

# UNKNOWN INDIA

Walther Eidlitz

PART III

## SADANANDA

(With later corrections by the author)

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### MY FRIEND SADANANDA

The coming of Sadananda – The path to the forgotten world – First talk with my new guru – The meaning of “The Friend of the lordless” – Questions which should not be asked.

When I prayed to God for a guru, one was already very near. One day there stood a newcomer outside the kitchen barrack, where a hungry crowd had gathered and the birds of prey circled overhead in eager swarms. He was tall and slender, and his head was shaved. He wore the Indian monk gown, although he was a European. His name was Sadananda. I spoke to him, and he answered in a matter-of-fact way with monosyllables. Our first real conversation took place at night on the football field. There he told me about an antique Greek vase he had once seen. The decoration on it was a wheel with sixteen spokes, and around the wheel were pictures from the ancient Greek mysteries and the inscription: “I have jumped off the wheel of Ixion.”

According to the conception of the ancient Greeks, Ixion was a man loaded with misdeeds, who was bound after death for all eternity to a wheel that turned incessantly – I remembered that much. But I had not grasped the fact that the Greek mysteries refer to our world as the place of misery, where every living being is bound without knowing it to a turning wheel, the wheel of repeated existences in the world of change.

I happened to think of a wheel in an old abandoned mill, which I used to stare at for hours at a time in my childhood. Its spokes were covered with grey moss. It turned round in a dark crevice whose walls were black with age, and cast up the water of the stream in cascades, which immediately fell and dispersed again: gain and loss, honour and ignominy, victory and defeat, joy and sorrow, health and illness, meeting and parting, withering, death and rebirth. The force of personal

desire was the water of the stream, which endlessly drives the wheel in the world of change. All the wisdom of India strives to free mankind from this wheel of Ixion. Shri, too, considered this delivery to be the highest goal.

“Delivery from attachment to the world of change is not the highest goal,” said my companion. “That delivery is only the first step on the infinite path that leads into God’s *forgotten world*, the path on which the guru who lovingly serves God leads his disciple.”

“What kind of a path is that? What is the goal?” I asked expectantly.

“The path is love, the goal is love, ever greater, ever more loving service of God. Just as it is the nature of fire to burn, so it is the nature of the soul, atman, to love God. Just as a spark is evidence of a fire, because it is burning, the atma is evidence of God, because he loves Him. The spark is the single atma, the great fire of love is God. The spark is little and insignificant as compared with the fire from which it emanates. But its infinite insignificance only concerns its outward form. The atma is hidden, and knows nothing of his real nature, but when he awakes and begins to love God and is filled with an inexpressible longing to serve Him, then he partakes of His nature, His fullness, pureness, freedom and eternity. Then he is stripped of all selfishness, and strives for nothing but giving joy to God. Then, in devoted service, he can become a part of the Divine inner life.”

“Is not the highest goal knowing the truth? My guru taught me so.”

“Wisdom is not attained by wanting to know, but by devoted service alone. Only wanting to know is still selfishness and a desire to satisfy egoism.”

“Is not Shanti, Divine peace, the highest?” I asked. “Think of the Buddhist sculptures. Think of the inexpressible peace in the calm smile of the meditating Buddha’s countenance. Are not all the religions of the world united in their prayer for the blessing of peace? ‘May the Lord bless thee and preserve thee; may He turn His countenance to thee and give thee peace.’ ”

“Yes, religions are united in praying for peace, since they are still in a preparatory state and are like lessons for obstinate children. They think the only important thing is the washing away of the filth of the earth, and of the world’s struggle. Observe the various religious devotees,” continued Sadananda distressedly, “all of them want something of God. As if God were a shopkeeper. One demands power. Another prays for riches. A third wants a beautiful young woman. A fourth prays for a son. A fifth, health and a long life. A sixth prays for victory for his side and miserable defeat for the opponent. The Christian asks to enter heaven and enjoy eternal blessedness there. The Hindu wishes to be freed from samsara, the burning wheel of the world of change, and then safely sink into rapture for eternity. The Buddhist wishes to enter nirvana. All want the same thing, an assurance of peace, security, freedom from suffering. The case is the same with the followers of Shankaracharya. They want to realize that their atma is identical with Brahman, sink into the formless Divine light, where all dissension vanishes. Or

they even desire to become like God. You, too, Walther Eidlitz, are among these. Did you not sing as you wandered in Himalaya: ‘Aham Brahmasmi ... I am Brahman’? Moreover, you have thoroughly misunderstood this sentence from the Upanishads. It means: In my innermost soul, my atma, I am of the nature of Brahman, just as the spark is of the same nature as fire.”

Sadananda stopped speaking. In silence we walked up and down the length of the barbed-wire fence. Round about the camp the jackals were shrieking, withdrawing gradually deeper into the forest.

“Shri never insisted that peace was the highest aim. He said rather: ‘For the time being, I shall grant you only peace’,” I resumed after a while. “And I did not even succeed in attaining peace.”

Sadananda laid his hand gently on my shoulder. “Do not grieve, Vamandas, because you are crushed and believe you have lost everything. Krishna is sometimes called Anatha-Bandhu, the Friend of the lordless, the Friend of those who no longer own anything but their destitution and their longing for Him. Believe me, Krishna rejoices more over one who, in spite of a thousand obstructions, longs to love and serve Him, in the crowds and the dirt of the barracks within this barbed wire, than over one who meditates in the shelter and quiet of a clean, calm forest, or a room behind padded doors. You belong to Krishna. And your meditation, your success and failure, and even your illnesses are His. But whoever dares completely to subject himself to God on His terms instead of his own? Many have tried to follow the example of a Divine saviour, and say like him: ‘Thy will be done, not mine.’ But when matters become serious, when the will of God overcomes one, then fear creeps in and one whispers in secret: ‘No, I meant not thus – so far, but no farther.’ No one wants to believe that God can at times make His appearance in the form of a catastrophe, a complete breakdown. But believe me, if one can prevail upon oneself in the hands of God, then he need never worry. God takes over the responsibility for him, for all his actions. Then it is of no consequence whether he happens to be in an abyss in the world of change, or in the kingdom of heaven, for he is always in God’s kingdom of love, playing a part in the drama of God and His eternal followers, of which the world knows nothing.

Peace, Nirvana, longed for by so many, is only an intermediary state on the path to God’s real kingdom. To be sure, many remain forever in this wonderful ante-room. But he who dares to penetrate farther, with a desire to devote himself to God yet more, does not lose peace thereby. True peace is not only the becoming free from stress. The freedom from passion, so highly valued by the Indian yogi, is very much over-estimated. True peace means preserving the certainty that in the depth of one’s being one is ever inseparably united with God, in all situations and through all suffering.”

Once more we walked silently for a while, “Svamiji,” I asked quietly, “what has your guru told you about his understanding of why we live? Why do we have these

earthly bodies?”

Sadananda became ardent. “My guru said: ‘We have been given this sluggish body in order to let the fire of every breath we take consume it in our devotion to God.’ But I do not expect you to understand this as yet, Vamandas. You do not even know yet who God, who Krishna, is ...”

“Oh, how I wish I could behold God,” I said.

“It is not a question of your beholding God,” my companion corrected me severely. “It is much more a question of God seeing you, that He may be drawn to you by the beauty and purity in your longing for affectionate loving service. When a person wants to see God, this wish is often a desire for self-advancement. Just as humans degrade all earthly phenomena in their selfishness, by transforming them to objects, relating them to themselves, and enjoying them so do some of them try to enjoy God.”

“How can I free myself from such egoism?” I asked.

“One should not ask such questions, either,” answered Sadananda harshly. “Even this question arises out of egoism. Pray to Krishna, the Unknown, the Hidden, to give you the strength sometime in the future honestly to beg to serve Him truly, and learn to love Him ... It is late. We must sleep. Good night, Vamandas.”

## CHAPTER II

### TEACHER AND DISCIPLE

Teaching in the midst of distractions – Sadananda's story – The golden Avatar – The scientist and scholar who taught Sadananda – Prisoners' oaths, and verses from the Bhagavata – Spies and questioning.

This meeting on the dark football field opened the way for many similar dialogues with Sadananda. Often our conversation turned quite unexpectedly in this direction, as we wandered up and down the length of the barbed-wire fence, and often even in the daytime, when sitting in the midst of a crowd of noisy fellow-prisoners, peeling potatoes outside the kitchen barrack. He could fling out a short utterance, the meaning of which was not understood by the others. At times he sought me up in my barrack, or I came to him and sat an hour or so on his bed. He lived very uncomfortably. His neighbour was a musician who had become degenerate in the tropics, and who most of the time smelled strongly of liquor. He traded in all kinds of wares with his bed as his headquarters, and just now played everlastingly on an old gramophone that he had newly acquired. Sadananda was kindly disposed towards this neighbour. He did not differentiate between people with civil virtues and the so-called asocial element. He even held that a criminal or a harlot often had greater prospects for a sudden and complete conversion than a law-abiding citizen. There were many examples of this in the Holy Scriptures of India, as well as in the Gospels. He referred to the stories of Maria Magdalena and the robber on the cross.

Every time I came to Sadananda during those days, a most frightful noise met my ears as I entered the door. Bartering was going on from the bed of his neighbour, and, furthermore, card-players sat around the only table in the barrack, slamming down the dirty cards. Often enough they got into dispute with one another. Sadananda did not seem to be the least disturbed by all this. He called out cheerfully: "So nice of you to come and call on me, Vamandas. Come and sit on my bed." A bright dome of peace seemed to hover invisibly over the miserable camp bed. When he began his narration, my ears became deaf to all the noise.

"What brought you to India?" I asked him.

"The longing of my heart. And my meeting Svami Bon, an Indian who had been sent to Europe by his teacher, my guru later on. And above all, an Indian book that I came across in the library of the University of Berlin. It was a book about Krishna Chaitanya."

"Ah, the secret Avatar of the age of discord, the golden Avatar! Shri had told me about him."

A smile broke out on Sadananda's severe countenance. "So Shri has told you about Krishna Chaitanya," he said gladly. "According to what you have said, I

thought that your teacher belonged to the school of Shankaracharya. You know, of course, that Chaitanya entered the order of Shankaracharya to redeem it from within, since his teaching contained only a half-truth.”

“Is not Shankaracharya right? Isn’t the world corruptible, an illusion and a delusion, yet filled with heavy pain?”

“Yes, but at the same time the world has its foundation always in God, the eternal God full of blessedness.”

“Yes, of course, what we think of as the world is really the impersonal, Divine Brahman.”

“The impersonal Brahman is only the radiance from the figure of the personal God ... It is not as simple as you believe, Vamandas. In God, the most unbelievable opposites are harmoniously united. God is simultaneously personal and impersonal. The world is separate from God, and at the same time not separate from God. The Divine saviour, the avatar, is separate from God, and yet not separate from Him. The teaching of bheda-abheda, of being separate yet not separate, as Krishna Chaitanya has explained it, is inexhaustible. When, during my studies at the University, I investigated the different systems of the Western and the Eastern philosophers, I always wished that sometime I might come across a philosophical system in which we would continue eternally without coming to an end. I have found everything I searched for in the philosophy of Krishna Chaitanya and His disciples, the treasures of which the world has not the faintest notion.”

“And your own guru?”

“My guru Bhakti Siddhanta Sarasvati was a follower of Krishna Chaitanya, and he lived in the loving service of God and made it known.”

With indescribable affection and tenderness, Sadananda began to tell me about his guru. In his youth, he had been a well-known scientist and scholar. One day the young scholar went to a hermit in the forest, and asked to be initiated. The spiritual teacher he had sought was a wandering ascetic, almost naked, wearing only a loin-cloth. His name was Gaura Kishora. Harshly, the old man ignored the wish of the scholar. “Learning and reputation in the world mean nothing before Krishna,” he said abruptly. But the young scholar did not cease his prayers, and finally the old man accepted him as his only disciple, persuaded by the endurance and affectionate loving service he had shown.

There were remarkable resemblances in the lives of Bhakti-Siddhanta Sarasvati, who had his home near the Ganges in India, and his European disciple, whom he called Sadananda. The latter, too, had breathed the harsh air of science in his youth. At the University of Leipzig he had studied comparative religion, learning various languages such as Pali, Sanskrit, Tibetan, Chinese and Japanese. After receiving his doctor’s degree, and publishing a new edition of a well-known standard work in the history of religion, an unusually promising career as a university teacher was opened up to him. But he gave up all plans of this kind, got rid of all his

possessions, and set out for India, in order to drink at the sources and to serve the lotusfeet of his guru, Bhakti-Siddhanta Sarasvati.

Sadananda showed me some photographs of his teacher. I was startled at the close resemblance between one of these and Sadananda himself. I looked at the photograph and at my friend, and at the photograph again. It was not enough to say that they looked like brothers, it seemed rather to be the same person at an early and a later period of life. The same carriage, the same expression, the same inner strength expressed in the gesture of the hand.

When I pointed out the resemblance to Sadananda he denied it with honest modesty. Gradually, as I learned to know my friend better, I noticed that he was pining from the suffering caused by the separation from his teacher. The latter left this world in January 1937. There seemed to have been a deep spiritual bond between this guru of God's love and his European disciple. On one occasion, when Sadananda broke his customary reservation, he told me that his guru, Bhakti-Siddhanta Sarasvati, had once uttered in the presence of some of his native disciples, these words: "You, Sadananda, and I, we have been together through all eternity."

"Fate has made it difficult for you," I said, "half the world lay between you and your guru. How easily it could have happened that you had never met him."

"It was bound to be so," Sadananda replied slowly. "It was bound to be so, in order to find out whether the inner urge of my heart was strong enough to overcome all the obstacles and fight its way against the current. And yet now it seems to me to be a wonder that I succeeded in finding him. However, it was all too short a while that I was allowed to serve him this time. Next time I hope it will be longer."

– "You dirty dog, didn't you hear me say ace of clubs? I'll skin you alive," shouted one of the card players, a well-known wrestler, the owner of a school of gymnastics in southern India. He looked like a giant suckling with swelling arm muscles and treacherous eyes.

"Yes, prick up your ears, so as not to miss any of the highly interesting conversation over there," Sadananda taunted me sorrowfully, when he noticed that I could not resist listening to the quarrelling of the card players. "You ask questions from a desire for sensation, just like everybody else. How well my guru understood this, when among his last words he pointed out for us seriously the following: 'As you withdraw from the lotus feet of Krishna, you will be overcome in the same measure by the enticing and repulsive forces of this world.' "

"Put out the lights! Put out the lights!" cried the European soldiers angrily, as they went on their round at this late hour of the night along the fence enclosing the Indian camp. Swearing, the card players hung blankets over the windows of the barrack. Then they continued playing.

"Take a sheet of paper and a pencil," said Sadananda. "I shall dictate a Sanskrit

verse for you from Bhagavata-Purana, which can perhaps be of help to you.

‘The knot of the heart  
(the knot in the form of the false ‘I’ and ‘mine’,  
which binds the atma)  
will dissolve by itself.  
All doubts shall be cleared away  
and even his karma,  
his deeds, and the inevitable consequences of his deeds,  
shall disappear,  
when God is seen directly in his atma.’ ”

Many questions arose within me as I walked back in the darkness from Sadananda’s barrack to mine. And other questions, which had troubled me my whole life, now received their answer. I was irresistibly drawn to Sadananda’s quarters. But it was not so easy to visit him, for at first he and I belonged to different groups within the barbed wire. He was German and I was of Jewish birth. I was spied on incessantly, observed and questioned: “Where have you been? What have you been doing during these last hours? To whom have you spoken?” And reports of all this were sent to the delegation that was considering which of us could be set free. Again and again I had to conquer attacks of fear, break the laws of the opposing parties and ignore the rules of the boycott, again and again I had to summon the courage needed to enable us to meet. But Sadananda appreciated the fact that I showed courage.

## CHAPTER III

### A NEW ROOM-MATE

Sharing a dish-washing room with Sadananda – A new room-mate – Piercing cries in the night – Sadananda's aggressive grace – The clothes and the real man – The breaker of enchantments.

After a removal and a consequent reorganization of the entire camp, Sadananda and I were placed in the same barrack. We lived in a little room by ourselves. There was even space for a third bed between our two.

This room had been the dish-washing room in a mess for noncommissioned officers, and was not intended for living in. It was built as a partition of the veranda. It was as hot as an oven there. The tropical sun beat down on the low slanting roof and the heavy brick walls. Besides, the athletic field was right next to it. It was impossible to open the little whitewashed window shutters, for then some stray ball would be sure to break the window immediately. To the left and to the right of our sleeping-place people sat all day long, crowded into tight rows on the veranda, watching the football matches. With every successful or unfortunate kick of the ball, these people shrieked enthusiastically or indignantly.

Meanwhile, my friend sat on his bed with his legs crossed under him. He worked eagerly, bending low as he wrote his comprehensive work. A little metal box, placed on his knees, served as a table. Beside him stood another larger metal trunk which held his books and manuscripts. All the volumes lay in exemplary order. My friend could lay his hands immediately on any of the pages, even in the darkness. In the lid of the open trunk there was a portrait of Sadananda's guru.

Shouts and whistling sounded anew from outside. Again the football bounced against our shutters. A sound of broken glass reached our ears. I tried in vain to suppress my annoyance, which was rising into what could easily become hatred of my fellows. "Is it not necessary to learn to love human beings before daring to aspire to loving God?" I asked.

"You cannot have any true love for human beings without knowing God's love," was the prompt reply. "Humans, yes, all the creatures of the world are like flowers of a flowering tree. The root of the tree is God. If you water the root, all the leaves and flowers of the tree will be refreshed. Love overflows. But you must not mistake the masks, the garments, I mean the bodies of human beings, their sensuality and their desire, for the true person, the atma, which for a while assumes one of these strange mantles. The atma is not a Nazi, a communist, an Englishman, a Jew, a Brahman, a prize-fighter, nor a man nor a woman. The eternal, inherent law of every atma is to be Krishna's eternal servant, even if it has forgotten this. You must try to concentrate your gaze on the atma."

“Can you do so?”

“I endeavour to do so.”

In our new quarters there was one inmate who was homeless. His monk's gown was similar to Sadananda's, although it was yellow instead of orange. He was one of the few European Buddhists in the camp. Some of them were excellent characters and very learned, but unfortunately I came into contact with an outsider. He was fat and had a naturally bald, shiny head. His name was Gross.

The contents of Gross' brain presented a strange picture. In his youth he had stood in a shop in a little town, where he sold herrings and cheese. Later he had become a strolling photographer, dragging his camera about with him and snapping the visitors at various seaside resorts, masculine and feminine, in more or less stages of undress. Suddenly he was seized with a longing for peace and certainty, and he made his way to Ceylon, where he became a Buddhist monk. But the part-learning that had been assembled in his brain like a tangled mass of brush, together with his aggressive nature, made him unsuitable for the difficult, profound mental work demanded by the teachings of Buddha.

Outwardly, he kept the rules of this order very strictly. At roll-call, mornings and evenings, he refused to stand in line with his fellow-prisoners. He would not take part in the work divided up by the others, such as peeling potatoes, chopping wood and other duties. He explained that the rules of his order forbade his performing work for laymen. He succeeded in holding his point of view.

With slow, dignified steps, always with his gaze fastened on the ground, according to the rules, he wandered up and down the length of the barbed-wire fencing, with his fat body wrapped in a yellow gown. Now and then he succeeded in finding a disciple who walked beside him for a few days, listening to his discourse, and later on deserting him and making fun of him. He was considered to be intolerant, and a spreader of slander and ugly rumours.

Following the removal and reorganization of the camp, all of the barracks refused to harbour Gross. Defiantly, he placed his bed out-of-doors near the football field, where the yellow clothes he hung up were a source of annoyance to many.

“He is an old man,” said Sadananda to me. “Winter is cold here. There is room in our nook. Shall we invite Gross to live with us?”

“He is aggressive,” I said cautiously. “There will be unpleasantness. I know that he has told many that I practise black magic.”

“Hm, Gross hasn't the slightest idea of what black magic is, and those who listen to him have still less,” laughed Sadananda. “But in any case it is wrong of them to scoff at his monk's gown.”

I do not know what the real intention of my friend was in saying this, whether he wanted to give me a picture of how one should be or how one should not be. Our new room-mate moved in ceremoniously, and encamped between our two beds. He

lent me a book in which I found a citation from Buddha, which I can never forget:

He scorned me, he beat me, he conquered me by force! –  
If you make room for this thought, you cannot be free of hate.  
For through this hate, there will be no peace for hatred upon  
earth, only by not hating can hatred find peace.

Behind his mosquito net, and the yellow cloths he hung over it, Gross sat every day on his bed between Sadananda's and mine, with his legs crossed, meditating for many hours. He always carried a skull about with him, and, placing it before him, he meditated on the corruptibility of the earth. "I radiate sympathy and love for all human beings," he told me. But in spite of his deep trance, he was remarkably well aware of what was going on about him. He who had given up all possessions, insisted upon all his personal rights, his share of the floor of the barrack, etc. However, he was not so eager when it was a question of sweeping this floor – the rules of his order forbade him. "I understand that you wish to pick a quarrel with me," he said to me several times. Both Sadananda and I walked on tiptoe so as not to disturb him.

Gross had the peculiarity of often emitting piercing cries in his sleep, calling out "huhuhu ..." as if he were in a nightmare.

"Don't shriek like that," said Sadananda harshly, once when it became unbearable, and he turned on the light. We were in the habit of turning off the light before the required time in order that our room-mate might sleep undisturbed.

Gross sat up then, blinking, and it took some time for him to come to his senses. "It is not to be wondered at that I shout in my sleep," he said deliberately. "There are two ears too many in this room." He glanced meaningly in my direction, for he was hinting at the secret artifices which, according to his belief, I practised in order to upset him.

At this, Sadananda dropped all his deference, and went straight to attack. He did not call his room-mate "your Reverence", nor did he address him by his Buddhistic monk's name, which otherwise he was in the habit of doing out of respect for the gown he wore. He called him by his old name from the days of the ware-shop. "Gross, don't try anything like that," he reprimanded him. "You don't shriek because of any dark and evil things about you, but rather because you yourself are filled with ugly secret thoughts. That is why you are tortured by nightmares. Because of this you live steadily in agony, and believe that others threaten you. You declare that you radiate sympathy and love, but instead you nurse your hatred. You say that you practise contemplation, but instead of this you sit there like a spider in its web, listening for something that might disturb you, so that afterwards you can complain about it. I have never in all my life seen anyone so thoroughly enveloped in egoism as you. You believe yourself to be the centre of the world that

surrounds you. You dishonour the respectable monk's gown of Buddha that you wear – you old hypocrite!”

With his fat countenance drawn into lines that were meant to express the fact that he was accustomed to suffering the bitterness of injustice, Gross listened to this torrent of words. With the same expression on his face, he moved the next day, taking his skull and his writings on mercy and love somewhere else.

“Why were you so harsh with Gross?” I asked when our room-mate had left us.

“To awaken his atma, his soul. Even if he runs away now with his feelings outraged and injured, the impression will remain until his next incarnation. This was a far better way of helping him than if I had nourished his egoism and vanity. My guru was a master in this manner of helping. He called it aggressive grace, grace through attack. But in the West it is so easy to mistake the garments for the true figure. You know that I value the social endeavour of the West very highly. Yes, welfare institutions for the old and the sick, the right of all to have work and education, it is excellent, all of it. Protection for children and those who are ill, weak or persecuted, this must exist. In our days it is, in fact, almost the only thing that distinguish humans from animals. But when I think of all these efforts at making the corruptible, changeable world pleasant for humans, it often seems to me to be the same as if somebody had fallen in the water and was in danger of drowning. Then another comes running to help him, and manages to rescue – his clothes and his hat and his spectacles. The drowning man himself, the true person – the atma – is allowed to go under.”

Gradually I learned to realize that every word uttered by Sadananda was the expression of bhakti, discerning love of God, and that all his actions, whether friendly or scornful – he could be exceedingly harsh and stern – were based on an effort to waken the atma in the people he contacted, to make the atma realize its true nature, to be a servant of Krishna. The inmates of the camp respected him, in spite of his monk's gown which invited derision. They were afraid of him, because he was quicker than they were at repartee. He made them uneasy, and they avoided him.

When Sadananda injured one's feelings, his words could wound one's self-love so deeply that the tears welled up in one's eyes. Whoever experienced this often felt as if the very foundation of his being had been uprooted. But the blow that was so painful did not come from the intolerant sword of violence, it was more like a purifying flash of lightning. It was the same kind of a blow as that with which many of our fairy tales end – for that matter, nearly all of them originate from India. There the enchanted person himself begs: “Cut off my head. Cut off the animal head that has been placed on me.” If the other hesitates, the enchantment is not broken. But if the rescuer strikes with his sword, the enchanted person is freed from the curse, and assumes his true form again.

But it is only in fairy tales that the princes that have been changed into animals

or goblins have the courage to ask, of their own accord: “Break the enchantment, give me the true shape of love. Strike, delivering sword!” In the camp they spoke unkindly of Sadananda. “He is a renegade who has betrayed his European birth and become a nigger.” And hateful reports and false accusations were sent in to the investigation committee.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE CHURCH BEHIND THE BARBED WIRE

The imprisoned missionaries – Old Pater Lader – Dr. Fuchs, the Protestant priest – Jesuits with notebooks – Sadananda’s lectures – Theological controversies – The guru holds his own.

There were a great many Christian missionaries confined in the Indian camp. One came across them in nearly every section. The entire life of the Church and all its difficulties were revealed within the barbed-wire enclosure. In the intimacy of life in the barracks, it became inevitably apparent that a poor mortal was hidden inside the clergyman’s apparel, with the usual human weaknesses. However, during my six years of confinement in India it was often a great comfort to me to know that within the camp, which was rife with hate and quarrelling, there were groups of people who endeavoured to fix their gaze on eternal matters. For example, every Catholic priest in the camp held a quiet service each morning, and on Sundays an altar was raised in the dining-room barrack and Divine service was held there, where prisoners otherwise assembled in order to eat, greedy and hungry. I rejoiced when on Easter Day this room shook with jubilation over the Resurrection, and when Catholics and Protestants together joined in the choir singing. I tried honestly to see the priests of the various religious faiths as successors to His followers to whom Christ once said: “Receive the Holy Spirit! ... Go out for my sake, and make all people your disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.”

But bearing the message of the Holy Ghost out into the world surely means also acknowledging the Holy Ghost in all His manifestations. I had learned to know the love of God, as Sadananda explained it, as a revelation which glowed with a holy spirit. I was very much surprised by the fact that many of the professed Christians spoke disparagingly and with contempt of Sadananda. It also surprised me that most of them had not the slightest conception of the powerful stream of pure theism that has existed since immemorial times in the many-sided spiritual life of India. The priests and other spiritual brethren spoke condescendingly of the “poor heathens”, among whom Sadananda was included. Only one of the many Christian missionaries with whom I became acquainted in the Indian prison camp had previously made himself acquainted with the ancient culture and religion of the people whom they had set out to convert. But many of them tried to make up for their neglect in this matter during their imprisonment.

It was a strange little gathering that for a while met regularly in our washroom, while the football enthusiasts clamoured just outside, and the big leather balls

bounced dully against our wall.

I remember some of those who attended Sadananda's course very well. Old Pater Lader sat there on a stool that he had brought along. His rough workman's hands were clasped on his knees. His coarse, wrinkled face was surrounded by an unkempt greyish beard. His fellow-clergymen were amused at his expense, and they laughed at "Kind Pater Lader", for he was not very particular about his appearance, and his white monk's cowl was often stained or fastened wrong. In his youth he had been a blacksmith's journeyman in Württemberg. Later he became one of the brethren of a religious order, and travelled to India, called there by some inner urge. There he had been caught unawares by the First World War, and had sat behind barbed wire for six years in an Indian prison camp. During the period between the two wars he had studied Latin, labouriously worked his way through a seminary and had been ordained as a priest. After that, for many years he had lived in an Indian village in the midst of the jungle, in solitude, in poverty, and the greatest privation.

"You don't know the Indian village," he said to me. "You know nothing about the superstition and fanaticism in such a village. You are acquainted only with the highest Indian culture and the Upanishads."

And yet he loved that Indian village, although he had but seldom succeeded in converting anyone during his long years of service. He loved the Upanishads, too. In the early days of my imprisonment he had come to me in order to borrow some Sanskrit texts. Of the many Christian missionaries I got to know in the camp, old Lader was the only one who had learned Sanskrit before entering the camp.

Beside Lader sat the Protestant priest, Dr. Fuchs. He wore well-fitting, spotless clothes, smiled complacently most of the time, and had a private liking for intrigue. But he was a talented man and had a longing in his soul. He often came to us in the little washroom, even when no lectures were in progress. Sadananda was harsh with him, as he was with all whom he estimated, or expected anything of. "He could have great possibilities," Sadananda said of him. "But he has had too much external success. He needs a hard blow of destiny which would crush him completely. Then his soul could really awake."

Beside Pastor Fuchs sat a layman, a quiet, white-haired geologist. Before his imprisonment he had explored mines in South America and India. So far he had only dealt with purely natural science, and had been a convinced atheist. After one of Sadananda's lectures he said to me seriously: "I should never have believed that anything like this was possible. The world in which I have lived heretofore is not the complete world. It is as if a veil had been drawn aside. A breeze from another, truer reality is felt when your friend speaks of Krishna." He looked at me aghast. "Have we entirely forgotten the true world?"

His wife was imprisoned a thousand miles away in the women's camp in south India, where I had stayed a short while. When, after many years of applying and

waiting, all the separated married couples were finally reunited in a newly-erected, barbed-wire-enclosed family prison camp, Dr. Schultheiss left us. He wrote repeatedly to Sadananda, and sent him as a Christmas gift a carved wooden plate that he made.

Tirelessly the three Jesuits noted down Sadananda's words in memorandum books they held on their knees. They were used to studying for examinations, and were also acquainted with scientific work. Not until they are forty-five years of age are they full-fledged members of their order. The novices wasted no time in the camp, they listened to lectures as previously. The Jesuits had established a complete theological faculty in the prison camp. The three who attended Sadananda's course were as unlike one another as they could be.

Young Pater Zehner did not make much of a stir. Nobody in the camp spoke unkindly of him, in spite of his white cowl and the beard that framed the furrowed brown face, from which his large eyes looked out. Without being asked, he went ahead and helped when a heavy trough of potatoes had to be carried to the kitchen, or when volunteers were sought for some difficult task. It was pleasant to sit beside him when sharing work with him. When he spoke, he chose his words carefully. "We too have them," he mumbled approvingly, when Sadananda hinted at the secrets of the Divine inner life, which are mirrored in the cult of Radha-Krishna. Zehner meant the love that streams between the three Divine persons of the Trinity. But he was evidently quite embarrassed at his own words.

Sonnenbichler looked like the archangel Michael carved in wood, and was as strong as a lion. At that time he was still only a novice. Later on he was ordained in the camp. For this purpose, one of the interned Italian bishops left his barbed-wire enclosure and came over to ours. The tall, light-haired youth lay prone during the service like the trunk of a fallen tree before the altar in the dining-room barrack. The following few days he went about in a trance. In reality his wish had been to become a sculptor. "Oh! how terribly difficult it is to learn Sanskrit," he groaned, as he stood beside me one day as we rinsed our tin plates. "How much easier Latin is! And those new, subtle lines of thought, that mobile thinking that one must master first. My brain refuses, it rises like an unruly horse."

"It was exactly the same for me in the beginning," I comforted him.

Pater Sprechmann, the third Jesuit attending Sadananda's course, came, like Sonnenbichler, from a village in Bavaria. His accent betrayed this, even though his theological studies at the University of Freiburg had put a veil of scholasticism over his country-bred straightforwardness. His eager, forced speech often hurried a long way ahead of his thoughts. It sometimes seemed as if he wanted to seize the Divine secrets with a crowbar. Dr. Sprechmann was versatile and ambitious. He was not only a theologian, but also an excellent athlete and long-distance runner, and he trained daily in the gymnastic hall. One of his aims was to win the "gold medal" for athletics in the camp.

Sadananda stood before the borrowed blackboard; he was slim and dressed in an orange-coloured garment which he himself had dyed, and on his feet he wore the Indian sandals that are common in this country. “The Krishna you have heard about, who is named in books, the Divine hero and teacher in the epic Mahabharata and in the Bhagavadgita, is not the complete Krishna, Krishna in His entirety,” he explained. “And even the Divinity who is the foundation of the world, and the God who creates, holds and maintains the world, receiving it at last into Himself – even these are only outer aspects of Krishna. The true Krishna is a deep mystery.”

Sadananda wrote on the blackboard in his fine, bold handwriting the syllable “krish”, using the Devanagari script.

“The word Krishna comes from the Sanskrit root ‘krish’,” he explained. “ ‘Krish’ means to attract. There is not only physical gravitation, but spiritual as well. Just as the physical sun attracts the earth and the planets so that they rotate about it, so does Krishna attract the souls, the atmas of all beings, to Himself by means of love, and indescribable beauty. Krishna is throughout consciousness. He is described with the metaphor ‘the spiritual sun of all consciousness’. The atma stands in the same relation to Him, to God, as the rays of the sun to the sun itself.”

Sadananda searched among his papers. “I shall dictate to you a hymn to Krishna from the Middle Ages. It originates from Jagadananda, a devoted friend and disciple of Chaitanya:

The atma is a particle of spiritual consciousness;  
Krishna is the sun of all that is spiritually conscious.  
They who behold Krishna eternally, love and honour Him.  
He who turns away his face from Krishna, makes place for desire.  
Maya, who is near him, seizes and embraces him.  
When the demon assumes the upper hand, the spirit is destroyed.  
The same thing happens when the atma falls into Maya’s clutches.  
‘I am the servant of Krishna,’ this he had forgotten.  
He becomes a wage-earner of Maya, and wanders about aimlessly.  
Sometimes a half-god, sometimes a demon, sometimes master,  
sometimes slave ...

By those dedicated to God, he learns the truth about his own being.  
When he knows this, he no longer bothers about the changeable world.  
Weeping, he cries: ‘Oh, Krishna, I am after all Thy servant.  
When I left Thy feet, I reaped only destruction.’  
And if only once he calls in prayer ‘Krishna!’  
Krishna is merciful and frees him from attachment to the changeable world.  
He leaves Maya behind him, and yearns to serve Krishna.  
And lovingly, lovingly he approaches the lotus feet of Krishna ...”

“But what is Maya?” asked Sprechmann. “One often hears the word Maya, and now you use it. I find it interesting. Will you explain its meaning?”

“Gladly,” answered Sadananda. “The infinite power of God appears in two aspects, attractive and repulsive, leading to the feet of God, and driving away from the feet of God. Think of the two forces centripetal and centrifugal. The force which, according to God’s will, drives away from Him and hides Him, is Maya.”

“I do not understand what you mean by ‘the force that, according to God’s will, drives away from Him and hides Him’,” muttered Dr. Sprechmann.

Sadananda wrote on the blackboard the syllable “ma”. “The word Maya comes from the Sanskrit root ‘ma’,” he explained calmly, but a secret fire, familiar to me, flashed in his eyes. “Ma means to measure. As long as we egotistically measure the things about us, value them according to the measure of joy or pain they give us, we are in the power of Maya. Maya, who hides God from us, is, according to the decree of God, ruler over the measurable universe.”

“Does not the universe belong to God?” I asked.

“Maya’s universe has come into being through the grace of God, in order that the souls who do not serve and love Him, but rather wish to enjoy and measure and value egotistically, shall have a dwelling-place.”

“The universe is therefore a concentration camp of God?” Dr. Schultheiss shot in, dismayed.

“No, an educational institution,” my friend replied calmly. “When we notice that suffering and bitterness lie at the bottom of every pleasure, and when we turn towards God, longing for unselfish devotion, we touch the heart of God, and He draws us back to Him. But we cannot conceive of such a thing with our senses and our measuring intelligence. As long as we degrade the phenomena of the world by making them objects of our desire for pleasure, we can understand neither the world nor God. God’s real existence is absolutely inapproachable for our logic.”

Sprechmann raised his forefinger. “Do you deny therefore the possibility of a logical evidence of God? If so, I must oppose this.”

Pastor Fuchs cleared his throat. “For once I have the same opinion as the Catholic Church.”

“The Mother Church,” said Pater Lader slowly.

“Is not our universe, with its innumerable Milky Ways, that lie millions and billions of light years away, is not every drop of water a testimony of the majesty of God?” continued Dr. Fuchs, now in a loud unctuous voice. “My point of view is, that the farther we penetrate into the secrets of the universe by means of the acquisitions of modern natural science, the nearer we approach God.”

“The brain of man can probably imagine a faint shadow of that aspect of God which is turned towards the world,” said Sadananda. “But God does not exist only in His majestic aspect. God does not exist only for the sake of the world. Even a few European mystics acknowledge this. God has a personal existence. Our

universe, that is bound by time and space, has the same relation to God's kingdom as the breakers on the seashore have to the boundless sea. I can only repeat that one cannot enter God's kingdom by wanting to know, but only through loving devotion."

"You spoke earlier about the force that draws us to the feet of God," said Pater Zehner slowly. "Did you not call that force Radha?"

Sadananda's pale face brightened. Silence filled the room for a moment. "Radha is a Divine entity, the original shape of the love of God. No one can approach God without the condescension of Radha, without Her bearing one's soul."

Sadananda wrote the syllable "radh" on the blackboard. "The word Radha comes from 'radh'," he said. "The Sanskrit root radh means to love, to serve, to satisfy by discerning service. That discerning love is not measurable. For even if love increases for all eternity, it yet has no end, no bottom. And the immeasurable kingdom of God is woven of love ..."

Pater Zehner nodded happily.

Sadananda continued: "In the hidden kingdom of God, Radha serves Krishna ever with unspeakable, loving devotion. And at the same time She is one with Him in the same way as the glow of the fire is one with the fire, and as the scent of the rose is one with the rose. Radha never leaves the innermost kingdom of God. But one of Her aspects is mercifully turned towards the world. That aspect is called in Christian theology the Holy Ghost."

The fountain-pens of the Jesuits glided quickly over the paper.

"I believe you have heard enough for today," said Sadananda, and closed his volume. Those attending the lecture left us.

Sadananda bent down over the open trunk containing his books and carefully laid in the papers he had used. Silently, he looked at the picture of his guru.

"I know, of course, that my efforts will not bear fruit this time," he said. "I am probably giving one or two of my listeners material that can later on be used in controversial treatises against Indian theism. But in any case I force them to pronounce the Name Krishna, to listen to the Name Krishna. And I am convinced that the Divine Name Krishna has such a force that it can help them in their next incarnation to approach the inner kingdom of God.

## CHAPTER V

### THE NAME OF GOD

We travel a thousand miles – The Name of God – Mystical power of sound – Importance of the Names of God – Meditation on the Logos – Monkeys race after our train.

One day I happened to hear the mantra of the Name of God on the lips of Sadananda. It was on an occasion when the whole camp had once again moved more than a thousand miles away from the barbed-wire enclosure in south India, to newly erected ones in North India at the foot of Himalaya. We had been on our way several days, and still had much of the journey ahead of us; all of us were locked into railway-carriages together with all our belongings, and we were carefully guarded. Sadananda was leaning out of an open window in an old third-class carriage “for Indian soldiers”, and seemed to be oblivious of those about him. He sang out into the wind, just as the sun sank behind the golden Indian plains.

The words were familiar to me, the melody, too. Where had I heard them before? My heart vibrated longingly at the sound, like a tuning-fork whose tones are awakened when harmonizing tones reach it.

It was the same wonderful sound that had met my ears one evening shortly after my arrival in India, when together with Shri I ascended a flight of weathered steps, in the midst of Himalaya’s flowering forests, and heard the song of the monks from the terrace of the pilgrim shelter. The sound and the secret that I suspected behind it had attracted me irresistibly, more strongly than anything that I had ever met with in all my life. I had pursued the sound, seeking it in vain – and now I had found it on a prisoner’s train that was rolling through India.

Night had fallen. The good-natured Indian soldiers who guarded us leaned forward wearily, as they sat with their loaded guns between their knees. My comrades were playing cards. “What was that you sang just now?” I asked.

Sadananda looked at me questioningly, as if seeing deep down into my soul. “That was the mantra of the Name of God,” he said.

Outside the train windows it was getting darker.

My friend instructed me: “The first revelation of the Divine world in which the soul can participate, is sound. Before beholding the kingdom of God, one hears it with an inner ear. Think of Logos, the word of God, from which all things have come to be.

The Name of God is identical with God. One should say rather: the Names of God. For in His mercy God has revealed to us many of His Names, both outer and inner ones, which encompass the whole of His Divine power.”

“The Padmapurana says: ‘The Name of God is spiritual substance (cit), pure,

eternal, perfectly free from matter (maya), since God's Name is not separate from God.' Therefore the Name of God has not only the power of easily washing away all sin, but can even untie the knot of the heart and grant the love of God."

"When one whose atma is completely filled with the love of God sings the Name of God, this has the power of waking a sleeping atma. What happens then is called initiation. By listening devotedly, while another sings the Name, and by singing it oneself, one's atma is led to its real nature, which is loving service for God."

Monotonously the song of the wheels sounded against the rails.

"And meditation, yoga ... all the other paths to God, which Shri spoke of and which the Bhagavadgita mentions, and the Gospels ...?"

"There are different paths. But we bhaktas are convinced that our own age, kali-yuga, has shrouded these paths more or less in darkness. However, when one sings the Name of God, the darkness is dispelled. Krishna Chaitanya, the Divine golden avatar of kaliyuga, has brought the Name of God down to earth as no other saviour before him has done. Hundreds of times he repeated for His disciples an ancient verse from the Naradapurana: 'Except for the Name of God, except for the Name of God, except for the Name of God, verily, except for the Name of God, there is nowhere, nowhere, nowhere, a refuge in the age of kaliyuga.' "

"Of course," continued Sadananda, "you must not believe that as soon as any person mentions the word Krishna, that it is the Name of God being uttered. The earthly clang of the Name, which your physical ears can detect, is only the shadow of the spiritual clang. It has been said: 'Krishna's Name, and all that is contained in that Name, cannot be perceived by the physical senses. But when a person, with a desire to serve, turns towards Krishna, the Name reveals itself to his tongue.' However, even the shadow of God's Name is capable of doing a great deal. It helps to lead the heart towards God. It washes away sin. Do you know what sin is, Vamandas? To be severed from God is the only real sin there is."

The lights of Delhi were getting nearer, and the endless barrack-like rows of houses, homes for clerks, coolies and street-sweepers, civil service men, and workers in the capital city of India. In a brightly-lit parlour car, which slowly glided along towards the big city on a side-track, two persons were seated. One was a high English Government official dressed in a dinner suit, probably the governor of one of the provinces, corpulent and decrepit, yet forceful in appearance like an ancient Roman procurator. And in the easy-chair opposite sat his elderly spouse in evening gown, highly rouged, and rigid. These two people, in sorry loneliness, seemed to be the only passengers in the elegant railway-carriage.

Our train went on; the big city was already behind us. Sadananda lay on the seat beside mine, hardly an arm's length away, and slept soundly. On the wooden berths, placed one over the other, our comrades were sleeping. Only the guards sat up, their guns between their knees. The window opened out to the moonlit night. I looked out at the unfamiliar landscape, saw swaying palmtops, well-sweeps, cranes

and storks. Great wild peacocks, Krishna's sacred animals, danced in the moonlight.

The Name of God ... I was thinking. Strange and unfamiliar were the things that my friend had just confided to me. And yet the moonlit Indian night seemed to me to be only a thin, fluttering veil, behind which the secret was being carried towards my heart as on a wave.

The *Name* of God, which wakens love ... "I have proclaimed them Thy *Name*, and shall proclaim it, that the love Thou hast given me may be theirs, and I myself may be theirs." These words of Christ to God, Christ's last, most sacred words in the circle of His disciples after Communion, came to me out of the blue Indian night.

"Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name." Christ's words to His Divine father when the disciples stood on the mountain beside Him and asked: "How shall we pray?" sounded in my ears.

"I baptize you in the *Name* of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, Amen." The ancient formula for baptizing echoed about me.

"Where two or three are gathered in My *Name*, there am I also." I was moved as never before by the words of the divine Saviour.

I recalled, too, a day long ago on the island of Patmos in the Ægean Sea. In the library of the cloister, a Greek orthodox priest opened for my wife and me the stiff, enormous pages of a manuscript of a Gospel from the ancient Christian era. It was written with silver letters on purple parchment, but the Names of God and Christ shone brighter than the rest of the writing. They were written in letters of gleaming gold.

Had we forgotten the loving power of the Name of God? Was it necessary to travel to India to rediscover the secret?

Logos, the word of God, sounded through the Indian holy writings and the words of joy with which Krishna Chaitanya, the hidden avatar of the age of discord, has praised the power of the Name of God:

"Taking the Name of God is most victorious in a many ways.

It cleanses the mirror of the heart.

It quenches the great forest fire of suffering,  
in separation from the service of God.

It is like moonlight, which opens the lotus chalice  
of the most Precious; loving service of God.

It is the inner life of beloved Lady Wisdom (bhakti).

It lets the ocean of Divine bliss increase ever more.

It gives the experience of Divine abundance  
at every syllable.

It bathes and invigorates one's whole being."

The night was heavy with the scent of flowers. The pleasant odour of the flowering mango-trees floated in to the sleepers on the north-bound train. It seemed to me as if I were being transported on a boat out on to a boundless sea of Divine love, whose waves enveloped each coastline, each earthly horizon. The waves of Divine love rose higher and higher.

Dawn came. Sadananda half-reclined on his seat and gazed out of the open window. I touched his hand. "Initiate me in the Name of God," I implored.

Once again my friend looked at me as though he were searching my soul. "I am not a guru," he said. "My task in this life is to lead people to the feet of my guru. I hope you will find your guru, and that he will receive you."

The train thundered on over an iron bridge. Down in the depths the silver-grey water of a river glittered in the light of dawn. "The Ganges," said Sadananda. "Not far from here, at Rishikesh, it breaks through the mountain chain of Himalaya."

Once more I had reached Kailas, the home of Shiva.

Our train stopped at a station. "Hardvar," I read.

"One of India's seven ancient holy cities," my friend informed me. "For that matter, you have studied Sanskrit. What does Hardvar mean?"

"Of course, I know. Hari-dvara means the portal of Hari, the portal of God."

Below the railway we could see cupolas and the flat white roof of a temple. On its roof great flocks of monkeys played undisturbed. They were considered to be the helpmates and followers of Hanuman, minister of the monkeys, initiated by God.

As if by command, the monkeys swung down from the roof, and the walls, and ran after the long train, which had been set in motion again, and slowly puffed its way up the steep incline through the forest.

Delighted at the unexpected diversion the prisoners leaned out of the windows, shrieking taunting invectives to the monkeys, and threw down whatever they could find in the way of empty cigar and cigarette boxes, metal objects and tin cans, until the apes gave up the chase against humans, and turned back.

"I have lain thinking all night long about the Name of God," I said.

Sadananda nodded gladly. "Yes, I know. He who has once been overwhelmed by the magnetic power of God, by the jubilant rejoicing power of God, can never escape from it."

## CHAPTER VI

### HUMAN GOALS

The new prison camp – Reading the Bhagavata in a tool-shed – The tale of King Parikshit – Overthrow of Kali, the Dark One – Meeting with an aged brahman hermit – cursed by the brahman's son – Belated regrets – The holy Shuka – The dying king attains the goal of life – What is the highest goal? – Love greater than liberation.

The mountains were green and wet with rain. But all the beauty of the Indian landscape seemed to fade once more as we entered the double barbed-wire entrance of the new camp, dragging our baggage with us. The tangle of rusty barbed wire was like that of all the other camps we had occupied. The people crowded there were also the same as before. They had taken along all their passions, their griefs and their fates. It was not long before the grass in the crowded square was trampled down by the many feet, and the earth robbed of its luster. But the light within me had not been extinguished, it streamed forth from my heart, it hung on the Name of God which Sadananda had sung during our journey.

In the new camp, Sadananda and I were no longer together in the same barrack. Sadananda had been directed to one in the southern section, where the Buddhist monks lived. On the other hand, I had the good fortune to live alone for a while in a tool house in the northern section, near the barbed-wire fence. This was a friendly gesture on the part of the commander of the camp, and I was very much envied.

However, the four large window openings directly under the roof had no glass, and the door was cracked. The birds of the skies flew in and out as they pleased through the open spaces between the roof and the wall. Right beside the tool-shed stood the canteen common to all who lived in this section of the camp, where home brewed ale and liquor were served until late at night – which naturally did not take place noiselessly. But in spite of all these inconveniences, this proved to be a very happy time for me. For I could work.

My friend came and helped me eagerly as I tried to furnish my new retreat. Somewhere in a heap of rubbish we found a damaged table-top, and, somewhere else, two iron supports on which to place it. These had been deemed too unsteady for use in the dining-room, but they were good enough for us. We spread a blue linen cloth on the table, such as the Indian guards used as a covering. After that the table really looked splendid. Sadananda, who was very handy, stood high up on a stool which we had placed on the rickety table. I held on to the swaying scaffolding so that it should not fall down, and he nailed old sheets which I had folded and sewn together over the wide openings in the north wall, to prevent the winter winds from the mountains from blowing right in.

Quite satisfied with our efforts, we sat there on opposite sides of the table in the bare room. Sadananda was tireless in the matter of imparting his teachings to me, although even at that time he had begun to suffer great physical pain. He burned his candle at both ends, put his whole heart into his work, and at the same time tried to teach me spiritual devotion as he had learned it from his guru.

Sadananda and I began once more reading together there in the tool-shed; we read from the great work called Bhagavata, in twelve volumes, which I had become somewhat acquainted with at Shri's home. With Sadananda's help I read again, in the original language, the numerous stories related by the youth Shuka to King Parikshit, as the latter sat on the shore of the Ganges awaiting death.

"If I should be placed on an uninhabited island and be allowed the possession of only one book, I would surely choose the Bhagavata of all the books on earth," my friend remarked enthusiastically.

"Not the Bhagavadgita?"

"The Bhagavadgita, in spite of its greatness, is only a beginner's book. Where the Bhagavadgita finishes, the secrets of the Bhagavata begin. The path, Vamandas, on which you have set out is a long one. But do not tire! How often my guru lamented the fact that he had never met anyone who was prepared to devote all his strength to translating and expounding the Bhagavata. I have begun, and have spent many years doing this. But my strength is not equal to the task. Will you help me? As a beginning, try to describe in outline the tale about King Parikshit, for his fight for righteousness and justice is probably the easiest part for a Westerner to understand."

I sat in my shed and thought: the Sanskrit word parikshit means "he who has withstood the test". As Narada before, Parikshit now also plays a role in God's drama in order to teach mankind. He is one of God's eternal companions.

Parikshit's grandfather was the famous hero Arjuna, for whom his charioteer and friend Krishna revealed the Divine song called Bhagavadgita.

When King Parikshit grew up, Krishna had already left the earth. The dissension of kaliyuga had enveloped the world. Parikshit did everything in his power, in spite of this age of discord, to re-establish the justice which had been defiled on earth. He rode through all lands in his golden fighting chariot, in order to help humans to reach the three goals set by the Vedas for each life on earth: justice, prosperity, lust for all.

I laid aside the book. This was a story highly appropriate to our own times, I thought, the story of king Parikshit, who wished to make the three human goals, dharma, artha, kama – justice, prosperity, lust – accessible to all beings on earth. These are the same goals that even today are eagerly sought after by the many hundred million human beings everywhere. And where had humanity come in its efforts to reach these goals? I shuddered at the thought.

I took up the book Bhagavata again, and began reading and translating anew. I felt that I must find out how the story of King Parikshit, the tested one, developed.

Strange things followed. The king, who wished to re-establish true justice everywhere on earth, arrived at the shore of a river called Sarasvati, the river of wisdom.

There Parikshit met a dismal figure on the shore of the river, a being who bore the name Kali. Kali means “the dark one”. He was the ruler of kali-yuga, the age of dissension, in which we live today. Parikshit met Kali, the Dark One, in the form of a figure clothed like a monarch who plagued the earth with his footsteps and trampled down justice.

The earth then appeared in the form of a cow, whose eyes streamed with tears, and who begged Parikshit for help. And justice appeared in the form of a white bull, which the dark despot beat madly with an iron staff. The wicked one had already succeeded in paralyzing three of the feet of the bull with the blows of his iron staff. The first foot of the white bull of dharma was the power of the judge to see clearly in meditation. The Dark One had already paralyzed this foot completely. The second and third feet of the bull of justice were the purity of heart, compassion, and mercy of the judge. These feet, too, had been paralyzed by Kali. With difficulty the bull tried to hold himself up on the one foot that was left, the foot of truth. An arduous searching for truth still exists among us, even in the age of dissension.

The story continued that Parikshit drew his bow and approached this terrible being. Kali cast off the unseemly ruler’s mantle. For he was no real king; he was cowardly and ill at ease, he was low-minded and a shudra. He begged for mercy as he writhed on the ground clasping the feet of Parikshit. “Wherever I flee, I shall always see thy bow flashing over me,” he groaned. “Oh, grant me, like all others, a refuge.”

“Even you shall not plead in vain for my protection,” answered Parikshit. “In gambling-houses, in brothels, in slaughtering-houses, in taverns, and in the hearts of all greedy men, you may dwell. These may be your five asylums.”

Parikshit was convinced that now he had bound the Dark One in abysses from which he could not escape. But he was mistaken.

Shortly after the apparent victory over the Dark age, King Parikshit one day was out hunting in a forest. It would have been a serious crime for a brahman to hunt animals, but, according to the rules of the warrior caste, this is a sport that is permitted and considered chivalrous. The king had followed game a long time, and he was tired and thirsty. In vain he had sought for a spring or a stream in the hot, dried-up forest of briars. Not a drop of water was to be found. Tortured by thirst, he came upon the twig hut of a hermit and entered it in the hope of finding something to drink.

There in the dusk sat an old man with his legs crossed, his back rigid, his eyes

half-closed, deeply lost in meditation, almost without breathing.

Parikshit, whose tongue was dry and cracked with thirst, begged him: "Give me something to drink."

The old man did not answer. He did not even invite the king to sit down on a mat or elsewhere. He did not ask him to bathe his tired dusty feet. He invited him to take nothing to drink. He broke all the rules of hospitality which King Parikshit had established on earth. An ugly thought crept like a snake into the heart of the king: Perhaps the old man is only pretending to be lost in meditation, because he considers himself superior to me, because he, a brahman, does not wish to wait on one of the warrior caste. A wild anger, the like of which he had never known, rose within him. As he turned to go, he happened to see a dead snake lying on the floor. He took up the dead body of the creature with the point of his bow, and threw it disdainfully about the neck of the old man. The latter did not move a muscle. With heavy steps, King Parikshit left the hut.

The young son of the brahman, a proud, beautiful boy, was playing with some other children nearby when this happened. When the boy observed the infamy inflicted on his father, he was distressed at the fact that a man of warrior caste could break the commandment of respect for brahmans. Wildly excited, he shouted to his playmates: "Oh, what injustice prevails among the rulers of the earth in this age! Since almighty Krishna is no longer here to punish the offender, I shall do so myself ... You shall see!"

In his wrath, the boy recited an incantation and uttered a curse on King Parikshit: "On the seventh day from now shall the prince of snakes by my command bite to death the man who has broken the law and dishonoured my father." Then he ran home, and when he saw that his father still sat with the dead snake hanging about his neck, he wept loudly in his distress.

The wise man heard his son's weeping, and he caught sight of the dead snake hanging down over his shoulder. Gently he removed the dead body, and asked: "Why are you weeping, my child?" The boy related what had happened. "My child, my child, what have you done!" wailed the father. "Oh, my child, you have committed a great crime without knowing it. You have invoked a severe punishment for a slight mistake. This noble king was suffering from hunger, thirst and exhaustion. And you have dared to judge the monarch who, according to the will of God, preserves justice on earth. Oh, may almighty and ever-present God forgive you for the sin, which in your ignorance you have committed against one dedicated to God!"

Meanwhile, Parikshit was having bitter regrets. "Oh, how stupidly I behaved towards the holy man. Something terrible will surely happen to me in the way of punishment. May that punishment be prompt and severe, in order to wipe away my sin."

While he was pondering over this, he heard about the curse that the brahman's

son had uttered. Without the slightest hesitation, Parikshit abdicated, handing over the throne to his son. He surrendered all his treasure and his flourishing, well-ordered kingdom. He left his beautiful wife. He denied all worldly things, and made a promise to fast the last seven days of his life. Everything that previously had seemed to be of importance – justice, prosperity and lust – now appeared to be a heap of ashes. He thought no longer about earthly laws. He thought about things that are far above laws and non-laws. Parikshit sat on the shore of the river Ganges and began to meditate.

Just then a crowd of holy men with their disciples came down to the river. Parikshit bowed low before them. He hailed each of them in turn. And when all of them had seated themselves, he stood before them with his hands clasped together, saying: “Ye wise men, and thou Ganges river, ye should know that I have sought refuge with God, that my heart now belongs to Him. Let the snake bite me without any stir. Ye shall sing the songs of God, who penetrates all things!”

“We shall remain with this man who is a devotee of God,” said the holy men, “until he lays aside his body and enters that world where there is no longer any error.”

“Help me to spend the last days of my life worthily,” pleaded the king. “Teach me what he shall do who stands at death’s door!”

Just then, young Shuka, the son of great Vyasa, came smilingly on his way. He wandered over the earth without desire. No caste mark could be seen on him, nor did he bear the costume of a monk or a penitent. He was naked. The vault of heaven was his only garment. He was surrounded by a swarm of children. He looked like a youth of sixteen, but the holy men knew well the radiance that steamed forth from him, and they arose respectfully.

Parikshit bowed low before the newcomer, and invited him to sit down. Then the king threw himself on the ground before Shuka, who was resplendent among the holy as the moon is among the stars, and he prayed him to answer his question: “What shall a person do, who is standing at death’s door? What shall he listen to? What shall he bear in mind? Whom shall he adore? What shall he meditate upon?”

“You have asked the most important of all questions,” said Shuka. “Your question will be of credit to the whole world. He who knows nothing of the atma asks a thousand questions, and strives to know a thousand different things. And meanwhile, life is going by, at night during sleep, and corruptible pleasures, in the daytime during the strife for corruptible things. But the question you have asked is loved by them who know the atma. It speaks of the final goal.”

Now Shuka began to instruct the king about the indestructible innermost being within all creatures, the atma. And he taught him the atma’s true foundation, God. He led the listener to Mahavishnu, of whom it is said: like sun-drenched streams of dust-specks floating through an open window, the innumerable systems of worlds float in and out of Mahavishnu’s pores. When Mahavishnu exhales, worlds come to

be; when he inhales, they are destroyed. But there will never be an end to the birth and destruction of these worlds. For Mahavishnu never ceases to breathe.

Shuka led his listener still farther, through the ocean of primordial cause, and through the endless ocean of the light of consciousness into God's inner realm. For seven days Shuka related to the man, who was awaiting death, of Krishna, who dwells in His own kingdom, and once every day of Brahma descends on earth.

"Hunger plagues me no longer, although it is a long time since I stopped eating," said Parikshit. "I feel no thirst any longer, although I have ceased drinking water. I desire nothing other than to hear more and more about Krishna. Every word about Krishna that you speak is like nectar to me."

After seven days Shuka went on his way. He walked along naked, dancing and singing the praise of Krishna. Children ran after him. The mermaids that played in the river were not embarrassed in the presence of him, with only the vault of heaven as a garment. In his holy innocence Shuka did not differentiate between man and woman.

During this time Parikshit sat listening on the shore of the Ganges. And when the poisonous snake came and bit him to death, so that in a moment his body was burnt to ashes, Parikshit did not notice this, for he himself was already in the kingdom of God. He had not asked for release from the curse, had not prayed to be allowed to live, although Shuka could easily have freed him from the curse. He only prayed to hear more and more about God. And thus the curse of the brahman's son came to be an infinite blessing for him. Because of the curse, Krishna came to him and bestowed upon him Divine love, the most priceless treasure to be had.

The next day Sadananda came again. Quite unexpectedly he appeared in my room. He did not like to make appointments, and even in the prison camp he was as free as a bird. "Well, Vamandas," he called. "It looks as if you have been working. Have you thought about the goals of human beings?"

"Oh, yes, I have. The true human goals are not dharma, artha, kama – justice, prosperity, lust – but liberation from the eternal circle of births and deaths. Mukti is the human goal ... Through his love for Krishna, King Parikshit attained liberation and entered Divine existence."

Sadananda looked at me sadly. "Do you not yet understand, are you still entangled in Shankaracharya's system which you learned from Shri? Do you not see how terrible it must seem to a Bhakta that anyone can seek the love of God, as Shankaracharya has expounded it, as a means for attaining liberation? And then, if he has attained the knowledge, if he knows that he is one with the Brahman, then he should let his love for God cool off and quiet down. Then he can take the picture of the personal God which he no longer needs, and throw it in the river, as a final illusion. He himself is now the great Brahman."

"But in the story of Parikshit, I think it is said that he becomes the infinite Brahman. Is not becoming Brahman the highest goal?"

“No,” said Sadananda shortly. “You know the verse from the last song in the Gita: ‘brahmabhutah prasannatma ... He who has realized the nature of his atma as being of the same quality as the Brahman, one whose atma is infused with the power of God and no longer grieves, and no longer desires’ ... Well, continue reading it yourself.”

I read: “ ‘... he attains the highest love, the highest bhakti, for Me’.”

“That means,” explained my friend, “he who has realized his affinity with the Brahman, and who no longer grieves and no longer desires, but who does not remain here, preferring in his great longing to serve and love ever more, to penetrate farther, he attains the highest bhakti for God. Krishna speaks thus. The final goal is not mukti or liberation. The true bhakta, like Parikshit, laughs at such an ideal. Here in the book Bhagavata it says: ‘God bestows mukti easily, but He seldom bestows bhakti.’ Spontaneous, unmotivated love of God, Divine love, for love’s own sake, that is the highest human goal.”

The real approach to the love of God, however, is to strive for bhakti from the very start, and avoid mukti as a tigress that wants to swallow your atma, that wants to devour the atma’s natural inclination to love and to serve God. If an atma completely has drowned himself in the ocean of Brahman, it is only Krishna Himself that can lift Him out from that terrible state, where no service of God is possible.

Sadananda came up to me and looked at me with flashing eyes. He seized me by the shoulders and shook me, and recited words from the Upanishads, so that they pierced me like lightning. These were the words: “Arise! Awake! and do not cease until the goal is reached. Svasti!” ... Then he went away.

But still the crashing lightning of love penetrated my being: as if for a minute it tore away from my innermost self all earthly coverings. “Svasti” ... that was an ancient Indian greeting that meant: sva—asti, the Self is, the atma is, the atma, filled with God’s power and love, is!

## CHAPTER VII

### THE STREAM OF DIVINE LOVE

Narayana, the first teacher of Love – Brahma’s song – Narada, the wanderer –  
Foundation of the world of Maya – Krishna Chaitanya.

I sat in my shed before the table covered with papers. The roaring of a mountain stream sounded through the night. I thought of the stream of Divine love, flowing inexhaustibly out of God’s realm, and streaming, unnoticed by the great majority, through our world of shadows.

The first guru to teach Divine love was Narayana, God in His almighty, majestic aspect. He performed the initiation for the creator Brahma, who shaped the world according to God’s plan. When an atma fit for the office of Brahma awoke after the long night of sleep called world dissolution, he was surrounded by darkness. He did not know where he was. He did not know that he was in the calyx of a lotus flower, whose stem grew out of the navel of all-penetrating Vishnu. The darkness stretched out around him. Troubled by this, Brahma arose and found his way upwards in the calyx of the lotus. He wandered thus a thousand years, and yet reached no boundary. Still troubled, he turned back and wandered down towards the lotus stem for a thousand years; still he found no bottom.

Exhausted and discouraged, Brahma sat down with his legs crossed in the pose for meditation, and tried to receive the knowledge of his mission in a serving state of mind, focused on God. Then Narayana appeared and gave Brahma the four seed-verses of the Bhagavata and instructions. He showed him His own realm and the realm of Maya and that everything depends on God as its source. While the builder of our universe later performed his difficult task within the boundaries of time and space, he was still able to remember God and never to forget Him.

At a much later occasion in Brahma’s life he even got the grace of beholding Krishna as He is in Himself in His Own realm of unrestricted exhilaration and joy, Goloka, which is a deeper reality than Narayana’s realm of unrestricted power and majesty, Vaikuntha. He then sang of the Divine world without fate, where no suffering lay at the bottom of every pleasure, where time is not painfully divided into past and present, but where eternal presence prevails, and where everything is woven of God’s love. Brahma sang of Krishna’s Own kingdom, Goloka:

“Every word is a song, every step a dance,  
And the flute, Krishna’s beloved friend,  
Resounds from his lips.  
Time, which flies so fast here,  
Stands still there.

Only a few of the wise who wander upon earth  
Know of this land.”

After being initiated by Narayana, Brahma, the creator, initiated his disciple and spiritual son Narada and gave him the four original verses of the Bhagavata.

My first teacher, Shri, and even Sadananda, had often told me about Narada. Narada is one of the great bhaktas, who, out of compassion for the unhappy beings who have turned away from God, wander about in the changeable worlds in order somewhere possibly to find a soul that is ready to receive the gift of loving devotion to Krishna. Just as the sun follows its course in the firmament, above the righteous and the unrighteous alike, the messengers of God wander about in their Divine purity, and wherever they come they bring the radiance of God’s kingdom, where they belong. What does it matter to them whether the actions of a being are good or evil, according to the world’s opinion, whether he is blessed or cursed? They see only the longing of the heart. What does it matter to them whether the ground they tread resembles, according to earthly conception, a heaven or a hell? They enter prisons, madhouses, concentration camps. No murderer, no woman of the streets, no lunatic, no child in the mother’s womb, none are excluded from the possibility of receiving Divine love, and being welcomed into the circle of God’s eternal companions.

In his wanderings, Narada once came to the dwelling of a hermit high up in the Himalayas, on the shore of a gushing river. There, near the source of the Ganges, sat Vyasa, the eternal servant of God, gazing depressedly into the whirling waters, playing a role in God’s play in order to teach the world.

Vyasa greeted the messenger of God reverently.

“Why are you so sad?” asked Narada.

“There is something which I am thinking of,” answered Vyasa in a troubled voice. “So far I have described religious laws and different forms of religion. I have succeeded in arranging the Vedas. I have even succeeded in arranging the Mahabharata and the Gita. I have condensed the essence of Upanishadic wisdom in the Brahmasutras. And yet my soul is not at peace.”

“In your beautiful works you have not yet spoken of God as He is in Himself and the religion that is directly related to Him,” Narada explained to him. “You must receive and offer yet another work that pleases God Himself and those that are His own bhaktas, then you will be fulfilled.”

Narada then initiated Vyasa and gave him the four verses of the Bhagavata in a nut-shell.

Singing and playing his lute, he then went on his way. And Vyasa sat on the shore of the Ganges and meditated on the four verses. He saw God and His relation to Maya and how all the worlds of Maya have their foundation in Him. Then he arranged the eighteen thousand stanzas of the work that speaks only of God, of

Bhagavan, and which is therefore called Bhagavata. “The sweetest fruit on the tree of the Vedas, the nectar of immortality, a fruit without seed or skin” – thus the Bhagavata is described.

Vyasa related the Bhagavata for his son, Shuka. The youth, who had lived in the bosom of God since childhood. Shuka loved to sing these stanzas, which overflowed with the praise of God’s love. And he in turn gave Parikshit, the righteous king, this work, when the latter sat beside the Ganges with the curse hanging over him, awaiting death.

Thus in India the tradition of Divine love continued, from teachers to disciples and their disciples, in an unbroken sequence through the centuries. The revelation of God wandered through the darkness and remained alive through the ages.

When, according to the Scriptures, Krishna once more descended to earth, about five hundred years ago, in the form of Krishna Chaitanya, He, too, sought a guru, in order to follow the venerable tradition.

The guru recognized immediately the exalted being that dwelt within the golden radiant youth who humbly approached him, and, rejoicing, he gave the avatar who had descended to earth the initiation he asked for. And Chaitanya departed reverently, and on his way, intoxicated with joy sang for three days this stanza from the Bhagavata: “Even I, even I shall stride through the terrible ocean of the changeable world and reach the other shore.”

Chaitanya brought to the world a clear conception of the Scriptures that had been forgotten by then. And the stream of Divine love flowed through India like the waters of life, hidden and yet not hidden, up to our own era. The hermit Gaura Kishora, a naked ascetic dressed only in a loin cloth, gave the initiation to Bhakti-Siddhanta Sarasvati, who had studied in the fields of astronomy and higher mathematics. The latter gave the initiation to a disciple who came from Europe, whom he called Sadananda.

When I sat in the Indian prison camp, which was filled with noise and discord, Sadananda came and in his compassion he too gave a drop of Divine love ... to me.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE PIGSTY

A dream in prison – Who was Odysseus? – Singing Sanskrit verses – Tümpelbaum, the unwelcome newcomer – Circe’s pigsty – Tricking Circe, the enchantress – Fire in camp – Tümpelbaum’s change.

*(Ulysses at the home of Circe)*

“... Then by Athena the goddess, the daughter of Zeus the Almighty,  
Taller and stronger to view he was made, while down from his head fell,  
Clustering thickly the locks of his hair, as the flower hyacinthine.

*Odyssey, VI, 229–31*

Thus when Athena had spoken, her wand she extended and touched him;  
All of the fair smooth flesh on the limbs of his body she withered,  
Shrivelled the yellow hair from his head, and the whole of his person,  
Every limb, with the skin of a man right aged she covered.

*Odyssey, XIII, 427–30*

... Spake, and her golden wand she extended, and lo, as it touched him,  
Firstly a fair fresh mantle around him was cast, and a doublet  
Covered his breast, and renewed was his body in stature and manhood;  
Dark once more was the tint of his skin, and in face he was fuller;  
Blue-black bristled the beard once more on his chin as aforetime.”

*Odyssey, XVI, 172–6*

Even before the removal of our camp, I had a dream that set me thinking. I lay in darkness, as many times before, in the row of sleepers in the prison barrack. Those lying next to me were groaning in their sleep. I tried to remember the words of comfort in a Sanskrit hymn which my friend had written down for me. The words came back to me:

“The knot of the heart  
(the knot in the form of the false ‘I’ and ‘mine’,  
which binds the atma)  
will dissolve by itself.  
All doubts shall be cleared away  
and even his karma,  
his deeds, and the inevitable consequences of his deeds,

shall disappear,  
when God is seen directly in his atma.”

“What is the atma?” I reflected. “As a man throweth away old garments and putteth on new, even so the soul in the body, the atma, having quitted its old mortal frame, entereth into others which are new...” Thus it was written in the Bhagavadgita. “This soul cannot be divided by weapons, the fire burneth it not, the water corrupteth it not, the wind drieth it not away ... for it is all-pervading, inconceivable, eternal.”

Moaning, my comrades turned again and again in their sleep, and the lousy wooden cots creaked. Often the room in the dark barrack was filled with a noise that made one think that a nightmare had seized the sleepers.

After a while I must have fallen asleep. In my dream I wandered through many lands, peeping curiously into all the holes of the earth, where wild animals attacked me. I ran through the night. The path became narrower and led steeply upwards. The sea flowed below me. I leaped through the air. Below me were clear mighty crystal waves. I fell and cried out in my fall.

From the depths of a great distance I heard the voice of my wife calling: “You are doing all that out of wantonness, *Odysseus!*”

I awoke at the sound of the word *Odysseus*. The rest of the night I lay thinking: *Odysseus?* I must find out more about *Odysseus!*

The next day I succeeded in finding in the camp a worn copy of a translation of Homer’s *Odyssey*. Astonished, as if I were reading it for the first time, I read the familiar text that had been so dear to me in my boyhood, so dear that I had almost believed myself to have been present in the Greek camp at Troy and in Ulysses’ tent and ship.

With a beating heart I read how Ulysses changed his form, his hair was blond, and again it became dark like a hyacinth, his head was bald, and later became covered with curly locks, he was old, became young, old again, and young again, his body grew in vigour, shrivelled, became vigorous again, he was driven from shipwreck to shipwreck, even down into the region of the dead, and again up into the light; Ulysses, who constantly wore different clothes, those of a king, or those of a beggar, again those of a king, who was wrapped in a different body as the goddess waved her magic wand.

I reflected: The many, as it seemed, tissues of lies, the many earthly careers in the past which Ulysses tirelessly related, were these perhaps quite true? Was he born not only in Ithaca? Was he born in Crete and other places as well? As the Bhagavadgita expresses it: “As a man throweth away old garments and putteth on new, even so the soul quitteth its worn body and enters another which is new.”

Was I, was every soul on earth, like Ulysses, a wanderer from life to life?

I read on to the end. But even on the last page of the book the wanderings of Ulysses had not ended. He was destined in the future to wander farther, in a far-away mythical land where the stormy might of the wild sea, his own mind's storm, would no longer reach him ... But whether he succeeded in entering the kingdom of endless Divine peace, which the Hindus call Shanti, is not related in Homer's *Odyssey*.

The words of the last chapter of the book faded before my eyes. Since I was reading out-of-doors in a corner of the sports field, in the dazzling sunlight, I had put on dark sun-glasses in order to be able to read in the blinding light of the Indian sun. Now the smoked glasses had become misty on the inside.

I took them off. Before me rose a wall of twisted barbed wire, and behind that a second one just like it. No, Odysseus was certainly not in the land of Shanti, in the kingdom of Divine peace.

In the space between the walls of iron thorns, the soldiers who guarded the camp night and day strode forwards and backwards with raised bayonets. Behind me there was noise and shouting. A football match was in progress. Somebody hit me between the shoulders with his fist. "Man, how can you sit there so unconcernedly!" My comrades cried indignantly: "How can anyone turn his back on a game like this! Think of it! The East Barracks against the West Barracks – the cup-final!" Shaking his head, as if doubting my sanity, he turned away.

Sadananda came joyfully to the corner of the field where I was sitting. The monk's gown which he had dyed himself gleamed brightly in the sun, as did his narrow ivory face and his clean-shaven head. "Come along, Vamandas," he smiled, calling me by my Indian name. "This game will soon be over. We can take a stroll."

The two of us strode slowly along the barbed-wire fence. Sadananda took me by the hand for a minute. "I see that your soul, your atma, is deeply stirred. Have you noted the verse from the Bhagavata-Purana, which I once recited for you?"

Thoughtfully I repeated in Sanskrit:

"The knot of the heart *shall be cut apart ...*  
when God is seen directly in his atma."

My companion nodded assent, and gave me a glance of approval. "You will master it. It is only the rhythm that must be improved. And it is not enough only to dream of the atma, one must live in it, quite wide-awake."

As he moved, dancing rather than walking, Sadananda sang the Sanskrit verse once more.

Shrill whistles called us to the evening meal. We joined our many comrades, who were hurriedly making their way towards the kitchen, their tin plates in their hands.

Once Sadananda and I celebrated a festival day in the tool-shed. With our legs crossed under us, we sat beside each other on the newly-scrubbed floor and sang the Sanskrit verses, which praised Krishna, the hidden God, who from time to time sends down to earth the great saviours, the avatars, in order to awaken the soul by one means or another.

But the last verse we sang was written by the avatar of our own age of discord, Krishna Chaitanya Himself. My friend, who was usually so careful about demonstrating his feelings, now sang loudly and joyfully, not at all troubled by the fact that every sound could be heard outside. He sang:

“Not riches, not noble birth,  
Not beautiful women, nor the art of poetry,  
Do I desire, O Lord of the world.  
But grant me birth after birth  
Unmotivated heartfelt love  
O my God, unto Thee!”

A coarse voice, full of conceit and self-satisfaction, bawled something outside. Angrily it approached us. A heavy body bumped up against the door of our shed, and somebody shouted: “Those confounded niggers and their swinish religion! They should be flogged to death!” Swearing and hurling insults, the man went on his way, filling the camp with his shouts.

On the following day this man, who was on good terms with one of the non-commissioned officers, succeeded in obtaining an order to move into my tool-shed as my room-mate. He arrived panting, his boxes and bundles with him. His old trousers now decked my walls. His camp-bed, with his dusty boots beneath it, now occupied the corner where Sadananda had sat singing God’s Name. The work-table, which we had so much trouble in putting together, was now chiefly Tümpelbaum’s. It was no longer Sadananda who sat opposite me at this table, but Tümpelbaum. When I looked up from my work, I looked into his spying, distended eyes. “Lock up all your things,” Sadananda warned me. “When your are out, Tümpelbaum will probably search through all your trunks.”

The first time I opposed my new room-mate, he came up to me, straddling, and standing so close that I could see every detail in his fat red face, the swollen mouth with its hanging underlip drawn into a crooked sneer, and his warm breath smelling of alcohol. He and I were at odds because he wanted to forbid my friend Sadananda entrance to our shed. “Listen now,” he shrieked. “Listen now, once for all: that nigger is never to enter my door. You will soon see who is master in this room. Do you know what you are, you, you – you are a heathen! But I, I am a Christian!”

“You don’t even know what religion, what Christianity, is.”

“I don’t know what religion, what Christianity is?” Tümpelbaum gasped for

breath. Frothing with anger, he sat down.

“You must not let him get the upper hand!” Sadananda encouraged me. “You must master the situation. It must be possible for you to work in peace even in the presence of this person.”

“He is no human being,” I burst out in my distress. “He is a dog that pokes his nose into everything. You have never spent a night by his side. The whole room is filled not only with the exhalations from his body, but even with the unclean sexual images that are always around him.”

“Tümpelbaum is not a dog, he is a pig,” remarked Sadananda drily. “But you must not lose control of the matter. Hang up a blanket between your beds, so that his exhalations cannot reach you.”

It was dark in the tool-shed. Tümpelbaum lay on his back, sleeping with his mouth open, and snoring heavily. He must have adenoids in his fleshy nose, I pondered. He should go to the hospital and let them cut the adenoids out of his snout! His breathing came in heavy gusts, like a storm at sea. I lay half-way between dreaming and waking, and was not in India now. About me was the wind-swept sea described in the *Odyssey*, the ancient epic of the Greek seer.

While Tümpelbaum snored like a snorting pig, I, like Ulysses, walked in my dreams through the rotting forests of Homer’s enchanted island Aiaie. About me the forest kept withering and becoming green alternately. The ground was hidden by mounds of mouldering leaves. I know that it was the forest which the Indians call *samsara*, or the world of change. I wandered past enchanted animals who looked at me with sorrowful eyes, seeking my lost companions who had been turned into swine by the enchantress Circe.

Hermes, the Greek messenger of the gods, came towards me. He was tall and slender, and moved swiftly with almost dancing steps. He took me by the hand kindly, and said:

“Whither, unfortunate, thus dost thou wander alone in the highlands,  
Strange to the place? It is surely thy comrades that yonder at Circe’s  
Closely imprisoned as pigs lie wallowing deeply in litter.  
Comest thou hither perchance to release them?”

Hermes pointed to the mounds of mouldering leaves which lay on the ground:

“See here! Bearing this powerful charm, in the palace of Circe  
Enter – and thus from thy head shall be wended the day of destruction ...  
Black at the root; but the flower was even as milk in its whiteness.  
Moly ’tis called by the gods, and to dig it is difficult labour,  
Labour for mortals, I mean – but to gods are possible all things.”

Not until now did I recognize the messenger of the gods who spoke to me. He wore an orange-coloured Indian monk's gown. It was Sadananda. "Vamandas," he said, "Do you know what the word 'moly' is in Sanskrit?"

"Moly – that is probably the word mula: root, source, ground."

"That is right," nodded Sadananda. "And who is the root of all things, their source, their ground?"

"Krishna," I answered without hesitating. "God."

"And the shining flower?"

"That is of course the flower of the world, which grows up out of the hidden ground."

"Never forget for a minute that Krishna is the root of everything that exists," warned my friend. "Then the enchantress Maya cannot harm you."

He vanished on his light feet, and I wandered on towards the house that lay deep in the forest. A sweet song could be heard within, and the house shook as the enchantress tramped her loom, weaving the web of the world.

How I laughed to myself as Circe opened the shining door with a welcoming smile, and invited me to come in and dine, slyly mixing the poison in my wine. I thought of the source of the world, the Divine root, and drank fearlessly.

Laughing, the beautiful betrayer hit me with her staff, and commanded scornfully: "Off to the sty! Go crouch thee along with the rest of thy fellows!"

But he who possessed the root Moly could not be harmed by the poison of the sensual world. Circe shouted in amazement:

"Surely I marvel that drinking the potion thou feel'st not enchantment.  
Never before hath another of mortals resisted the potion,  
None that hath drunk it – when once by the door of his teeth it had entered.  
Surely within thy breast is a soul too strong for bewitchment."

I rejoiced: "Happily my heart is indestructible. My inner heart is indeed an eternal soul, an atma."

I looked deep into the eyes of the enchantress Maya, and she revealed herself as she was. I recognized her, and she recognized me, the atma within me. I lay in her delightful bed, but she was powerless to do me any harm. Thus the night passed. The verses of the *Odyssey* streamed about me:

"While that the nymph threw round her a garment of glistening whiteness,  
Delicate, lovely, and over her waist then fastened a girdle,  
Beautiful, fashioned of gold, and her head in a hood she enclosed."

The colours of the earth were reappearing. Tümpelbaum lay snoring in the morning light, his face swollen, his mouth drawn crookedly to one side. Had I only dreamt

that I was disenchanted? Were we still in the pigsty? Must Tümpelbaum and I, and all my comrades, be changed into real human beings? Through the open window I heard the whistling of the sleepy soldiers who paced between the two barbed-wire fences of the camp incessantly, and signalled to one another. They, too, were enchanted, and must carefully keep their enchanted comrades in their respective sties.

Fire broke out that day in one of the neighbouring sections of the camp, that of the Italian Fascists. The thatch roof of a large barrack was in flames. Fascinated by the sight, Tümpelbaum stood close to the fence watching the fire and the crowd of prisoners who tried to save their few belongings. "All we need is a strong east wind," he shouted happily, "so that the whole camp can burn down, all of it, all of it." He stretched out his arms as if he would gladly welcome a fire that would destroy the whole world.

The fire seemed to strengthen Tümpelbaum's self-assurance perceptibly. He began to announce excitedly, as we sat in the shed, what he thought of the world, how he would like to make a clean sweep of everything. Corruption existed everywhere, among the Allies as well as among the Axis Powers. He raged against the Nazis and the Fascists, in whose section fire had broken out; he raged against his own comrades, the Anti-Nazis, who were confined in the same barbed-wire cage as himself, and who, in his opinion, were not true Anti-Nazis. He showered his contempt on the Christian priests, the interned missionaries, he ridiculed the Jews and the few German and Italian Buddhists in the camp. Only he himself remained finally in solitary greatness. Then he described delightedly, licking his thick lips as he spoke, how he would like to punish his opponents after the victorious conclusion of the war. "Pour melted lead into their mouths, skin them alive, hang them! ... You, too, you wretch, will be hanged," he prophesied with satisfaction.

"You, too, poor fellow, are a bewitched atma," I thought. "But I must not forget that. I must always see the atma in you."

Enraged at my silence, Tümpelbaum began searching noisily in one of his trunks. He wanted to find some tool, but did not succeed. He happened to pick up a framed photograph, the portrait of a little boy. He looked at the picture a long while, and then carefully nailed it up on the wall beside his bed. "My child, my little son who died when he was only three years old," he said, as he noticed the look of sympathy on my face. Then, quite unexpectedly, he began telling me about himself, about his youth in northern Germany, and his disappointments, about the many trades he had tried in Siam and China and other countries in the East. He had been a technician, a policeman, teacher in a Chinese school. He spoke of the woman who was the mother of the dead boy. He, too, had had a child. He, too, had loved a woman. He knew nothing of her fate. She was an American nurse in the Philippines who had been taken prisoner by the Japanese.

From that day my room-mate's behaviour towards me changed. "Good mor-

ning,” he greeted me heartily and a bit rowdily every morning when he woke. One day he surprised me by laying some razor blades on the table, and asking me to accept them as a gift. Razor blades were a luxury in the camp.

He even managed to behave politely towards Sadananda after this, when the latter began coming again, instructing me in a hushed voice. But Tümpelbaum was embarrassed in Sadananda’s presence, and he usually vanished quickly from the shed, leaving us alone. This exaggerated courtesy, however, was not quite sincere.

“You had a visitor here while you were out, the doctor was here,” he informed me once. Sadananda had come during my absence to fetch a Sanskrit book he had lent me, which he happened to need at the time. Tümpelbaum had followed my movements triumphantly as I searched among the books and manuscripts on my side of the table. “Aha, is something missing?” he grinned. “Ha, ha, the doctor carried something away with him. You must keep better watch over your friend!”

## CHAPTER IX

### THE MILK-WHITE GODDESS

On parole – Singing the Name of God in the woods – Following crowds of children  
– The temple of the Devi – Durga the jaileress.

During the latter years of our imprisonment we were permitted by the authorities in the camp to take leave of absence on certain days, and make what were termed “excursions on our honour”. We were required to sign in advance a written agreement to return to the camp punctually at a given time, and not to seek contact with any Indians. The violation of this agreement was to be punished with a long term of jail.

“Go out into the woods and sing the Name of God,” said Sadananda. “Even if you have not yet received initiation in God’s Name, you can sing it. You know so many of the Names of God from the Bhagavata and other writings. Sing the Names and put into the song all your longing to be able one day really to serve God in His own kingdom, in confident, loving devotion. Sing: ‘Krishna! Krishna! Krishna!’ The vibrations of your song will move the sleeping atma in stones, in flowers, in birds and animals on your way, and their souls will awake for a moment and remember their true nature: to love and serve God for all eternity ... This is the redemption of the earth.”

How wonderful it was to take these excursions with Sadananda! They were only too few, however, for even then he was not well. After the roll-call on the sports field, and the repetition of this performance at the exit, we went out through the two barbed-wire gates to the open road. We went in single file along the narrow path between wet, flowering bushes that brushed up against our legs, crossed the tall grass of the meadows fresh with morning dew, and followed the river whose waters now flowed abundantly over the gravel during the rainy season. We waded barefoot in the crystal-clear, cold, running water of the streams. It was easy to shake off and put on again the Indian sandals that were fastened with only a strap over the big toe. We walked through ripening wheatfields, in which the stalks made one think of soldiers holding lances, as they beat against each other above our heads. To the north we glimpsed a mountain ridge now and then, behind the ears of grain or the leafy tree-tops.

I learned to see the world as my friend saw it. He taught me to love the Indian earth and the Indian rivers even more than I had done before. This earth is sacred, because since time immemorial Divine saviours have traversed it with their bare feet again and again. The rivers are sacred because the feet of Divine saviours have repeatedly waded through their waters.

“The true greatness of India does not lie in her natural wealth nor in her great

population, not in her art nor her history,” explained Sadananda. “India’s greatness lies in the fact that time after time the Divine saviours, emanating from and returning to God, have chosen this land as a dwelling-place. Only once has such a saviour come to the West, overflowing with the power of God. Do you know whom I mean?”

I nodded assent.

I thought of the holy bare feet that had walked through the waters of the Jordan river to the christening. I thought of how Christ’s feet had wandered over the mountains of Galilee, over the great ashlar of the temple courtyard, and over the hard cobblestones in the narrow alleys of Jerusalem towards Golgotha.

From the village nearby a swarm of ragged children came running towards us; they barred the road and stood there begging: “Sahib, cigarettes! Sahib, cigarettes!” They knew that we who were interned had no cash. Sadananda laughed and gave them sweets instead of cigarettes. Before leaving for our excursions, he generally bought sweets for the children with the special paper money of the camp. And now he began to clap his hands and sing the Name Rama, the Name of the great Divine saviour who lifted up the fallen, redeemed and purified them:

“Raghupati Raghava Raja Ram  
Patita Pavana, Sita Ram.”

And the whole troop of children marched along with us, singing and rhythmically clapping their hands. Some years later, when Sadananda had lain ill a long time in the hospital of the camp, and I made these excursions alone, the children would come running towards me asking: “Where is the Svami? Where is the Svami?” and they sang:

“Raghupati Raghava Raja Ram ...”

The singing of the children could be heard in the distance just now. Sadananda and I were resting near a spring. A Brahman came riding down the mountain slope on his donkey. When he reached the spring he dismounted, washed himself from top to toe, rinsed his mouth and drank, mumbling his mantras the whole time. We knew that he was singing the ancient formula that should change the water of the spring into the same water as that which flowed in India’s seven holy rivers:

“O, Ganga! O, thou Yamuna!  
Godavari! Sarasvati!  
Narbada! Sindhu! Kaveri!  
Make your dwelling in this water!”

Sadananda, too, mumbled this invocation to the seven holy rivers before drinking. Without letting his hands contact the water, he took the running water into his mouth. He bathed in a crevice below a little fall. Diving and rising, spurting and spouting, he sang gaily while he bathed: “Shivo’ham, Shivo’ham, I am Shiva, I am Shiva, I, like Shiva, am Krishna’s servant.” Many Bhaktas in India worship the exalted Shiva, not as the Lord of the world, not as the Destroyer, not as the Lord of the yogis, but rather as the ideal for a bhakta. In his innermost self, Shiva is a bhakta of Krishna, and meditates on Krishna with the deepest longing. Old legends tell that the walls in the house of Shiva, Kailas, are bright with frescoes that depict scenes from the life of Krishna.

Near a group of ageing lingam stones, raised in honour of Shiva, stood a ramshackle resting-place for pilgrims and a temple dedicated to Maya, who is often called simply Devi, the goddess. The sanctuaries of Shiva and Maya generally stand near one another. The temple, surrounded by mighty mango-trees, lies on the old pilgrim road leading from the city of Hardvar to the sources of the Yamuna River high up in the regions of eternal snow. Here the great mistress of the universe bears a name that I had heard nowhere else in India. She is called Dudhya Devi, the Milk-White Goddess. This brought to my mind the dream I had had about Odysseus, and the strange words that the Greek seer Homer makes the messenger of God say to the wandering Odysseus: “Milk-White is the flower ...” Here Maya is worshipped as the milk-white mistress of the life of all the worlds.

I thought of her as the goddess Arbuda with the black countenance, before which I had stood with Shri in the cave inside Mt. Abu. And I thought of her as the giant-like, blood-red Kali in the gloomy mountain cave. Now I stood before her once again, where she had entered into daylight. She was enveloped in only a thin veil, and this time her colour was milk-white. But everywhere she was the same mysterious Maya.

According to the Indian custom, Sadananda walked three times, following the course of the sun, around the stone wall of Devi’s temple, and I followed after. She is worshipped and praised on earth under many names by those who pray for earthly gifts, for sons, for riches, for liberation from sickness.

Sadananda sat with his legs crossed a long while in the cool temple, around which Himalaya stretched in all its loveliness, with its steep forest-clad slopes, its torrents and ravines. He sang to the great Maya. It seemed as if he conversed with her.

“What did you sing to Maya?” I asked on our way home, as we walked through the forest, over meadows and grassy slopes, down the steep hills to the barbed-wire camp, where we must return at a given time. “How can one of Krishna’s bhaktas praise the mistress who bestows delusive wordly gifts?”

Sadananda smiled. “The enchantress Maya, the severe chastiser of our world, performs her task in Krishna’s service. One of her many names is Durga, which

means prison. I have told Durga, the jaileress, who serves Krishna in exile, about Krishna's hidden kingdom, which she herself does not dare to approach."

I stopped short in my amazement. The stones under my feet crumbled into gravel.

Sadananda continued: "I told Durga about Radha, who is the personification of God's power of rejoicing, and who serves Krishna with inexpressible love in his inner kingdom. Thus can a Bhakta of Krishna honour the great Maya, and bring her joy. For she is a devoted servant, a shadow of Radha."

In front of the sentry-box at the entrance of the camp the dusty crowds of home-comers were gathering. Our names were called and noted down. A guard unlocked the double-barred gate for us. Once more we were confined within the walls of barbed wire.

## CHAPTER X

### THE HOLY NIGHT

Winter in the Himalaya region – Christmas celebrations – The poetry of Novalis – Meditations on the Nativity – Parallel of the Indian legend – Jesus and Krishna – The wanderings of Chaitanya.

Winter nights at the foot of Himalaya are cold and stormy. Tümpelbaum and I often froze miserably in our draughty shed, in which the three oblong windows still had no glass. On Christmas Eve Tümpelbaum had left early, in order to celebrate the occasion in more pleasant surroundings at a drinking bout with fellows of his own kind. Therefore the way was clear for Sadananda to visit me.

It was decidedly warmer in Sadananda's barrack than in my little retreat. A fire burned gaily in the open fireplace. Yet he preferred to come to me in my cold room, so that I need not spend the holy night in loneliness.

When my friend arrived he was shivering with cold, for he did not own an overcoat. Even in winter he went about clothed in only the thin orange-coloured cotton gown. I wrapped him in blankets, and, as so often before, we sat opposite each other at the rickety table. We spoke of the Divine saviour whose blessed birth on this cold night was being celebrated all over the world. Sadananda loved Christ, and I loved Christ. But Sadananda knew Him better than I did, for he knew the ever-living Christ.

"Vamandas, take a notebook and a pencil and write," he said to me. And then I received a favour I had once asked of him. He explained to me the similarities and differences in the worship of God by both Christians and Indian bhaktas. First he spoke of the courage of faith (*Wagnis des Glaubens*), in the West as well as in India. He spoke of the simplicity of child-like devotion in Bhakti and in Christianity. He spoke of the sacrifice of worldly esteem (*Einsatz der Achtung der Welt*), of the complete change of personality in human beings (*Verwandlung des ganzen Menschen*), of the meaning of brotherhood (*Beduetung der Gemeinschaft*), of the sanctity of life ... It was the essence of a whole scientific book, perhaps even of a whole life's work, which he dictated to me that night in short, forcible sentences.

From one of the barracks there came the sound of a little bell. It was the Protestant Christmas service. A few hours later the ringing of a bell was heard in another barrack; it was the Catholic Midnight Mass. But the bell-ringing and the stillness of the night were broken again and again by disturbances and yelling. Most of the European soldiers from England and its dominions who guarded us were drunk. Most of the prisoners were drunk. From all directions, from the barracks and the canteens in the various barbed-wire enclosures, all of them hostile to one another,

and from the dark landscape outside the barbed wire, the wild clamour of drunken persons penetrated our walls.

“The poor fellows cannot solve their many problems and troubles, and therefore they get drunk,” said my friend sympathetically.

The door was wrenched open. A strong gust of wind came rushing in. My corpulent room-mate staggered into the room. Without seeming to notice our presence, Tümpelbaum vomited several times, then threw himself on his bed with all his clothes on, not even bothering to remove his boots, and began to snore.

Sadananda calmly continued as before, sitting at the table. Neither the noise outside, not the sounds emitted by the sleeping drunkard, affected us. We sat in silence a while, a happy, festive silence. “Well, what are you thinking about, Vamandas?” my friend asked earnestly a little later.

I recited slowly some lines by Novalis, which I had loved since boyhood:

*“Ein Gott für uns, ein Kind für sich,  
liebt er uns all herzlichlich.  
Aus Kraut und Stein, aus Meer und Licht  
schimmert sein kindlich Angesicht.”*

*“A God for us, a child Himself,  
He loves us dearly.  
From herbs and stones and sea and light,  
His child-like face shines forth.”*

A smile lit Sadananda’s face. “It is fine, Vamandas, that you have brought just those lines from Europe to India.” He got up and looked at me with beaming eyes. “But do you remember the prophetic verse that the seer Novalis placed before the lines you repeated just now?”

I continued gladly:

*“Geuss Vater ihn gewaltig aus.  
Gib ihn aus deinem Arm heraus!”*

*“Pour him forth, o Father, mightily.  
Send him flowing from Your arms!”*

We remained silent. Then Sadananda placed both his hands on my shoulders for a minute. “I must go now. Think of Him who on a troubled night like this descended to the dark earth. A blessed Christmas to you, Vamandas!” With light footsteps he went away and vanished out in the blackness of the night.

While my comrade Tümpelbaum slept off the effects of his drunkenness, haw-

king and gurgling right beside me, I lay on my hard bed, completely happy. I thought of the child that nearly two thousand years ago had been born in a manger, because every house and every inn of the little town of Bethlehem was filled to overflowing with boisterous guests. Humbly and fearfully, Joseph and Mary bent over the newborn child. The words spoken by the angel were imprinted in the heart of the Divine Mother. The animals in the stable breathed quietly beside the humble cradle of the child. Hardly anybody in the whole world suspected that at last the longed-for Son of God had arrived on earth. Only a few poor cowherds, led by Divine voices, came and worshipped the child. And three wise men from the East brought him their gifts.

I pondered over all the particulars of the sacred story, which is known to all of us. But I thought, too, of another holy child who descended in India thousands of years earlier. That child, too, entered the world on a dark midnight, and the scene of his coming was even more lamentable than the stable in Bethlehem. The Krishna child descended in a prison. His father and mother were chained to the prison wall with heavy iron links. A wicked king called Kamsa, who resembled the dismal king of the Jews, Herod, ruled the land at that time. He had killed all Krishna's brothers, for it had been prophesied that a son of these parents would one day dethrone and slay him.

The Bhagavata relates that Vasudeva, Krishna's father, received the Divine child first in his spirit. Then he communicated the Divine being to the spirit of his wife Devaki. While she bore the holy child, a radiance that illumined the whole house surrounded her. When the boy was born, both of the parents recognized with awe the Divine majesty of the child, and they fell down on their knees before him, singing hymns in his praise.

But although Devaki, the young mother, knew very well that her son was eternal, almighty God, her mother heart was filled with fear. Anxiously she pleaded with the newborn child: "Oh! hide Your Divine majesty, so that the terrible king cannot see who You are." Krishna obeyed the anxious mother and hid His majesty. He now looked like a helpless human child.

While the exhausted mother fell into a deep sleep, the father took the child in his arms, at Krishna's command. His chains fell away. The gates of the prison opened up before him. Vasudeva walked past the sleeping guards, and, clasping the child, went out into the dark night. The Yamuna River swelled there in front of him. His heart knew which way he should go. The waters of the river parted for him, so that he could walk with dry feet between the roaring walls of water. Unharméd he reached the opposite shore and continued his way towards the pastoral country Vraja, still carrying the child. Here, too, all were asleep. The animals slept, the people slept. The cowherd king, Nanda was asleep in his home. The cowherd queen, Yashoda, slept. She had just given birth to a daughter, but was still in a deep trance and did not know whether it was a boy or a girl that she had given birth to.

Carefully, Vasudeva entered and laid the Krishna child on her breast, and he took the daughter of the cowherd parents in his arms. He returned the same way that he had come, and laid the little girl in the arms of his sleeping wife. The gates of the prison were locked once more behind him. The child began to cry. The stupefied guards awoke and rushed to the king with the news that he had expected with fear in his heart, year after year.

Filled with grim determination, King Kamsa burst into the prison, seized the newborn child by the feet, and threw it against the stone wall in order to crush it. But the child ascended in the air. And in the enchanted night, a voice was heard: “You wretch! You thought you could kill me! I am Maya. All this has happened according to the will of God. Krishna is in safety. Woe to you, King Kamsa. You shall not escape destruction.”

The two stories now became interwoven – despite other differences. Trembling before the wrathful King Herod, who commanded that all the newborn children in Bethlehem should be killed, Mary and Joseph fled with their child to Egypt. Jesus was in safety. The child was taken safely into the temple of God, and old Simeon recognized the promised Messiah. He took Him in his arms and cried out joyfully: “Lord, allow Thy servant to go forth in peace ... For my eyes have beheld Thy splendour.”

Krishna grew up in safety in the land of the cowherds, although Kamsa sent his mighty demons across the river to destroy him. As soon as Krishna touched them, their terrible bodies fell down dead. But at the same time their real natures were freed by the touch of Krishna’s hand, or His little feet or His childish mouth. They entered into His Divine light.

Many other scenes told in the Bhagavata about Krishna’s childhood awoke in my memory. Once the little boy sat on Yashoda’s lap, and, as always, she was filled with overwhelming love as she looked at Krishna. Satisfied with his meal of mother’s milk, the child yawned sleepily. When the mother looked into the child’s open mouth, she beheld to her surprise the whole earth and the sun and the moon and the starry skies. “Who are you, Krishna?” she asked wonderingly. The child closed its mouth again and smiled up at her. And over-whelmed with mother-love, Yashoda immediately forgot what she had seen and fondled and kissed little Krishna.

Another time, Yashoda was going to bind Krishna by way of punishment. The little boy had crept up on a stool and broken a pot of butter. He had then eaten a lot of butter, and had also shared it with the monkeys. However, the cord that Yashoda was going to bind Him with was too short. Other cords did not suffice, either. She tied extra bits to it, but the cord was not yet long enough. Soon the neighbouring women stood about her surprised at her vain efforts to bind Him. The cord would not suffice. At last the boy, who stood crying, saw that his mother was trembling from her efforts that were all in vain, and that sweat was pouring from her face. He,

the Eternal One, whose infinity the greatest yogis and wise men, even in deep meditation, have been unable to fathom, felt sorry for his mother, and became an obedient child, allowing himself to be bound by the one who loved him so much, that she had spent all her efforts in her service for Him.

The door of the tool-shed was jerked open. Three drunken men stuck their heads through the opening. "Tümpelbaum! Tümpelbaum! Tümpelbaum! Come and have another drink!" they shouted. Unwillingly, Tümpelbaum grunted in his sleep and rolled on to his other side. The men began hoarsely singing a vulgar street song, then they slammed the door and tottered on, supporting one another, intending to repeat their performance at the next barrack.

The stories of how God time after time descended to earth, are entwined one with another. He, too, the hidden Divine saviour Krishna Chaitanya, about whom the West knows nothing, had been born at midnight. A full moon night in spring illumined the earth. But an eclipse of the moon was approaching. The bright disc of the night sky darkened. People began to sing. Many entered the Ganges, full of reverence, in order to bathe there, and, according to ancient tradition, to invoke God during the eclipse of the moon. All of them sang. Just then Krishna Chaitanya was born. Wrapped in the Name of God, the sound of which caused the firmament to tremble, Krishna Chaitanya came to the world.

His coming, like the birth of Christ, had been proclaimed before.

One of the eternal servants of God had descended before Chaitanya and longingly prayed to God for many years that the golden avatar might descend to earth from God's kingdom. He came. When the child descended it is said that immense crowds of strangers streamed joyfully to the house of the amazed father, and fell on their knees before the child, bringing it rich presents. These strangers were Brahma the Creator, and Shiva the Destroyer, and other exalted beings, in disguise. Neighbours and friends of the mother of the child came to her with gifts.

In order to test the character of the child, they later placed before him jewels, coins of gold and silver, silks, a clod of earth, and lastly a book, the Bhagavata. Without hesitating, the boy grasped at the book in which God's deeds of love are praised, put his arms about it and clasped it to his breast.

Assuming the role of bhakta, Krishna now as the avatar Krishna Chaitanya, made his way almost through the whole of India. He was the most generous of all the avatars and granted the highest gift of loving service of God even to the unworthy. Once it happened that two notorious robbers attacked His bhaktas, because the robbers were infuriated when they asked them to sing the Name of God. In the end even they were converted, and began singing the Divine Name.

Krishna Chaitanya did not perform many miracles. He slew no demons. Seldom do we hear of his having healed the sick or raised up the dead. But many thousands of people were healed by him of the most terrible suffering that exists – the illness

of being turned away from God. I repeated softly to myself the mantra that Sadananda had taught me:

“Praise to the most generous one,  
to Thee who bestowest love for Krishna,  
To Thee Krishna, called Krishna Chaitanya,  
who shines like molten gold.”

For forty-eight years Chaitanya wandered upon earth, as the Scriptures say: “Wrapped in Radha’s golden light and Her love of God.”

Towards dawn the disturbance outside quietened down. Was it singing that I heard, the singing of Christmas songs? “Silent night, holy night.”

Like two blooming rose-bushes, shooting forth from the same root, the tales of the saviours from the East and the West stretched their branches above me:

*“Ein Gott für uns, ein Kind für sich,  
liebt er uns all herzlichlich.  
Aus Kraut und Stein, aus Meer und Licht  
schimmert sein kindlich Angesicht.  
Geuss Vater ihn gewaltig aus.  
Gib ihn aus deinem Arm heraus!”*

That night it seemed to me as if I had stood all my life at the bottom of a deep well, longingly looking up at the little bit of sky visible through the hole at the top. I saw a beloved star there. It was called Christ. But now I had begun to climb up the sides of the well. The star shone nearer and brighter with more and more increasing love. And now it was no longer alone. On all sides of it shone other wonderful stars, other brotherly saviours, a whole starry heaven of God’s fathomless love, which streamed down towards me. The saviours of God who descended to earth, one after another, seemed to be different. They shone with different radiance and different strength. Some were heavily veiled, others less so. And yet they were not really different. All were revelations of the Only One. They all originated from the same light, the same ancient light, the same original Divine being.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE GATE OPENS

Sadananda falls ill – Engineering a visit to hospital – Lines from the Padma-Purana explained – Why I had come to India – The hidden purpose of the prison camp – Sadananda hovers between life and death – Translating the Bhagavata – He comforts the hospital menials – He fasts, then decides to live – World history in the making – The escapists – News from my wife – I dream of release – Sadananda set free – A letter from Shri.

When Sadananda handed me a bundle of loose sheets from the Padma-Purana, which he kept in a silk cloth, he was already very ill and lay in the camp hospital. This was after the first abdominal operation, when the doctors were convinced that he was going to die. I had managed to get a look at him now and then through the window. He lay there stretched out, motionless and pale like a corpse, in the room which the patients called the death room. But one day, to my surprise and delight, I received a note written by Sadananda himself. I read the few lines that my sick friend had written: *My dear Vamandasji, do not remain in God's antechamber, in the infinite light of the formless Godhead. For the true Krishna never enters that place ...* It was signed: "Always in the one service: Sada."

A postscript was added: "*Vamandasji, can't you visit me sometimes here in the hospital?*"

It was strictly forbidden for us who were interned to visit anyone lying in the hospital. But with a little ingenuity I managed this, even on the following day. I complained of serious eye trouble, and was sent to the hospital under escort for treatment.

The old eye doctor was one of our comrades, a prisoner like ourselves. He had been the favourite pupil of a world-famous professor at a German eye clinic, and had been sent out to the Dutch Indies for scientific study. The First World War had prevented his returning home, and he had remained on the wealthy island of Java even after the war was over. As superintendent of a sanatorium he had managed gradually to forget the ambitious dreams of his youth, and he had sunk into the pleasant life of the tropics. The white-haired old man now began writing according to form in his card system, noting down the details in regard to my person. Then with skillful fingers he lifted my eyelids, smeared them with a silver preparation and other drugs, and at my own suggestion decided that I should return the next day for further treatment.

"Why, Vamandas! What a sorry sight you are!" exclaimed Sadananda with a laugh that turned into a grin of pain, and he stretched out his thin hand to me warmly. "What is the matter with your eyes? Tears are running down and leaving

black streaks on your face!”

“My eyes have been treated with *lapis infernalis*.”

“Is there something wrong with them?”

“Nothing at all.”

“I see, you have done this in order to enter the hospital and visit me. That is very kind of you.”

During the short half-hour that I sat beside Sadananda’s bed, he told me many hidden truths. Finally he gave me the lines about Krishna’s inner kingdom from the Padma-Purana to translate. They were the same lines that he had sung some months previously for the milk-white goddess, during one of our long walks in the forest.

The Padma-Purana manuscript is said to originate from the ninth century, thus it is about a thousand years old. But as all the Scriptures it is based on the eternal Word handed down through an oral tradition that has been passed on from innumerable generations from guru to disciple. The translation caused me a lot of trouble. The text was printed in a very old-fashioned way; the words were not separated from one another, but each line of verse was forged into one block of words. And where the various words melted into one another, the sounds were changed and had been assimilated. It often required long, patient listening to the rhythm of the lines and their inner significance, before their meaning became clear.

During the time that I sat and translated, my room-mate also sat at the farther end of the room. Without saying a word, he had given up his share of the table, and had made himself a new one out of an old box. He now felt more at ease and could engross himself in his favourite occupation, that of solving mathematical problems and geometrical figures. It was very hot, surely more than 100 degrees in the shade, and the flies were pestering him. They were attracted to his perspiring, red face. Tümpelbaum kept hitting at his tormentors with a fly-killer, which he thwacked many hundreds of times angrily, not far from my neck. But this did not bother me. As carefully as I could, I wrote down the words of revelation that Krishna, the hidden God, had spoken as He smiled calmly in His kingdom, and addressed His devoted bhakta, Shiva.

I felt as if I were wandering in an unknown land, on a path towards a distant mountain. To begin with, the mountain appeared to the wanderer like a solid, bright blue wall of clouds. But as he came nearer, it stretched out into a landscape of hills and valleys, woods and lakes, and the wanderer met the beings who lived there. It is just in this way that the veiled kingdom of Divine love reveals itself gradually to the soul striving for the service of God.

This is no dream, it is not poetry; it is pure reality. A gleam from the eternal realm of archetypes has always, since childhood, penetrated my life. Often, even as a boy, I have awoken frightened out of my sleep, as I had been rescued after a long, endless wandering: I have forgotten something, I have forgotten something infinitely important!

What I, and all of us, have forgotten and lost, I had to travel to India to be reminded of; the land where there is no guilt and no fate, where that which has been done will be undone. The ground one treads there is not earthly soil. Time there is not earthly time – every moment is no longer painfully divided into past and future. The happiness experienced there has not a layer of sorrow always lying at the bottom. There is no death there. “Each word is a song, each step a dance ...” But one cannot enter there, if one desires to do so selfishly; only through unselfish loving service of God can this land be reached. Before the first morning ray of the veiled land can be discerned, mountains of night must be traversed.

When I first set out for this realm – open to all, yet thickly veiled from our sight – and kept stumbling and beginning the climb once more, my life was filled to the brim with the utmost despair. Yet in a world of barracks, where everything of spiritual value that I had once attained seemed to be lost, where every path ended, after a few steps, in a tangle of barbed wire, and where one would be shot at if one tried to go farther, even here in my despair I made an effort to make my way on a path that led to the land where there was no guilt and no fate.

Sadananda came and helped me to find the open gate of Krishna’s inner realm of Vraja, where one can proceed eternally without coming to an end. It was only in order to find him – I know that now – that I had undertaken the journey to India. In order to find him, I would gladly wander the whole distance around the globe. Yet I had to enter a prison camp for the purpose of finding him. Thus the long years of my life.

Five times Sadananda was laid on the operating table during his imprisonment in the Indian camp. Each time he placed himself completely in the hands of God. Once, before awaking from his unconscious state, he sang for an hour without stopping: “Krishna, Krishna, Krishna! ...” The medical attendant, one of our comrades, asked him afterwards why he had called that Name incessantly. Sadananda became embarrassed, feeling ashamed that he could not hide his heart better.

For about two years my friend lay in the camp hospital, with only short intervals of respite, and several times he was placed in the room for the dying. I often sat beside his bed in one of the wards. My real instruction began at this time, when I had to fight for every opportunity of meeting him.

Even in the hospital Sadananda worked much of the time. When I arrived, I usually found him, as previously in the barrack, sitting with his legs crossed on his bed. His little metal trunk lay on his knees, serving as a table, and he wrote eagerly. Often, however, I found him sleeping. Then he lay with his head under the sheet, resting after a sleepless night of pain. All about him in the hospital there was noise and disturbance. I waited calmly until he awoke.

When we were together, he looked over the translations I had completed since our last meeting. He often criticized me, complaining that I worked too fast, not precisely enough. “Nobody expects you to be a racer,” he once said to me. “One

can speed on tracks of dead gravel and ashes. But on the spiritual pastures of the Bhagavata, where God and His friends play their eternal games, one should tread with reverence.” He showed me in which attitude of soul I should approach my work. “You must bow down inwardly before every line of a verse, every word, as if they contained the final revelation. And then you must remain quiet, listening, until the original text itself takes the initiative within you and begins expressing itself.”

Once he warned me: “A notebook containing translations of the Bhagavata should be a model of neatness and order. This order attracts Krishna’s grace. Each pencil, each sheet of paper, can be a means for serving Krishna and bringing Him joy. My guru insisted on such order, which colours all one’s life, and he was an example of what he preached. For one thing, he ate, like all Hindus, with his fingers. But he touched his food only with the tips of his fingers. It was not like eating, when he partook of a meal, but rather like praying.”

For a long time Sadananda observed a pledge of complete silence, writing his answers and remarks on bits of paper, and in this way many of his utterances have been preserved, and I treasure them.

One day he asked me: “Why are you so upset, Vamandas? It troubles me.”

Then I told him that a cat had been killed in the camp, just before we on the sick-list had marched to the hospital. “A crowd, myself included, surrounded the dying animal. The cat was not quite dead as yet. It wanted to creep away and hide, as animals do when they know they are going to die; it tried to get up in order to escape to some dark corner, but it sank down whining again and again. Its back was broken. I did not know what I ought to do. Should I have taken a stone and thrown it at the cat, in order to end its misery? I did nothing, I just went away. What should I have done?”

Sadananda’s eyes flashed. His whole being was afire. “You behaved quite wrongly, Vamandas. You should have knelt beside the dying animal, in spite of all the staring eyes about you. And you should have sung Narasinha’s mantra in the ear of the animal. You know that I have given you that mantra, the verse about Krishna’s great avatar Narasinha, who tears away like a spiritual lion the veil of Maya from the atma with its diamond nails, and wakes it to life. If you had done this, the animal would have been reminded in the hour of its death that it is an atma, belonging only to Krishna; and that his inner mission is to serve Krishna for all eternity.”

Sadananda was loved by the Indian boys who performed the most menial work in the hospital, that of emptying night-chambers, and the like, for the European prisoners. It made him very unhappy once when one of the German internees persisted in trying to incite the boys against him by means of slander. But they took no notice of this. He, the European Mahatma, understood their language. He instructed them regularly. They sat crouching in a circle on the floor about him, and

listened to what he had to tell them about the descent of Krishna to earth, and of God's great avatars. The superintendent of the hospital forbade this instruction, and demanded heavy fines from the poor boys. But they kept coming to Sadananda. They came to him with their troubles. He paused in whatever work he had on hand at the time for their sake. He always had time for them. He even helped these boys, who were excluded from the schools, in their patient efforts to learn to read and write. Every time that I visited the hospital I saw one or two of these boys sitting in the narrow strip of shade outside the toilet-houses, squatting on their heels and ready in case the gruff voice of any sick sahib called them. They held a pad of writing paper and a reader on their knees, and tried to copy the involved figures of Hindi script.

In the hospital, in the whole camp, and in the bazaars of the neighbouring communities, the rumour began to spread that Svami Sadananda had started fasting. He preferred to die rather than be forced to continue eating meat. After one of the operations with life or death in the balance, the German doctors, his own comrades, had tried to persuade him, for his own good, to drink *bouillon*. I had often witnessed the agony he experienced, when time after time during his confinement in the camp he had been forced to choose between starvation or partaking of food that his religion forbade. He had tired of this now. Although still very weak after the severe surgical treatment he had undergone, he had begun to fast. The hospital attendants had been instructed to serve his meals punctually, and let the food stand beside his bed until it was time for the next meal. Sadananda continued his fasting.

Not until the evening of the sixth day of his hunger-strike did I succeed in entering the hospital as a patient. When I came into his room, he was so weak that he could only show his recognition of me with an expression in his eyes. As I sat silent beside his motionless body I was sure that I was looking at my friend for the last time.

Suddenly he began speaking in a clear, surprisingly forceful voice, and he gave me the same command as often before: "Vamandas, take a pencil and paper and write. I shall dictate to you in Sanskrit, a prayer from the Padma-Purana. It is directed to the Divine Pair, Radha-Krishna, the two who are one:

'That which is I, that which is mine,  
In this world, in a future life,  
May all this be borne today  
As a sacrifice before your feet.

I am thine, Krishna! I am thine, Radha!  
With my body and all my deeds,  
With my spirit, and with every word  
My tongue speaks.' "

When Sadananda finished, I asked him: “Svamiji, don’t you really wish to live a little longer?”

He smiled, and said humorously: “Yes, today when I saw you walk past my window, I decided to try to continue my life on earth a little longer – in order not to break off the instruction I have begun giving you, before you are capable of making your way alone.”

My friend broke his fasting. A new stage of companionship unfolded for us that evening.

While I received my instruction, almost unperceived by my comrades, world history was in the making. The fronts of the scene of war in four continents were pushed forward, and withdrawn again. These changes cast heavy shadows into our camp, where everything continued seesawing up and down. Men who had previously been disregarded or unnoticed suddenly became influential personalities in the barracks. And those who had been highly respected, and greeted with fond flattery, sank down among the masses, degenerated, and disappeared. One year followed another. We began to get grey and lose our teeth. Once I happened to stand in the queue outside the canteen behind a man who had always been exceedingly particular about his appearance. Now I saw a bedbug walk calmly out from the collar of his ragged khaki shirt, and down his back. As the years had gone by he had converted everything he owned into drink, even his fine suits that were made by a well-known English tailor. The members of the camp celebrated every little victory with a drinking bout, and they drank again to drown their sorrow after a defeat.

A group of mountain climbers who had been taken unawares by the outbreak of war during an expedition in the Himalayas could no longer stand the confinement behind the barbed wire. They succeeded in carrying out a well-planned escape. Some of them got far away into Tibet. But one of the bold, hardened men had succumbed to the privation they suffered. We saw the others again in the camp after they had served a term in the camp prison. They had either been captured, or, ill with fever, had dragged themselves through the mountain tracts and voluntarily given themselves up to the police. One of them, who had held out the longest, told me that towards the end he could not bear the loneliness of Tibet’s windy desert plateau: the roaring of the storm, the rushing of the torrents in the mountain crevices, and above all the strange thoughts that stole over him at night. He told of the greed of the people there, their desire for silver coins. He told us of a ghost-like deserted village, where there was not a single living person. And of a village nearby, where he had been driven away by stoning as he approached it, tired and hungry. He showed me a deep scar on his forehead that he had received on this occasion. “Not until later on did we find out that a few villages near Lake

Manasarovar had been completely depopulated by the ravages of smallpox. The people in the village where we were stoned were beside themselves with fear that we were contaminated.”

I was horrified at the man’s story. Why, I had come to India with the intention of crossing Himalaya in order to reach Lake Manasarovar. Now I heard that even in these regions human beings hated one another, and suffered fear, greed and sickness. Oh! It was just as Shri had said. The lake of the Holy Spirit is not to be found on earth; it lies in quite another world.

I was sitting beside the bed of my friend in the hospital when I received a card from my wife, sent from Sweden. I had heard some time previously that she and our child had found sanctuary in the eleventh hour in this hospitable country. My wife wrote: *We must thank God that your beloved mother is dead, that she need no longer suffer in the ghetto camp of Theresienstadt.*

I bowed by head. My mother had been a proud, fiery soul. There was no egoism in her. She had had only one last wish in life: to see her son once more. This great longing had kept her alive for years in an environment in which the majority succumbed. But the fulfillment of this one burning wish had been denied her.

I could not prevent the tears from streaming down my face. Some of the patients in the ward noticed this, and stared curiously. Sadananda took my hand, “Vamandas, your mother is with Krishna, in Krishna’s realm,” he said comfortingly.

The next time I visited Sadananda he told me of a dream he had had. “I dreamed that I was released from the camp. But when I went out through the gate to travel to Brindaban, where a friend, a disciple of my guru, lives, I was stopped by the guard. He said to me: ‘Yes, you may go. But you must take the little child with you.’ ” Sadananda smiled. “It was a bright, healthy youngster. But its eyes and ears were sealed with earth. Vamandas, do you know who that child was?”

Oh, I knew. It was myself. It was my spiritual eyes and ears that were sealed with earth. Whimsically, but at the same time with my heart quietly rejoicing, I answered with a mantra he had taught me:

“Reverence for the guru who opened my eyes,  
as if with a little staff smeared with the salve of wisdom,  
and took away the darkness of my blindness.”

We both laughed. “We have some way to go as yet, before getting that far,” Sadananda remarked.

Shortly afterward, Sadananda was suddenly given his freedom. He travelled to Brindavan, the region where Krishna Himself descended five thousands years ago. There, on the shores of the Yamuna river, Krishna had spent His happy youth among the cowherds.

The hospital ward seemed empty when Sadananda had left, although every bed

but his was occupied. Kahosta, formerly a ladies' hairdresser from Vienna, who had introduced permanent waving successfully among the young Chinese women of Haza, glanced disdainfully at his remaining comrades in the ward, and said: "It's awfully dull here now that the Hindu fellow has left us. All of us miss him."

But I was happy and full of confidence. I was sure that I would see my friend once more. There was only one thing that troubled me, and that was the complete silence for so many years of my first guru, Shri. Was he silent because he felt that in many ways I had been unfaithful to him? He had wanted to lead me to the exalted goal of knowing the truth. But during my association with Sadananda I had learned that unless one's heart is filled with the discerning love of God the greatest wisdom is nothing but chaff, like empty husks which it is useless to try to thresh.

I wrote a letter to Shri, trying to describe in detail the inner evolution I had experienced. For several years he had observed a pledge of silence. He neither wrote nor spoke, he only meditated for the harassed world. But now he broke his pledge. I received a letter in his own handwriting. Shri wrote: *My dear Vamandasji! You have spent your time in India well. I bless you. I bless you for what you have done. And I bless you for what you are going to do in the future.*

A few days after receiving this missive, I was quite unexpectedly released from the prison camp. As I passed through the two iron-barred gates, the guard asked as usual: "To the hospital?" The English non-commissioned officer escorting me answered: "No, he is free." There were still several thousand men behind the barbed wire of the camp.

## CHAPTER XII

### FAREWELL TO INDIA

Good-bye to prison – I visit Shri in Mahabaleshvar – Alone in Bombay – Gandhi is welcomed by vast crowds – His son sings – Sadananda's visit – I am initiated by Svami Bon – Embarkation for Europe – I fly from London to Sweden – Reunited with my family.

When I left the camp, the first visit I made was to Shri. He had retired up in the mountain regions of Mahabaleshvar, where I once had spent a summer with him. Just as before, I sat at the feet of the good old man. He kept the pledge of silence he had held for so many years. But every morning and evening, when I bowed deeply before him, he stroked my hair with his slim hand, by way of blessing, and looked down kindly at me with his child-like, innocent, happy smile. Rana, too, was there. Once again Rana and I wandered together in the woods, where wonderful orchids were growing on the mossy branches of the trees, and where now and again one would be surprised by a glimpse of deep valleys and ravines in the open spaces between the foliage of the trees, and sometimes even a glimpse of the faraway sea.

From Mahabaleshvar I travelled to Bombay, in order to obtain a boat reservation to Sweden. For it was now more than eight years since I had seen my family, and my courageous wife had carried the burden of responsibility quite alone all this time. Now she had nearly reached the end of her strength. She had written: *Come and take care of our child.*

I was quite alone in Bombay, as I hastened from one government office to another, and everywhere I had to fill in long questionnaires, in order to prove that my journey was necessary. Not only myself, but whole armies that had fought in Asia, were waiting for a chance to get home. Sadananda was far away, he and his friend, Svami Bon, had travelled to Assam, in the farther end of India near the Chinese border. I had written to him, to be sure, that I would like to meet him once more. But to what avail were letters or telegrams, when the whole of India had been paralyzed for weeks by a general post and telegraph strike. Unforwarded letters and telegrams lay in heaps on the floors of the empty post-offices. There was a rumour of a threatening railway strike as well. Bank clerks, who demanded a rise in salary, were distributing printed sheets on the streets instead of sitting at their counters. Sometimes long columns of demonstrators marched through the town with bright red banners that bore the hammer and sickle. Bombay had changed decidedly during these years that had passed since I landed there. Only the shrill chorus of voices from the gold exchange remained the same.

One day I read in the newspapers that Gandhi had arrived in Bombay, in connection with important political matters. That evening I entered a crowded bus, and

went to the distant factory district where the Mahatma lived and held his daily prayer-meetings. There is not a palace in the whole of the wide-stretching country that had not gladly received this old man as a guest. But on his visits to large towns he preferred to live in the slums, in the midst of Indian factory workers and the casteless, because he felt that he was their brother.

I stood wedged in this crowd of people, many of whom had never eaten their fill, or had never learned to read or write, or had never been allowed until recently to perform other work than the most menial. Many of them lifted up their infants, so that they might once in their life see the Mahatma. The millions of poor Hindus did not see in Gandhi the successful politician or the lawyer. They loved him because they felt he was a saint, who had entered the political arena out of love for the oppressed people.

Gandhi sat up on a platform on an easy-chair, facing the assembled crowd. He looked tired, his hands lay folded on his knees, and his eyes were closed. It happened to be that day of the week when he usually observed silence. Therefore another person read his short speech. But when the loud-speaker sounded, the first words we heard were not those of Gandhi. To my surprise, the mighty resonance of the first lines of the Isha-Upanishad rang out in the square framed with factories. For thousands of years the study of the esoteric teaching of the Vedas had been introduced with this Upanishad. Even Shri had observed this when he instructed me. This Upanishad contains the essence of the secrets of the Vedas, which the casteless of India were formerly strictly forbidden to share in. Now it flowed in rhythmical waves over the heads of the untouchables:

“Isha vasyam idam sarvam  
yat kinca jagatyam jagat ...”

These lines mean: “May the whole universe, and all that moves in this perishable world, be enveloped in God, the Divine Lord ...” But the ancient Sanskrit has a fullness and richness that makes it impossible to translate the lines with the conciseness of the original. The words intimate, too, that we might be ever conscious that our world is filled with God, invested with God, inhabited by God, permeated by God.

As I stood in the midst of the crowd of people who trembled under the force of the thundering words, I thought: this line from the Upanishad is like a threshold. If one has benefited by the meaning of the line, one can live in the midst of the world, with its noise and strife, without being engulfed. Only then can one tread the endless path that starts here, leading on into the realm of Divine love.

The voice of the Upanishad had died away; the crowd, too, was quiet. One of Gandhi’s sons began singing up on the platform. The verse that he sang was also familiar to me. It was one of God’s Names, that of Rama, that Sadananda and I had

often sung together with the happy children on the slope of Himalaya.

Ten times, twenty times, Gandhi's son sang the Name Rama. Then he said to the crowd, "Sing with me!" Shyly at first, but gradually louder and full of joy, they sang, all of them, latrine cleaners, coolies, street sweepers, workers from the cotton mills, and women whose work was to stand half-naked in the motley mixtures of the dye-works, wringing long lengths of wet, dyed cloth; forty or fifty thousand people sang, and I with them. Gandhi's son showed the people with raised arms how the rhythm should be marked by clapping their hands. And all of us clapped our hands and sang at the top of our voices:

"Raghupati Raghava Raja Ram  
Patita Pavana Sita Ram."

It seemed as if they never wanted to stop singing rapturously the Name Rama, the Name of the Divine saviour who had descended to earth and lifted up the fallen.

Many of those singing turned hesitatingly, perhaps for the first time, towards God. The old man, who tells in his memoirs that the Name Rama freed him from all fear, sat on the platform listening. No one could have guessed then that, before the opening of a similar meeting for prayer, a fanatic was to shoot down the Mahatma, in order to silence the voice that tirelessly insisted that one must love one's enemies.

Gandhi had disappeared into the hut where he was living. The crowds stormed the buses. I realized that I should probably have to stand where I was and wait at least an hour. Then I decided to take one of the nearly empty buses that went far out into the country.

Feeling quite elated, I saw how we passed through ugly suburbs, between barracks, factories, gravel heaps, garages and hangars. I tried to understand what Shri had taught me, and what is explained in the Upanishad, that there is not a speck of dust that does not have its ground in God, and that my own heart has its ground in Him.

When night came, I got off the bus at random, and asked a passer-by somewhat anxiously if there was a street-car or bus that went in the direction of my hostel. The man laughed. "You do not need to ride. Your hostel is only a couple of hundred steps away." Without knowing it I had returned home.

At the hostel a letter awaited me, and was handed me by a messenger. It was the news I had been waiting for. The American Express Company notified me that a sailing reservation had been booked for me on a day not far off. The next morning I began my rounds again to the various government offices, breathed once more the particular air of these places, and filled out blanks. By dinner time I had all the necessary papers in my possession, and they were stamped according to require-

ment: permission to leave India, British through permit, Swedish entrance permit, etc. In my heart, however, I was a little downcast at having to leave India, which I loved, without having once more seen my friend Sadananda – and without having been initiated.

Dejected and exhausted, I lay down on my bed in the heat of noon, in a room that I shared with four old men. Suddenly it seemed to me that I heard Sadananda's voice. He came in with swift strides, tall and slim in his light monk's gown. Once in the camp he had said to me: "If you really need me, I shall come to you, even though I am a thousand miles away." And now he had come, to my overwhelming surprise. "Get up, Vamandas," he said. "Hurry up! Time is precious. Put on your best clothes. Svami Bon is waiting in the carriage below."

"We cannot stay here longer than two days, perhaps three," explained Sadananda, as we hurried down the wooden steps of the tall house. "We came only to meet you before your departure for Europe – and Svami Bon will give you the holy Name of God and the Indian rosary of Tulasi pearls."

Sadananda's friend, Svami Bon, sat in the two-wheeled carriage that stood in front of the door, the man who had been sent to Europe by his guru, Bhakti-Siddhanta Sarasvati. He was the first Bhakta that Sadananda had met. Svami Bon, whose fine features and calm eyes I had seen in a portrait shown me by Sadananda, appeared older than I had expected him to be. I touched my forehead to his feet by way of greeting, and climbed into the carriage. He embraced me heartily. We drove away. We did not bother about the two men in Indian dress who stood in front of the door of the hostel, and eyed us suspiciously. They were probably members of the secret police.

We spent only three days together. We walked barefoot through the masses in the courtyard of the great temple of Narayana. This temple is the seat of Indian orthodoxy, and in its halls the pandit expounds the writings in song for a circle of listeners, who squat in a circle about him. We passed on. The three of us sat together on the seashore. We dined together, endeavouring first to sacrifice the food to God as a gift of love, and receive it again from Him as Divine grace, and partake of it in communion with Him, a mutual meal of love.

*"Take the spiritual treasure you have found here in India into the West,"* said Sadananda to me, as we said farewell to one another at the Central Station, in Bombay.

The train that my friends were taking left the station. They returned to Brindaban, the region where the boy Krishna had once spent his happy youth in the woods among the cowherds. And I boarded the great ship that was to take me to Europe.

The stately but exceedingly overcrowded luxury steamer seemed to me to be unreal, a thing of dreams. There were nine of us lying in three layers, one over the other, in a cabin intended for two. During the fourteen days of the voyage the loud-speaker could be heard incessantly in all corners and nooks of the big ship. The

musical programme was constantly interrupted by military orders or disciplinary messages. English generals and privates, army chaplains and nurses, were returning home on this ship, and even a large group of cabaret artists and dancers in uniform. The latter had given performances in the great forests of Assam and Burma, in order to make life a little brighter for the worn-out troops at the front. All day long they lay on the boards of the deck, in short khaki trousers or light bathing-costumes, as if they were at a seaside resort. In the evenings they danced in shimmering evening dresses with the British officers on the festive, brightly-lit deck. "Forget, forget all that has happened!" seemed to be everybody's motto. Meanwhile, nine hundred returning Italian prisoners of war, taken on as passengers by the overcrowded ship at the last minute, camped on a lower, darker deck, tightly crowded. When the Calabrian coast was sighted, these Italians shrieked wildly and rushed to the railing, causing the mighty ship to lurch. On the following morning they landed quietly in a devastated Naples, in a long column, each man carrying his heavy pack on his back.

We travelled on. Impatience and anxiety filled those on board as the ship made record time from Italy round a large part of Europe, past the coasts of Morocco, Spain, Portugal and France. Then we entered the English Channel, and the waves became greyer. I, too, was impatient, and my heart was filled with a longing for home.

I flew from London, although the ticket was altogether too expensive for my pocket. A fog hung over England, fog enveloped the aeroplane, and one could hardly see as far as the tips of its wings. For a long while we dived down into air-pockets, one after another, but when we flew over the North Sea the sun was shining. The sun shone on the granite cliffs of the Swedish coastal islands. In the roar of the motor I sang aloud, unheard by anyone. I sang the mantra of the Name of God, which bestows love, and which surely had never sounded before over this land and these waters. I sang the words of joy with which Krishna Chaitanya, the hidden Avatar of the age of discord, had praised the might of the Name of God.

At midnight, holding my worn tropical helmet, and breathing the cool, fresh air of the north, I stood on the railway station of a little Swedish town.

A few steps away stood my wife with her head bowed. It seemed as if she had lost hope of my ever returning. Beside her stood a slim thirteen-year-old boy. He had been a little child of four when I had seen him last. He called out in a clear voice: "Father!" and relieved me of my travelling bag. Hella, whom Shri had called Shanti, Peace, looked up and came to me smiling. Just then it seemed as if we had been parted only a few days.

In the room put at my disposal in a hospitable home at the edge of a wood, I began relating my experiences to my wife. All night I sat beside her bed and related, and I continued my story during the days and nights that followed. Yet I

noticed that I had only reached the beginning of the inexhaustible that I had to tell. I saw how my wife blossomed when I told her about the love of God in India, and I sang for her the bhakti songs that my friend Sadananda had taught me.

“Father, may I listen?” asked my son, who had shyly opened the door of his bedroom, and stood barefoot before us.

“Yes, sit down beside us and listen,” said my wife. I continued my song. It was one about Krishna Chaitanya. Outside the open windows the weeping birches were murmuring in the light breeze. How amazing! ... It was the murmur of trees in the North, no longer the roar of the rivers of Himalaya.