfer to himself the Karmas (results of actions) of such people, let them eat the offerings by all means. Why should you worry?” From that day nobody dared to touch the cashew nuts and almonds.

22. Here is an episode narrated by my Gurubhai Mr S-1 who is an advanced soul himself. Once, he happened to go to Trivandrum (or some place in Kerala) to meet Gurudev. It was 25th December - Christmas day . My Gurudev was asked to give a talk in the local Ramakrishna Mission and Mr. S-1 was among the audience. When Gurudev was talking about the message of Christ, suddenly Mr. S-1 found him transformed into the form of Christ. He could not believe his own eyes and thought it was all a delusion. This vision was not casual but was persisting. Just then, a stranger sitting next to Mr. S-1 nudged him and asked him “ Do you see what I see? It is Christ himself who is speaking and not Swamiji”. How blessed they were to have such holy visions?

INITIATION IN SRIMAD BHAGAVATAM

23. I am sorry for this digression. In my first visit, when I went to take leave of the Maharaj, he suddenly told me “Aye, you are coming during the ensuing birthday celebrations in November/December (1957) and will do ‘Bhagavata Saptaham’ . It surprised me as he had never once asked me my qualifications or whether I knew Sanskrit at all. I was also scared. Even though I had studied Sanskrit in a Sanskrit college years back, I had never once gone through the book “SRIMAD BHAGAVATAM”– an epic Purana which contains the essence of the highest spiritual knowledge. This book was the favourite of Maharaj since the days of his youth and while yet a boy he used to go to various houses on demand and read portions of Srimad Bhagavatam to them. Bhagavatam used to be the touchstone to test the knowledge of great Sanskrit scholars. (शारदते विद्यावती परीक्षा).

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24. A few days before Maharaj’s birthday in 1957, I got a letter from Vasishtha Guha intimating the exact dates and reminding me that Maharaj was expecting me to conduct the Bhagavata Saptaham for seven days excluding the preliminary day of introduction on Mahatmyam (glory of Bhagavatam). Now there was no other go. I procured a copy of Bhagavatam from Delhi, proceeded to Guha and on the appointed day started reading it loudly before the audience, with Maharaj sitting on a parallel dais. I never knew how much portion was to be read on each day and where to end. Maharaj told me by about 11 a.m. to stop and I stopped reading. He then told me that as the audience did not know Sanskrit, I should

explain the contents of the portion read to the audience in Hindi from about 2-30 p.m. for four hours. I was shocked as I myself did not know what the contents were. I had been reading mechanically without understanding. I went to the banks of the Ganges and went through the Hindi translation available in my copy of Bhagavatam till 2 p.m. and then started my exposition in Hindi after praying to Guru Maharaj. Thus started the Sadhana prescribed for me by my Gurudev and is being continued on every birthday of his till now (1999) except for a gap of about 15 years or so after the Mahasamadhni of my Gurudev. It is this study of Srimad Bhagavatam which contributed substantially to my spiritual progress.

25. Guru is said to be अहेतुक कृपा सिन्धु i.e. an ocean of causeless compassion. How many times have I witnessed it?

26. One day in 1958, I got a telegram while in Meerut, from Mr. P that Guru Maharaj was at Delhi at No.1, Lodi colony. Immediately I availed of some leave and left for New Delhi. When I got down at Lodi Colony Bus stand, I saw a lady disciple of Gurudev to whom I happened to show the telegram, after greeting her. She immediately told me that the address given was wrong and that the contact address was Bungalow No.1, Lodi Road (residence of one Mr. Kaul, then Finance Secretary to the Government of India). To top this miracle, when once I entered into the house, my Gurudev who was seated on the lawn along with many devotees laughingly greeted me “See, this fellow got a wrong address but has come to the right place.”

MANTRA DIKSHA (INITIATION)

27. Even though I was going like mad almost every month to Vasishta Guha, to spend a couple of days with Gurudev, I never once bothered to enquire from others about the lineage of my Guru. I was so thoroughly happy and contented to be in the presence of Gurudev that I never felt the need to learn anything about him. Sometime in mid-1958, an engineer devotee in the Ashram gave me a biography of my Master. I was delighted to discover that my Gurudev was actually from the lineage of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and was the disciple of Raja Maharaj (Swami Brahmanandaji). All the other conditions set by me (in 1951) for my Guru were also fulfilled in him but I had never seen him going into Samadhi state. While I was sitting cogitating on this matter, I was called upstairs by my Master. He was sitting all alone and asked me to read the portion relating to the indweller of the heart (अन्तर्यामी शक्ति) from BRIHADARANYAKA UPANISHAD which was given to me. I was reading it for the first time and was quite fascinated by it. It started with “यः यथिष्टां विद्मः.....” describing the Brahman as the essence of the Earth, as the eye of the eye, controlling the eyes but whom the eyes have never known etc., etc. I was completely lost in the beauty of that passage and when I finished it I found Maharaj sitting still-stature like-in Samadhi. I was awed by that sight. I was sitting quietly looking at my master for a few minutes and then slipped out. What a fulfilment of my desire! **Oh Guru Maharaj, Compassion is thy name.**

28. Even after finding that the Maharaj had fulfilled all the conditions set by me for becoming my Guru, I never felt like

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approaching him for Diksha (Mantra initiation). It was in 1959, on my Master's birthday that when I was taking my meals at 4 p.m. after serving several batches of Mahatmas, who had come for the Bhandara (big feast given in Ashrams), one of my Gurubhais, Swami Nirvedanandaji Maharaj, came rushing to me and informed me that I was wanted by GURUDEV pronto. When I went upstairs, my Gurudev, of his own accord, gave me Mantra Diksha. Scriptures prohibit giving Diksha or any spiritual instructions to anybody without being specifically asked— “नगृह्यः कस्यचिद् ब्रूयात्”. Here my Gurudev calls me and bestows a Mantra, unasked, on his own birthday in the evening when I had not taken even a bath and was dressed in soot-stained clothes drenched in perspiration. Is this not compassion galore?

29. In those days my eyes were only for my Guru. I never got myself introduced to other devotees except two or three. Even though all of them used to talk of the high state of consciousness reached by my Gurudev, I was unable to either feel or understand even a little of the greatness or glory of my Master. The Maya's veil was so dense. But some inexplicable attraction held me bound to him and made me seek his holy company again and again. Rightly it is told that the glory of a Guru is revealed only in due course when our own mind becomes pure.

‘महिमा तव गोचर शुद्ध मने
गुरुदेव, दया कर दीन जने।’

30. In his compassion, my Gurudev in one of his letters to me in 1958 wrote: “God and the world are two opposite ends.

One has to abandon the world in order to reach God. You are intelligent. You should know what to do.”

31. Those words had no effect on me. I continued in the Government job. Again, during the very end of 1958, the day after his birthday celebrations, my Master asked me “Aye, have you to go back to Meerut? Why don't you stay here?” This was a second chance he gave me knowing full well that I was unfit or immature for the spiritual path of renunciation. In my foolishness, I told my Gurudev that it was essential for me to go to office in order to attend to some urgent work and left for Meerut. I never realised that it was a direct invitation to renounce the world. At the same time, my heart was also yearning to don the robe of a Sannyasin. What a contradiction!

UNFIT TO RENOUNCE

32. In Nov./Dec. 1959, a few days after the Mantra Diksha, myself and Gurudev were coming down from his room, in the evening, all alone. My Master's hand was on my shoulder and we were going down the steps. On the very first step, apropos nothing, suddenly he told me “Aye, you are not fit for Sannyasa now. You have still some strong samskaras of a householder left in you. You better marry soon.” These words shocked me to the core. I was 30 years old and was fully convinced in my heart that I was an eminent candidate fit for Sannyas because of my knowledge of Sanskrit and some study of scriptures. My Gurudev's words were a severe blow to my ego. I became like a balloon from which all air had

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escaped. I removed the hands of my Gurudev from my shoulders and sat down on the step. My Master went down the steps, looked up from the last step with eyes brimming with compassion and told me “Aye, why are you worried? One day you will get 'that' also.” Obviously he meant Sannyas by the word “that” and his prophecy was fulfilled nearly 32 years later. I knew that my Gurudev could never err in his judgement. In September 1960, a day before the marriage (in Poorvashram), a beautiful letter was received from my Gurudev. Along with the blessings he quoted from Mahabharata.

“विवाहो न विलासार्थः प्रजापतिव केवलम् ।
तेजो बुद्धि बलध्वंसो
ऋतुकालभिगमनात् ब्रह्मचारी इतीयेति” etc. etc.

(See appendix A)

33. “Marriage is not meant either for enjoyment or for begetting progeny. A householder who leads a life of restraint seeking his wife's intimate company at proper times sanctioned in scriptures is also deemed to be a BRAHMACHARI.” That was the last written communication I had from my Guru. In February 1961, when my Gurudev left his body in the Guha, I had already been transferred to Pune and was on that very day going up TRIYAMBAKESWAR (near NASIK) for the darshan of the JYOTRLINGA.

34. I felt the loss of my Gurudev very badly. I felt that the only support in this life had been taken away from me. I was ignorant of the fact that a **Guru is not the body and so he never dies**. I little knew that it was after leaving his mortal

coil that the full grace of Gurudev descended on me and slowly but surely pushed me to unimaginable heights of spirituality. His grace pushed me to prosperous heights in the material aspects of the world too.

COMPASSION OF GURUDEV AFTER MAHA SAMADHI

35. The glory of a Guru reveals itself, in due course more and more only when the mind becomes purer by Sadhana. It is in retrospect that one realises how great his Guru was. Oh Guru Dev, how many times have you averted calamities and saved me from dangers with your silent presence!

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36. It was in 1963, when I was posted at Pune that one Mr. K who was an esteemed office colleague of mine came to my house on a Sunday and offered four big nice looking apples to me. I gave them to the lady of the house (Mrs. P) in the kitchen, came back and was conversing with my friend. Suddenly a voice in my heart warned me “ Do not eat these apples. Throw them away.” I went inside the kitchen and instructed Mrs.P. not to use the apples but just keep them aside. I forgot about them . Next day when I went to office, another colleague of mine Mr.M. mentioned that he happened to go to a famous TANTRIK along with Mr.K. the previous day morning. He also said “ Mr.K. told the Tantrik Swami about some serious ailments of his wife. The Swami bade him purchase and bring four apples. The Swami performed some elaborate Pooja to goddess Kali and handed over the apples to Mr.K. with the instruction that he should not use

them but give them away to some wayside beggars. After Mr.K. left, I asked the Swami as to why he prohibited the apple prasadam to be eaten by Mr.K. but enjoined on him to distribute them to beggers. The Swami said “ These are all secrets which normally we do not reveal to others. These apples are not prasadams. By the use of mantras, the ailments and karmas of Mrs.K. had been infused into the apples and whosoever eats them will fall a victim to those diseases”. I could put two and two together and knew that those were the very apples which Mr.K. in his ignorance, had given me the previous day. “ Oh, Gurudev, who else but you could have warned me imperceptibly to throw away those apples? Is there any end to your compassion?” When I went home that day, I took away those apples and threw them into the river Mukta nearby. I left Mrs.P wondering about the crankiness of her husband who could not allow such nice apples to be eaten by the members of his family or even by the poor servants but threw them all away into the river.

37. In 1967, though a very junior officer in my department, I was selected and sent on a long term assignment to serve under an African Government, till about November 1971. For nearly four years I was busily engaged in heavy office work, parties and entertainments and studying for Cost Accounts Examinations of London (U.K.). So I forgot God, Guru, Meditation and prayers during this entire period. In February 1971, after 10 years of marriage, a child (boy) was born in Aga Khan Hospital in Africa. On the fourth day of his birth, the child was found to have a fatal disease called “A-B-O incompatibility” where some indirect blood was eating away

the blood cells of the birth group. The Doctors declared that it was a rare ailment and there was no known remedy for it. The child was to die in another seven or eight days' time and all milk intake was stopped. While returning from the Doctor's room on the fourth day (3rd March 1971) towards the private ward where the mother was accommodated, I heard the distinct voice of my Gurudev addressing me "Aye, tell the mother of the child to write RAM-NAM (the name of Rama)". I first took it to be an illusion of my own mind. Why should my Gurudev be bothered about a fellow like me who had forgotten his Guru and God? Within minutes, the same injunction was repeated. Now, I was sure that it was a manifestation of my Guru's infinite grace which had glossed over all my failings and negligence. Now again the question was how to convince and persuade the child's mother, a graduate from Bombay University with little or no conditioning towards God or Mahatmas. Again due to my Guru's Grace, she accepted the advice without any remonstrance or hesitation and began to write Rama's name (राम, राम etc.) in a note book night and day. After another four days, the indirect blood percentage of the child began to decrease inexplicably and on the tenth day from the date of starting Ram Nam, it became 'nil' – which according to the doctors was a thorough impossibility (they declared it a freak case). In due course, the child became healthy and was named "RAMCHANDRA" the God's name which had saved him from certain death.

38. Gurudev, how can I ever express my gratitude for the unlooked for and **unbounded compassion with which you enveloped me repeatedly**—though I little deserved it.

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39. Another instance of my Guru's Grace. Sometime in May 1971 or so while returning from a late party at midnight with the family, I took a short cut through a lane where my small car got entangled in deep mire in a pit. I was unable to extricate it. When I came out, I found myself very near a colony of Africans. In those days, dacoity and burglary were very common. All shops in that country were usually closed by 5 p.m. and no Indian would venture out except in a car or van. My companion was decked with all her ornaments (diamond ear ring, gold necklace etc) and I was on that day surely heading to eternity. My companion was trembling with fear, holding her child in her arms and chanting the name of Ram. Within seconds which looked like an eternity, a Mercedes Benz car with a CD plate (Corps Diplomatique) appeared on the scene, driven by a well dressed African gentleman with a lady by his side. He stopped his car by himself, enquired about my plight and asked me to sit in my car and reverse it while he himself, a giant of a man, lifted the bumper in front of the car, standing in knee-deep mud and mire, in his fine suit. If our positions had been reversed I could never have spoilt my suit and helped him to take out his car. Before I could stop the car after reversing, come down and thank him, the African diplomat got into his car with his clothes dripping with mud and drove away without a backward glance. We reached home safely by the main road. Next day morning, the child's mother told me "Do you know who rescued us yesterday night? It was SRI RAM Himself who, at the request of our Gurudev, had come in a Mercedes Benz car." Tears came into my eyes.

40. Sometime in June 1971, I booked my return passage to India by a ship due to sail in November, 71. The very next day a veritable volcano erupted in my Ministry's office. On account of an Audit objection alleging deliberate overpayment amounting to some lakhs of shillings to a contractor, my boss, the topmost officer (an Englishman) in Accounts/Finance in the Ministry was released from service within an hour's notice, declared *persona-non-grata* and packed home (to England). The Engineer-in-Chief and his subordinate officers were put in Jail and the passports of all Indians serving in the Ministry except myself were impounded *sine die* till the case was decided in the Court of Law. I was the ultimate officer in charge of the section responsible for pre-audit and passing for payment of all Works Bills. At any time, I could have been put in jail in the foreign country. I alerted the lady of the house to take a flight to India along with the child in the event of my being put in jail and kept a bag with passport, money and minimum necessities ready for instant use. That lady began to write Ram Nam daily as she became panicky. I remained unperturbed, ready for any eventuality (this was also the grace of my Guru). By that time I had become an Associate member of the Chartered Institute of Cost and Management Accountants, London-ACMA and had more time left for my meditation which was resumed since March 1971. All the auditors and officers working under me were often taken by the police for interrogation but till November⁷¹ nobody ever came to me or questioned me on this case. Early November '71, I boarded the boat for India along with the poorvashrama family and after journeying for nearly two hours I heaved a sigh of relief and thanked my

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Gurudev. Later on, I came to know that all the bills involved in the overpayment had all been directly presented to the cash section for payment without being authorised by my section. This was the crowning instance of my Master's Grace which never rained but poured.

41. Since the Maha Samadhi of my Gurudev, my connection with Vasishta Guha as also with my Gurubhais and other devotees was completely cut off. I could not think of visiting the Guha empty of my Gurudev (this is what I thought in my ignorance) whose presence and loving glances kept me captivated in his life time. The very thought brought tears in my eyes. Since my return to India in November 1971, I remained posted at Bombay till July 1974. During that period and subsequently too till 1977 (while at Delhi) I used to go regularly for a spiritual retreat to Gita Bhawan at Rishikesh and other Ashrams but was studiously avoiding Vasishta Guha. How the grace of Gurudev dragged me back into contact with Vasishta Guha and other Sannyasi Gurubhais once again and thus paved my way for a fast progress on the spiritual path is an interesting anecdote.

CROCODILE GRIP OF GURUDEV

42. In mid 1978, when I had been posted to Meerut I suddenly got a letter from Haridwar from Swami Nirvedanandaji, a highly evolved Gurubhai of mine with whom I had some closer contact between 1958 and 1960. It seems that a departmental colleague of mine who happened to travel with him to Haridwar by train had given him my official address at

Meerut. He was staying in Ayyappan Mandir at Haridwar and expressed a desire to meet me, if possible. Who could imagine that after a gap of nearly 18 years, a highly evolved Gurubhai of mine and a Sannyasi would try to revive his contact with me?

43. I was overjoyed and immediately left for Haridwar. It was a sight to see the Swamiji looking radiant and shining with a divine light with a body emaciated through austerities of a high order. I almost wept on seeing him. His very first question after the greetings was as to how often I had been visiting Vasishtha Guha. He was shocked by my negative reply and the cause attributed to it. He reprimanded me heavily—“Does a Guru ever die? Is he the body? Is this all the knowledge you learnt from Srimad Bhagavatam which you were disseminating to others! All right. We are just now leaving for Guha”. Immediately he took me to Vasishtha Guha at Gullar (22 km from Rishikesh on the road to Badrinath) by bus. Before the Samadhi of my Gurudev I wept copiously till I exhausted all my tears and ignorance too.

44. Another Gurubhai of mine, Swami Chaitanyanandaji was in charge of the Ashram. He had done a lot of inimitable personal service to my Gurudev and was an excellent Sannyasi who was averse to Kamini and Kanchana (Sex and money) since his boyhood. He was all love and invited me to come for BHAGAWATAM reading and lecture on the birthday of Gurudev. Thus my link with Vasishtha Guha was again forged and I began to visit it often with my family members (of Poorvashram). My Sannyasi Gurubhais like Swami

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Sankaranandaji Maharaj, Swami Nirvedanandaji Maharaj and Sri Anandapuri Maharaj began to purify my house at Meerut/Delhi between 1979 and 1986 by visiting me and bestowing the privilege of their Satsang. I also began going to Utarkashi and studying PRASTHANA TRAYA (Brahmasutra, Upanishads and Gita) under the inspiring guidance and encouragement of Swami Sankaranandaji Maharaj—an ideal Sannyasi and a good scholar in Vedanta. It was he who cultivated in me a deep interest in Vedanta Philosophy. He had an excellent knack of clarifying any doubt in any Vedantic text in a very lucid manner. I finally took my Sannyasa Diksha also from him. Every year I used to go and live with him for 1 to 1½ months studying various texts. All my Gurubhais were extremely loving towards me and in an inscrutable manner kindled Vairagya (dispassion and detachment) in me. They substantially contributed to my spiritual progress. But for my Guru's Grace, why should such eminent Sannyasins whom I had arrogantly ignored for nearly 18 years, come forward to take me in their hands and shape me? Oh Guru Dev, what an ignorant man I must have been that you had to deploy an army of your Sannyasi disciples (yourself supervising over them all) to discipline and bring me to the noble path of renunciation! But for these repeated acts of compassion of yours, where would I be now, Gurudev? How did I ever deserve this unstinted love of yours? How many times have you made me shed tears, while writing down this memoir! Gurudev, I do not want MOKSHA (liberation). Let me, in every birth, remain in constant remembrance of thy love and compassion sitting at your lotus feet for ever and ever, and gazing at your loving countenance. Gurudev, while writing about you, words fail,

my diction and style are forgotten, my vocabulary disappears and I just scribble like a child.

45. For years since 1957 I had lectured on Bhagavatam in the Guha/Lucknow in Gurudev's presence while doing Saptaham. Many of the poems in the book were beyond my understanding but I never took any pains to go through any of the standard commentaries and try to understand them. In 1984, a colleague officer (late Sri K.) expressed a desire to study BHAGAVATAM word by word and wanted me to suggest a good tutor. I put him off and never revealed my knowledge of Bhagavatam. One day he happened to see on my table an invitation for the Bhagavata Saptaham on my Guru's birthday (in 1984) in Vasishtha Guha. From that day onwards he compelled me to

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take a class on Bhagavatam daily during the afternoon recess for one hour. I had to get some Commentaries (by Sridhara, Vallabhacharya, Viswanath Chakravartthy and others) and prepare everyday at night by going through them in order to teach Mr. K. How many living Gurus would take so much interest and pains to compel the disciples to study a scripture in depth? My Guru Dev, your Grace is exceptional and how you have shaped me, reconditioning me grain by grain, atom by atom. Again in 1995 or so, while a monk, I was made to take a class on Bhagavatam, stanza by stanza, for a lady aspirant of a high order at Turuvanamalai. What a course of Sadhana, my Gurudev arranged for me from time to time!

46. It was in Nov/Dec 1983 or so. I had gone to Vasishtha Guha for doing Bhagavata Saptaham on the occasion of Gurudev's birthday. In those days no Mantra Diksha was ever given

to any seeker in Vasishtha Guha, on principle. One Mrs.B. (a sister of a Gurubhai of mine) from Delhi approached me one day for Mantra Diksha. The Swamiji in charge of the Guha had already refused her. Naturally I expressed my inability too. She was so grief stricken that she exclaimed "If none of you is prepared to give even a Mantra, what shall we do to get God realisation!" I was moved to compassion and just to satisfy her I told her "If you really long for God sincerely, one day Guru Dev himself will come in your dream and give Mantra Diksha". Years later when she met me again in 1990s she confirmed that within a few days of my talking to her during our previous meeting Gurudev came in her dream and gave the Mantra. What a compassion of Gurudev!

47. On another occasion in 1983 or so, during my Bhagavat Saptaham period, one evening, one Mr.D. (a lecturer in a local Inter College) and his wife came to me at Vasishtha Guha. They confided that they had successful treatment for negative Rh factor under a competent Specialist but despite that, both the times she conceived there was either an abortion or the child was born dead. They repeatedly entreated me to give some special Mantra, Puja or ritual which would ensure the safe birth of a son. When I told them to pray to Gurudev, they retorted that they had done it already without any results. When I pleaded ignorance of such special Mantra etc. they would not believe it. In order to stall them, I asked them to come next day evening. I straight went to the room of the Swamiji in charge of Vasishtha Guha and saw lying there the latest special issue of KALYAN magazine called

“ DEVTA VISHESHANK”. I took it to my room and opened a page at random. Imagine my surprise when I saw a Mantra of SACHI DEVI meant to prevent abortions, death while in womb and any dangers to the child till it is four or five years old. I copied the Mantra and kept on the Gaddhi of Guru Maharaj near his picture.

48. The next day I gave it to the couple when they came to me. After a full year when I visited the Guha next, one morning, I found the couple sitting outside my room holding a small child (boy). With faces wreathed in smiles they prostrated and informed me “ This child has been born to us and is hale and healthy due to your grace”. I told them “Please go and prostrate to my Guru Maharaj(His picture) whose grace alone is responsible for your happiness”.

49. My Guru Dev gave me as a new year bonus on the 1st of January 1990, two fractures on my backbone caused by slipping and falling on the floor of the house where I was living. I refused to undergo any surgery as the backbone is an important vehicle for the rise of the spiritual power (Kundalini Sakti) having the six chakras (resting place for the Sakti) and I did not want it to be tampered with. I had absolute bed rest for three months , which enabled me to walk though with some pain by strapping around my back an alluminium equipment to keep my backbone straight. A few months later when I went to Vasishtha Guha, Swami C. in charge of the Guha solicitously suggested that I should go to Sivanandashram at Rishikesh and consult one famous Orthopaedic Surgeon from Lucknow Medical College who

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was going to hold a free Orthopaedic camp in the coming week. I casually brushed aside the suggestion retorting that if my Guru Dev willed, those experts would come to Vasishtha Guha and advise me.

50. To my utter surprise, the same Orthopaedic Specialist came to Vasishtha Guha the very next week. At the request of Swami C. he examined me thoroughly and prescribed certain exercises.

FINAL RENUNCIATION (SANNYAS)

51. Almost from 1979 to 1990 was a period of rapid progress on the spiritual path. After retirement from Government service in 1986/87, I was spending almost six months in a year in Vasishtha Guha or Uttarkashi Ashram in Sadhana and the balance in teaching Sanskrit (through classics) to some people at Madras and Bangalore in collaboration with Hindu Seva Prasthanam. It was all a period of austerity and meditation. In those days, I never used to eat anything in anybody's house including those of close relatives like my brothers. Since about 1982, I was surrounded by only such friends who were sincere aspirants for God realisation and who never used to talk on any subject except God. When I retired in May 1986, my poorvashram son had just completed his 10th standard and I had promised the people in the house that I would not renounce till atleast the boy became a graduate. In June 1991, the boy's final year of Engineering in I.I.T. had started. Something told me that it was time for me to leave the house. I had completed 63 years of age. I kept all my financial affairs well arranged, left all my pension

papers in the house and burnt off all my various academic certificates etc. On the advice of a Gurubhai Swamiji I had kept one Fixed Deposit receipt for Rs. 25,000 or so solely in my name, the rest all being in the names of others. A week before I decided to renounce the house, while in meditation, it struck me suddenly as to what a no confidence motion it was against God to renounce and go to Himalayas solely depending on Lord but with an F.D. Receipt for Rs. 25,000 in the pocket for emergency use in a Sannyasis' life. The foolishness of it made me feel ashamed. The next day I went from Bangalore to the Bank at Madras, terminated the F.D. and got it re-issued in others' names. At that time, the lady of the house (Mrs. P) had gone on a lecture assignment to Madras and her son was at I.I.T. Kharagpur. I went away to Utarkashi in June 1991 and everybody took it as my usual yearly trip, but I knew that there was to be no more return. My mind was calm and almost blank like. There was no sort of emotion and there was not even a thought that I was leaving the house forever. Whose house was it and where is the question of leaving it? Imperceptibly, I had already become a Sannyasi at heart. Does one become a Sannyasi only when a bell rings and one is given the Ochre robe? There was neither any excitement nor any grief or regret. I had just enough money to reach Uttrakashi and a little more too.

52. Swami Sankaranandaji welcomed me with open arms as he was aware of my intention to renounce the world. I took up the life of a Vanaprastha (forest life) and started bringing alms (Bhiksha) daily for both of us from two or three Kshetras (alms houses) once a day. He told me that he would give

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me Sanniyas only on the next Shivaratri day falling on 2-2-1992. In the meantime, my Guru Dev subjected me to a severe test in order to judge my maturity.

53. In early September 1991 or so, the lady of the house (Mrs.P) arrived at Utarkashi Ashram all alone and unannounced. She said that as it was years since she had had any Satsang, she decided to come to this Ashram for Sadhana. She was given a separate room and she cooked her own food while I was staying in the verandah of Swamiji's room. After a month or more Swamiji got perturbed and told me "Find out how long she intends to stay here. If she is to remain till Shivaratri it will create a problem in your taking Sanniyas as she may become emotional." Mrs. P. curtly replied that she may even spend a year here in Sadhana and reminded me that she never used to question me about the length of my stay whenever I had been coming to the Ashram in all the previous years. Anyway, I told Swamiji that as I was already a Sannyasi at heart I was not particular about taking formal Sanniyas and that I was prepared to roam around the world in white clothes. Swamiji was very unhappy and quoted Sankara's injunction in Aitareya Upanishad Bhashyam etc., that even for a Jnani, formal Sanniyas was essential.

54. Sometime in November 1991, while Swamiji was away for a medical check up at Delhi, a telegram came from a neighbour from Bangalore that our house at Bangalore had been broken open by thieves, all boxes and things were lying pell-mell and we should rush back and file an F.I.R. with the police. Mrs. P was highly agitated and demanded to know

when we would be leaving for Bangalore. She little knew that I had already cut off all my connections with the house. I told her that as I had come for Sadhana which was my top priority I could not go with her. She became incensed and wanted to know whether it was not my duty as a man to go to the police and file F.I.R. etc. I went back to my room without any further argument allowing her to weep and berate me for my lack of sense of duty. The next day morning she left with her luggage without even talking to me, took a bus and left for Bangalore. A month or so later I got a letter from her starting with “See my Ram’s glory. Our house was burgled but nothing was stolen. Even some bundles of currency notes which I had kept hidden in the folds of a saree thrown on the floor by the burglars remained intact. The kitchen was broken open but the silverware (dinner plates etc.) remained in tact. Only the old Godrej safe has been damaged beyond repairs.....” I was amazed as to how my Gurudev played a clever ruse to remove her away from the arena of Sannyas and also ensured that she suffered no big financial loss too. Incidentally, he could also test how great my vairagya was and whether I could be made to go back to the house abandoned by me on this pretext of burglary. Who can understand the play (Leela) of my Guru Maharaj?

55. Swami Sankaranandaji gave me all the Sannyas Mantras to be gone through in order to enable me to pronounce them properly at the proper time. He also gave me books like ‘YATI DHARMA SANGRAHA’ by VISVESWAR BHARATI to enable me to understand all the rules of conduct, behaviour and duties imposed on Sannyasins by the scriptures. He

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himself was an excellent ideal for me to follow. The Shivratri day came. The day previous to it was a day of fasting and keeping vigil through the night. My Sannyas Guru was so concerned that I might fall asleep that he used to come to my room often in the night. I had already discharged my debts to the Gods, manes etc. through ASHTA SRADDHA ceremony and had my head shaved except for a small tuft of hair. I was full of some unknown excitement tingling through all the pores of my body and I was fully awake without a tinge of sleepiness. For some time I was doing Gayatri Japa and for some time I was reading some portions from Mahabharata. At about 2-30 a.m. I got up, had my first bath and started VIRAJA HOMAM, the last worship using sacrificial fire—a ceremony meant for the purification of body and mind, in the exalted presence of SWAMI SHANKARANANDAJI MAHARAJ. The mind was absolutely pure – not a single thought of the world around ever crossed my mind. The mind was in a state of calm and ineffable bliss. At 4 a.m. we went to the Ganges. The sacred thread and tuft of hair, the last vestiges of caste were cut and thrown. I had my dip in the Ganges several times and **threw off my clothes into the river. I was stark naked and became a ‘nobody’.** There was a peculiar sense of divinity in me.

56. It was 2nd February 1992, and the water in the Ganges chilled me to the marrow. I found that I was almost losing consciousness due to the extreme cold. I prayed fervently that I might survive till atleast I could pronounce the Preshya Mantra thrice with my hands upraised standing waist deep in the water and thus die as a full fledged Sannyasi. Suddenly an electric-like

burning force coursed through my entire body. With full consciousness I intoned the Preshya Mantra. I felt intoxicated. That sense of intoxication remained with me fully for about three years after Sannyas. I came out of the water naked and prostrated before the Sannyas Guru while chanting the Vedic rhythm—

‘यो ब्रह्माणं विदधाति पूर्वं
यो वै-वेदांश्च प्रहिणोति तस्मै
तं देव मात्मबुद्धिं प्रकाशं
मुमुक्षु वै शरणमहं प्रपद्ये ॥”

57. The Guru called me by the name “SHANTANANDA PURI” and then gave me the loin cloth, dhoti (all ochre coloured), danda (a bamboo stick of prescribed specification) etc., each to be taken by chanting a Vedic Mantra.

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58. I became a Dandi Sannyasin. Immediately I threw away the Danda (stick) in the Ganges with another Mantra and thus became a Paramahansa formally. The name given to a Sannyasi (termed as ‘yoga pattam’) should be such as to denote the upanishadic attributes of the attributeless Brahman (the Supreme being). The word ‘Shanta’ is the first attribute mentioned in the description “ज्ञानं शिवं सुन्दरं”. As bliss (Ananda) is one’s own real form (Swaroopa), it is added to all names in the Dasanami Sampradaya of Sannyasa. Sankara has divided the surnames of Sannyasis into ten categories:- TIRTHA, ASHRAMA, VANA, ARANYA, GIRI, PARVATHA, SAGARA, SARASWATI, BHARATHI & PURI. **Here a Puri is one who is always engaged in the knowledge of the Self.**

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As Tota Puri was the Guru of Ramakrishna Paramahansa, all the monks in his lineage have the surname of Puri.

59. The balance portion of the Viraja homa was got completed. The Sannyasa Guru gave me the Pranava Mantra (OM), all the four Maha Vakyas (great aphorisms of the Vedas) and certain Sannyasa Mantras like Paramahansa Gayatri etc. The one who gives the first Mantra Diksha opening the inner eye and meant to take us to MOKSHA is always considered as the Guru and his surname is taken even though Sannyasa can be taken from any Sannyasi with any other surname. Normally, a householder who himself is unable to come out of the world and reluctant to renounce it, however great and holy a man he may be, cannot be considered as one capable of giving a Mantra which could lead another to MOKSHA.

“स्वयं तरिगुणक्षमः कणमसौ परान्तरयेत्” How can one who is himself not capable of crossing (the ocean of Sansara), enable another to cross it.

60. Sannyasa is the natural culmination of Vairagya (dispassion) and should automatically come to one whom the world is not capable of enticing. When one of my Gurubhais wrote to Guru Dev seeking his permission to resign his job and come to the holy feet of the latter for taking up Sannyas, my Gurudev replied “when the mango is ripe it can no longer be on the tree. It has to fall. **So when the Buddhi is ripened through spiritual sadhana how can it remain in the world.**”

61. Many people used to ask me whether I had taken the permission of my mother and other people in the house before

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taking up Sannyas. The scriptures do not enjoin taking such prior permission. The Bhagavata says that whenever a mature aspirant wants to take Sannyas, the jealous gods enter into the bodies and minds of his wife, mother and others and make them oppose the intention of the aspirant. It is for the aspirant to disregard the pleadings and feelings of his relatives and go ahead with his intention. So long as one has the least doubt as to where his duty lies—i.e. with his relatives or with God-realisation, he cannot renounce but has to continue with his so-called household duties.

UNSHAKEN BY EARTHQUAKE

62. It was 21st September 1991 when a terrific earthquake shook the entire Uttarakhand of the Himalayas, including Uttarkashi, I was in Uttarkashi awaiting Sannyas and staying with Swami S (in Mangal Ashram) who was to be my Sannyas Guru. While the town was being rocked by the earthquake, at about 2-30 a.m. in the morning , I was sitting in meditation in the verandah of Swami S, when I felt the entire building swinging wildly. That night, in the entire Uttarkashi, several buildings collapsed, walls crumbled, many a person was crushed to death while asleep and various vessels and articles in houses and shops fell down on the ground spilling out their contents. To my surprise, in Mangal Ashram, not a single leaf fell down and there was no damage whatsoever. Just where I was sitting, on the wall behind me there were a dozen bottles (both of glass and plastic) containing Ganges water and not a single bottle fell down. Just all around the Ashram and adjoining buildings there was devastation.

“जाके राखे साइयाँ मार सके न कोई”

The one on whom the Sadguru's Grace falls, not a hair of his can ever come to harm. How many times in my life I got proof of **the abundant love and compassion of my Gurudev which provided an unassailable umbrella of protection over me at all times.** Guru Dev, my prostrations at your holy feet again and again.

INVISIBLE TRAINING IN SANNYAS

63. Just about a week before my Sannyas was due, while in meditation, I got the following instructions from my Gurudev—“After Sannyas you will not remain in one place like Uttarkashi or Vasishta Guha taking guaranteed meals. You will lead a Parivrajaka life for atleast seven years and in the first two years you will not stay in any Ashram for more than four days at a time (except at Dakshineswar, Belur Mutt, Brindavan and Naimisaranya and during chaturmasya). When I told about this message to my Sannyas Guru, the latter poohed it saying—“As in your earlier life you had been touring intensively while in service, it is this vasana which is persuading you to lead the life of a wandering monk and it cannot be your Guru's message. At this age (64 years) you will not be able to stand such a life”. Then a visiting Brahmachari friend (an evolved soul) who was present during this conversation intervened and told me “Whether your Guru has ordered it or not, a wandering life is prescribed in scriptures in the normal course for a Sannyasin. I shall also accompany you during your wanderings. What harm is there

in leading such a life?" I was happy and it buttressed my self-confidence that a friend will be accompanying me in my wanderings. The same day, a lady Sannyasini at Utarkashi advised me to go alone and not in company. While in meditation that day I heard my Guru's voice once again:- "Aye, Parivrajaka Yatra is a Tapasya (a discipline of austerity) and not a picnic. **For Tapasya one goes alone.**" This clinched the issue and I started alone on this journey after four or five days after taking Sannyas.

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64. It is really wonderful how my invisible Gurudev trained me during my wandering life from the very beginning. I had given away every pie I had to my Sannyas Guru before taking Sannyas and did not have any money with me. My first place of destination was Vasishtha Guha—my Gurusthan. Just when I started from the Utarkashi Ashram my Sannyas Guru gave me Rs. 50/- and another Rs. 50/- was pressed on me by a Sannyasini who had studied Chandogya Upanishad under me earlier and who had come to the Ashram to see me off. I now had sufficient money for my bus fare to Vasishtha Guha. The Lord certainly looks after the devotees who place their full confidence in him unconditionally.

65. From Vasishtha Guha my next place of visit was Deva Prayag. The moment I reached Deva Prayag I approached the priest in Ram mandir for some information regarding accommodation etc. He seemed to be allergic to all Sannyasins. He greeted me with abuses. Finally I got some information from an old Naga Baba sitting in a dilapidated cottage nearby. He advised me to get a room in the Kali Kamliwala Dharmasala after

crossing the bridge and to get my Bhiksha at 11 a.m. from the 10 or 12 houses on either side of the approach road to the bridge. While going towards the bridge I found the road as also the houses there to be extremely dirty with steps and approaches full of dried faeces (of men and animals) and with a stinking bad smell pervading all around. I was horrified at the thought of getting food from such houses and I was sure that I would not be able to swallow a single morsel of such food. Lord, is this the way you want to condition me to a monk's life? When I was about to approach the Kali Kamliwala Dharmasala, I found a bare bodied brahmin feeding a cow on the wayside with chapaties. He greeted me with warmth and after making some enquiries about me invited me to have food in his house, which was almost next to the Dharmasala and was maintained in a neat and clean manner. I was extremely happy and gave him my Kamandalu (or small vessel) which he filled up with nice food. Yes, Lord did oblige me this time but punished me too for having dared to choose while remaining a beggar. For another 48 hours, He denied me food thoroughly. I was taking only one Bhiksha per day in those days and at night time I used to have nothing to eat or drink. For the next day, a teacher—a bachelor neighbour had already invited me to have my noon meals with him at 1 p.m. Next day came and I was waiting up to 2 p.m. when a young urchin came and passed on a message, that as my teacher neighbour was called away to play percussion in a music programme by his friends, his invitation to me for meals was to be treated as cancelled. Where could I go at that time for Bhiksha? That entire day, I passed with a few glasses of Ganges water. The next day morning I started for Chandra

Vadani, a temple dedicated to the Divine mother at a peak involving bus journey upto Jammi Khal and then a climb up by foot for 6 to 8 kms. En route, the local people assured me that I could get nice food at the temple. I reached the temple by 12-30 p.m. The priest felt outraged when I sought some Bhiksha. He told me “Even water to wash God is brought by me from my house down below. How dare you expect to have food in such an inaccessible place? As an exception, I shall give you a little water to drink.” I went back by foot to Jammi Khal and then by bus to Deva Prayag. The next day morning I returned to Vasishtha Guha when I had a hearty lunch prasad at 12 noon. I learnt my first lesson that **I should learn to accept whatever God grants us without any specific like or dislike.** It is because of this conditioning of the mind to likes and dislikes that we are subject to miseries and sorrows. This is the practical way in which Gurudev began to train me up.

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GUIDANCE OF GURUDEV

66. There were several occasions when my Guru Dev had saved me from dangers during my wandering as a monk. In late 1993, I was going towards Dwaraka in a car along with a Gurubhai–Swami Sambhavanandaji Maharaj. It was dusk and en route we wanted to stay somewhere and proceed the next day. From the passersby we learnt that there were two good Ashrams nearby, one on the left and the other on the right. My senior companion (Swami S) chose the left. There were a number of well dressed monks and some loudspeakers were being fixed. The monks welcomed us, gave us tea and

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entreated us to stay that night when a nice Bhajan / Kiritan programme by some expert lady singers was to take place and to attend the Bhandara next day. Suddenly it came into my mind that the entire place was impure and the people living there were accustomed to take alcoholic drinks. I whispered in the ears of Swami S who rebuked me for my imagination obviously based on my vasana of earlier service days, when I had to move with Defence personnel used to drinks. Finally, very reluctantly, he excused himself and came along with me. Till we reached the car parked outside, he was murmuring about upstarts who had not served as monks even for a full year but were imagining themselves to be Sidhas with mystic powers. We had a nice welcome at the second Ashram. While we were talking with the monks of that Ashram I just mentioned how we went to the first Ashram but somehow did not like it. One of the Swamis of the Ashram told me “That Ashram would not have suited you at all. There the Monks are all given to alcoholic drinks and they resort to other orgies too which are prohibited even for normal people, not to speak of monks.” Then I thanked my Gurudev inwardly for having saved me from a danger.

67. It was in 1992, soon after my Sannyas that I went to Haridwar (after my visit to Devaprayag). It was the time of Kumbh Mela. I stayed with a Brahmachari in an Ashram at Kankhal. That Brahmachari used to take his meals in a small hotel. As I did not like such an arrangement, I took him also with me and went to the Ashram of a famous lady saint (not alive in 1992) at Kankhal where a number of beggars, including women, mostly Bengalis (but not a single Mahatma) were standing in a queue for ‘Narayana Seva’.

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They seemed to be 'regulars' and on their respectful advice, I kept my Kamandalu (a vessel of stainless steel) along with that of the Brahmachari near the doorway. The sevak (server) who opened the door and brought rice and dal in big vessels stared at me and the new Kamandalu with evident disapproval and asked me who I was. When I answered his question he ordered me to take my Kamandalu and get out. Just at that time, a Bengali Swamiji with whom I have had a nodding acquaintance earlier came over there and assured the sevak that he knew me and requested him to serve me too. Still, with reluctance the sevak served me with rice and dal (half the quantity served to each of the other beggars). When I was about to leave, a fat gentleman came with vessels full of chapatis and vegetables in two cycle rikshaws, stopped on the road in front of the Ashram, invited us and distributed them to all starting with both of us. God is perhaps kinder to a novice monk who seeks him sincerely.

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68. From childhood, I had not been accustomed to taking tea or coffee in the morning. Much later, after my thirtieth year I had started taking tea but it was never a must or a necessity. Especially during the four years preceding my Samnyas I seldom used to take coffee, tea or any drink in a hotel. In 1992, while at Haridwar, one morning I was suddenly seized with an intense craving to have a cup of tea. I did not also want to purchase a cup of tea from a tea shop. I walked over to Har-Ki-paudi where a number of pilgrims were coming for Ganges bath and was standing near a tea shop in the hope that somebody or other or the tea shop owner will spot this 'Mahatma' and offer some tea. My desire and disappointment were both growing minute by minute. There

were so many Sadhus in ochre robes who were also moving about. Nobody noticed me. Suddenly, I found that a number of beggars and Sadhus formed a queue before the tea shop and they were all served with hot halwa. My mouth began to water but as a Mahatma I did not want to join them without being invited. Nearly 45 minutes elapsed. Nobody cared to invite me and the crowd before the tea shop dispersed. The craving for a cup of tea or halwa left me as suddenly as it came. My mind became calm. Then it dawned on me how foolish it was to have wasted more than an hour in quest of a cup of tea, forgetting the Lord. I wept for my weakness. Pondering retrospectively, I feel that I must have had some pride that I had been able to renounce the house and hearth due to my high vairagya and God wanted me to realise that nobody can renounce a single thing without His Grace and unless He willed it so. Never again I forgot this lesson and never again such cravings have assaulted me so far.

69. Another day, (during Kumbh Mela) myself and the Brahmachari decided to go for Bhiksha towards Saptarshi Ashram/Bharat Mata Mandir side which was quite far off from Kankhal area. We reached by 10 a.m. As we had heard of a Gita Ashram (or Gita Mandir?), we went there first. The durwan standing guard outside did not allow us to get in and meet the Manager but drove us away. Then on the advice of some Swamijis whom we met on the way, we went to another Ashram where hundreds of Swamijis with Kamandalus had congregated. We all formed a queue. When the Ashram executive came with the food for distribution, he sternly ordered that only those monks possessing identity

cards should come forward for taking Bhiksha and the rest would be served to the extent any balance food was left. On enquiry, I understood that monks of certain Ashrams formed several associations (unions?) and were issued with identity cards which entitled them to take Bhiksha from four or five specified Ashrams. Vive la union of Monks!

After waiting for an hour, I was informed that the food was exhausted (but not myself). We went to two other big Ashrams but the same leela was repeated identically. It was 12 noon and I was feeling hungry (or perhaps the feeling was psychological). I decided to go back to Kankhal and be content with the drinking of holy water from Ganga Mata, who luckily never insists on identity cards. While returning, after 15 minutes of walk, we came across an inconspicuous small Ashram with a sign board "Kichdiwala Baba Ashram". We never noticed it but a Panditji who was emerging out of the Ashram shouted and called me from the other end of the road. As so many Swamijis were moving about, I was not sure whether he had called me or somebody else as 'Swamiji'. The Panditji assured me by sign that he was calling me and asked me in a sweet voice whether I have had my bhiksha. I narrated him briefly my experience since morning. He said "I am just going to offer the food (bhog) to Bhagavan. In another 20 minutes you can have bhiksha in the Ashram. Please go inside and wait." We had nice food and there were some 40 to 50 people more who partook food along with me. I learnt that day that every morsel of food comes by God's Grace. My Gurudev, in how many diverse ways you taught me to grow as a monk and to develop deep faith in God.

GLORY OF VASISHTHA GUHA

70. Vasishta Guha situated at GOOLAR village, 22 kms from Rishikesh where my Guru Dev had done his austerities for more than 25 years, has a unique glory of its own. It is said that the Guha (cave) extends behind the present wall for about 20 kms and that the entrance to the extension was got closed by my Gurudev in 1940s for the reason that a number of Siddhas (perfect masters) were meditating inside for a number of years in their subtle (astral) bodies, not visible to naked eyes, for the welfare of the entire mankind. My Gurudev perhaps did not want them to be disturbed by any interloper who might take into his head to explore the inner cave.

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71. About March 1996, Swami Dayananda Saraswati of Rishikesh (an internationally famous Mahatma) visited the Guha along with a devotee who took the photo of the Sivalingam on the platform at the very end of the Guha. On returning to his Ashram and on developing the photo, he found two big parallel rays of light emanating from the Sivalinga going up by the side wall nearest, making patterns of loops and circles on the top, descending by the farther side wall, going to the middle of the way leading to the inside of the cave and disappearing into the earth. As this was an extraordinary phenomenon, Swami Dayanandaji Maharaj sent a letter to the Guha enclosing two copies of the photograph concerned.

72. Sometime in 1994 or so, a young Dutch woman visited the Guha on a day when I happened to be there. It was her first visit. She was sitting in meditation inside the cave till lunch

time. During lunch she suddenly addressed me and asked "I find that your Gurudev had left his body in February 1961. Since then, have you met him again at any time". The question sounded strange and I answered in the negative. After finishing her lunch she followed me to my room and narrated the following unique experience of hers in the Guha:-

"After about two hours of meditation, when I suddenly opened my eyes, I saw a Swamiji with a laughing face standing before me. He was identical with the photograph kept outside the cave on the dais. The only difference was that unlike in the picture he had a long stick in his hand. A thought came to my mind that the vision was some sort of an illusion. The Swamiji smilingly told me 'you are wrong, my dear child, I am as real as you are. I am not an illusion.' I was astonished that he could divine my thoughts accurately. He asked me 'Aye, what do you want?' I replied 'Swamiji, I want Gyan (True knowledge).' He laughed in a wild manner and disappeared." I believed her because in her narration she had mentioned certain typical characteristics of my Gurudev as follows:-

1. My Gurudev often sported a long stick even though in the picture on the dais it was not there.
2. His typical question to many visitors or disciples was:-
"Aye, what do you want?"
He always used to be laughing like a child.

73. In 1980, when I had gone to Yasishtha Guha to attend my Guru Dev's birthday as also to do Stimad Bhagavata Saptaham, one

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Mrs.P had also come to the Guha. On the first day of Bhagavata reading in the morning, Mrs.P did not attend the recitation partly perhaps she had no taste for it and could not understand the Sanskrit text. She went and sat inside the cave for meditation. After a while, when she opened her eyes she saw my Gurudev standing before her with a smile. She could not believe her own eyes. He told her "Yes, I am really standing before you but you will not believe. Today one old ex-armyman with a beard will be visiting Guha for the first time but he will refuse to have lunch here in this Ashram and will go back. When this happens, you will believe in this vision. Tomorrow I shall initiate you with a Mantra." Mrs.P never disclosed this to anybody. In the evening when I saw her face full of misery, I asked for the reason. Then she narrated the incident and told me "Today I have not seen any such old ex-army man visiting this Guha. Perhaps it was all my imagination." Then I exclaimed "No, it is true. Today one old ex-armyman came and the Swami C incharge of the Ashram took him to the library and was showing him the book YOGA VASISHTHA in three volumes. When Swamiji pressed him to stay for lunch, he excused himself and left." Mrs.P was elated at this news.

74. Next morning when she went inside the Guha and sat for meditation, Gurudev again appeared. She was desperately praying in her heart "I want only a Mantra on 'Ram' and not on any other God." Gurudev smiled and said "Yes, I shall give you only Ram Mantra. Do not worry. Do you know any hymn on Ram for meditation purposes (Dhyana Sloka)? If so, recite it". She recited.

नीलांबुदश्यामल कोमलाङ्गं सीता समरोपित वामभागाम् ।
पणो महा सायक चारु चापं नमामि रामं रघुवंश नाथम् ॥

75. My Gurudev gave her a Mantra, bade her to go and attend Bhagavatam reading which was going on outside and disappeared. I was the only one with whom Mrs.P. confided the full details of her initiation.

Chapter IV

WITH SWAMI NIRVEDANANDAJI MAHARAJ

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FIRST MEETING

76. I first came into contact with Swami Nirvedanandaji Maharaj at Vasishtha Guha, when he had come as a Brahmachari during my Master's birthday in Nov/Dec 1957 and his name then was Veda Giri. Even then I used to be awed by his very personality and serious mien. He was always kind to me from the very first time we met. He was a silent guide and a great inspiration responsible for intensifying my vairagya (detachment) as I often wanted to model myself on his lines. He was initiated into Sannyas by my Gurudev in March 1959. I have seen his sense of extreme vairagya at close quarters. After a long and intimate association with him, I gathered courage once in late 1970s to send him a M.O. for Rs.15/- as my humble offering. He returned the M.O. without accepting and followed it up with a letter where he wrote “ अर्थनिर्णय शिवाय

‘निरी’ (consider money always as a source of calamity)— an advice by the great Sankara meant not only for householders but more so for sannyasins like me. Lord is providing for my daily requirements. What shall I do with this money??”

VAIRAGYA

77. He once told me an incident from his early Sannyasi life to illustrate how Lord looked after his daily needs. One day while travelling in Secunderabad he had no money left with him. He had not had even a cup of coffee. He had planned to visit a town nearby but had no money for the bus fare. He was simply sitting unconcerned in a small park from 7 a.m. to 11 a.m. A young local student approached him diffidently with a request to join him for breakfast in the nearby hotel. Swamiji complied with his request without a demur. The boy hesitatingly gave him also Rs. 2/- apologizing that he had only that much money left with him at that time. Swamiji happily left for the bus stand as he now had the exact bus fare required, due to the grace of the Lord.

78. With all his high state of divine consciousness, he had a childlike simplicity, an inevitable characteristic of all great saints like Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and our own Gurudev. Once in late 1959, I met Swamiji accidentally in Lord Krishna’s temple at GURUVAYOOR in Kerala. When I invited him to accompany me to Coimbatore where I was staying in a hotel having come on an official tour for a month, he readily agreed with childlike enthusiasm. We both stayed in the same room and all the nights in the next fortnight were

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spent in talking about Guru Dev and other spiritual matters. It was a crash course on spirituality arranged by my Gurudev. My intimacy with Swamiji deepened only at that time.

MIRACULOUS CALL

79. Once in 1980 or so, I had gone to Jodhpur on tour from Meerut and was meditating one night on the open terrace of a guest house. Suddenly I heard a clear voice commanding me “Go to Swami Nirvedananda”. I first thought it was all a hallucination. After some time the command was repeated. As if in reply I began to argue in my own mind thus “How can I go to Swamiji who is in Kurtha village near Ghazipur? I do not have any surplus money to make such trips. No doubt if he were to be somewhere nearer to Meerut— say Delhi, Haridwar or Dehradun, I would not mind visiting him.” The next day when I returned to my house at Meerut, a letter was waiting for me from Swami Nirvedanandaji Maharaj from Barlowganj (near Mussoorie / Dehradun) where he was staying with an eminent saint of Swiss origin, a grand disciple of Paramahansa Yoganandaji of YOGODA SATSANG - Sri Jnanananda Maharaj.

80. By coincidence, I had an official tour scheduled for Dehradun three days hence and Swamiji had invited me to come and stay with him at Barlowganj for three or four days. Next week end, I had an excellent Satsang with two extraordinary saints for about three days or so. Just three days earlier to writing of this anecdote in the manuscript of this current memoir I had the good luck of going to Barlowganj and spending a

whole day of unadulterated bliss in the holy company of Swami Jnananandaji Maharaj after nearly two decades. He was talking of his experiences with many saints in India. His talk was also full of wit and humour and all of us (I was accompanied by five more friends) were bursting into peals of laughter every few minutes. After a few hours when I suggested to the Swamiji that he might like to have some rest, he quipped “No, I am restless” (for God realization). One of the stories he told us is thus:-

81. A king once posed four questions to his courtiers:-

- 1) What does God eat?
- 2) When does He weep?
- 3) When does He laugh?
- 4) What is He doing now?

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Not to speak of his ministers and other courtiers, nobody in his kingdom could give a satisfactory reply even to a single question. At last a poor farmer came before the king and expressed his ability to answer all the questions.

For the first question, the farmer said :- **God eats away the ego of a man.** All courtiers agreed with this answer.

For the second and third the replies were:-

- 1) **God weeps when man forgets Him.**
- 2) **God laughs twice :-**

- (i) Once when two brothers partition the land saying that this much is mine; that much is yours.

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- (ii) again when a doctor assures his patient “I shall certainly cure you”.

Now the king put the last question but the farmer became dumb. He repeated the question with vehemence. The farmer said “Sir, how can I answer it while you are sitting on the throne and myself sitting on the ground? Let us exchange places and then you put the question to me.” The king promptly placed the farmer on his throne and himself squatted on the ground. Now he repeated his question. The reply came:- “This is exactly what he is doing **‘Dethroning a king and making him sit on the ground and elevating me to the throne.’**”

RELIGIOUS FILMS – OBSTACLE TO PROGRESS

82. Reverting back to Swami Nirvedanandaji Maharaj, he had a unique, practical and soft way of instructing people on the spiritual path. When once he was staying with me at Delhi (in the 80s) on a Sunday I brought the T.V. from another room and fixed it in Swamiji’s room so that he could also watch with us the serial on Ramayana, which was being telecast every Sunday. The moment the T.V. started, Swamiji turned his face and body towards the wall and did not watch the film at all. This disappointed us all. Next day morning, during breakfast, the lady of the house put a question to Swamiji “How is it, Swamiji, yesterday you refused to see the Ramayana film? Is it that Sannyasins are prohibited from seeing or reading Ramayana and Mahabharata?”

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83. Swamiji laughed and asked her a question:- “You know that as per many of the magazines, the lady who acts certain main roles is more of the permissive character and does not enjoy a good reputation in orthodox circles. If a Sita or Sabari stares at you from the T.V. will you be getting the holy vibrations of the mythical Sita / Sabari or the not so holy vibrations of an actress? Will it in any way help a Sadhaka in his spiritual path?” From that day, I left off seeing even religious episodes on the T.V. This matter can also be extended to audio cassettes. There are many persons who sing Bhajans with divine sweetness but whose moral character is below par. When you hear such Bhajans only the vibrations of such insincere persons come to you, which are more likely to harm us. I always suggest that **people should record Bhajans or Prayers like Vishnu Sahasranama in their own voice and go on hearing them especially during the last moments of their life.**

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LAST DAYS

84. Those were the last days of Swami Nirvedanandaji Maharaj in 1991. He had been suffering from a severe bone cancer and it was in terminal stage. He was lying in a room in Manav Seva Sang Ashram in Ghazipur and a number of staunch devotees both local and from outside were attending on him night and day. He had a number of pathological fractures in his hand, feet etc., all bandaged. He refused to have pethadine injections to alleviate the excruciating pain. His only food was a tea spoon of Ganges water and tomato juice. He never even winced, even though the pain must have been unbearable not

to speak or crying or shouting with pain. He was always chanting ‘OM’. A few days before he left his body in January 1991, I went from Madras to Ghazipur to have his last darshan along with the family. Swamiji sent a devotee to Varanasi for meeting and escorting me to GHAZIPUR. He gave me a very effusive welcome and for hours together he was talking about Gurudev and his own experiences with him. He was quoting with precision the dates and timings in his narration. Next day morning, Mrs.P the lady who accompanied me put him a question:- “You have been so pure and devoted to God from the very early days and still you are suffering from such a disease like cancer. On seeing this situation, people will lose faith in God. Why is this so?” Swamiji laughed and said “It is possible that some Mahatmas may take over the Karmas (Prarabdhas) of some devotees of theirs out of compassion or by divine command.” I explained to her that Swamiji also has perhaps taken over deliberately some body else’s suffering but such Mahatmas would never admit it in as many words. How blessed I was that I was not only lucky in getting a Sadguru but by my Guru’s grace had excellent and highly evolved senior Guru Bhais who also had their share in shaping my destiny and guiding me on the spiritual path both by their own example as also of their precepts. Gurudev, please accept my prostration at your holy feet lakhs of times.

Chapter V

AT BRINDAVAN

85. In April 1992, I reached Brindavan, the holy place where the Bala Leelas of Lord Krishna had been enacted. An interesting incident took place. One day I was coming out of ISKCON temple after borrowing three books from their library. Just opposite to the gate was a young beggar with an attractive countenance sitting along with a number of other beggars. He bowed to me from the waist with a big 'Namaskar'. He told me in Bengali "All your life you have read a number of books. Leave off these books and do more of meditation." I was astounded at these words addressed by a beggar who was also sure that I knew Bengali. For another ten days I was going that side daily to have a sight of that beggar but he was no more to be seen. Was he my Gurudev himself?

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Chapter VI

AT YOGADA ASHRAM, DAKSHINESWAR

86. By June 1992 I came to Dakshineswar. The moment I got down from the bus, I took a little mud from the ground and applied it to my head in reverence. This was the soil on which Thakur had walked around and here were the places where Thakur himself and his disciples had sit in meditation. Oh Mother Kali, Bhavatarini, I bow to you again and again for having brought me to this holy place where you reign supreme and once played the role as Ramakrishna Paramahansa? Were you two ever different from one another? After the darshan of the Mother and the room where Thakur had lived, I approached the temple management for accommodation and food. They laughed and said "the kutias of those days of Thakur are all gone. We can neither supply food nor accommodation. As you are a strict vegetarian and do not eat fish, it will be difficult for you to stay here." This shocked me. Before Sannyas my Gurudev had indicated Dakshineswar as one of the places where I should stay for 15 days. There was a big hall in front of Kali shrine, where some Kirtan

was going on. I went and sat there in meditation. A divine command came from within “Go to Yogada Ashram”. I asked some people around but nobody could tell me the location of that Ashram. Someone directed me to ADYA SAKTI PITH, an ashram where I was assured that immense hospitality awaited every Sadhu. When I reached there I found that the office people including some Brahmacharis were reluctant even to talk to me, a beggar from the street. When I approached the President, an old Brahmachari, he told me that allotting accommodation in that huge complex was the duty of the Secretary. As the Secretary had gone out of station, till he returned nothing could be done. Suddenly it flashed in my mind that this was all the result of my having ignored the command of my Divine Mother. The first person I asked after coming out of this Ashram pointed to Yogada Ashram which was not far from that place. On entering Yogada, I approached a young Brahmachari in the office. After drilling me with various questions on my personal history, he promised to inform the President (Swami Shantananda) – an American Swamiji – who was busy dictating letters. Nearly an hour passed. Some other visiting Swamiji from some other branch of Yogada came to me and again drilled me with many questions and promised to talk to the President. After a little while the President himself with a smiling face and an attractive personality came and told me that I could remain with them for 15 days as desired by me and directed someone to take me to a room. It was a couple of days later that the President confided to me that on the first day he was extremely reluctant to entertain an unknown Swamiji from outside but some unknown force made him relent. On some days, the

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Ashram used to have a twelve hours’ meditation session which I liked immensely. I used to participate in their cosmic exercises and meditation sessions morning and evening. The entire atmosphere of the Ashram was surcharged with high spiritual vibrations. The President Swamiji was all love towards me and requested me to extend my stay by three days in order to enable me to attend Sri Yukteswar Maharaj’s (Guru of Swami Paramahansa Yogananda) birthday celebrations. On the day of departure he came to my room and presented me with a large packet of imported badam nuts and a copy of “Autobiography of a Yogi.” During my stay, I spent the major time daily in Kali Temple and Thakur’s room.

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Swamiji's room. Throughout the night I prayed to Swamiji to pour his grace and blessings through the ceiling. I was again and again grateful to my Guru Maharaj whose blessings only could have got me, an insignificant and immature fakir from the street, such a glorious accommodation at Belur Mutt.

Chapter VII

AT BELUR MUTT

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87. When I went to the R.K. Mission Hqrs. at Belur Mutt in July 1992, I had no recommendation letters or any papers of identification. I straight away went to the reception office, met the concerned Swamiji Maharaj and requested accommodation for three or four days. An old room with minimum furniture was allotted—a separate room on the very banks of the Ganges. A few monks of the mission/mutt who happened to pass by that way enquired of my antecedents and expressed their surprise how this room happened to be allotted to me. Out of curiosity, I enquired from one of them as to what was supposed to be special about this room. That monk expressed further surprise and told me “What, you do not know? This room is just below that where all the possessions and used articles of Swamiji (Vivekanandaji Maharaj) are preserved. Usually this room is allotted to the monks of this mission only, while for visiting Swamijis we have a separate guest house complex.” On hearing this I almost jumped with unbounded joy. Immediately I went up to have darshan of

AT JAYARAMBATI

88. From Belur Mut I got recommendation letters for the R.K. Mutt at Kamarpukur (the birthplace of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa) and at Jayarambati (the birthplace of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi). I was not very enthusiastic about going to Jayarambati. From the very early days, my reverence, belief and regard for Thakur never extended to the Holy Mother. I had in fact read all the books about the Holy Mother and was well aware of the high esteem in which she had been held by Thakur himself and Naren (Swami Vivekananda) and others. But somehow I was of the opinion that the merits of the consorts of great men were always being exaggerated far beyond actuality. On the third day of my of stay at Kamarpukur, I was sitting in meditation before Thakur who was dressed that day in an ochre-coloured cloth. When I suddenly happened to open my eyes, I saw before me a statue of the Holy Mother with her hair flowing over her shoulders, with head covered and draped in a pure white Sari with a thick red line border. For several minutes I continued to look at it and there was no change. I pinched myself, to ensure that I was really awake. Again I went into meditation but, in my curiosity, as many times as I opened my eyes it was the Holy Mother who was before me. Finally, when I got up, I found that it was again Thakur draped in an ochre coloured Dhoti. I was confused and unable to understand the significance of this strange vision. Perhaps Thakur wanted to reveal to me that the Holy Mother was not at all in any way different from him. So I decided to go to Jayarambati the next day.

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89. I was given a nice room at Jayarambati. In that season, I found that not a single visitor came to the Mutt and all the Monks/ Brahmacharis had very little work to do in the day. On the third day morning I was sitting in the shrine of the Holy Mother along with the monks of the Mutt in prayer and meditation. It was about 5-30 a.m. Suddenly I prayed to the Holy Mother thus:- "Mother, if you are really the all-powerful Divine Mother, please reveal yourself to me. You know that I am not arrogant but only ignorant. Give me, please, some proof of your greatness. If today some visitor is to give me a Pronami (donation to a monk), let it be even a rupee or two, I shall take it as a proof." We all came out of the shrine. At the steps, one Brahmachari accosted me and told "Swamiji, I have brought my old mother on a pilgrimage. Yesterday she saw you meditating in the afternoon in the shrine and has expressed a desire to offer her namaskars to you. If you could kindly wait here for a few minutes, I shall just bring her over to you, from her room." I tried to persuade him that I was a fresh Sannyasi of recent origin and he should take his mother to the Senior Monks of the Mutt, but he was so persistent in his request that I had to concede finally. He came along with his old mother who offered me Rs. 11/- as pronami after prostration. What a compassion of the Holy Mother to give me the proof I demanded but in my foolishness I refused to accept this as proof. I told the Mother in my mind "Mother, this offering had been decided upon by this old lady yesterday afternoon itself when she had seen me meditating, while our contract started only this morning. So, I am sorry, I cannot take this as a proof. "Mother, today is the last day of my stay here. If some eight or ten visitors were to give me some

offerings of money today, I shall certainly accept your greatness.” Mothers show greater compassion towards foolish and ignorant children.

90. That day, after lunch, when I was washing my hands under a tap outside, a Brahmachari came running to me and said “Swamiji, please do not go back to your room. The Bara Maharaj desires you to remain seated here on these benches.” There were some small benches arranged in rows underneath a roof. Very soon, all other monks of the Mut also came and joined me. I was curious to know the reasons for this assembling. The Monk sitting next informed me “Today many officers and executives from the Defence Factories at Ichapur (Ishapore) have come along with their families in two bus loads and have conducted a Bhandara (feast). Look, they are coming here with some offerings.” Some 23 to 25 persons (including women and children) were coming towards us. Each one (including children except 2 or 3 tiny babies) came with a bundle of currency notes, gave a note (of Rs. 20, 10, 5 or 2 each) to each one of us and offered pranams. I could not believe my own eyes. I was charged with emotion and my eyes were filled with tears. With utmost restraint I was able to control my sobbing. From nearly 20 persons, the total dakshina (offering) received by me that day was about Rs. 160/- or so. This amount was burning my pocket as it had been forced out of the Holy Mother due to my pig-headedness. In the entire universe with millions of atheists among them, why should at all the Holy Mother bother or stoop to convince me or give proof of her identity with the Divine Mother in the very manner in which it was demanded

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by me. Rather, Holy Mother, I deserved to be punished for having had the insolence to doubt your greatness. Is it all because my Guru Dev interceded on my behalf that you were prepared to satisfy me on my own conditions? Holy Mother, I am thy slave forever and ever. Let me never forget you in any birth.

Chapter IX

WITH SWAMI SATCHIDANANDAJI MAHARAJ OF KANHANGAD

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91. There were many realized souls who had lived during my lifetime but the Lord did not allow me to come into contact with them while they were alive. One such great saint was Swami Ramdas of Kanhangad. He used to emphasise on the chanting of the Mantra 'OM SRI RAM JAI RAM JAI RAM RAM'. He used to give this as Mantra Diksha to all seekers. At Anandashram, along with him there was Mother Krishna Bai—another great soul. Swami Ramdas had come to Vasistha Guha sometime earlier to 1929 and in the second Guha (Arundhathi Guha) he had the holy vision of Jesus Christ, leading to his remaining in the exalted state of Samadhi for nearly 12 hours. In 1953, while at Kanpur I wrote to him a letter and he responded with all love giving me directions as to how I could reach Anandashram at Kanhangad in Kasargode district (Kerala). I had the good fortune of visiting that Ashram only in 1990, by which time both Swami Ramdas

as also the Mother had attained Maha Samadhi. At that time Swami Satchidanandaji Maharaj was there and he still continues to be the successor. He runs the Ashram very efficiently and all the routine work upto the occasional building works are being run very smoothly by themselves. It would look as if Swamiji is a guest in the Ashram. He is all love and compassion and it is the only Ashram in the South where any monk can go and live for 5 or 6 days and can be sure to get some money for his travel expenses and/or a dhoti, umbrella or any other minimum need fulfilled.

CALL FROM MOOKAMBIKA

92. I stayed in the Ashram for fifteen days. In those days, each one was to pay his canteen bill at the end for the breakfast, lunch etc. Everyday it was a paradise to remain in the midst of the ever resounding Kirtan of "OM SRI RAM JAI RAM JAI RAM RAM" being sung from 5-30 a.m. to 9-15 p.m. A friend of mine who was more of an atheist himself told me that even at midnight he heard clearly the chanting of 'SRI RAM JAI RAM JAI RAM' when everybody was asleep. It is a unique Ashram wherefrom nobody returns without being strongly influenced. Apart from Vasistha Guha, the only two Ashrams which have exercised a lot of influence on me through their very high spiritual vibrations are (1) Sri Ramanasramam at Tiruvannamalai and (2) Anandashram at Kanhangad (Kerala). On the last day of my stay in 1990, I met Swami Satchidanandaji Maharaj in the evening and informed him of my impending departure early next morning. He insisted on my meeting him again next

morning before departure for receiving the Prasad. That evening, when I sat in meditation, I heard the voice of my Divine Mother which commanded me to go to Mookambika (a famous temple of Devi in Karnataka) next day, which involved a bus journey of about 7 hours. I found myself remonstrating with the Divine Mother "I shall not then be left with any money to return to Bangalore. I have just enough money left for my return after meeting the canteen expenses." A curt reply came "Don't worry, you will be able to go back after visiting Mookambika." Next day morning after taking leave of Swamiji when I went to the canteen to pay my dues, I was surprised when the Manager told me that nothing was due from me as Swamiji had sent him a note not to collect anything from me. That was my first visit to the Ashram and I had seen the Swamiji only on arrival and again at departure time.

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93. Now I had sufficient money for all the fare. En route, at about 1 p.m. we had a break at Udupi and many of us went to a nearby hotel for lunch. There was an unknown bearded young man who also sat in the same table with me and left earlier after taking his food. When I went to the counter to pay my bill, the manager told me that the bearded gentleman had already paid for me too. When I went to the bus stand, that bearded gentleman accosted me and said apologetically that when he was about to pay his bill, he was instructed by Devi (Divine Mother) to pay for me too. At the time he talked to me, I heard the giggling sound of

a girl very near to me and there was no girl to be seen standing anywhere in the vicinity of the bus stand. My astonishment knew no bounds.

94. When I reached Mookambika guest house, I found a "no accommodation" board exhibited there. Someone there told me that all the Ashrams were full that day and there was no possibility of my getting any accommodation. I was just standing perplexed and it was evening 5-30. Suddenly one gentleman approached me and said "I travelled with you in the same bus from Kasargode. I know one of the priests in whose house I have stayed many times. Come along with me and you shall have both accommodation and food in their house." We went to the house of that priest who gave no indication of having known my companion but he gave me a nice room. As that was the last day of a festival when the Divine Mother was coming on the rounds in that small village, he asked both of us to go and have darshan and then return. After the darshan, my companion told me that he was going to a hotel for a cup of tea and would return later. I went to the temple along with the priest who enquired about the absence of my companion. I had a nice darshan of the Pooja and Arti of the Devi and the priest gave me a lot of prasad. The priest took me back to his house and gave me meals. I remained there till next day evening but did not meet my companion at all. It remains still a mystery to me. Was he perhaps a guide sent by the Divine Mother to help me in my distress?

Chapter X

AT SRI RAMANASRAMAM

INTRODUCTION

95. This is the Ashram where perhaps the culmination of all my Sadhanas took place. Bhagavan Sri Ramana lived at Tiruvannamalai (about 160 kms from Chennai), a holy town, from 1896 to 1950. There are supposed to be seven levels of true knowledge (Sapta Bhumicas) and persons in the last four levels are all realized souls—liberated while alive. Bhagawan Ramana, also termed as Maharshi was one of the rarest examples of a Gyani in the highest level where he lived as the highest supreme being (Para Brahman) descended on the earth. Swami Krishna Prem Maharaj of Mir Tola (Ronald Nixon) once told me that he saw clearly with his eyes, **the shining Supreme God in Bhagawan Ramana.** It was my misfortune that I was not able to meet Bhagawan Ramana in flesh and blood as none ever told me that such a great Mahatma was existing and I should go and have

darshan of him. He was the only **Atyashrami** in the past few hundred years. An Atyashrami is a gradation superior to that of a Sannyasi and a vivid description can be found in Suta Samhita and Jivan Mukta Viveka. An Atyashrami does not conform to the rules or injunctions of any of the four Ashrams (Brahmachari, Grihastha, Vanaprastha and Sannyasi). He is called “गुरुणा गुरुः”—the preceptor of all the Gurus of the world.

CALL FROM RAMANA

96. It was in August 1995 that I kept myself locked up inside a house of silence (Moun Mandir), established by Pujiya Motaji at Nadiad in Gujarat, for a period of five months from April '95. I was absolutely out of touch with the world. The room had no windows and there were some meagre ventilation holes near the ceiling. I could neither see the sky nor any person. I could feel the benevolent presence of Pujiya Motaji (who had left his body more than 15 years back) in that room. Even in day time I had to use electric light. There was no fan. When barely about two weeks or so were left for me to leave the Moun Mandir, one day I heard the Divine Mother's voice telling me “In this December you will go to Ramanasramam and do Sadhana there for ten months.” I heard myself asking the voice “That Ashram will not allow any monk to remain for more than a week or so. Even the foreigners who are prepared to donate well in dollars are not allowed that long”. A crisp reply came “When you go there, everything will be got done.” I wrote a letter to the Ashram about the Divine command requesting them

to allow me as a special case to remain in the Ashram for six weeks within which time I could try to find out whether any other Ashram or Murti near about would give me shelter and food for 9 to 10 months. Otherwise, I would return to Guha as it is the duty of the one who commanded me to provide me with the wherewithal to comply with the command. After a few days, the reply came signed by the President of the Ashram, that I was free to come to their Ashram and spend not only six weeks but all the ten months. It was unexpected and my delight knew no bounds. The Ashram gave me an excellent accommodation where some high level devotees of Bhagawan Ramana had lived earlier. The devotees who were living in and around the Ashram in Ramanagar were all very sincere and excellent Sadhaks. Due to pressure from them, I was taking classes daily on Bhagavad Gita, Upadesa Saram etc. Once I did a full scale Bhagavata Saptaham in another Ashram called "Athithi Ashram". In Ramanasramam itself I gave lectures on "Bhagavad Gita Saram" in which Bhagawan Ramana has selected 42 slokas as containing the essence of all the 700 slokas of Bhagavad Gita. All these lectures formed my own Sadhana besides meditation, chanting of prayers and reading of spiritual books from the library of Sri Ramanasramam which contained all the best and up-to-date books on spirituality and all religions of the world, arranged authorwise and subjectwise in an excellent manner.

97. As my luck would have it, 1996 was being celebrated in a big manner as the centenary year of advent of Bhagawan Ramana who first came to Tiruvannamalai on 1-9-1896 as a school boy of 16 years but fully enlightened.

RAMANA SUPPRABHATAM

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98. A few months before September 1996, I was requested to contribute some material for the Souvenir the Management was proposing to bring out on the advent day. In my life I had never written any article etc. even for a school magazine and so I was perplexed as to what to do. My own knowledge of the life and teachings of Bhagawan was very superficial. That day one Mr. K. Natesan, an old devotee of Bhagawan suggested that I should try to compose a 'Suprabhatam' poem on Ramana (a song sung early in the morning to awaken Bhagawan). That night I sat down and the Suprabhatam poems delineating Bhagawan's life, his blessings on certain special devotees like Sri Kavyakanta Ganapathi Muni, Sri Muruganar and others, his teachings and the glory of the Ashram etc. flowed from my pen spontaneously. About 19 stanzas were over that night and the balance was completed next night. It was on the model of Venkatesa Suprabhatam being sung at Tirupati (Balaji Mandir). When I handed it over to the Management, they were all extremely pleased. This is the first original composition in Sanskrit that I had ever attempted and after writing it once, I never amended, corrected or rewrote a single line. The Ashram got the entire Suprabhatam sung by a lady devotee and brought out cassettes too. I am of the belief that the entire composition was written by Bhagawan Ramana alone, through my hand.

99. In my life, except perhaps in early stages I never planned and did any Sadhana. Many types of Sadhanas were all

planned by the Lord and my Guru Dev and got executed through me. In Ramanasramam I could feel the presence of Bhagawan Ramana in every particle of sand. The spiritual vibrations are so high that even a common foreigner whose spiritual antenna has not developed much is able to feel the special influence of the Ashram. In that small sleepy town of Tiruvannamalai, hundreds of foreign aspirants who come to Ramanashraramam either continue to remain in the town for years or visit the place almost every year for months at a time. Many of my friends who saw me visiting Ramanasramam for months at a time, every year, began to suspect that I was a renegade who had transferred his loyalty from his Gurudev to Ramana. **A Sadguru is never a body nor an individual and He is only one. I see only my Gurudev in all Mahatmas including Bhagawan Ramana. When one becomes a realised soul, he becomes one with the Supreme Being and thus merges with all realised souls in the Brahman.**

100. It is my Gurudev who had sent me to so many places including Ramanasramam. The spiritual benefits attained and the progress made by me while at Ramanasramam are beyond words. Many mystic incidents happened since my beginning to go to Ramanasramam. Normally such incidents are not narrated or told due to certain spiritual reasons.

RAMANA'S INSPIRATION

101. Once, perhaps in 1995, a devotee of Bhagawan Ramana brought his sister, whose husband had run away a couple

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of years back. She was accompanied by her two school-going kids. She wanted to know when her husband would come back to the family and what japa, prayers, rites etc. should be done to ensure that. I gave her some prayers to be chanted and assured her (just for consoling her) that her husband would be back by December 1997 (just some arbitrary date). That person actually came back in December 1997 and is with his family. It is all a leela (play) of my Guru Dev played through this body as an instrument. I had never possessed any powers of divining the future.

102. Once I went to the house of a lady devotee to give her Mantra Diksha. As she had been closely associated for years with Arunachala (Tiruvannamalai), I took it for granted that she must be a devotee of Lord Siva and I went prepared to give her the Panchakshari. On reaching the house, I received a command inside my mind that the lady was to be given Krishna Mantra. I had my own misgivings as to whether she would like it. After the Diksha, she told me with tears in her eyes that since her return from Pandharpur a few months back her mind was occupied with Lord Krishna and she had been praying hard the previous night that she should get Krishna Mantra only.

103. There was a case of another Mantra Diksha at Madras to a lady aspirant (a married woman). The Mantra had a special Bijakshara (a sacred compound-syllable) which is not in common use. After the Diksha was over, the lady took me to her Pooja Room where she had drawn early in the morning a Rangoli design with the same Bijakshara in the centre.

104. One day while doing perambulation (parikrama) of the Samadhi of Ramana Maharshi, an old lady devotee living outside the Ashram approached me with a problem arising during her meditation. I just told her to chant a particular Bijakshara for a few days. I was not at all aware that the particular syllable would prove a remedy for her problem. It just came out of me spontaneously. Just after a week's time that lady came to my room with some fruits to tell me that her problem had been solved with that Bijakshara.

105. Another time I was doing the parikrama of Arunachala hill in a car along with a couple who had come from Bangalore. Unusually, the lady was very quiet all through the journey. After a few days when I visited their house, the lady told me "Swamiji, the other day when we did the parikrama with you in a car, I was transported to a highly delightful state of consciousness as if my soul had come out of the body. Please grant me that experience once more." I was surprised and told her "I wish I myself had such an experience. It is all Lord's Leela and I have nothing to do with it."

YOGI RAMSURAT KUMAR

106. While at Sri Ramanasramam, I came across two other Mahatmas. One was the great Yogi Ramsurat Kumar (known once as VISIRI SWAMI- i.e. a Swami with a hand fan). He is a great Siddha who has been living in Tiruvannamalai for a number of years. For years he was alone in a small house, constantly chanting Ram Nam- "SRI RAM JAI RAM JAI RAM!" When he stands close to

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you and holds your hands you can see his bright eyes and the entire face glowing with a Divine light. Once he came unannounced to my room when I was staying at Athithi Ashram in 1994. After prostrations I requested him to bless me to have the same intensity of Vairagya as he had. He said "This beggar has no Vairagya". I rejoined "Whatever you have is sufficient for me." A big ashram has now been built for him. Many a time when he passed me in his car on the road, he used to get down from the car, hold my hands for some time and bless me. It is my Gurudev who is responsible for my getting the blessings of various saints.

TINNAI SAMI

107. The other saint was known as Tinnai Sami (The monk of the Verandah). It seems he had been a young married man with kids when due to some dissatisfaction he resigned from his service in late 1950s perhaps. One day he went to consult Bhagawan Ramana about the various professional offers he had, while the latter only said "Summa iru" (Remain quiet). Immediately he went away and laid himself down on the open verandah of some house at Tiruvannamalai (behind Sadhu Om's Samadhi). Since then seldom does he get up from that place or talk with anybody. For more than 50 years he has been lying in the verandah (which has been now enclosed) and an old lady has been feeding him with care all these days. Even if somebody were to be standing before him while he eats, he never looks up or talks. What an example of Vairagya! I saw him last in March 2000.

Chapter XI
AT SRI AUROBINDO CENTRE
NEW DELHI

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108. In the first week of May 1998, I was doing Bhagavata Saptaha lectures every evening for eight days at Aurobindo Centre, New Delhi. One of the lady devotees, a Class I Officer of the Central Government, told me later that for two days or so, while hearing my lecture, she found my face transformed into that of Lord Narasimha (with the face of a lion) and even when she went out for some time and returned to her seat the same vision persisted. On another day, she saw some rays of light coming strongly from my Guru's photo on the wall behind me and entering into me. A couple of days after that when the lady was sitting and chatting with me, another lady (Mrs. A) – a stranger to both of us, introduced herself and told us how on a Friday when she came to attend my lecture in Sri Aurobindo Centre she found my face transformed into that of Lord Narasimha. It was on the same Friday that a similar vision was seen

by the other lady too. I know very well that I possess no siddhi or any divine mystic powers. For reasons of His own, the Lord plays through this body and incidentally tests whether I get puffed up with pride and self importance imagining that I have acquired some powers. Perhaps, when an aspirant steadily progresses on the spiritual path, the Lord demonstrates such leelas (plays) in order to increase the faith and devotion of such people in the Lord.

109. Once I was standing in Vasishtha Guha to bid farewell to the family members of one Sri M, a long term devotee of the Guha who was a lecturer and had taken initiation (of Mantra) from me. This devotee Mr. M and I were standing together at one corner while other members were standing elsewhere. All of a sudden I pushed him away vehemently with both hands saying "Hato, Hato". A minute after he and I moved away, a heavy branch of a mango tree just fell down on the very spot where we had both been standing. The entire action was done unconsciously and I had no awareness of the impending disaster at all. Many a time he recollects this incident and recounts it to others. Another leela of my Gurudev.

110. My Gurudev has not only protected me in all my wanderings till now but has also extended his protection to my close friends too.

Chapter XII

WITH SWAMI KRISHNA PREM

111. I had the good fortune of coming into personal contact with Swami Krishna Prem (Ronald Nixon) – a great Vaishnavite saint of the 20th Century.

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112. I have already mentioned in Chapter III that in 1952 I had come across an article where the names of two living realised souls were mentioned – one being my Guru Maharaj and the other Sri Krishna Prem (Ronald Nixon) of Uttar Brindavan. All my efforts to find out the exact whereabouts of Sri Krishna Prem had proved futile for quite long. It was in the winter of 1956 that I happened to go to Ranikhet in Himalayas on an official visit for two months. One of the officers of the Defence formations where I had gone on duty, Mr. B, casually mentioned one day that he was going on leave for a week. When I probed further, he said he was going to spend some time with his Guru Dev – Sri Krishna Prem (Ronald Nixon) – an American Sannyasi who was living at Mir Tola in an Ashram situated nearly 100 kms

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or so away from Almora. He also added that Krishna Premji never encouraged visitors to come and meet him. When once a Governor of a State wrote to him expressing his desire to come and have his darshan, it seems Krishna Premji curtly replied that he had no desire to see the Governor. I was determined on meeting Krishna Premji. A week later, fortified by a letter from Mr. B and carrying a basket of fruits given by Mr. B for delivering to Krishna Premji, I set off on my journey by bus. Swami Krishna Premji welcomed me with a pleasant smile and accorded permission to me to stay with him for a couple of days. The day of my visit was Buddaha Jayanthi. Sri Krishna Premji had a lot of reverence for Buddha whose worship he did that night. In his earlier days, he had practised a lot of Buddhistic Sadhanas and later on it was one woman saint – Yasoda Ma – who brought him on to the Spiritual Dharma (Eternal law or religion). Much earlier, he had been a Bomb Pilot in the First World War and had a miraculous escape while returning from one of his trips. The plane he was piloting was forcefully wrenched away from the control of his hands by an unseen force and turned away from the direction towards which it was heading and where the camouflaged enemy force was waiting to capture him. This incident was perhaps a turning point in his life. Another famous Mahatma from Pune (Sri Dilip Kumar Roy) has written a biographical sketch of Sri Krishna Premji in which this and various other interesting incidents have been described.

113. Krishna Premji had built a beautiful temple for Lord Krishna and in my presence did an elaborate pooja, arati and kirtans

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(songs) along with his American disciple Madhav Ashish. That night he gave me some boiled Tapioca-like root and a steaming cup of coffee. He was talking to me of his experiences in South India. He said that he saw God personally in all His glory in two places – First, when he visited Sri Ramana Maharshi at Tiruvannamalai he saw Bhagawan Ramana as a great Jyothi (light). Similarly, when he visited Lord Ranganatha (name of Lord Narayana) in his temple at Srirangam (near Tiruchirapalli in Tamil Nadu) he saw him as a raging fire of immense brilliance and went into a trance (Samadhi).

114. It was terribly cold and I retired to my room. I was shivering due to lack of woollen blankets. After a few minutes, I saw Krishna Premji entering my room with two heavy blankets in his hands. In order to avoid getting up and doing prostrations to the Swami, I pretended to be asleep when Krishna Premji put the blankets on me and tucked them around me with all love and went away. I was really ashamed of my pretence of sleeping.

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or regard I have got from various people are all attributable to my Gurudev's Grace only. I am still left wondering how I ever deserved them? Gurudev, let me always hug your holy feet tightly. Please do not abandon this child.

115. Throughout my stay, Krishna Premji never once asked me about my academic or professional qualifications, my profession or status. He accepted me as an aspirant (Sadhaka). He was always radiating around him an aura of holiness and spirituality. On the morning of the day I was to return to Ranikhet, Krishna Premji accompanied me by walk upto the nearest bus stand which was about 3 kms away and put me in the bus, an unexpected honour which even Governors could hardly aspire for. Till today, what all honour, praise

WITH SRI SATHYA SAI BABA

Chapter XIII

116. Sri Sathya Sai Baba of Puttaparti is too well known both in India and abroad to need any introduction. In 1959 he came to Vasistha Guha and met my Guru Dev. For three days consecutively he was coming from Sivaramanda Ashram at Rishikesh.

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117. He materialised a crystal necklace (Mala) and gave it to my Guru Dev who used to wear it till the last. One day both of them shut themselves inside a room and it is told that Baba lay down on the ground with his head on the lap of my Guru Dev. One Brahmachari of the Guha, Mr. P and one Sannyasi disciple of my Guru, Swami K., peeped through the key hole of the room. Mr. P could not see either Guru Dev or Baba but saw a big light—an effulgence inside the room.

118. Years later, at the instance of a friend of mine who was working voluntarily at Prasanti Nilayam Ashram of Sri Sathya Sai Baba, I visited Puttaparti in 1996 for a couple

of days. The first day evening I was sitting along with several thousands of Baba devotees in the audience hall waiting for the darshan of Sai Baba. Baba was going arbitrarily among the rows of visitors. Suddenly he was standing before me smiling. He was rotating his right hand with a finger or two pointed downwards. I mistook it as a sign to keep on the ground a book I was holding in my hand “Srimad Bhagavatam: Its message for the modern man”, authored by me and recently published. I placed the book down below. Baba lifted his right hand where a good quantity of holy ashes (vibhooti) had mysteriously appeared and gave the vibhooti to me. I was immensely happy at this unexpected blessing. Then Baba addressed me “Give me that book”. I lifted the book on Srimad Bhagavatam and handed it over to Baba. Baba saw the cover page, hugged it to his heart and repeated twice “I am happy” He began to walk away when I realised that I had forgotten to do namaskaram (prostration) to his holy feet. What a foolishness? Baba took the book away and I was told by some inmates that Baba rarely ever used to take away a book presented to him but used to give it back. This was also a rare blessing.

119. The next day, in the morning session, I was sitting in a different place when Baba came and stood before me with one of his hands holding up the gown which was raised a little and with his feet bared as if inviting me to do the prostration which I had forgotten the previous day. What a compassion! I did pada namaskaram when Baba once again materialised vibhooti in his right hand and handed it over to me. I was twice blessed.

120. In the evening session on the same day Baba again came to my seat and gave me vibhooti materialised on the spot. He walked away a little distance and sent a message through a volunteer asking me to go to the interview room. I could not believe my luck. I have heard that many devotees including foreigners used to come daily for months together hankering for an interview and finally depart with their desire unsatisfied. I never hoped for or expected to be called for an interview during the two days of visit. I could see the subtle manoeuvring hand of my Guru Dev in this near impossible feat of getting an interview with the world famous Baba, who is fondly called “Bhagavan”.

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121. Another interesting experience relating to Baba. I went and stayed at Sivanandashram st Rishikesh (Muni-ki- reti) for a couple of days on 21st & 22nd November '99 for sadhana in solitude. On the night of 22nd November, after finishing my night meals brought to me in a carrier, I wiped the dining table clean and not a scrap remained on it. Next day, early in the morning by 3.30 a.m. (on 23rd November), when I came out of the bath room after my bath, a tiny thin round plastic disc shaped sticker (brownish in colour) just like the Bindi which ladies wear on the forehead, was found lying on the dining table. When I just reversed it, there was a tiny picture of the smiling Baba. The recollection flashed in my memory that it was the birthday of Sathya Sai Baba and I mentally prostrated to him, grateful for his darsan (vision).

122. In about 1997, One Mr.A of Columbia came to Vasishtha Guha while I happened to be there. He came to me and

said “ I am coming from Puttaparthi (Prasanti Nilayam) after having darsan of Sathya Sai Baba. Baba directed me in my dream to go to Vasishtha Guha, meet the Swamiji who speaks English and get all my doubts on spiritual matters clarified from him”. For three days consecutively he was coming to my room and bombarding me from morning to evening with various questions of serious nature. He was a sprightly young man who was thirsty for knowledge and many of his questions were intelligent as also interesting. During those days he found that I was rejecting all the money offered by any of the visitors. He presented me with a honey bottle. On the last day, he just rolled some three hundred rupee notes and pushed them into my room underneath the door before leaving finally. I found them in the afternoon but could not return them as he had not left his address with me.

Chapter XIV
IN HARI OM ASHRAM OF
PUJYA MOTAJI

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123. This account will remain incomplete without the mention of Pujya Mota of Gujarat, one of the most evolved spiritual luminaries of the century, who left his body in 1976. He has written hundreds of books and hundreds of cassettes of his conversation with devotees are preserved in a national Institute (Tata's) at Bombay. He used to exhort his devotees to chant "Hari om, Hari om" loudly at all times. It was his main mantra. His unique contribution was the Moun Mandirs which he got built at Hari Om Ashram at both Nadiad and Surat (and also at Kumbakonam in the South which has become non-functional).

124. I first came to know of this saint in 1994 when one Dr.D. an Octogenarian skin specialist accidentally visited Vasishtha Guha and had long conversations with me on Pujya Mota.

He also arranged for me to stay for one month each, locked in the rooms at Nadiad and Surat in Gujarat.

The Moun Mandir was a furnished room with no fan, very little ventilation in the form of small rectangular openings near the ceiling, completely netted and blocked by the pigeon's nests. There were no windows. There were plenty of bulbs in the room. A bathroom and a toilet were attached. On one of the walls there was a square box like opening closed by doors both inside as also outside with locks. There were electric lights in the room, as the outside sun light could not penetrate. Meals and Tea were used to be kept twice a day in the closet on the wall at fixed timings with a call of "Hari om". One has to open the closet from inside and later keep back the empty plates etc. inside the same closet. Inside the room one may chant any hymn or Mantra even loudly, meditate or read. As Motaji has infused all the silent rooms with divine power one could almost feel the presence of Mota mutely helping the inmates. One gets enough time for introspection and peace settles in his mind. All this for 5 rupees a day. In 1995 I remained in a Moun Mandir at NADIAD for 5 months and never felt bored, lonely or depressed. The main door locked from outside will be opened only after the period of silence contracted for is completed. In such a silence one gets a glimpse of his real self. How I wish I had known Mota in his life time?

125. Mota had worked with Mahatma Gandhi and was one of the freedom fighters who were jailed by the British rulers.

Serpent bite and Rammam

126. Once in his early days he was bitten by a poisonous snake while sleeping in a field at night. He was continuously chanting Ram nam all the time when he was finally taken to a Missionary Doctor living at a good distance in a bullock cart. The Doctor revived him but declared that but for Mota's remaining awake continuously chanting Ram Nam, he could not have reached there alive.

Epilepsy cured by HARI OM Mantra

127 From early boyhood Mota was subject to fits & bouts of epilepsy. While coming on a bicycle carrying collections for Harijan fund he used to fall down and have fits. One day when he had gone to some place on the bank of river Narmada, one Sadhu Maharaj voluntarily advised him that if he were to chant HARI OM for a few months he would be completely cured. Mota had no faith in that remedy but informed his God-mother at Baroda about the saint's advice. One day when he was wounded badly while falling from the staircase due to fits at Baroda, his God-mother who had helped him a lot for his studies entreated him to chant Hari Om for a few months just for her sake. Mota complied with her wishes and got cured of his malady.

Burglary at VISVANATH mandir (KASI)

128. Once Mota was living at Varanasi (Benaras) in some house along with two young girls as their guaradian. The girls had

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come there for writing some examinations in the university as per whose rules the examinee girls were to reside with a male guardian. They were the daughters of Mota's close friend and general manager of a branch of Scindia Company in Karachi, under whom Mota was working. One morning the girls took off their golden ornaments and gave them to Mota for safe keeping. Mota had put them in his pant pocket but subsequently forgot all about it. In the evening they all went to the temple of Lord Vishvanath (of Kasi) and though it was fully crowded, had a good darshan.

129. On returning home when the girls asked Mota to return the ornaments, he found to his dismay that his pant pocket had been pickpocketed and some thief had stolen all the ornaments. Mota was flabbergasted as even by toiling all his life he would never have been able to compensate the girls for the loss of the ornaments. The girls tried their best to console Mota. Mota went into a room, sat in meditation and was fervently praying. While in a trance like state he saw himself standing inside the temple of Lord Visvanath. He found a thief putting his hands surreptitiously in his pant pocket and taking away the ornaments. Mota followed the thief quietly to the latter's quarters in some remote slum area. Mota accosted the thief and told him "Look here, these ornaments are not mine. They belong to somebody else and were given to me for safe keeping, I am living in such and such address. Before 9 a.m. tomorrow morning you should bring and deliver all those ornaments to me. Otherwise it will go hard with you and you will suffer as never before in your life." At this stage Mota got out of the trance and the vision disappeared.

130. Next morning, a haggard looking man came running to Mota and entreated him “Please take this bundle of ornaments quickly. Since the time you came and intimidated me yesterday night, I am having an unbearable burning sensation all over the body. Please take charge of these ornaments and relieve me of my suffering.” Mota, before receiving the ornaments, extracted a promise from the thief that he would never again steal anything from any devotee inside the temple of Visvanath.

Mota at the bedside of his ailing mother

131. While at Varanasi (Benaras) as a guardian of the two girls, Mota got a telegram from Nadiad to the effect that his mother was in death-bed. He had earlier promised his mother before leaving Nadiad that he would certainly be by her side during her last days. Mota was in the horns of a dilemma as he could not leave his wards—the two girls alone in an unknown city and go to attend on his mother. It was equally horrible to think of going back on his words to his dear mother. He went inside his room weeping and implored the Lord to somehow get him out of this dilemma so that he could go to his mother’s bedside before she breathed her last. Mota lapsed into a trance where he saw himself bending and prostrating at the feet of his ailing mother lying on a cot with his other brothers sitting on one side of his mother. His mother called Mota’s brother with great delight and told him “See, I knew that my son would never fail me. See, he has come and is bending over my feet”. She died peacefully with a happy smile in her face. Mota got out of

his trance in his room in Varanasi and a couple of days or so later received a letter from his brother narrating how his mother was able to see Mota (obviously in her imagination) and died happily. Mota was moved to tears at this unexpected grace of the Lord which had helped him tide over the crisis—a clear proof that **God heeds all sincere prayers and never lets down a devotee.**

Mother re-born

132. Once Mota was asked by a devotee, as to whether there was re-birth or not. Mota replied, “Whatever answer I give you, will not be acceptable to you unless I give proofs in support. While I was in Benaras, I had a dream one night that my mother who was dead had been re-born at a particular address in Benaras. The next day I went to the same address and was standing outside singing songs of devotion loudly. When somebody from inside came and enquired about the purpose of my visit I told them that my Gurudev had informed me that a girl child was born in that house a few days back and that I would just like to have a look at her. They complied with my request though with some reluctance. I was astonished to see on the body of the child the same peculiar birth mark which my mother used to have. I prostrated mentally to that child and came away”.

Call from Shirdi Sai Baba

133. One day Mota got a letter purporting to be from Shirdi Sai Baba, a saint who had departed a few years earlier. Mota

was unaware of the existence of this saint. The letter commanded him to come to Karachi to meet Baba. Mota was not enthusiastic about it especially as he had no money to pay for the fare to Karachi. A few days later when Mota was walking along a road along with a friend of his, he came across a bundle lying on the road. On opening it some currency notes were found along with a note mentioning that the amount was meant to be used for his trip to Karachi.

134. When he went to Karachi, Mota used to go to some solitary place in the evenings and sit in meditation for hours together. One day a fakir came to the place of his meditation and picked up a quarrel with him without any reason. Finally, the fakir taught him certain special yogic exercises and disappeared. It was then that Mota came to know that it was Baba himself who had come to him. **When a devotee, is sincerely desirous of God realisation, God sends both living saints as also great saints who had lived in earlier periods, to help him in reaching his goal.**

Voluntary advent of the Guru

135. One day a Bengali saint popularly known as Balayogi, was camping near Sabarnati river at Ahmedabad. He was shouting from time to time, "Ask that Mota of Nadiad to come and meet me here." Ultimately this news was conveyed to Mota and the necessary fare to go to Ahmedabad was also given to him by a friend.

Balayogi was extremely delighted to meet Mota and for some days continued to ply him with huge quantities of sweets

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received by him as offerings from devotees. He also told him that he was an emissary of Swami Keshavananda who had been ordained by the Lord to be his Guru. Mota was initiated by Balayogi on behalf of Swami Keshavananda whom he was to meet later.

Hospitality of Narmada Devi

136. Once Mota and his Guru were travelling along the banks of river Narmada with a view to meeting another saint nicknamed Magar (crocodile). En route, Mota became tired and hungry. He informed his Guru of his state. His Guru set up a camp there itself and within a few minutes, a young lady of incomparable beauty appeared and placed before them, two silver plates full of various delectable dishes. She then disappeared. After finishing the meals, Mota was directed to keep the silver vessels safely. The same incident was repeated the next day too. On the day they started from the camp, Mota was asked by his Guru to throw all the vessels back into the Narmada river as they belonged to Narmada Devi who was gracious enough to send them food daily.

Hitting with a stone

137. One day when Mota was sitting with his Guru, in the verandah of a house, a stranger was passing by that road. Mota was commanded by his Guru to hit the head of the stranger with a fairly big stone that was lying there. Mota knew that the stranger had done nothing to deserve this chastisement but he obeyed his Guru's words instantly. The

stranger asked Mota the reason why he had thrown a stone at him. Mota referred him to his Gurudev. The Gurudev told the stranger, "you are normally a good person. Why are you now going to do a highly disgraceful and disresponsible deed which does not behave you." The stranger was surprised to know that the saint had divined his errand rightly. He fell at the feet of the saint begging his pardon and returned by the way by which he came.

Qualification for initiation

138. For some period, Mota was living in Kumbakonam (in Tamil Nadu) along with the family of Mr. G a famous diamond merchant and jeweller. The partner of Mr. G. (Mr. X) sought initiation (mantradiksha) from Mota. On enquiry from Mota, he revealed that his relationship with an uncle of his was strained and that he would never like to see the face of that uncle in his life. Mota told him that unless he first went to his uncle's house by eschewing all ill-will against him, and sought his forgiveness, he would not be initiated. How true, that eschewing of all hatred and ill-will against others and thus establishing external harmony and amity with one and all, is a sine qua non for spiritual success! Mr. X, left for his uncle's house and braving all the insults and invectives heaped on him by his uncle, he succeeded at last in obtaining his forgiveness. He was initiated by Mota happily.

A Yogi's departure

139. It was in 1976. Pujya Mota had been suffering from various physical ailments and from the Ram Navami day in 1976

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itself he had withdrawn himself from his devotees. One day during the Chaturmasya period (rainy season), Mota was going in a car to a farm house near Nadiad on the banks of a river accompanied by six devotees including a lady doctor, Ms. K. It was raining heavily and it was hard going for the car. Suddenly Mota asked the person (Mr.Y) seated next to him in the front seat to enquire from the owner of the farm house (Mr.M) who was sitting behind as to whether he had any objection to his leaving his body that day in the farm-house. Mr. M. promptly replied that as the farm-house belonged to Mota he could do whatever he wanted. All were shocked at this unexpected proposal from Mota. Mr. Y pleaded with Mota, "This being the Chaturmasya period, it will be difficult to get dry wood for proper cremation of a dead body. Can you not kindly postpone your proposed departure from this world?"

Mota replied in a gruff tone, "If you find it difficult to cremate me, you may just throw the body into the river. I do not want any more talk on this subject."

140. On reaching the farm house, Mota wrote some letters purporting to be his last will and testament. He mentioned therein that he proposed to leave his body as it was beset with many incurable ailments thus rendering him incapable of further service to the world. He directed that after he died that day, the cremation should be done by those six companions and only after the cremation, people outside were to be informed of his demise. He also directed that all the ashes should be thrown into the river and no memorial

of brick and stones should ever be built for him. He enjoined on them that nobody should touch his body till his death in the evening. All the devotees preferred to sit inside the room where Mota lay on his bed and were chanting 'Hari OM, Hari OM' incessantly. By the evening Mota breathed his last.

141. I had the privilege of meeting in 1996 the lady doctor, Ms. K., who was present at the time of Mota's departure. She told me confidentially that when Mota's body was taken out for cremation, there were evident signs of his having left his body through the fire of yoga. I deem it a great blessing to have been associated with the Moun Mandir got built by Mota. Even to write about or hear of anecdotes of such great saints like Mota is enough to purify us.

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The magic touch of Mota

142. Sometime in August 1996, while I was confined to the Moun Mandir at Nadiad, one day a severe colic pain started in my stomach. I took the medicines which I had kept for such eventualities but they were of no avail. The pain was increasing beyond the limits of my tolerance, hour after hour. My breath was being choked and I thought that the call from the Lord was imminent. I left a small note of instructions for disposing my body by throwing it into the river in case of my death and mentioned the address of Vasishtha Guha to whom intimation was to be sent. Suddenly I felt a cool hand stroking my belly and some sixth sense told me that it was Mota in person. In an instant all my pain disappeared

as if it had never been there at all. How lucky I was to have been the beneficiary of the blessings of such a great saint! **Lord, give me again and again the company and contact of such great saints whose glory is beyond words.**

Chapter XV

LESSONS I LEARNT

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143. Normally the Sadhanas one does on the spiritual path are all suited to one's own spiritual constitution/vasanas and cannot constitute a guidance for others. There are a few lessons which I had learnt from my Guru Dev and other saints which could prove useful for Sadhaks who are mainly entangled in worldly activities in these modern days. They are given below:

- (1) The ultimate truth or God is non-dual (Advaita) and being the very Self of all the beings is formless. But as He is also infinite, one cannot limit Him as formless. **For Sadhana purposes, God with form is as real as God without form and each Sadhak can reach the highest state of realisation through either way.**
- (2) **Constant remembrance of God.** Constant remembrance of the Lord can be done through Japa of Guru Mantra, chanting prayers like Vishnu Sahasra

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Nama, Siva Mahimna Stotra etc., reading holy texts like Upanishads, Gita etc., chanting the simple names of the Lord like "Siva, Govinda, Rama, Krishna and so on". The names like Ram consist of syllables with immense word power and this chanting or doing Japa alone for hours continuously can lead one to Samadhi state and God-realisation. **One who is engaged in a profession or worldly activity should start from 4000 Japas per day and go upto 6,000 numbers while a retired person should do at least 10,000 Japas per day.** If the name or Mantra is small, one should increase the aforesaid number by 25% to 50%. **One can also practise taking the names of the Lord every time at the beginning as also at the end of each talk, conversation or answering any body's queries- saying 'Hari Om' 'Jai Sri Ram', 'Mahadev', 'Shiv Om' 'Jai Sri Krishna' 'Jai Mai' etc.** In the entire day we talk directly or over the phone a number of times and **taking the name of God every time will be an effortless means to remember God constantly.**

- (3) God is the ultimate boss of all institutions, families, offices, banks, colleges, private companies, public corporations etc. All other bosses are all interim bosses under God. **So let us dedicate every activity of the day to God before performing it.** Let us be conscious that all the activities in any institution, house, company etc. belong to the Lord and we are only serving Him. Even when we want to brush our teeth in the morning, first mentally tell the Lord **"This activity is for you.**

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You are residing in me as Atman. This body is your temple and it is my duty to keep it clean.” When a housewife is cooking for her family she should say **“Lord, you only are in the form of my children, my husband etc. So I am cooking for you and it is all an offering for you.”** With such an attitude how can we ever get job dissatisfaction or disgust?

Let us do our best in all our duties and do them all sincerely and never bother about the result. Let us leave all the results to God as they are not in our hands. **Let us do all activities without any expectation and as an offering to the Lord.** All works bind us. If we do good work, we have to take birth to enjoy the reward. If we do a bad act we again have to take birth to suffer the punishment. **By dedicating the work as also the results to the Supreme being, the chemistry of the activity changes with our attitude and no activity can bind us.** This is a part of the surrender process.

- (4) The entire life is a pre-planned drama and all events and happenings are already pre-determined. **Lord himself is the author of each drama and the director too.** He himself acts in all the forms and there is nobody else. You and I have so identified ourselves with the roles, names of bodies etc. that we have forgotten that it is the one Lord who plays all the roles. **So accept all situations and happenings with pleasure and do not rebel or try to get them changed.** This is also part of the surrender process.

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- (5) Do not feel that you are the doer of any activity or the experiencer of its results. **All the activity is being done in the Totality at the global level by the respective senses and you are only a witness of all these actions.** For instance, when you go to the dining hall, it is the feet which take you there, the hands contract the food in the plate and take it to the mouth, the mouth pushes it into the gullet. You never did any of these actions and you were only a conscious witness. **If you disclaim any doership or experience** (which happens to your body/senses), **such works will cease to bind you. The false ego which flourishes by appropriating doership i.e., “I did this. I experienced this”, will fade away and the individual dissolves into nothingness.**

- (6) **Increase your longing for the goal i.e., the realisation of the Self or God. It has to become so intense and volcanic that it draws the Lord to you.** Even when an actor is acting in a drama as per the script, nobody can prevent him from thinking of his wife at home even though he may be acting as Rama in Ramayana drama. So also, even though all the events in life have been pre-determined, **you do have the liberty to think of God or the world and nobody can take away this free will.** By keeping your mind constantly on God, you will be able to realise who you are and thus attain God realisation.

- (7) **Everyday you should pray to God and talk with Him as if He is your friend.** Confide all your fears

and problems and seek His help. Many great souls like Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Paramahansa Yogananda used to talk to the Divine Mother. These are all techniques which have been proved to be infallible and if you follow them without questioning or arguing, you will get the results. Read books like **“Letters from Brother Lawrence”** or **‘How to talk to God’** by Paramhansa Yogananda which will be useful for developing this technique.

(8) **Visualise what you want to become.** Everyday, for a few minutes, visualise yourself as a realised saint and imagine that you are behaving in that way. Repeat **“अहं ब्रह्मास्मि”** I AM THAT within you. However, while talking to people do not go on claiming “I am That.”

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(9) **Try to observe absolute silence** (no indication through signs or in writing) for atleast 6 hours on any one Sunday or holiday in every month. **Silence of the mouth will ultimately lead to silence of the mind too.** Slowly increase the frequency to two days in a month and increase the number of hours too.

(10) **As soon as you get up from the bed early in the morning, you should sit in the same bed and chant loudly “OM” in long strides from the navel and deeply too.** One should do this at least 11 times. **When once you intone ‘OM’ deeply in a long breath, you will experience a sense of peace.** So after finishing one ‘OM’, leave an **interval of 1/2 a minute to remain merged in the peace** and again chant the next ‘OM’ and so on.

Throughout night, in deep sleep, the ‘I’ and the world both disappear. When you get up, the I thought comes first and if you give time to go to the bathroom or wash the face, you will begin to remember your appointments, telephone calls to make etc. In short, the entire world will rise up in your mind. That is why you should sit down to chant ‘OM’ as soon as you get up from the bed.

(11) **Another most important means for quick progress in this path is to cultivate the company of holy men.** Go and attend lectures in good religious organizations or temples as often as possible. **To remain in the silent company of sadhus and holy men for a few hours at a time is sufficient.**

(12) On one hand, many Sadhaks are anxious to eliminate the past vasanas but are seldom concerned with the daily input of vasanas in the form of (1) reading of newspapers containing all news of violence, sex, rape etc. (2) seeing T.V.— especially the films full of violence, sex etc. and (3) gossiping with friends on politics, society, neighbours etc. Even idly gossiping about the relative merits and levels achieved by great Mahatmas and comparing Ramana with Aurobindo or discussing scandals in Ashrams will all have disastrous consequences and result in strengthening the wrong conditioning of the mind. One should reduce them all. Whenever friends come to you, begin to read out juicy portions from spiritual books like Srimad Bhagavatam,

Yoga Vasishtha, Talks with Ramana Maharshi, “I am that” (of NISARGA DUTT MAHARAJ), books of J. Krishnamurthy, Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna etc. and 90% of your friends will remember their imaginary appointments and run away. Thus, **convert all gossiping sessions into a serious spiritual study circle.**

144. **FIRST AND LAST, REMEMBER GOD ALWAYS AND NEVER FORGET HIM FOR A MOMENT. THIS ALONE CAN LEAD YOU TO GOD.** After all, everyone of us is liberated and we are bound to realise one day that we have always been free. Even that one day is here and now as all the dreams of countless births and deaths are all taking place in a moment and all time and space is as unreal as the world, being equally a product of Maya.

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145. Repeat always and be convinced:-
 “नित्योऽहं, शुद्धोऽहं, बुद्धोऽहं, मुक्तोऽहं”
 Eternal I am, ever-pure I am, enlightened I am and ever-liberated I am.

BOOKS SUGGESTED FOR READING

1. Gospel of SRI RAMAKRISHNA (R.K.Mission)
2. God Lived With Them by Chetananda (R.K.Mission)
3. They lived With God (R.K.Mission)
4. Eternal Companion by Swami Brahmananda (R.K.Mission)
5. Ponder These Truths (Early Morning Meditation Talks) by Swami Chidananda (Divine Life Society, Rishikesh)
6. Peace Pilgrim (Her Life & Work in her own words) Friends of Peace Pilgrim, 43480 CEDAR AVENUE, HEMET, California-92544, U.S.A.
7. The Tao of Meditation by Stephen H. Wolinsky
8. I AM THAT by Nisargadatta Maharaj
9. The Path by Madhuri (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan)
10. Imitation of Christ
11. Letters by Brother Lawrence or How to Practise the Presence of God

SOME ANECDOTES SUBSEQUENT TO THE FIRST EDITION

I. Calculated Generosity

In May/June 1992 I went to Calcutta and I got accommodation in Bharat Sevashram Sangh. As it was time for lunch, I left my chappals outside the dining hall and went inside where the serving of meals was in progress. By the time I finished my Bhiksha and came out, I found to my dismay that no chappals were left and obviously somebody had taken away mine also. It was noon and the Sun was very hot and with great difficulty I was able to walk to a nearby shop and purchase a pair of Hawai chappals for Rs. 32/-. I had very little money left and mentally I was vexed with the Lord. I was proceeding to Bhawanipur on foot and telling the Divine Mother how unfair on her part it was to deprive me of my chappals and put me to an unnecessary expenditure of Rs. 32 ! *En route*, I espied a new Durga temple and on an impulse I went inside. There, I met a stranger, a young man who was coming out and he hesitated and stopped for a minute on seeing me. When I returned after the darshan of Goddess Durga, I found the stranger waiting outside. He came near and put some money in my shirt pocket without a word and walked off. When I took out the money, I found to my amazement that it was exactly Rs. 32, the cost of my new chappals. I wept in my heart at the compassion of my dear Divine Mother who, at the same time stuck to her arithmetic (not a pie more nor less than the exact amount spent by me).

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II. Divine Intervention

(a) In September 2000, I had been suffering from Gall bladder stones (calculi) for more than six years resulting in occasional colic pain of a severe nature lasting for hours. In that month, on the way to Adwaita Ashram, Mayavati (Himalayas) I stopped in the house of one Mr. S.S. Srivastava (Mr. SSS) at Delhi. That morning, a well dressed stranger came there and introduced himself to me as Dr. D, a Senior Surgeon in a reputed Hospital at Delhi. He came to see me as one of my books, on *Srimad Bhagavatam* (which he got from a library) had left a deep impression on him. During the talks Mr. SSS was solicitously enquiring about the status of my gall bladder stone problem. Dr. D intervened and told me "Swamiji, we have a surgeon in our Hospital who is an expert in laproscopic surgery and your operation will be got done on any of the days of operation convenient to you and at no expense (not a pie to be spent by me).

I narrated to Dr. D. how I had originally multi calculi (seven stones in a row like a necklace) but, without my volition, I was taken by a Swami S (a friend) to a person in a remote village (about 190 kms beyond Jhansi, in Madhya Pradesh). That person (a farmer) was reputed to remove the stones either in kidney or gall bladder in a jiffy, while possessed by a Divine Force, twice a week for 3 to 4 hours a day. There were 50 to 60 persons waiting in a queue and the healer, sitting some 4 feet away from me, waved a shaf of fresh neem leaves with his hand for a few minutes when six stones (each of the size of an end tooth) fell out of the leaves in succession. I was the last patient and he went away saying, "enough. This is all". He charged no fees from anybody. But the one single stone left was enough to give me a miserable time occasionally (once in 2 or 3 months). I

(the first doctor who diagnosed it) in his private clinic. As against Rs. 25,000/- approximately due for surgery and consultations he told me that he was prepared to accept whatever amount I could give. I gave Rs. 5,000 and another Rs. 5,000 were voluntarily given to the surgeon by my other friends unasked. All ailments are due to the result of past actions. But if we place our unconditional Trust in God, He not only gives us timely warnings of impending problems but also helps us in seeking the remedy. How can such miracles ever happen to an extremely ordinary monk like me and with what words can I ever express my gratitude to the Lord who has shown such extraordinary love and kindness? Yes, it can all happen if only we have a Guru who intercedes with the Lord on our behalf. It is all my Guru's lila (sport).

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