

## My sadguru

There are times in one's life when an event or a person changes the whole course of the river of one's life. That may well be said of my first meeting with a great man of God, Swami Vishwananda. With an encounter of this kind, words are inadequate to describe the true greatness or importance of such a meeting. To meet the guide, the one sent to you by God, to lead you to the highest safety, peace eternal, your true home, after incarnations of exile, after roaming in this ocean of delusion, this dream that we call reality, is inexpressible.

As one great saint described life, *for those who are awakened from this terrible nightmare, there is no more roaming*. In the clear mirror of their consciousness they are able to easily see or distinguish reality from dreams, like the swan that can separate milk from water. It is also said that God is more eager to draw His wayward children than they are willing to come back to His Omnipresence. I can understand this better now because after I was splashed with the Divine Love of this Man of God, my tendency was to withdraw: *No, that force is too strong. I am not ready for that. I do not have the capacity to receive him* — that was my reasoning. For years I had been searching consciously for him, praying every day that he would come to me. When he came to me in the form of my *sadguru*, I withdrew, just as a tortoise retreats into its shell. I shrank from receiving what He had come to give.

Swami Vishwananda was very patient with me. He came again a year later, hoping that I would let go of my fears and worries and recognize the instrument of God that had been sent to take me home. This time there was less resistance on my part. He promised that he would come back to Croatia the following year, and I was hoping to accompany him on his tour. I sensed that he was a great person and had the desire to spend as much time with him as possible. Of course it did not occur to me that you couldn't come to him unless he himself was drawing you to him. I later realised, after speaking with him, that it was he

who was guiding my thoughts and desires. He said to me that I had been his disciple for many, many incarnations. It is the promise of the *guru* that he will lead his disciple until he realises God, until the final liberation from the bondage of this illusion which we call life. The disciple in return promises that he will follow the precepts of the *guru*, faithfully and to his best ability.

Indeed, in my *guru* I found this bond of divine love unbroken, although I wasn't fully aware of it before I met him. He has been with me my whole life, silently guiding my heart, until I was ready to meet him in person, after the seeming separation of this current incarnation. In him I found the fullness of the mother-to-son, father-to-son, friend-to-friend, brother-to-brother, lover-to-lover relationship. In other words, all in one. He is my mother. He is my father. He is my true friend, my beloved: my all. No relationship in my whole life had the fullness I have felt with my *gurudeva*.

I will never forget our second encounter; it was at the airport where I had come to greet him. That was his second visit to my country. As it happened, I was able to accompany him on that tour and afterwards returned with him to Steffenshof, his main *ashram*. It was an instant recognition of our souls' bond. He invited me for a drive; he sat in the driver's seat and beckoned me to come into the car. Hardly detectable, in the farthest corner of my mind there appeared a doubt or a little fear to be driven by him.

Nonetheless I felt pretty safe. I soon forgot about that one-millionth of a second thought that had rushed through my mind earlier. After we arrived at the appointed place, just as we were getting out of the car, he turned to me and asked, "Were you afraid?" — "Of course I wasn't". I replied. Hours had passed when I finally remembered that tiny little millisecond of fear.

Having been raised with the teachings of Paramhansa Yogananda, I had read that he would challenge his audience

with the question, "How is everybody?" Everyone would shout back, "Awake and ready!" Then, as if he had not heard them the first time, he would repeat again, "How does everybody feel?" And people would again shout back, "Awake and ready!" Only then would he start to give talks, to pour out divine inspiration to receptive hearts and minds.

Swami Vishwananda, whenever I meet him, as he does with everybody, asks, "How are you?" Being awake and ready has been my motto for years. Awake and ready to receive God's love, to be attentive to what God is offering me on a day-to-day basis through connections with other people, to their words and the situations around me, and to the inner voice of intuition. Swami asked me this question many times, and I would always literally shout back: *Awake and ready!* At first he was startled when I responded like this, but of course he got the meaning of my response. As it happened, he decided to test me once to see whether I really was awake and ready.

We were staying in the house of one of the devotees from Zürich, Switzerland. It was two o'clock in the morning when I met Swami in the kitchen on the ground floor. He asked me the same question; again my response was the same. He challenged me again, "Are you sure?" I answered, "One hundred percent!" — "Are you sure?" he asked again. "Positive!" was my response. Then he said, "Go outside. There you will find some fruit on the kitchen window sill. Take three of them and eat them". Dressed only in my *dhoti* and wearing nothing on my feet, I rushed outside into the cold night and found only red chilli-peppers hanging from a tree, no fruit whatsoever. I rushed back into the kitchen and said to him, "I couldn't find any fruit there, only these red things", and I pointed to the window where they could be seen. Then he said, "Aren't these fruit of the tree? I meant fruit of the tree!" I then realized that I wasn't one hundred percent awake and ready. I wanted to go

out again and eat the peppers, but he said that the mind had already started to work and I had not passed the test.

Well, that was not the end of that story. The next day was bright and sunny, and I was enjoying my morning stroll in the garden. I stood by that very window and when I suddenly turned around, I saw a big apple tree, with only three, maybe four, apples hanging from the tree. At that point, I could only shake my head in amazement at the whole incident. Had I been more attentive the previous night, had I just taken a few more seconds and turned around, I would have seen the “right” tree, and I would have passed the test. Even though the story ended this way I was so grateful, for I gained more than I could have imagined.

This incident was, I would say, typical illustration of the *guru*-disciple relationship. There are many other small incidents, sometimes only a glance, or a look from him, perhaps just a word, spoken or unspoken, that create deep love and longing for God within me, or joy and bliss, or a deep stillness in my heart and mind. The way he treats us, his chosen children, with motherly care, is inspiring, sometimes overwhelming.

One beautiful thing about being with a great *guru* is that he will never pump up your ego. On the contrary, he will do his best to crush it. My *guru*, Swami Vishwananda, does it all the time, but his methods are gentle and loving. Accepting him as my saviour, I gave him my permission to iron out all the kinks in my character, to remove all negativity, all stumbling blocks that prevent me from realising my unity with God. I know that he has free access to my innermost thoughts because I granted it to him as a part of accepting our sacred bond as *guru* and disciple.

One evening I stood at the entrance of the chapel where icons of saints are displayed. There were other disciples around as well, all of them preoccupied with their own tasks. I was just

enjoying the atmosphere of being in the presence of my *guru*. Knowing that he never acknowledges that he is aware of what is going on in our heads, I felt free to express my divine cry for my Divine Mother, whom I beheld in the form of my *guru*. Feeling safe and secure within my own mind, and the thought that he would avoid me completely so as not to build up my ego even in the subtlest way, I was melting into the arms of the Divine Mother. I gently shed my tears of love and longing for Her, with a tinge of sadness that She had not yet come, mixed with the joyous expectations of Her long-awaited coming. Just at that moment *gurudeva* approached me, looked into my eyes and asked with the sweetest tone of voice, “Why are you crying?” I was taken aback as I hadn’t expected this sudden turn of events. I tried to hide my feelings, stuttering, hoping to find the right words to cover my Love. *Hiding from the guru!* Shame on me, I thought later on. Don’t we all do the same thing over and over again every day? Playing hide- and- seek with our own Creator who is just behind our thoughts, behind every heartbeat, in every atom of our being and all around us, who understands us better than our dearest friend, better than our own mother or father — and we wonder why He is hiding from us. We are running away from Him, like prodigal sons, not He from us! And He is always patiently waiting that we may perchance lift our hearts, just for once to receive His Love.

On another occasion, Swami approached me in a parking lot and with the deepest love, he pressed his hand over my heart and gently massaged the area, without saying a word, just with a deep fathomless look in his eyes. Afterwards he gave me a bear hug to confirm once more his love for me. Sometimes I would ask myself: *Why on earth does he love me so much?* I don’t even love him as much as he loves me. I know that I am not special. I have no special skills to offer him, nor money or inheritance, nothing. Quite often I feel that my love sucks, for that is the only thing that the disciple is supposed to offer to

one's *guru*. What to offer to him then, when you feel that way? Hopefully, the *guru* sees far beyond our egos and minds.

For the love from our hearts, which is pure and untainted, is ever ready to sprout forth, though covered with the mud of our restless thoughts and egos. Swami penetrates deeply and guides us directly from the soul level and doesn't mind our egos and minds, for we are not that. These are like old garments that we need to get rid of. He loves us for who we truly are — children of God, pure love and bliss. He teaches us to rise above the ego and the mind; to look deep within ourselves and to reawaken the divine memory that we are not mortal beings doomed to roll in the mud of our wrongdoings. He came to sow the seeds of love in the hearts of men and to show us the way back to our true home, in God. He is the true lighthouse, the guiding star of our shipwrecked hearts. To him I offer my gratitude and devotion. Glory be to God who came to me in the form of my *sadguru*. *Jai Gurudeva!*

Ch. – Croatia