

First meeting with Swami Vishwananda

It was the end of September 2003, and I was on my way to India. A great Mahatma was to celebrate his fiftieth birthday. I was one of a number of spiritual seeker, who had volunteered for kitchen duty: cleaning vegetables, peeling onions, and so forth.

A young man on my flight told me about Swami Vishwananda. I listened with interest but was not able to picture him clearly in my mind. The young man explained that Swami Vishwananda could materialize, produce lingams, and also do everything else that marked an avatar. However, this conversation was forgotten amid the work and the experience of this fiftieth birthday

In January 2004 I received an e-mail with photos of Swami Vishwananda – photos that I had to look at again and again – flawless in their charisma. But that was not all: I was offered a private audience with Swamiji in Switzerland. I only had to accept. I tried to put off my decision as long as possible, because I was not yet sure if I wanted to meet him; but the appointment was made on my behalf without my knowledge for April 2004.

In the meantime I was again on my way to India, the land that had stamped my consciousness with the indescribable experiences, awareness, and encounters that I had had there for more than fifteen years. In April I returned to Germany happy.

Had it not been for the call that reminded me of the audience with Swami Vishwananda, I would be much poorer today.

Somehow I did not want to travel again so soon – I had only just arrived physically but spiritually I was still wound up in all my Indian experiences. Was I at all receptive enough for such an encounter?

I was filled, however, with a special energy that gave me the strength to board a train to Basel in the morning. Everything for this trip had been organized by the people who traveled with me and, like me, were to have audiences with Swamiji. The journey proceeded in silence. Everyone was wrapped in his own thoughts; I heard music.

Friends were supposed to pick us up in Basel. We searched in vain for them at the train station. Time flew by and the hour for the audience came closer. I was beside myself. I couldn't understand why they had not notified us. The worst thing for me would be to be late for a holy man. It would be completely alright if I had to wait for Him, but not the other way around – and especially not for a first meeting. I gave free rein to my resentment and cursed the friends for having that kind of disrespect toward a holy man. At last by cell phone we reached the friends, who were very unconcerned about whether they came too late or how I would feel. They were stuck in a traffic jam.

I decided, whatever it might cost, to take a taxi to get to the place where we were expected as quickly as possible. Time passed – and it was at least a thirty minute ride. In the taxi I was already asking for forgiveness – it was so unpleasant for me, it seemed so ignorant, so disrespectful toward Swamiji Vishwananda – it was distressing to come too late.

I asked the taxi driver to drive as fast as possible. We arrived four minutes late, exhausted, agitated, and wind blown. This was not how I wanted to meet Swamiji Vishwananda, but unfortunately it could not be helped. We raced up the steps and stood exhausted and drained in the hallway. The door opened and Swamiji asked, "Who is next?" It could not have been better timing.

Breathless, with drops of sweat on my forehead, I looked at Him; and before I knew what happened, I had disappeared with Him, just as I was, behind the door that He had just opened. Everything was completely different from what I had expected but God handles things differently than I would.

I tried to catch my breath; inconspicuously I quickly dabbed away a few drops of sweat from my forehead. I wanted to excuse myself for our lateness, for the agitation that had set my heart to pounding, and for the stormy atmosphere that I had brought into the room. But I never got that far. He said, "I know what happened at the train station, I know...."

He must have sprinkled some kind of divine drops of serenity in my aura, for I was suddenly as tranquil as a calm sea. I just looked at Him – Him – the omniscient. I lost myself in His eyes. I had no more thoughts – nothing . . . and that lasted ten minutes.

There are no words to describe this encounter. Only the one thought: I must see Him again.

God is benevolent and granted me more meetings with Him in 2004.

And again I flew to India, visited charity school projects. As I was mopping the floor of my room one evening, I slipped and unfortunately fell on my left knee. By the next morning, my knee had swollen to three times its normal size and was extremely painful. I could hardly move it; but because I had to continue on my trip, I had no time to take care of my knee and had to bear the agony.

In Germany the doctors advised me to have an operation on my knee immediately, but I had an audience with Swamiji in Italy. This appointment was more important to me than further examinations, the more so as I knew that sometime no more private audiences would be given. So I traveled with a group to Italy.

As I stepped into Swamiji's audience chamber, I would have liked to bow down before Him as a sign of honor and respect in the Indian tradition. But it wasn't possible because of my injured knee. I wanted to excuse myself for my conduct and said, "Swamiji, in India I..." Swamiji interrupted me and said, "I know. I know everything that happened in India," and let me know by a calming gesture that this subject had come to an end. Then He asked, "And otherwise, do you have a question . . . ?"

In a flash the thought raced through my head: He knows everything! Although I am aware that He knows everything, I nevertheless must remind myself time and time again of His omniscience.

In October, November, and December 2004 Swamiji gave several Darshans in Germany and Holland. We traveled to all the Darshans and always invited Him to come again and also to come to us. And then in December 2004 He came to us at home.

We picked Him up at the airport. He was accompanied by one of His disciples. At home we prepared tea and took a place at the dining table in the living room. On one wall of this room there is a long book shelf. In several sections books stood two rows deep.

Swamiji was silent. So were we. We waited until He spoke to us. Swamiji broke the silence and told His disciple to go to the book shelf and remove the first book from the left in the lowest section and take out the book that stood behind it, for this was the book that had been read the most of all.

She did as He asked. He said to take the book furthest back and lay it in front of him on the table. The book was worn. It was well thumbed. He leafed through it – one could see how single passages, certain sentences had been marked in different colors. Without looking up, He repeated, while again leafing through the book, that this "is the most read book in the house"; and then He looked at me. Exactly. No one except me could know that, because this book was my book of books: *Paramahansa Yogananda – Autobiography of a Yogi*; and only I knew how often I had read it for over fifteen years. Once again He let me experience his omniscience. In deep eternal gratitude I bow before Swamiji Vishwananda.

Gloria - Germany