

Looking Back

My Encounters with Sadananda and Vamandas

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“Do you see my point – I did not come to make disciples; I want to be a friend of those very few who desire to get a glimpse of a path and goal that is possible to reach. One should know each other very well, and such understanding may take a long time.” (Svami Sadananda Dasa, extract from a letter to Kid, 27 April 1974.)

I, Kishordas (Kid Samuelsson), am writing these lines to share my recollections of events concerning Svami Sadananda Dasa¹ (Ernst Georg Schulze) and Vamandas (Walther Eidlitz) from 1972 to 1977, as well as my personal experiences in meeting them. I do this because my friends have requested me to. I will also offer a brief account of the events that occurred after their departure, their physical presence here. I am fully aware that memories are unreliable, and where possible, I will refer to written sources as support.

When you read these lines, you may think I am a very egocentric person, but what else can I do but share my own story? My role in this Play is very minor. By providence, by Shri Radha’s compassionate mercy, I have only briefly connected with Sadananda and his seva (service of God) here on earth this time – that is all.

First, a few words about my background: I was born on All Fools’ Day in 1949, in Stockholm, where I spent my childhood and youth. As a child, I played in my own world, whose borders ended two blocks away. When I reached my early teens – to my great surprise – I suddenly found myself *thinking* in a boundless world. I remember devouring heaps of books, adopting and rejecting ideas and isms at lightning speed – and feeling out of place everywhere. I saw myself as a seeker with a strong desire to find life’s meaning in its deepest sense, and I spent much time in libraries, where I also came across Walther’s two books² in Swedish: *Krishnas*

¹ Hereafter called Svami or Sadananda.

² For information about Vamandas’ books in English, German, and Swedish, see the following link: <https://www.sadananda.com/index.php?lang=en#text-downloads>, retrieved 10 November 2022.

leende and *Indisk mystik*. I was very young when I first discovered these two books in a Stockholm library, and I probably did not understand much of what I read, but they left a strong impression on me. Strangely enough, I cannot recall Walther's book *Den glömda världen*, first published in 1948.

I will not delve into the details of what I read and experienced during the turbulent 1960s. Let us say I was a typical teenager, tossed about by the winds of change. Nonetheless, during these years in pursuit of truth, I became increasingly eager to reach the point at which I felt my present life would truly begin. So far, it was more a matter of *neti, neti*: not that; no, it was not that, and it was not that, either, I was searching for.

In the summer of 1972, I met my life companion, Maria Hillfon, at a meditation course in Norway. I had been meditating regularly for a couple of years and had even become a meditation teacher. However, I became increasingly disappointed the more I came to understand the philosophical tradition behind this movement. In 1961, Svami wrote to Vamandas:

“You should not feel overly despondent when the foul fish from the water's surface are caught, when the foolish worship of the so-called Indian has gone so far that the poor souls are naive enough to believe that a so-called mantra without shakti [can lead to Bhagavan], without any understanding of who, what, and how Bhagavan is, or who it is that must be led to Him. They do not realise that this can only be a curiosity, like when foreigners in India buy souvenirs in the form of tiger claws and relics from the Taj Mahal.”

(Extract from the letter “Atmically Disordered”, 4 January 1961; my translation.)

Initially, I was not very aware of the different sampradayas, the lineages of Gurus in India, and their various schools of thought. I simply felt that the meaning of life is in the transcendent, beyond what we call body, mind, and “soul”. But gradually, I realised that seva, the loving service of Godhead without ulterior motives, seva for seva's sake, to bring joy to the object of this love, was the true purpose of my life.

1972 was the year Walther Eidlitz published his Swedish pocket edition, *Livets mening och mål i indisk tankevärld*. This book finally convinced me that bhakti, the unadulterated service of the Godhead, was the highest path and goal. When I realised that my meditation movement had its roots in the school founded by Shankaracharya, known as Advaita Vedanta, it became clear I couldn't continue with this form of meditation. Shankaracharya teaches that the undifferentiated,

formless Brahman is the only reality, and that everything else is illusion. In contrast, the school of bhakti asserts that Bhagavan (the personal Absolute), the jiva (the living entity), and the world of Maya are all real, and that the eternal natural function of the living being is to serve the personal Absolute through bhakti, which is God's own potency of pure knowledge and joy, granted to the jiva by a bhakta. Although the philosophical terms were often the same, they were viewed from entirely different perspectives. Soon after, I also read the following in Walther's book on Krishna-Caitanya, concerning the leader of Shankaracharya's tradition in those days:

“Even in Navadvipa, before Caitanya became a mendicant, He thought of the philosopher Prakashananda in Benares (Kashi) in anger. While He was speaking, He was filled with the awareness of being God, the Lord, and, gritting His teeth, He said (to Murari), ‘The sannyasi Prakashananda sits there in Kashi, and with great ardour this fellow cuts My Divine bodily form into pieces. He explains Vedanta and denies the eternity of My Divine form! He was struck with leprosy, and still he does not learn anything. Innumerable universes are (ultimately) founded in My Divine form (of Being, Knowledge, and Joy). And this fellow has the boldness to say, ‘All this is illusive’ ... Whoever denies that I am [eternal] Divine bodily form will perish.”

In 1972, Walther's 1948 book, *Den glömda världen* was republished. It is closely related to the book mentioned earlier, *Livets mening och mål i indisk tankevärld*, which explored the philosophy. *Den glömda världen* inspired me by allowing me to follow Walther in his quest for life's meaning and to experience his encounter with Sadananda in internment camps in India. In this way, I already knew them to a certain extent before I met them in real life.

When I learned that Walther was still alive and lived in Sweden, I was eager to meet him. In the winter of 1972, during a visit to Maria's parents, Gösta and Hertha Hillfon, in Mälarhöjden, Stockholm, I was told that Walther's son, Günther, had been married to Kerstin, one of Hertha Hillfon's sisters, and that Maria, as a child, had seen Walther at their wedding. Soon after, I contacted Walther and invited him to Mälarhöjden. At that time, he had moved to Vaxholm to stay with Ulla and Torbjörn Fjellström, and Helena Moberg (later Fjellström).³ Since the death of Walther's wife, Hella, in 1967, he had been living temporarily in various places and

³ All three had met Walther at the same time and lived under the same roof as long as Walther lived, despite the fact that Torbjörn and Helena had just fallen in love. After some time Ulla and Torbjörn divorced and Torbjörn and Helena raised a new family at the same time as Ulla stayed there. The hub that kept them together was Vamandas and his teachings.

needed a permanent home. In a letter to Vamandas from 8 February 1972, Svami writes (extract, my translation):

“My dear Vamandas, Thank you so much for your kind letter from 26 January. That you have finally found a permanent place to live, together with friendly people, is a load off my mind. I can imagine you have had a tough time these past years.”

I was overwhelmed by everything Walther told me and wrote to me from the very beginning. He was very open-hearted, and from then on, until his disappearance in 1976, he wrote down Sanskrit and Bengali verses from the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Shrimad-Bhagavatam*, the *Caitanya-Caritamrita*, etc., word for word, with their grammatical forms, and concluded each verse with a complete translation. He also sang various songs, verses, and hymns, often in a loud voice, such as Yashomati-Nandana, Gurvashtakam, and Shikshashtakam.

When we were alone again, Maria and I returned to Skåne, where we lived in a small village, Maglehem, in a picturesque 17th-century cottage with a thatched roof.

After my contact with Walther, I wrote a few letters to Sadananda without receiving any answer, which left me a bit downhearted. But finally, I got a letter from him for the first time. In the envelope, I found a small sheet of paper that read:

“Dear Kid, got your letters. I am down with heart troubles. I have not forgotten you; we shall meet. Radhe! Radhe! S (Undated; the envelope is missing.)

In my letters to Sadananda, I had told him about myself and my conviction that bhakti was the path and the goal, and that I wanted to meet him when he came to Sweden next time.

Around this time, Walther also gave a lecture somewhere in Stockholm. I remember the huge lecture hall was filled with people, and I looked at this little man on the scene and wondered: would he really reach out to everyone and catch their attention? But soon everyone was spellbound, including me.

In April 1973, our daughter Frida-Ananda was born. During summer, I attended Walther’s course in Dalarna, listening attentively to his inspiring lectures. I knew Svami would visit Sweden that summer, and when we were in Stockholm, returning home to Skåne, Majstin Hedtjärn invited us to lunch at her place, halfway between

Stockholm and Skåne. There, we met Sadananda, Majstin, and Marthe Calmbach for the first time. In a letter to Vamandas, Sadananda writes:

“My dear Vamandas,

Please note: I’ll come to Sweden on or about 26.8. I’ll be there and want to see you, because I got stirring letters from A. and B. I want to thank you personally, my dear Vamandas, for all you did for these young seekers.” (Extract from a letter, “Young Seekers”, 8 August 1973.)

There he was, *Sadananda!* He reached out his hand and said: “Guten Tag!” I was struck by the impression that Sadananda seemed so “normal,” and that I felt so at home, that I belonged there. Svami, Maria and I went to the veranda while Maitri and Marthe were cooking, talking, and laughing in the kitchen. On the veranda, Maria stepped back and began breastfeeding our three-month-old daughter. Sadananda now asked me about my background, my meditation, and my health.

Then Sadananda spoke of mukti as an eternal pension in a hammock, of bhukti as selfish enjoyment, and of bhakti as the loving service of Godhead. He also asked me about Gita 13.1–2, which addresses the knower of the field (the individual atma) and the knower of all fields (the Paramatma), and looked pleased when he saw that I had understood these verses properly. – When I noticed that there were a lot of gnats on his arms, he said, “Yes, *mycket Mücken*, they like me, probably because of all the medicine”, using the Swedish word for ‘a lot of’, ‘mycket’, and the German word for ‘gnats’, ‘Mücken’. Then we had a long lunch on the veranda, all of us, where we continued to talk until we had to leave for Skåne.

I was, of course, excited to meet Svami. The only difficult part was the language barrier. Svami spoke English with me, and even though I could understand most of what he said roughly, I found it very hard to express what I wanted to say. Nonetheless, Svami encouraged me to read more and keep in touch with Vamandas and himself. When we left, Svami, Majstin, and Marthe followed us to our car, where Svami pressed his palms together, raised his hands high above his head as if to touch the sky, and looked truly beautiful.

In December, we revisited Maria’s parents and invited Walther to their home. There, Hertha Hillfon soon started working on a sculpture of him, and Walther and I read and talked together.

On 27 April 1974, I received a new letter from Sadananda:

*“My dear Kid, I did not forget you! I was down with a very bad sinusitis and heart trouble. Do you see my point – I did not come to make disciples; I want to be a friend of those very few who desire to get a glimpse of a path and goal which is possible to reach. One should know each other very well, and such understanding may take a long time. I am coming to Sverige this year and hope – if you so desire – to have good dialogues with you. Did you read the Swedish edition of Walther Eidlitz’s Caitanya-book? With best wishes to Frieda-Ananda and Maria.
Radhe! Radhe! Yours Sada”*

The Swedish edition of the Caitanya book, as Svami refers to it, was a Swedish translation of the German original, made by Sigvard Sjögren. He also translated *Der Sinn des Lebens* into Swedish. The Swedish edition was titled *Livets mening och mål i indisk tankevärld*. He visited Walther in our cottage in Skåne in 1974 or 1975, accompanied by his wife and newborn child. Later, I recall borrowing a typed translation of the Caitanya book and making a copy of it over the weekend, staying up all night. An aunt of mine, who ran a radio and TV shop, allowed me to use their copying machine, which was very different from those we use today, and each sheet had a coating that needed developing.

This summer, Walther visited us in Skåne for a few weeks. See the following letter from Svami to Vamandas:

“I am happy to hear that Kid, Maria and Frida-Ananda are fine. Thanks, and Krishna’s blessings on everyone there, because it is good for them and you to be together in Krishna’s seva. I have a high opinion of Kid – but he does not have to know this, if you think this is the best?” (Extract, my translation, 10 June 1974.)

Walther told me what Svami wrote in this letter, and he also pointed out that he had written “Śrī⁴ Kid Samuelsson” on one of my letters from him, which made me both elated and apprehensive.

In October, when Svami, Maitri, and Hertha von Perbandt⁵ came to Stockholm, they stayed at the Salvation Army Hotel in the very centre of the city. One day, I drove them to Mälärhöjden, where Maria and Frida-Ananda were waiting, along with an old friend of mine. First, Svami went to see Maria’s painting of Vamandas. He looked amused but said nothing until we came to a painting of a tree with two trunks. Then he talked about the twin tree in the Damodara-lila.

⁴ Here the word “Shri” is used as an honorary title, indicating that the person in question has been blessed with bhakti. It has many deep meanings.

⁵ Hertha von Perbandt was a German disciple of Svami who had worked as a nurse.

Svami seemed to be happy, and I was up in the air, of course. After lunch, when we took a walk, I remember he kept stopping whenever he talked about important things, so we didn't get very far. Among other things, he spoke of the nine characteristics of bhava-bhakti and God's different realms, that they have different intensity, and the difference between God's feature of sublime majesty and charming loveliness.

When I replied to his question about military service, saying I was a conscientious objector, he said it must apply in all situations. I nodded. I then remembered that I had read that Svami's mother was a pacifist and his father rather the opposite.

In the evening, I took them to their hotel. In the car, Svami asked if we could visit a young man the next day. This young man had written several letters to Svami before his visit to Sweden this time. When we parted outside the hotel, Svami said goodbye to my old friend, saying, *"I just want you to be happy."*

The next day, Svami, Maitri, Hertha, and I went to the young man near Stockholm, where he lived with his mother. Svami spoke with him at length in private there. I had met him before, at one of Vamandas' summer courses. He was very young and bright. On our way home, Svami looked worried, though, and told me he was concerned about this young man, who fixated on his mother.

During Svami's stay in Stockholm this year, he also went to Waxholm, to Ulla, Torbjörn and Helena, where he also met other people, like Ulf, who later got the letter "Straitjacket" (8 August 1975):

"Got your letter. There is no need for any philosophy, much less for any dogmatism. Please do not think of Krishna as a separate entity except as a centre of all pre-, sub- and conscious gravitation – of all centrifugal and centripetal energies.

The question is not to learn to know Krishna, but to rid oneself of all dried-up, personal channels of thought and feeling. What you need is freedom and the breakthrough towards the joy of all joys – i.e., burdenlessness.

There is no good in thinking repeatedly about what others think about the world and God and the Self – the thoughts of others are not the bounds of your own experience.

First, do not see yourself as a jnani, a bhakta, or anything else; try to start anew, like a child, and feel the pulsation of life in everything, loving all. You can begin to do this if you see everything – persons, plants, animals, stars, or whatever it may be – from its point of view, not relating it to yourself. Let everything be as it is, and do not harm it. Forget about trying to master anything, not even your own

being. Why? Because by depriving things, persons, and yourself of their own being, you see, realise, and dominate shadows, misunderstandings, and non-reality.

Freedom and bondage are terms of ignorance only – if you dare to throw away all the rubbish of clichés others have used, you can have a chance to meet me on the path of “Beyond-Reality” as a comrade and friend on the same path.

I try to meet you in Sweden in the fall – if you feel you should.

Do not force yourself to follow the way of others who “enjoy” to vegetate in the strait-jacket of ‘isms’ and musts.

From heart to heart, Your Sadananda”

Then I took them back to their hotel once more, and we parted ways. The following day, or perhaps the day after, when it was time to return to Maitri’s place, I collected them from the hotel and drove them there. While I was driving, Svami, seated to my right, gave me a tender look and started to sing the Mahamantra – and soon I joined him. After a while, he stopped, and we remained silent.

At Maitri’s place, it was soon time to go to bed. Then I heard that Maitri was chasing a rat in the kitchen. The rat then ran into “my room” and disappeared into my bedding. After a while, Maitri managed to catch the rat in my pillowcase and ran out with it, under much laughter.

The next day, after breakfast, Svami looked at my stubble and asked if I wanted to use his electric razor. Of course, I wanted to! – Then, after a long breakfast, it was time for me to go back to Stockholm.

After a week or two, Svami rang and invited me to Maitri’s place, saying, “Do you think we shall let Vamandas come along?” I didn’t understand anything! What was I compared with Walther? I would have been happy to take Walther there, then go home immediately, and then pick him up again. – I just said that we would both come. Walther and I went there in my car, and we stayed for a weekend. What happened there was utterly overwhelming. In answer to an interview for the online magazine “The Touchstone”⁶, I once wrote:

I met Svami Sadananda only a few times before his disappearance in 1977, but those encounters profoundly influenced my life. His outward appearance and behaviour revealed nothing extraordinary – quite the opposite. However, I was firmly convinced that he was not of this world and that he could read every secret

⁶ See https://issuu.com/gaudiyatouchstone/docs/edition_1, page 56. Retrieved 18 October, 2022.

thought I harboured. On one occasion, I spent a weekend with him and his disciple, Vamandas (Walther Eidlitz), and I was astonished to see 80-year-old Vamandas transform into a 5-year-old boy in the presence of his much younger Gurudeva. Sadananda, as sharp as a thunderbolt, criticised him for two days regarding numerous mistakes he had made in his translations of the Shastras and other matters.

Previously, in Vamandas' book, 'Unknown India', I had read that Shrila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakur also often expressed what Sadananda called 'aggressive grace'. Many years earlier, in the internment camp in India, Vamandas had asked Sadananda:

– Why do they torment you? Give you the worst place in Wing II, without air and light, spread lies about you, so that you once again act as a troublemaker. As if they want to catch you in a net.

– To draw out the extreme of seva. Yes – Yogamaya [God's Own, internal shakti; the director of the lila, the divine play]. She behaves like vikarshana-shakti [the external shakti, Mahamaya's repelling force, hurling away from the Centre of all existence].

– And why do people hate you? It seems your methods of 'aggressive grace' come back to you as karma.

– Aggressive grace is ahaituki [causeless].

– You mean cit, without karma?

– Yes.

– And why do they hate you?

– Because they feel that I am firmly rooted in something. This is what the philistine hates most of all: when someone is firmly rooted, as he is not, 'he is drifting'. (Notebook, Vamandas)

On the day of our departure, Sadananda's mood shifted, and he warmly embraced both Vamandas and me, with tears in his eyes, conveying a kind of affection I had never felt before. Then I understood what the words describing the Guru meant: "Hard as a thunderbolt, soft as a flower."

Twenty years earlier, Sadananda wrote to Vamandas:

"You must not be upset by my harsh critique of your faults. It is because I love you deeply, Vamandas, for your dedication to the bhakti cult, that I permit myself to be so stern with you, who has sacrificed so much for me. But rest assured that your sacrifices will not remain with me; they pass like sunshine through wide-open windows to Him and Her."

The day before, he also showed me his great sense of humour when, suddenly, out of gratitude, I felt the need to bow before him. Then he looked at me with a smile, saying: “Hast du Rückenschmerzen bekommen? (Have you got some pain in your back?)

Then, when he emphasised the utmost importance of sambandha-jnanam and defined the atma and the subtle and gross body, he suddenly asked me, his eyes flashing:

Do you know the meaning of the word “Radha”? It is derived from the two Sanskrit roots “ra” and “dha”. “Ra” means “to give”; like a flash of lightning, Radha grants Krishna, the profound, dark mystery, insight into His own being – and then She immediately withdraws again, removes Herself, “dha”.

Now I sit here today, writing these lines, 50 years later. I also remember that Svami pointed at the giant longcase clock at Maitri’s place, saying:

“Look at the clock: the two cursors are moving, but without the clockwork, which is invisible, they will stop. Every little part of the clock is all-important.”

I understood what he was hinting at, what I also could read later in one of his letters to Hella, Walther’s wife (16 February 1954; extract, my translation):

“It is a pyramid of seva, where the foundation is to know oneself to be dasa-dasa-anudasa. [To be a servant of those who are the servants of those who are the servants of Them.] On this foundation, the whole lila develops, and this is why Radha-Krishna love the dasa-dasa-anudasas so much. We must always take care, not to inflate ourselves to a Raktaka or Rasala (servant), a Subala or Sudama (friend), a Yashoda (parent) or a [Lalita or Vishakha] (sakhi; a female friend), and this is why Raghunatha Dasa Gosvami, in a prayer [Vilapa-Kusumanjali, verse 16], in an inner dialogue with Radha prays: ‘The thought of wanting to become one of Your sakhis or female friends – this [being a sakhi] I honour from a distance; may I have love for, a special liking for, becoming one of Your dasi-s [maidservants]!’ [...] From my heart, Your Sadananda, Radhe! Radhe!”

When Svami and I went for a walk, he told me that he had to break Vamandas’s samskaras, his deeply engraved habits of thoughts, feelings and living. Then he asked me if Vamandas had told me how to repeat the Mahamantra. When he heard that Vamandas had told me that ‘Hare’ (the vocative form of ‘Hari’ or ‘Hara’) in the first Name of the Mahamantra means (only) Radha, he became angry. Later,

when all of us were assembled, he said that Hari – the Thief of all Thieves, He Who steals everything from us that stands in the way of bhakti – means all aspects of Hari, of Bhagavan Krishna, and that one should think of this together with the first artha (inner meaning) given by Gopal Guru Gosvami, until one has attained freedom from bhava (samsara)!

When Sadananda gave initiation in the Mahamantra – as far as we know – he showed the disciple how to serve the Tulasi-mala (rosary) he was now given, and explained the riti, the method, how to serve it in the right way. The riti was also given in written form together with Gopal Guru Gosvami’s 16 arthas (inner meanings) of the mahamantra. Sadananda said nothing about Sankhya, how many rounds the disciple should do on the mala, or whether a vrata (vow) was required. To some disciples, he also gave the Gopala mantra, for instance, to Maitri dasi, who continued the disciplic succession by giving diksha to some of her disciples (the Mahamantra and the Gopala mantra). Sadananda may also have given other mantras and instructions to certain disciples.

I also remember that Svami asked Maitri whether Krishna could do everything He wanted. Maitri laughed and said she thought He could. Svami spoke for a long time, then he said that Krishna cannot do everything He wants to do because He is bound to His Own nature.

When we looked at the *Brahma Samhita*, Svami asked me to recite the first verse, which I did. Then he said the visarga [the aspirates] must also be heard. When I inquired about Shvetadvipa, “the white island”, mentioned in this book, he simply smiled and said we would discuss it later. When I used the expression “acintya-bhedabheda-vada” [see below], he became upset. At that time, I did not understand why, but later I read the following in Svami’s text “Gaudiya-sampradaya-tattva”:

“Mahaprabhu did not create a new system, nor did Jiva Gosvami. Acintya-bhedabheda⁷ is an inference, a conclusion, a siddhanta, a conclusion drawn when one considers the Word Revelation as a whole, i.e., when the Upanishads talk about unity and duality, distinction, and non-distinction, and with this double statement want to make a statement about God’s nature, it follows that God simultaneously is form and not form, one and manifold etc. This may be contrary to the laws of human logic, but God and His nature are in no way confined to obeying mundane,

⁷ Acintya-bheda-abheda. Inconceivable simultaneous distinction and non-distinction. Bheda = distinction, abheda = non-distinction. Acintya = Only cognizable through the realization of the unrestricted import of the Shastrams. (Shridhara in Vishnu-Purana-tika 1.3.2)

human laws of thinking. – The term acintya-bhedabheda-vada⁸ appears much later. Mahaprabhu and His contemporaries had no intention whatsoever of forming a new system, unlike the existing, disparate monistic and dualistic systems. Still, they wanted to show that one does violate the Absolute when one tries to squeeze it into either a monistic or a dualistic system, and instead of accepting the double statements of the Revelation, choose only one.”

Therefore, to call acintya-bhedabheda a ”vada”, a system, a teaching is wrong.

During the time Vamandas and I stayed at Maitri’s place, she did not seem to bother at all about Svami’s scolding of Vamandas. Hertha, on the other hand, seemed rather surprised and taken aback. I don’t think she knew about the “Corrections”⁹ before she came to visit us later, when we had moved from Stockholm to Skåne. But Maitri was joyful all the time, spreading harmony around her wherever she was. And Vamandas? – He looked ever so happy, despite being wounded by Svami’s harsh words! And why should he not? Now, he was together with his Guru again. Was he aware that this was the last time – this time?

Later that autumn, Svami returned to Basel, and I hoped to see him again the following summer. – In January 1975, a postcard from Svami arrived:

“God’s blessings on you, Maria, Frieda and Mrs and Mr Hillfon. I got your letter – the photocopy of the Devanagari alphabet I will send in January. Thanks for the photo of Walther’s statue [The photo of Walther’s sculpture, made by Maria’s mother]. Please give my best wishes to E. I felt so happy in your company in 1974. Radhe Radhe”

19 June 1975, I got a new letter from Sadananda:

“Dear Kid, thanks for your phone, the statue of Vamandas [picture of the sculpture of Vamandas], etc. Please let me know if you are going to Siljansee [Vamandas’ summer course]. How long are you to stay in P.L. 3151, S-290 12 Degeberga? [our cottage in Maglehem]” Thank you so much –nobody informed me if Eidlitz got the Dr H.C. actually. He wrote on 28.3 that he did not know whether the rumour was true. I had a minor stroke in the meantime, but since yesterday, I have been a bit better. I could not follow what you said on the phone yesterday – have you reached

⁸ Vada = teaching, system of thoughts.

⁹ Sadananda’s 300 pages corrections to Vamandas’ book *Die indische Gottesliebe*.

your goal?¹⁰ How are you, Maria, and Frida? I have no one here available to correspond on my behalf; please excuse the delay. Please tell Vamandas and Maitri I cannot come now. Is the Bhagavatam you got in Stockholm, printed in Gorakhpur, India, with an English translation? Please send me the bookseller's address. I think of you, Yours in the One Seva, Sadananda”

This summer, Walther stayed with us for a month in Skåne. See Walther's letter to Svami (21 June 1975), my translation:

My dear Svamiji, I have been here with Kid, Maria, and little Frida since 26 May – except for two days in Lund during the conferring of the doctor's degrees at the cathedral. It is a great joy to be with Kid and to work alongside him. Among other things, we are studying Prabhupada's last vani, and we are now reading the Raya Ramananda chapter in C.C. Kid is like a loving and helpful son and friend to me. I also have very good contact with Maria and the little one. They invited me to Mälarhöjden (Stockholm), should it no longer be possible to stay in Waxholm, to the place you once visited, because they plan to make it their residence from 1 August: the house that belongs to Maria's father and mother, Gösta and Hertha Hillfon. Hertha Hillfon is a sculptor and intends to create a new sculpture of me. As a conscientious objector, Kid must perform civilian service from 11 August, probably at a museum in Stockholm. [...] On 30 June, I will fly with Maria to my course in Indian philosophy in Dalarna. Kid will stay here on the south coast of Sweden to look after the child. My address until 10 July is Folkhögskola Leksand (Hantverket), S-793 00 Leksand. [...] I was very distressed when Kid – after his phone call with you – told me you are not well at all. Please, stay with us a little longer. I think of your words: 'The Guru is not a removal van, he is a chariot. He must lead his disciple over a battlefield of aparadhas.' Sometimes, I think I may come to the point when you can tell me more of the inner lila.”

Later that summer, we relocated to Mälarhöjden, Stockholm. Unfortunately, Svami was unable to visit Sweden that year, making 1974 the final year he was here.

In January 1976, Walther unexpectedly began writing his last will at our house in Stockholm. (See appendix!) Maria's parents were witnesses and signed the document. I was shocked and anxious, unsure how to handle this spiritual inheritance. Later, Ulla said that I had received a heavy rucksack! I was speechless, and Walther himself did not explain. Over time, I gradually realised that this was

¹⁰ What I said on the phone was, “Please, help me to attain my eternal goal!”

actually great Mercy, an invitation to do some seva, despite all of my imperfections. At that time, I was 27, and Ulla was 12 years older.

Walther's blood tests had been poor for some time, and it finally became clear that he had advanced cancer. He expressed his wish to die fully conscious, not in a haze of morphine in a hospital. Ulla then informed us she needed to go to her parents in northern Sweden to work there for a while, and that the situation in Waxholm would be uncertain while she was away.

After all, Walther was very ill at that time. Because of this, she asked whether Walther could come to us in Mälärhöjden before his summer course, and whether we could take him there, assist him, and then return to Mälärhöjden. We agreed and decided to help him have a natural death in Mälärhöjden, because this was what he wanted. We knew Walther could not live much longer, and he had talked to his doctor, who was optimistic and promised to be available and to provide the necessary help. Maria's parents were also supportive, and Maria's father said that 20 years ago, he had done the same for his mother, in this very room.

Ulla was not only a dear friend of Walther and us – and still is – she was also a nurse. She said she would help us as much as she could when she was back from the north, but that she also had to work. In the second half of June, Walther came to our place. He got “my” study room on the first floor, adjacent to the bathroom. The room was painted white, with skylights, a balcony, and a large writing table flanked by bookshelves.

Despite his serious illness, Walther was determined to run his summer course, which took place from 29 June to 7 July. I took him to the course, having made him a bed in the car. In some way, he managed to give his lectures, burning the candle at both ends.

Then Walther and I returned to Stockholm. He was now completely exhausted. Back in Mälärhöjden, we all tried to make the best of the situation. I worked all day at the museum, and Maria was supposed to do some artwork and look after Frida, who was now three years old. But Walther was a very patient patient.

Nevertheless, after a few weeks, I had an idea! I planned to explain the whole situation to my supervisor at the museum and see what he had to say. To my great surprise, he became very touched and said, “You are supposed to be here till September, but what you are doing now at home is of much greater importance. You are free. You don't have to be here any longer.”

Two weeks prior to Vamandas passing away, Maitri wrote a letter to him (9 August 1976; my translation):

Dear Walther! ... I heard from Marianne that your summer course in Dalarna was very good. I am pleased to hear about the Swedish book, Guds lek, the first part of the Caitanya book, and that the second part will also be published in Swedish. [The complete book was not published until 2013.] Most of all, I thank you for the book, Den glömda världen, which was my first guide to the world I had long been searching for. I hope you understand that I am very sorry to hear that you are seriously ill, but I am glad you can be with Maria and Kid at their place in Mälarhöjden, Stockholm. You couldn't be in a better place. And I say, as I said to Erik [Maitri's husband] when he was ill: "As the Paramatma (or maybe Krishna in cittam?) arranges everything, in accordance with my karma, this is how it must be, and I willingly accept it." Just imagine, Walther, what a fortunate life you have had! You have met a true bhakti-Guru and received instructions from him, the most wonderful thing that can befall a living being. Through books and lectures, you have also guided others on the bhakti path. This is the most precious, the best thing that can happen to a human being. I know you are happy and grateful for this. I can never thank you enough for having met Svāmī and you! It is so good that you can read and talk with Maria and Kid. Just imagine, the Master of speech, Svami, cannot speak! Give my love to Maria and Kid! Radhe! Radhe!"

Reading this letter now, I recall how happy Walther was when he read these lines. It also makes me think of Svami's last (?) letter to Vamandas (25 August 1975; extract, my translation):

*"Dear Vamandas,
Many happy returns of your day. May Shri Krishna's mercy prevail and grant you the strength to serve Him for many years to come and to spread His message to others. [...] Please pass my regards to all my friends in Waxholm [...] and tell them I wish them all the best. I hope to see everyone in high spirits when I meet them this autumn, including you, my dear and loyal Vamandas. I thank everyone who remembers me, even though I am not allowed to write.*

Radhe! Radhe!

Always from my heart, your Sadananda

Tell everyone – what they do for You, they also do for Me – Everyone here sends their regards."

We, Ulla and Helena, did our best to help Walther. He went through various stages: sometimes he was worried, other times he was beaming; his whole room seemed to shine! – He ate less and less, and eventually, he also drank less and less.

Now and then, Walther’s friends visited him. A few also came on his 84th birthday, 28 August, the day he stopped breathing. The atmosphere was very peaceful and joyful that day. Everyone knew it would be over soon. At that time, we knew little about Vaishnava conduct and how to help a Vaishnava in his last days. We knew about the Name, of course, and when Walther stopped breathing, we were sitting around his bed, singing the Name, while Ulla and I were holding his hands.

After some time, our 3-year-old daughter came into the room and found Walther lying there, peaceful, with Tulasi leaves on his forehead, surrounded by loving friends. She asked: “Is he dead now?” No fear, no desperation, only peace prevailed.

Then we realised we had to call the police. This is a standard procedure when someone dies at home. The police arrived, asked a few questions, and departed. Later this evening, a large black car pulled up outside our house. It came to take Walther’s body to the mortuary.

Shortly after these events, and in accordance with his will¹¹, a friend brought Walther’s books, notebooks, etc., to our home, where Ulla and I continued to sort everything out.

After some time, we took everything intended for his son Günther to his flat in Uppsala, in a large cardboard box, i.e., everything except Walther’s Indological papers and books, photos, etc.

Books and translations were scattered all over my room now, and I did not know how to serve this spiritual inheritance! My English was poor, my German non-existent, let alone Sanskrit and Bengali! Walther had told me that I needed to learn German and English thoroughly. I had to do this. But when and how?

Walther’s funeral took place at Skogskyrkogården (“The Forest Churchyard”) in Stockholm, where his ashes were scattered in a memorial grove. I have no clear memories of the funeral, except that his son Günther read verse 5:56 from Brahma-Samhita.

¹¹ See the appendix!

*“There, the forms of His Own potency are His beloved ones,
 and their only Beloved is the supreme personal God.
 There, the trees fulfil all wishes, the earth consists of cit-jewels,
 And the water is nectar.
 There, every word is a song, every step is a dance,
 and the flute, Krishna’s beloved female friend.
 The stars in heaven consist of pure knowledge
 and Divine joy: ‘Supreme light’.
 This and everything else there is rasa,
 direct, loving service, through and through.
 From eternal cows flows the ocean of pure milk.
 Time has no access there.
 Time, which is (here) split into fractions of seconds.
 In serving love, I worship this truly pure realm,
 which is secluded like an island
 and inaccessible from other realms.
 Goloka, it is called, the realm of (pure) knowledge.
 There are only a few of those who truly exist,
 who roam this earth, and are aware of this land.”*
(Brahma-Samhita 5,56, freely after Sadananda’s detailed translation)

A few weeks later, Maria and I were married in our garden in Stockholm. One of Hertha Hillfon’s sisters, a priest, officiated at the ceremony. Providence ensured it took place on Radha’s avirbhava, the day of Her appearance, which glittered in a mesmerising golden light that afternoon.

At the same time in Basel, Sadananda was still in the hospital, very ill.

For some time, we had cherished the dream of living in the countryside. During winter, we rented a house in Skåne from friends. While there, we viewed an old farmstead and successfully obtained a loan from the bank. On 1 April 1977, we moved in.

On Easter Monday, Maitri rang us – Svami had departed!

By being ill for such a long time, Svami gave us the opportunity to adapt to a life without him, without his vapu, his physical presence here on earth. But we still have his vani, the sound and vibration of his transcendental words and teachings, waiting

to be listened to not only by us but also by many new souls in the future. And by serving his *vani*, we remain forever connected.

Now, when neither Sadananda nor Walther was present here in their physical forms, a new chapter of our lives began, during which Maitri became of utmost importance to us and many others as well. Vamandas called her Maitri, the Friend (of everyone). Svami also often used this name for her. In a letter to Mario (from 13 September 1974), he also refers to her as “our Swedish Yogamaya” [Yogamaya, who is the Director of the Divine Play], probably because of Maitri’s swiftness, adaptability, modesty, serving attitude, good temper, harmonising nature, her ability to organise everything smoothly and to the best advantage, among other qualities. In the years that followed, until Maitri’s departure 2011, we maintained regular contact, which allowed me to ask her about Svami and Vamandas, her husband Erik, who passed away in 1968, Hella, who died in 1967, and about everyone and everything, including herself.

Two years of hard work renovating our new home and building a studio for Maria followed, and I was nearly 30 years old. Our daughter was now attending school every day, and I decided to study English and German at the university in Lund. I obtained a study loan and had to attend high school first, which took three years, because I needed to achieve top marks in all subjects to be admitted to the training college and borrow all this money at my advanced age. But I never intended to become a teacher; I just wanted to learn English and German, so I could serve our spiritual heritage in some way. Overall, I studied for seven years. Strangely enough, I never had to repay my substantial student loan because my income was always too low.

Before that, however, in December, Maria and I travelled to Vraja for two weeks. We knew little about India at the time; we only knew what we had read from Sadananda, and we absorbed everything like innocent children, wide-eyed and with mouths agape. There, right in front of us, were the river Yamuna, the mountain Govardhana, and the pond of Radha, Radha-Kunda! At Radhakunda, we met Krishnadas, “Madrasi Baba,” who, along with his elder brother, had studied philosophy in Bombay when they were young. One day, they learned that Sadananda would give a series of ten-day lectures on Mahaprabhu. They attended the lectures, which led them to leave their philosophical studies and head for Vraja! Krishnadas remembered that it had been very hot during the lectures, and he had fanned Svami.

Over a few days, Krishnadas showed us some significant sites in Vraja, ending with a nightly parikrama (circumambulation) of Mount Govardhana beneath the enchanting light of the full moon. – We will not dwell on that now, however. This is a story of its own. Let us return to Sweden!

After Svami's disappearance, Marthe Calmbach, who lived in Basel, used to visit Maitri during her summer holidays. Then she flew to Copenhagen and stayed with us for a few days before I took her to Maitri. Afterwards, I returned to our place until it was time to go back to Maitri to bring Marthe back here, before she went home. – But who was Marthe?

The day after Svami's arrival in Basel, on 14 June 1961, Marthe visited him at the hospital because she had previously met Vamandas and heard about Svami from him. She was a young woman who had worked as a dressmaker and produced fashion drawings in Paris. She did much seva for Svami in Basel, wrote down dictations, and typed much of what we have today. Svami often spent his weekends working and dictating in her small flat, where he felt at home.

At the start of the 1980s, Maria and I spent a week at Marthe's place. We were younger than she was and liked her "Bohemian style." We read together for hours each day, and one day we visited Svami's grave at the Hörnli cemetery in Basel, where we took photos of it, snow-covered. The gravestone has, unfortunately, been removed since then, and the area has been levelled.

One day, we also visited Phyllis Imhof, in whose house Svami lived from 1963. It was a home filled with upper-middle-class furniture and hand-painted porcelain, painted by Phyllis herself. In this spacious house, she cared for Svami through his daily life for 14 years, first with her mother and then on her own.

Before we returned to Marthe's flat, Phyllis unlocked the door to Svami's study, where all his books were kept, and we took some photos. She then showed us Svami's small bedroom and asked Maria if she would like to rest on his bed for a while, which she did.

In 1987, Marthe suddenly vanished one night. Everyone was puzzled. No one knew for certain what had happened to her, but after some time, her body was discovered in a sluice of the River Rhine in Basel.

In August 1987, Phyllis wrote to me, telling me I had to go to Basel quickly and take care of Marthe's Shastras before it was too late. I told her I needed to finish

my final university exam first. A few days later, I did so while Maria was waiting in our car outside the university. Then we headed to Basel immediately. Seven years of study were now complete, and I was ready to perform some translation Guru-seva. I felt as if I were living in a fairy tale! Seven years of hard work had given me the key to fulfilling my life's purpose!

Now I also remember Svami's last words to me at Maitri's place, when Vamandas and I went there together. After Svami's severe scolding of Vamandas, I did not know what to do! Should I really stay with Vamandas if he was so hopeless? It was at that moment Svami embraced us both with such deep love, with tears in his eyes. Then he took a firm hold of my arm, saying, "Stick to Vamandas!" Well, I had done so, and finally also obeyed Walther's request to learn German and English.

We met Phyllis again at her place. She then took us to Marthe's flat, which was now empty. The property owner had bought everything from Marthe's flat, which her father, who was still alive, had owned. In fact, we already knew the property owner, since we had visited Marthe a few years earlier. He then took us to the cellar and showed us all of Svami's typed works in so-called Klemm-mappen, neatly arranged on a shelf behind an unlocked door covered with chicken wire. He did not know what to do with them and was glad we took care of them.

At Phyllis's place, we also received many books, notebooks, typed sheets, and some of Svami's more personal belongings, like his Giridhari and his seal. The next day, we loaded everything into the car and drove straight back home, too afraid to leave it behind.

Back home, there was one last major obstacle: to become a teacher, I needed to spend another year studying at the school of education, and I had a huge student loan with no idea what to do. I only had one thought in my mind: to start translating Svami's works.

One night, I dreamt of being confined in a grey cellar without windows or doors. Nevertheless, I was determined to find a way out, and suddenly I noticed a crack in the wall. I moved closer and sensed God's presence, bowing in awe. In the crack, I saw a chrysalis from which a large entity, like a bird-butterfly hybrid, emerged. It displayed the most stunning bright colours and ascended into the sky.

Then I woke up, filled with great joy. I knew I would find a way! I spoke to Maria, and we made a deal: I would translate Svami's texts into Swedish and read them aloud to her because her knowledge of German and English was very limited. I

would also organise the ground services here at home so she could dedicate more time to her work as an artist. We decided to give it a try!

Some time later, I received a letter from Mario Windisch (Mandali Bhadra Dasa) in Germany. I had never met him, only heard about him from Vamandas. Mario had just heard from Phyllis that Marthe was probably dead. I invited Mario and his close friend, Oliver Hertel (Vasudeva Dasa), to Högåsa so we could meet and discuss everything that had happened.

It did not take long for Mario and Oliver to arrive by ferry at Trelleborg. By then, I had translated many of Svami's "Corrections" into Swedish, and we read them here in German and in Swedish, deeply grateful to Svami for this extraordinary work.

This marked the beginning of our annual summer reading week and another gathering where we collectively read and translated Svami's texts. One by one, others joined us. Now that both Vamandas and Svami had departed, everyone turned to Maitri, our senior-most Vaishnava and clear authority. Watching her listen to the texts we read together was truly captivating.

Over the following years, I translated extensively into Swedish and later into English, and soon others began to contribute. Initially, I relied on a typewriter, but in the 1990s, computers became more common, and I acquired one.

By the end of the 1990s, we had created Sadananda's and Vamandas' first website. Initially, this site was only accessible to us because I was unsure whether it was right to publish Svami's works in this way, even the most basic ones. Majstin often reminded us of Svami's last words to her: "Vorsicht mit Bhakti!" ("Careful with Bhakti!") When people who have turned their backs on God and His service hear or read about God, the bhakta and bhakti, they will easily think and say things that are derogatory, which can hurt them spiritually. After weighing the advantages and disadvantages for a very long time and questioning my motives, I ultimately decided to take the risk and make the website available to the public, though this does not mean we publish everything on it.

After several years of offering translation services in Svami's "Bhakti workshop", I felt the need for additional qualified help, so I began to pray to Svami: Please send us a helper, we cannot do your seva alone. – After some time, Katrin Stamm (Kalakanthidasi) appeared. She had much of the knowledge, qualities, and capacity we needed, and has since achieved many great things in Svami's Bhakti-workshop: translating, organising Sadananda's website, creating various Facebook pages

connected to the Vaishnava world – collaborating with the Journal of Vaishnava Studies, the Bhaktivedanta Research Centre in Calcutta, Ferdinando Sardella, Stockholm University, and Måns Broo, Åby Akademi in Finland, among many others worldwide. She never met Svami in his physical form but considers him her shiksha-Guru. She was initiated by Maitri dasi, her diksha-Guru, and is a link in the disciplic succession.

In 2016, I was diagnosed with leukaemia and realised I needed to make plans for a future without me. Ulla Fjellström and I then decided to bequeath the complete spiritual and personal literary estate of Svami and his foremost disciple, Vamandas, to Katrin Stamm. Today, this estate has been transferred to her residence in Flensburg, Germany.

I have now recovered from the leukaemia and can, despite my Parkinson's disease, continue my Guru-seva on a small scale. May these words of Sadananda be a blessing to us all.

I think of you.

Yours
in the One seva

Sadananda

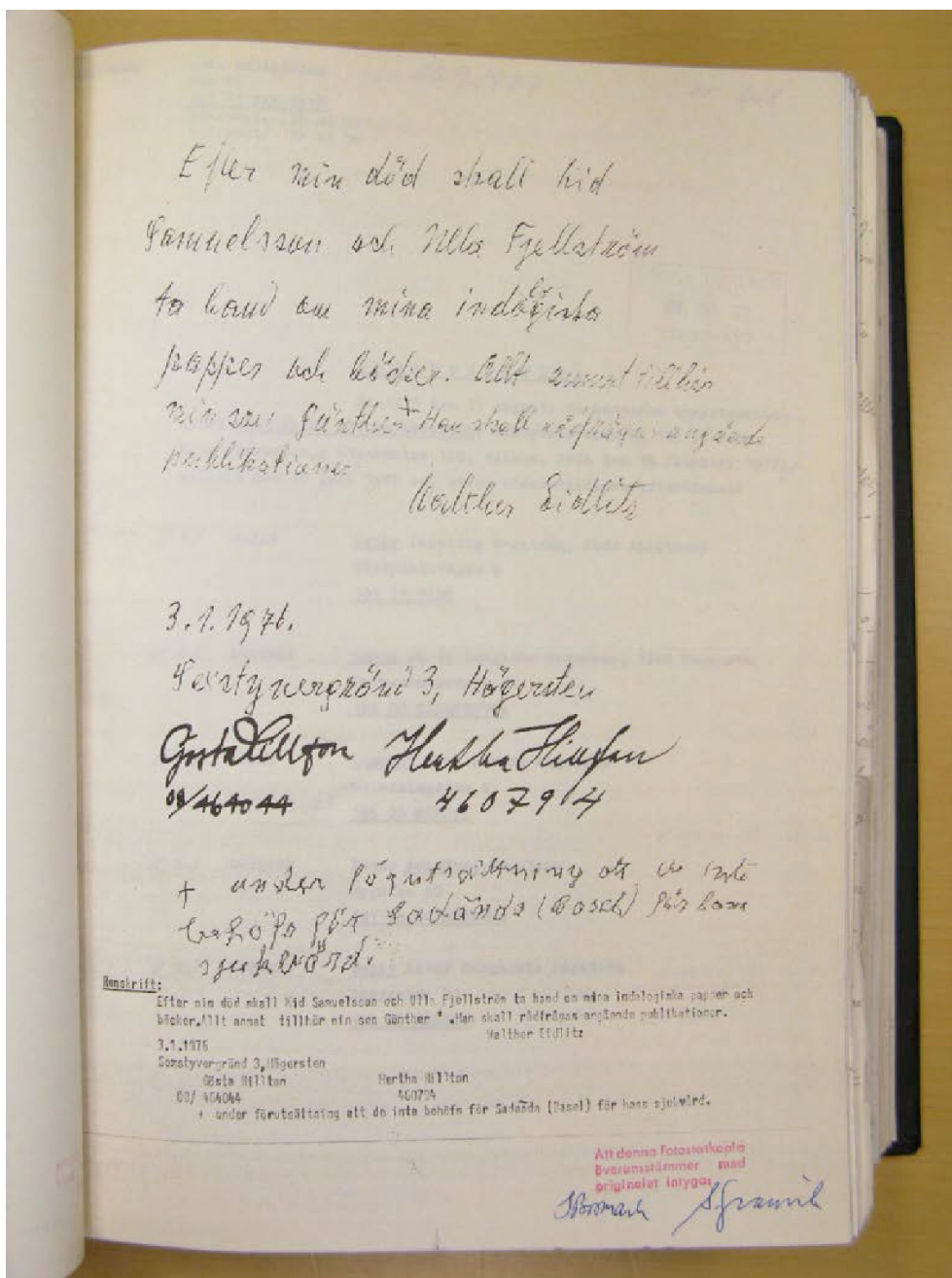
Appendix

Från: Catarina Ahlfors <catarina.ahlfors@stockholm.se>

Ämne: Bouppteckning

Datum: 29 december 2011 10:47:17 CET

Till: "info@sadananda.com" <info@sadananda.com>



Översänder beställd bouppteckning Dnr: 4.1.4---21955/11 Med vänlig hälsning

Catarina Ahlfors

