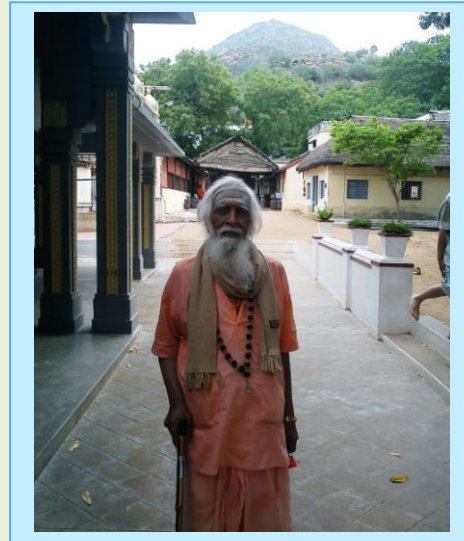


MY FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH MY GURUDEV SWAMI SHANTANANDA PURI

- *By Ajata*

“Aham Brahmaasmi” “Remain as the Brahman and wake up to the Reality.”
– Swami Shantananda Puri, in his book, **Instant Self-Awareness.**



My name is Carmen Negoescu, also known by my spiritual name, Ajata. I am from Romania, working since 2000 as a General Manager for a Swiss Branch in Romania and Moldavia. I had the good fortune of meeting Gurudev in 2003. Since then, I am a devotee of Gurudev. His Love and blessings constantly pour into my life and everywhere I walk, His Grace is accompanying me. My heart is full of joy and gratitude for this most unexpected encounter with Him.

Every meeting with Gurudev miraculously touches my heart with profound teachings and deep insights. Writing about Him is not an easy task as the words cannot express my deepest gratitude in comparison to the vivid experiences I have had with Him. It is challenging to choose a topic for this book of reminiscences about Him as there are so many amazing miracles He performed in my life. I will narrate about the magical experience of my first meeting with Gurudev, an event which goes back ten years in time.

2003 - Meeting with my beloved Gurudev

For more than a year before my meeting with Gurudev, I was very restless. I was struggling to understand what happiness is and why I was feeling so incomplete, although having everything that I previously thought would make me happy. I strived and worked for a good career, car, house, relationship, money, travelling abroad, loving parents, etc. Yet my heart was puzzled and kept asking questions such as “Who am I?” “What is happiness?” “Why is it that everything I have gathered does not fulfill me?” “Why do people around me cannot make me happier?” “What is the real purpose of life?” “Why are we born and why do we die?” Every day I would ask these questions. With anxiety in my heart, I began to pray fervently to God, searching for answers.

I had a chance meeting with Ajati, presently Swami Ajatananda Puri, who introduced me to India and Advaita Vedanta. Finally, peace started to trickle in my heart. I knew I was on the right path to find the answers I was looking for. This was the first sign of Grace and the starting point of my love story with “my India” as well as the beginning of the journey back Home.

9th of July 2003 - First vision of Gurudev

I was travelling to Italy on a work assignment. I had to take the train from Milano to Padova for the management meeting. I started reflecting on the teachings about our true nature. My heart was bursting with the desire to know more about who I really am. Something inside me began to shift deeply. I had a clear feeling that this is the beginning of a new page in my life, and it felt so right. I was experiencing strong emotions and was unable to stop the tears rolling down my face. Though the people around me saw my emotional state, yet I was unable to stop the flow of tears or fully understand what was going on inside me.

On reaching Padova I checked into the hotel and had two hours to wait for my business meeting. Feeling quite tired, I decided to rest for a while. As I put my head down on the pillow, I fell into deep sleep. It was then that I had the following dream:

I saw myself in a sunny place. This place looked like an open yard with a few trees and graded gravel on the ground. In the background, I could see a house with a porch and a few pillars. On my left, there were two small monuments, both having metal grills. In front of me, Swami Ajatananda appeared with another man. They were both levitating in the lotus posture. The unknown man was an elderly monk with immense shining eyes and a shaved head. Swami Ajatananda said to him: “Please meet Carmen.” At the time I did not have a spiritual name. The older monk greeted me with a broad smile.

Suddenly awakened from sleep, I had strong feeling that this was not just a dream, because it felt so real. I wondered where the place was, who this man was who looked at me so serenely and with so much Love? I searched the memory chip of my mind but I could not find any answers.

18th of July 2003- Second vision- Arunachala

A few days later, I came back to Romania and started my usual day-to-day life. I kept reflecting about this dream and realizing how deeply my heart was touched by this beautiful monk. One day as I sat in meditation I had the following vision:

I was hovering above from where I could very clearly see a winding stony path leading up to a strange mountain with unusual trees. Gracefully, from the sky a beautiful red rose fell very slowly and gently on this path.

Again, although I could not reconcile the place with an image from my memory, it seemed familiar. At that time, I felt a burning desire to visit India and the sacred mountain of

Arunachala, about which I had heard. On 7th of August I embarked on the greatest adventure of my life. Inexplicably, it felt like going back home. The starting point of my first journey to India was Tiruvannamalai.

9th of August – Meeting Gurudev in person

Reaching Tiruvannamalai, I experienced again the feeling of returning home. A strong and sweet energy was enveloping my heart. My wish was to climb to the top of Arunachala and meet with Swami Ajatananda's Guru about whom he talked with so much love. My heart was trembling with the thought of finally meeting a true Master.

Climbing the mountain was a marvellous experience. Getting closer to the heart of the sacred mountain, I was astonished to see the stony path and trees just like they appeared to me in meditation. I felt sacred vibrations of the mountain. I felt very grateful as I began to finally understand the significant events happening in my life leading up to my visit to Arunachala.

Coming down from the mountain, I felt so energized. From the terrace of Daya Dharmam I could enjoy the quiet beauty of Arunachala. I started reading *Fragrant Flowers*, the autobiography of Swami Shantananda Puri Maharaj. As I read, I realized that the Sanskrit words, which were earlier difficult to remember and pronounce, seemed mysteriously easy and familiar.

A few hours later, Swami Ajatananda and I went to see Swami Shantananda Puri. When we reached Sri Ramanasramam, another surprise was waiting to unfold: the place in my first vision, when I was introduced to the elderly monk was right there! I recognized the house, the porch and pillars and the two monuments, which later I found out are Samadhi tombs made for Bhagawan Ramana's pet crow, cow, deer and dog.

Entering the room of Swami Shantananda Puri and seeing him, I realized that he was the elderly monk from my dream-vision. I kneeled in Pada namaskar for the first time in this life in front of the One who was to become my beloved and treasured Gurudev. I understood that I was given the boon to "see" him in the dream before meeting with him in person and understanding thus the fantastic connection, already preordained by Ishwara. I was speechless; what could I have said about this avalanche of Grace in my life, of whose gigantic greatness I could not fully comprehend at that time?

Swami Shantananda greeted me with a broad smile and made a sign to sit down. He was in mouna, the vow of silence. In that space of quietness and filled with his Love, I suddenly heard the Mahavakya "Aham Brahmaasmi"; it was an arrow that pierced me in the middle of my chest. A deeper peace was dawning upon me. Through His Grace, I was experiencing a state of blissfulness, a deep peace; all mental agitations disappeared, there were no

questions, no thoughts, and no worries. I felt free, without any limitations. I was speechless! Any attempt to describe this state would fall short.

Before our departure, Gurudev wrote on a piece of paper and handed over to me, again with a big smile: "When once you come to Arunachala, you will come again and again. May you have a long life. All my blessings. Swami Shantananda." My heart was genuinely moved and my eyes filled with tears. We went outside to take a picture in the same yard where I saw Gurudev in my vision-dream. This picture is the icon of my first meeting with Gurudev, the symbol of Ishwara's Grace manifested as my teacher. Gurudev's words come true as always as I have been visiting India and Arunachala every year since 2003, sometimes even twice a year.

Until I met with my Guru, I did not know the experience of pure Love. After meeting with Him, my whole life changed and a deeper understanding dawned upon me. Through the years, Gurudev has showered me with his unending Love and compassion. I feel Gurudev so close to my heart. He is my best friend on earth. Every meeting, every discussion with Gurudev, every second spent in His presence feels like a direct encounter with Ishwara. His teachings are gems that answer all spiritual questions, eliminating doubts and dispelling fears and sorrows. Gurudev compassionately answers our day-to-day questions with practical solutions. His pearls of wisdom are reaching the heart of the seekers in a unique way, transforming each of us. In any form the answer comes, it leads us to the Ultimate.

Many times, with the sweetest voice, Gurudev said to me: "Ajata, even if the sky were to fall on you, do not get disturbed, remain at peace. Don't forget that everything is a dream; remain as witness in the totality, there is nothing to gain and nothing to lose. Be the watcher in the tower. Be happy. Remain with no thoughts, no likes, and no dislikes. Think of Consciousness, this is the only thing that matters." Amazing Grace flows constantly from Him to all who come near Him.

Gurudev, You are everything to me: Mata, Pita, Guru, and Deva. You are my Divine Mother, Divine Father, Beloved Guru and my God. I humbly bow to Your velvet Lotus Feet in deep gratitude. Please bless me with Your guidance and Grace and lead me to the ultimate goal in life: moksha. We pray that You will be in this Divine Form and grant us your Divine presence and unending wisdom.

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