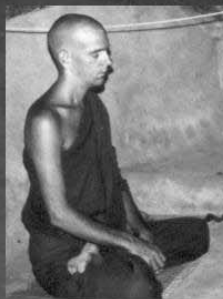


ONE NIGHT'S SHELTER



(FROM HOME TO HOMELESSNESS)

The Autobiography of
an American Buddhist Monk

3RD REVISED EDITION □ ELECTRONIC VERSION
BHIKKHU YOGAVACARA RAHULA
BHAVANA SOCIETY

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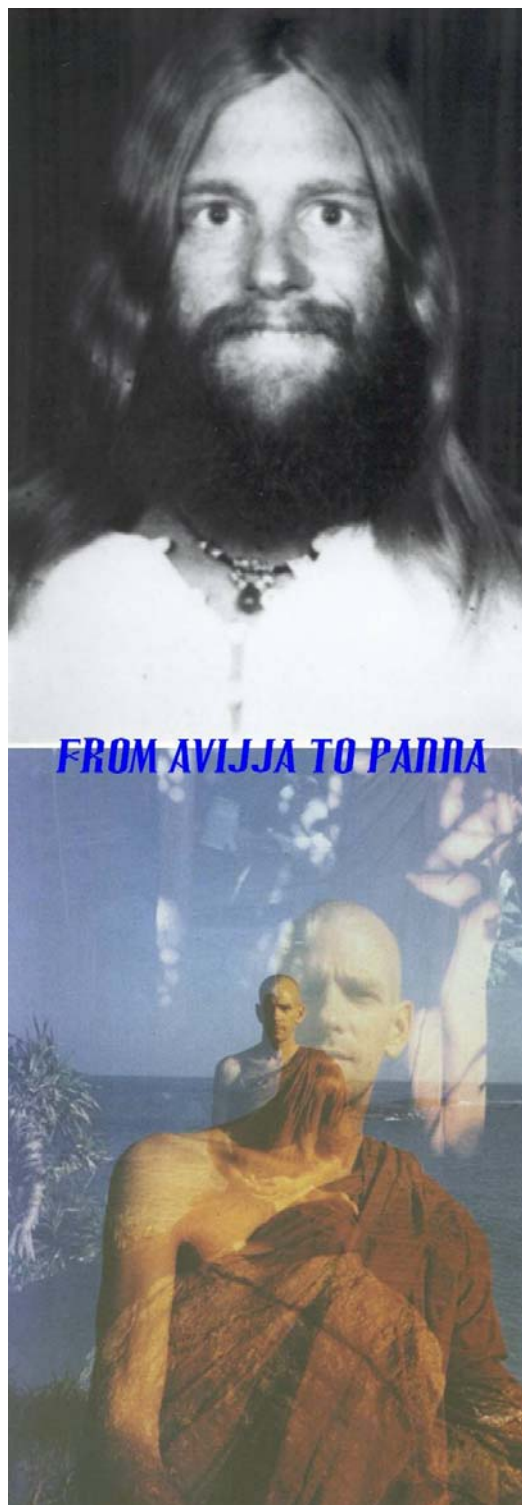


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Notes:

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Dhammavamsa — November 2004

PREFACE

Some of the people caught up in the 1960s drug culture ruined their lives. A few turned their lives around and became an example to others. Bhikkhu Yogavacara Rahula turned away from his unsafe indulgences at the right age by discovering the truth at the right time with the right teachers. “One Night’s Shelter” illustrates how this dramatic but gradual change took place.

His teaching of Dhamma is based on his own personal experiences with sex, drugs, rock and roll, and self-centered behavior. Transforming a chaotic life into a regular one is very difficult, much less turning to the religious and contemplative path. One needs great determination and 100 percent honesty to do it. Bhikkhu Rahula has accomplished this task on his own initiative guided by his own inner voice.

On one level this book could be an inspiring guide to anyone trapped in hedonism and unhealthy habits of body and mind. They will come to see how he gave up these habits and patterns and turned a new page in his life by following the Dhamma. It’s not something that happened overnight. But he persevered, aided by the diligent practice of mindfulness.

I met Bhikkhu Rahula in 1985 in Sri Lanka for the first time, when we both happened to be visiting a certain temple in Colombo at the same time. At the time I already had many appointments to see various people and did not have much time to talk with him. When he came to live at the Bhavana Society as my assistant in 1987 I began to know him little by little. He is a monk who does not care for food or comfort. He devotes each day he lives to the practice of Dhamma in action. The Buddha’s description of a monk like him is:

“The person who wears the patchwork robe, who is lean with veins showing all over his body, and who meditates alone in the forest — him do I call a Brahmana.”

This is Bhikkhu Rahula. He “is lean with veins showing all over his body and who meditates alone in the forest” at the Bhavana monastery/meditation center. When he is not meditating he is working for the benefit of those who come to this center to meditate and for those who live here. He does not expect any reward or recognition for his work. On the day we dedicated the new meditation hall, I said to him that I would

like to say a few words about his work on the new hall. He told me, *"Please don't say anything about me. I would feel embarrassed to hear any flattery."*

Once he opened his eyes to the Dhamma, Bhikkhu Rahula began to appreciate the value of his parents, teachers, friends, the Dhamma and the whole world. Not too many people these days in the West fully appreciate what their parents have done for them. As long as you remain blind to the truth of your parents' value you will never appreciate their sacrifices for you. This was but a part of his awakening to the world and to his life.

Ultimately, you are totally responsible for your life. Bhikkhu Rahula's commitment to the Dhamma and practice of meditation and Yoga brought him to an extraordinary position. Today he is a prominent meditation and Yoga teacher, teaching all over the world. He states very dramatically how he was "reborn" while listening in rapt attention to a Dhamma talk on his first retreat in Nepal: *"This is Thanksgiving Day (it was November 25th 1973), the first day of the rest of my life. Today I am reborn."*

This actually is what you realize when you first glimpse the Truth of Dhamma. This is inevitable. You have to experience it. No matter how many words you hear or read, you will never be able to make this expression with total sincerity and honesty until you touch the depth of Dhamma. "One Night's Shelter" can be an inspiration.



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INTRODUCTION

As an American living as a Buddhist monk in Sri Lanka, the most common question I was posed by the local population as well as by the Western tourists I met was, “Why have you become a Buddhist monk?” Most of the curious expected a short, off the cuff reply, as it might have been asked while standing on a street corner waiting for the bus. There is really no simple direct answer to a question of such magnitude if one is to do justice to it. One Night’s Shelter or From Home to Homelessness is, you might say, a long indirect reply or description of that process. I say process because as I experienced it, there was no definite cut and dried decision made in the matter which should become clear to the reader by the end of the story.

The book is divided into two parts: the first half briefly describes my growing up in Southern California during the fifties and sixties, three years in the army with a stint in Vietnam, experimenting with drugs, then playing the hippy while free-wheeling and dealing around half the globe to Nepal where I was destined to meet my Gurus. This first part is characterized by following the crowd, self-centeredness and living out my fantasies. The second part traces the beginning of a conscious search for self understanding and Truth — the journey of gradual spiritual awakening, characterized by intense introspection and struggling against the ego’s old habits. The book ends with my ordination as a novice Buddhist monk in Sri Lanka... Out of necessity for understanding what my mind was going through much about the Buddhist and Yoga philosophy that I was learning and practicing has been explained. Some of it may sound a bit heavy especially for the readers without any prior background or serious interest in what is called the Dhamma (Eastern spiritual teachings) but try and bear it out. If sometimes I sound a bit hard or critical of myself, it is to emphasize the deep rooted ignorance in the mind and the seriousness of the matter as I saw it.

On the surface the book can be read simply as an interesting travel adventure with lots of interesting tidbits of information about places, events

and people I learned about and met along the way. The style of writing and the idiom used is fairly typical California street language with many slang terms, especially those of the hippie/drug scene. This is done to try and give a feeling of the state of mind I was being influenced by and operating under. For those unfamiliar with these slang expressions as well as many of the Eastern religious terms, I have attempted to make them clear, using footnotes where necessary and a glossary at the end.

On a deeper level One Night's Shelter is a description of mental conditioning and the process of life, the evolution of a mind from confusion to clarity. It illustrates how a person is molded and acts primarily from his or her environment, how the different people and situations one encounters in life are not merely ends in themselves but are all part of life's mysterious learning process. Each experience a person has — the hopes, desires, pleasurable or painful experiences are just a momentary pause in which to take refuge, or one night's shelter, before the continuing changing current of life resumes. It is hoped that the reader will get a feeling for this as the narrative unfolds and use it as a mirror to reflect upon oneself; after all, conditioning and impermanence is conditioning and impermanence for every person anywhere and anytime in the world, only the circumstances vary. The book is written with the idea to provoke some thought, to laugh a little, to identify with the author's feelings, passions, fantasies, foolhardy stunts and confusion, seeing bits and pieces of oneself in these, and in the end, perhaps to compassionately understand the outcome.

This is not intended to be a scholarly work. It is honestly and frankly how I experienced everything along the way and how I interpreted it. There was a ten to fifteen year gap between many of the events and this writing. Some of the facts and details about travelling, places, events, and people may be outdated or slightly off in accuracy. The descriptions of the meditation courses — the schedule, teachings, teachers and people are as faithful as I can remember but, again, it was how I saw or heard it. There may be readers who had been at some of the same places or courses at the same time and who may have had a different experience or account to tell of the same event. Admittedly, I have been a little liberal and at times a bit cynical

in some of my observations but it all illustrates how the normal egoistic mind functions.

Often throughout the text I switch from narrating in the past tense to describe something of common knowledge or aspects of Dhamma in the present tense, or switch from the first person to second person or the third person. This is done to try and involve 'you' more, by not seeing everything as only happening and pertaining to someone else in the past. An appendix is included with numbered notes from the text. These mainly enlarge upon a certain fact or topic which may or may not be known or be of interest, dealing with aspects of Buddhist meditation and psychology, Yoga, customs of a country, and people.

Relax into it and enjoy.

Bhikkhu Yogavacara Rahula
Bhavana Society



Introduction



CHAPTER 1 GROWING UP



I came into this world on the first day of summer in 1948 in a dusty town in Southern California near the Mexican border. I have a sister five years older and a brother one year older than myself. My mother was a schoolteacher and my father was a tractor salesman. I do not remember a whole lot about my earliest childhood but a couple of incidences stood out. Our house had a large backyard and we had a lot of pets including cats, a dog, ducks and a skunk. While playing with the baby ducks my brother used to throw them up into the air like a ball and catch them as they came down. One time he missed and the baby duck crashed to the ground and died. I was watching this and was saddened when we rushed to it but it didn't move. Mom told us it was dead and we had to place the dead duck in a shoebox and bury it. I cried as we covered it over with earth. Another time a big German Sheppard dog which belonged to the neighbors jumped over the back fence and chased the terrified quacking ducks around the yard. The dog finally caught the biggest male duck and killed it. Again I cried. We kids also saw the birth of life to complement the death we saw. We witnessed our cat deliver a litter of tiny fluffy kittens and there were white mice which had as many as eight or ten babies at a time. These were

all valuable lessons in the realities of life which were imprinted on my growing young mind.

I had the average wholesome lifestyle of the time, joining the Y.M.C.A., the Boy Scouts, going on camping trips and being influenced by the new fascinating invention, television. My parents also took my older brother, sister and me to the local Methodist Church and Sunday school every week. I played sports in school and started surfing in 1962. When my brother turned sixteen our parents bought him an orange colored 1952 Chevy which we nicknamed, the crayfish. We would drive down the fifty miles from Riverside to the beach at least twice a month on a surfing safari. My parents also bought me a car on my sixteenth birthday, a black 1954 Ford panel delivery van. I started cruising the streets with my friends, going to parties, drinking beer and wine, having different girl friends and generally just having fun. It was the era of the pop and rock music explosion, long hair, faded Levis and T-shirts and the more casual free lifestyle for youth, which started in California and quickly spread. It was the cultural revolution with the experimentation and popularity of marijuana and LSD¹ and emergence of the hippie movement. I very much indulged in and was conditioned by that eventful time period.

During one of my many surfing trips to Baja California, in Tijuana, I was walking along the street where there were many handicraft shops selling colorful paintings, pottery, blankets, leather goods, etcetera. I passed a shop which had various assorted clay statues all neatly stacked up on display. I had seen many of these before but something caught my eye as I walked by. I looked over, and perched there on top of a whole array of tall cats, bulls, matadors and other images, I saw a golden colored statue of a sitting Buddha. It stood out like a sore thumb above the others and I was intrigued by it. It seemed to be silently saying something to me. At that time, however, I did not know that it was specifically a Buddha statue. But its demeanor and tranquil look, sitting there above the riot of color and gaudy pottery was such a contrast that I bought it and took it home. I put it on top

¹ LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide) is one of the major drugs making up the hallucinogen class. LSD was discovered in 1938 and is one of the most potent mood-changing chemicals. It is manufactured from lysergic acid, which is found in ergot, a fungus that grows on rye and other grains.

of the old broken television set I had in my bedroom and used it as a place to hang the straw hat I used to wear. When my mother saw it she was a little surprised and told me it was a statue of the Buddha, the founder of the Buddhist religion. How she knew I don't know. I looked it up in the Encyclopedia and read about Buddha's life and the religion he founded. It sounded a bit interesting but did not really "turn me on" at the time. I still used it as a hat rack. On an unconscious level, however, I think that image had a slow and subtle effect on my mind.

I graduated from high school in 1966 during the escalation of the Vietnam War. I went to junior college for one year and started to study the new field of data processing and computer science. It was during this period that I started smoking pot. I first experienced the marijuana 'high' while on a surfing expedition down to Mazatlan, Mexico after graduation from high school with a group of surfing friends. By and by I was smoking pot quite regularly along with taking 'reds' and 'speed' from time to time and drinking beer. By this time the antiwar sentiment and protests were gaining momentum. I did not have any deep emotions about the legality or morality of the Vietnam War and didn't really understand what it was all about. We were only told "to stop the spread of evil communism." Many of my nineteen year old friends were getting drafted and I knew I would be next anyway. So in December of 1967 I joined the Army along with a friend named, Dave. Joining meant committing myself for three years instead of the normal two for draftees. But it gave one the opportunity to choose the type of training one wanted. Most draftees were sent into the infantry. I chose training in electronics.

After boot camp and advanced training I was sent to the NATO forces in Germany. There I was assigned to an armored infantry unit to repair radios on tanks. The name of my particular tank outfit was F troop. And the similarities with the old television program of the same name were not far off. While there I started to smoke a lot of hashish and took LSD for the first time. Staying stoned a lot I usually had a big Cheshire cat grin on my face and I picked up the nickname, 'Smiley'. Even the First Sergeant, not remembering my name, resorted to calling me Smiley. I liked that, it was great fun. There were a lot of 'crazy' guys in F Troop and I guess I kind of

added to it. Being from California I was something like a rebel hippie soldier. I had relatively long hair and a moustache and wore 'love beads'. This was considered unsoldier-like, unpatriotic behavior by the 'lifers' or career sergeants and officers. I was harassed and called a 'California queer punk'. After six months three friends and I decided to go AWOL. One night we slipped out of the barracks, went into the nearby town of Bamberg and got on our 'freedom train' to Copenhagen. We thought we might go to Stockholm and desert the Army to seek political asylum, as some Americans did. But we decided against it. After twenty-nine days in Copenhagen we voluntarily surrendered to the military attaché and were sent back to Germany to happily face our punishment. The four of us were court-martialed and sentenced to three months in the Army prison near Nuremberg.

I wrote to my parents just before going into prison explaining as best I could what I had done and my feelings about it, and what punishment I was receiving. When I got a reply from them a month later my thoughts about their feelings were confirmed. Their initial reactions were of disbelief, horror and shock. They heard of this happening to other GIs but they never imagined it happening to their own son. My father was especially bitter as he had been an officer during the 'big war' and he was highly patriotic. It was difficult for them to tell the other family members and naturally they did not tell any of their friends about it for fear of shame. Eventually, however, they cooled down and sort of got over it.

After release from prison I was transferred to another Army unit located just near the army prison in Furth. This was the Headquarters Company for the Seventh Army. While in this new unit I met new army buddies and had more freedom than I had had in F troop. I switched my official army job position. I began to work in the data processing department to run the now outdated IBM machines like collators, sorters etcetera. I was even sent to a special one week Army school in the Alps to learn this. I usually worked only three or four hours at night and had the days and weekends free. I bought a used Volkswagen van and a group of us used to drive down to Munich on the weekends to participate in the carefree hippie scene, which included tripping on LSD in the English Gardens park numerous times. It

was here that I first met American and European hippies who were returning from overland trips to India and Morocco, who related their interesting adventures, including where to get strong, cheap hashish. During this summer of 1969 I read in the newspapers of the Great Woodstock Rock Festival taking place in upstate New York. I remember having serious envy for the lucky persons who were able to indulge in all that free spirited music, drugs and sex.

During these six months, in Headquarters Company I got along nicely with almost everyone except the inevitable one or two 'lifers'. One of them did not like me because he knew I was an ex-con and, moreover, a pot-head and kind of revolutionary — at least as far as GIs he knew. He thought I was having too much freedom and fun for someone just getting out of prison and it irked him. Unfortunately, this particular personnel sergeant was in charge of handling transfers of men to different duty stations. So very discreetly he managed to get me reassigned to go to Vietnam. Before I knew it, I received a thirty days notice informing me of my being transferred to South Vietnam. I was quite unprepared for this sudden news, as I was so wrapped up in staying stoned and having a good time. But I soon accepted it without qualms and realized that it was just another chapter in this seemingly big joke of life.

So having only thirty days left in Europe I decided to take a quick two week trip to London and Amsterdam, two cities I had been wanting to visit. I got leave immediately approved because of my circumstances and talked a friend into coming with me. We spent a week in London and a week in Amsterdam. Besides the usual tourist circuit of London we saw the musical play HAIR and the newly released movie Easy Rider, both of which moved me with deep feeling and emotion. In Amsterdam we reveled in the international hippie drug cult scene, which seemed like a 'hippie's heaven' for a city anyway. The Dutch people appeared very liberal and tolerant towards most of this and the straight and the stoned seemed to mix harmoniously. Here I met more young people who told of their recent adventures of travelling overland to India and Nepal, which further increased my desire to do the same journey one day.

I was given a two week leave before I had to report to Fort Lewis, Washington from where I would fly to Vietnam. By this time many of my friends who had been drafted around the same time that I had joined were back home and out of active military service. Dave was also back. He had been sent to 'Nam' and was in the frontline fighting. He had been hit by a grenade that landed in his foxhole. Both his legs below the knees were blown off and much shrapnel had embedded in his body. He had been in the hospital in San Francisco for several months undergoing operations and had been fitted with artificial legs on which he was now learning to walk and adjust mentally. His spirits were very low. A few other friends had also been wounded in Vietnam and one killed in action. I visited with some of these wounded friends and we got stoned together. It felt a little strange to be with them, imagining what they had gone through and suffered compared with the free-wheeling times I experienced in Germany. I did not tell them that I had gone AWOL and was court-martialed and sent to prison. These visits made me reflect on the idea of fate and why people have to experience what they do. What was it that determined my going to Germany and Dave's going to Vietnam and things like that? Could it really be a God that was controlling these life dramas? I really didn't know. Only much later when studying Eastern philosophy and the **LAW OF KAMMA** would this question be adequately resolved in my perplexed mind.

I had heard from other army guys that when a person was reporting for duty in Vietnam he could get away with arriving at Fort Lewis up to one or two weeks late. This amounted to being AWOL but due to the circumstances (going to Nam anyway) generally one did not receive any punishment, they just shipped you off quickly. So, liking to live adventurously I decided to unofficially extend my leave an extra week and take my chances. I did not tell my parents this however. They thought I just had an extra long leave because of going to Nam. For one week of my leave a few old friends including Dave who could now get along ok on his new artificial legs went down to our old surfing haunt near Ensenada (Baja, Mexico). We rented a house on the beach and sort of just partied down like old times. We took with us a good supply of pot and LSD for good measure and we went into Ensenada town to get drunk at Hussong's Cantina a few times. It was a nice reunion for all of us. We met a few college coeds from

San Diego State also there on holiday and so was able to satisfy my sexual urges as well. As I was going to the war in Vietnam and not knowing what to expect, it could have well been my last good time, so I made it count.

For the last few days of my extended leave Dave, who could drive a car, drove me up to Berkeley where we stayed with some old girlfriends from Riverside who now were living there with some other people. Dave also wanted to drop by the big Veterans Hospital in San Francisco where he had spent several months on his return from Vietnam. He wished to visit some of his wounded buddies who were still in the hospital. We went into the large amputee ward where there were about a hundred young men, all of whom had missing one or two arms or legs or a combination thereof. One young man had both arms and both legs amputated due to extreme injuries suffered in the war. Some were sitting in wheelchairs or lying on their beds talking or joking amongst themselves. Some were learning to use their new artificial limbs, and others were quietly reading, sleeping or starrng out into blank space. Dave talked with some of the guys he knew while I mostly just stood back at a distance. A thought like, "I may come back like that" entered my mind. After a few minutes of seeing all this I got butterflies in my stomach and became nauseated. I had to exit quickly to find a bathroom. My body became feverish and I felt very weak. I was amazed at this strong body reaction. I patiently waited outside for Dave to come out and then we left.

The next day a small group of us from the house in Berkeley went on an outing in Muir Woods, a protected forest area located north across the Golden Gate Bridge in Marin County. We all ingested some mescaline capsules and spent the afternoon strolling through the tall, thick, shady redwood trees with vibrant green ferns and mosses adding to the luxuriant foliage. I felt very close to this natural beauty and sensed the subtle energy of living life all around, with the spongy softness of the cool mossy covered earth beneath my bare feet. That evening we went to the famous Fillmore Auditorium in San Francisco to a concert and light show with the Steve Miller Band. I was still pretty 'high' and the music of Space Cowboy was a perfect climax to a beautiful day. The next day I was flying to Fort Lewis.

I was one week tardy upon reporting at Fort Lewis and the army had started cracking down on soldiers coming late for their one week Vietnam orientation training. All of us who were more than three days overdue, and there were many, were given an "Article 15". This is the Army's equivalent of a misdemeanor and we were fined twenty dollars for each day we were late. I was then assigned to a new platoon and had to undergo a week of simulated jungle combat training, the standard for all soldiers going to the Vietnam War zone for the first time. This included how to watch out for bobby traps and anti personnel mines and give emergency first aid, which was reassuring. We were issued a new set of jungle fatigues, boots and other items made for tropical conditions and we had to wear that funny new suit on the airplane. We were told that sometimes airplanes were fired upon by the enemy when landing in Vietnam, so we had to be ready for combat the moment we touched down. But I think that was just a bunch of typical army BS designed to scare us raw recruits into taking the training seriously.

For one more experience I had saved a hit of acid (LSD) to take during the plane flight. It was a commercial flight which the military chartered to fly the vast numbers of soldiers back and forth from the war zone. I ingested the acid just before boarding as I wanted to be 'peaking' when the plane took off. It was just my luck to be seated next to an Army Captain. He must have thought I was scared of going to Nam and started telling me not to worry, he had been there three times already, and that I should be proud to fight for the suppression of Communism. And all that while I was getting off on the acid! The plane landed in Anchorage, Alaska for refueling and we all had to deplane for one hour. I was pretty stoned by now and with mountains and snow everywhere it felt like I was stepping off onto the top of the world. The ground appeared to undulate and sway. Instead of going into the terminal building like everyone else, I stayed outside to continue the unique experience. We landed again at the military section of the Tokyo airport and had to deplane again. In the waiting area was a group of soldiers just returning from Vietnam and they made it known to us new guys, using a few 'four letter words' that they were getting out.

All of us new recruits were nervously peering out the windows to see if the Vietcong were out there waiting for us as we landed. But all was calm and peaceful in the bright sunlight amidst the giant sand dunes of Cam-Ranh Bay on the South China Sea. I waited one day in the reception station for orders to which unit I would be sent, hoping like hell it would not be an active combat unit. Fortunately, I was stationed in a medical supply company. Because of my college experience with data processing I was selected to operate a stock-record accounting machine processing medical supply orders. I was even sent to a one week training program to learn how to operate and troubleshoot the NCR500. It was situated at Long-Binh Post, a large Army base near Saigon away from active combat zones. Because operating this machine was considered an important job I was exempt from all other duties. I only had to work four or five hours at night in an air-conditioned van especially built to house the delicate electronic system. My job was basically pretty easy and routine so that I could get stoned and still operate the machine well enough. The guards and I would get together for a 'joint' break at least once a night.

As in Germany, many U.S. soldiers in Vietnam smoked lots of dope and some even used heroin to numb their minds from the horrors and depression of being in a place we did not want to be. We knew the war was becoming a farce and not worth the cost materially and psychologically. I just stayed stoned as much as possible waiting for the day I would return home.

Heroin was easily available in white powder form which could be snorted up the nose. Many guys in our company used the stuff to get real stoned. Being in a medical supply company syringes and needles were readily available, and several hard core junkies 'shot it up'. I also began using the stuff for the first time but snorting it through the nose only. I never put a needle in my arm nor did I get to the point of being uncontrollably addicted. Life for the GI in Vietnam was depressing both in the combat zones as well as in the rear, perhaps more so in the support units located away from active combat. Here where it was relatively safe there was more time to think and get depressed.

Our company was situated near a large army hospital. Nearby was the morgue where the corpses of American soldiers killed in the battlefield were brought. Almost everyday we could see large stacks of olive green 'body bags' waiting to be processed, so I knew that many young American boys were dying every day out in the rice paddies.

One day a few friends and I took a truck from the motor pool and drove down to Vung-Tau, a popular beach resort about fifty miles from Long-Binh. We drove through the paddy fields and palm trees toward the coast, bare chested, drinking beer and smoking joints in the warm tropical sun with our hair blowing in the breeze. On the way we saw an armored convoy of tanks and APCs evidently on some kind of patrol or combat mission. We waved our beer cans at them as we passed by at a short distance. They must have thought that we were crazy driving like we were, unprotected, unarmed, undoubtedly high and not giving a damn. A few of the armed soldiers waved back at us, probably envious.

We spent much of the day at the beach swimming and soaking up the rays, and of course getting more stoned. At one point while floating out in the water on an innertube I looked up at the cliff overlooking the beach and saw four Buddhist monks wrapped in bright orange robes, their smooth shaven heads glistening in the bright sunlight. I watched with rapt attention as they slowly descended the steep trail down to the sandy beach. They slowly and mindfully removed their outer robes, folded them up and placed them on the rocks. Then clad only in their under robe they went to the water's edge where they laid down on the sand to let the incoming and outgoing tide move their lithe bodies gently to and fro. This was the first time I had ever seen real Buddhist monks and I did not know what they were doing exactly. I supposed that they were doing some kind of meditation, but not really knowing what that meant at the time. They continued like that for about thirty minutes before getting up and departing in the same slow mindful way they had come. Late that afternoon we happy-go-lucky GIs drove back to Long Binh Post and continued partying in my room as though nothing had happened.

In January 1971 my three years in the army were over. At the beginning of December I was given notice that I would be going back to the States for discharge. Just before leaving I was promoted to the rank of Specialist Fifth Class (Spec. 5). I also received the Army Commendation Medal for meritorious, dedicated service. I really had to laugh at this because of my previous record of AWOLs, court-martial, prison and using the army as a time to remain almost always stoned while seeing much of the world. First I was flown to Fort Lewis, Washington where I was formally discharged from active service and then took a normal commercial flight to Los Angeles. At LAX I quickly went into the restroom, hurriedly shed my army dress uniform and stuffed it into a trashcan. I put on a pair of faded jeans and t-shirt (which I had taken with me to Vietnam), got on the RTD bus and headed home to Riverside thinking, "What in God's sake is next?"



ONE NIGHT'S SHELTER (FROM HOME TO HOMELESSNESS)

Chapter 1: Growing Up



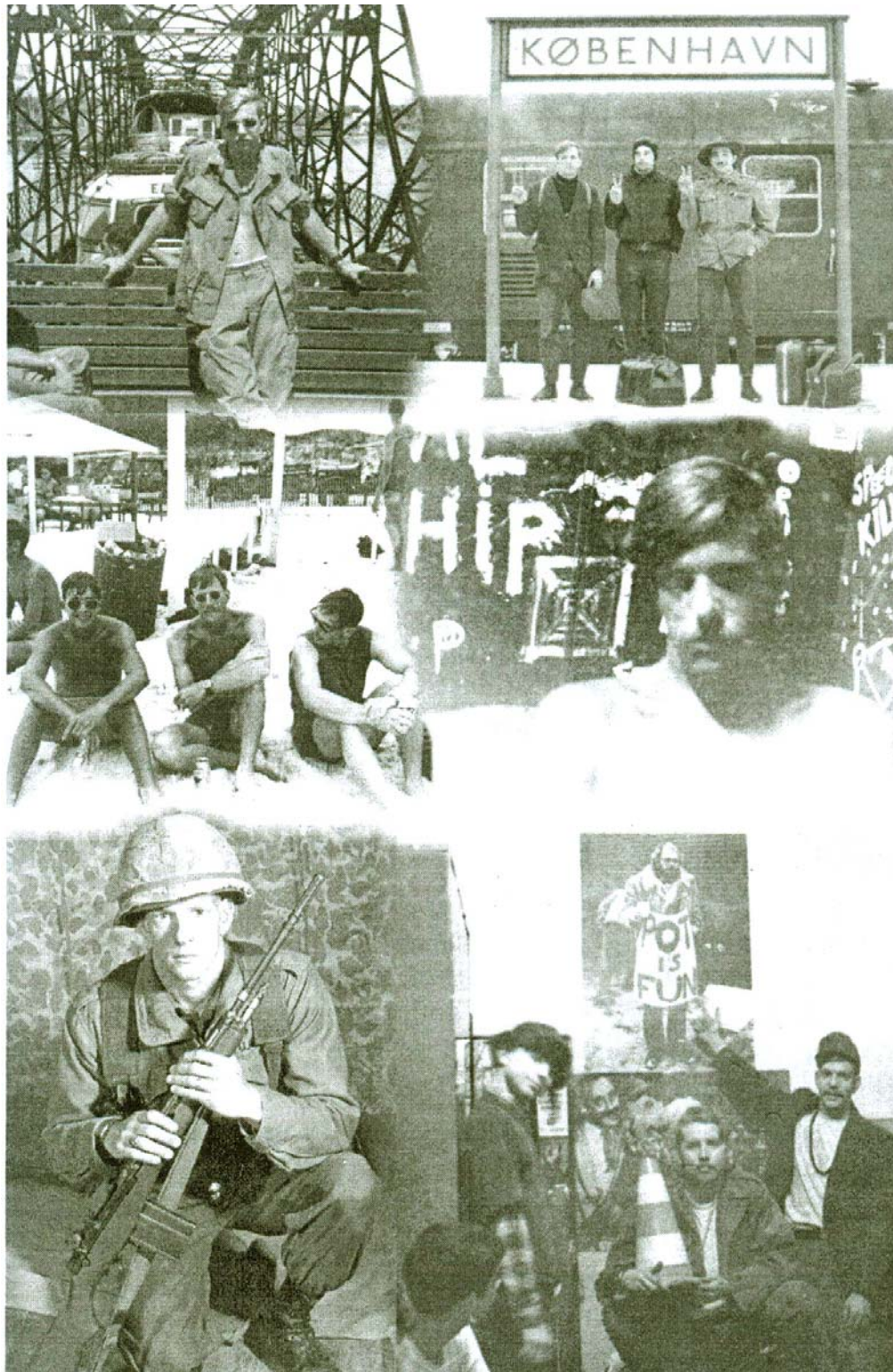
ONE NIGHT'S SHELTER (FROM HOME TO HOMELESSNESS)

Chapter 1: Growing Up



ONE NIGHT'S SHELTER (FROM HOME TO HOMELESSNESS)

Chapter 1: Growing Up



CHAPTER 2

EXPANDING HORIZONS

Within two weeks after my discharge from the Army in January, 1971, I had enrolled back at the junior college in Riverside (RCC) to continue my studies. I tried to leave the military experience behind me and catch up with free living and partying. I started growing my hair and beard out and to acquire the hippie image. I continued smoking dope and taking psychedelics because it was the 'in thing' to do, at least among my peers. At this, however, I also became interested in Transcendental Meditation (TM) which was gaining in popularity. Dave and I and another friend, named Tom, went to the TM lectures held at the University of California, Riverside (UCR). The lectures were well presented and the psychological description of the mental process and different states of consciousness experienced in meditation interested me very much. Tom and I decided to take the initiation but Dave wasn't so turned on. We were told that we would have to stop using all non-prescribed drugs and smoking pot or taking LSD for a period of two weeks prior to the initiation ceremony. This stipulation came as a surprise but I decided to try it, taking it as a challenge. Dave didn't want to make that sacrifice and Tom dropped out when he learned that he would have to bring flowers and a piece of fruit for the initiation ritual.

I succeeded in stopping to smoke any grass or hash during the two weeks, paid the required thirty-five dollars fee (student concession), went through the short initiation ceremony to receive my mantra and began faithfully practicing. I enjoyed the twenty minute meditation sittings twice a day and felt there was a lot of potential and value to be developed from meditating. However, I still had the desire to maintain my growing hippie image and get loaded. So after about one month I decided to leave off the meditation practice, but with the idea to come back to it when I had burned out my desire for getting stoned.

At the time I don't think that this interest in meditation was motivated by a conscious desire for spiritual enquiry. It was most likely due to a desire to experience something new, which I always had a penchant for and perhaps a growing disillusionment with being dependent on using dope to get high. But as I reflected on it later, it was probably the innate, often unconscious or latent inclination and pull towards Truth or God which is in all of us, that was beginning to knock on doors. The events over the previous years all added their little bit to precipitate this search and would continue to do so, albeit in seemingly odd ways. During this time also, I came across a copy of 'Be Here Now', the spiritual primer by Ram Dass which I read with great interest. It coincided with the TM practice and helped put into words the direction my mind was evidently beginning to take. I began trying to live more or less in the present moment or what I thought was the present moment, by following the flow of day to day situations as they happened to occur. I did not force myself to follow any rigid pattern except, of course, getting stoned. I thought that living in the present was to allow the automatic course that one's life seemed to take, without trying to control it.

During the Spring break a few friends and I drove down to Palm Springs to join in the party atmosphere. While walking around town to find a party we came upon a large enclosed area with a huge tent erected inside. It was a revival meeting of 'born again Christians'. Some of these 'Jesus Freaks' were outside trying to get passersby to come inside and listen to the testimonials being given. I decided to go inside just for the fun of it. Once inside the tent I listened to a few persons relating how they 'found Christ', how they were converted to this strong back-to-the Bible belief. They described how their life before was full of confusion and pain, or they had been addicted to drugs and/or alcohol. But now they had attained salvation and happiness through a firm conviction that Jesus Christ was the only Son of God and the only way to get to Heaven to live with God. One of these people came and sat down with me and asked if I believed in God. This was the first time I ever had to think about how to answer this big question. Although I had been brought up going to a Methodist Church I never really had formed a strong conviction or feeling about God or Jesus. I suppose I had more or less just taken them for granted. But now with my growing exposure to Eastern religion I was beginning to vaguely relate to that

philosophy with its expanded meaning of God more than to the Christian idea. So I tried explaining to this guy, “I do not believe God is an individual person or creator who governs the world with an iron fist from his control room in heaven, punishing or rewarding people”. I said, “God is more like a kind and wise pervasive energy from which everything has somehow evolved”. Again, these responses did not come from any deep personal insight or firm conviction. I was more or less mimicking what I had recently picked up, but it sounded good. This Jesus freak would not buy any of that Eastern way of thinking and he kept interrupting with his witty quotes from the Bible which was supposed to be proof of the Divine law. After fifteen minutes or so I became tired of his trying to convert me. I abruptly departed to rejoin my friends, smoke a joint and find a party.

That summer I took a two-and-a-half month hitchhiking trip through Europe, Spain, and Morocco. In Amsterdam I met a blonde girl from Santa Cruz named Terri. She accompanied me hitchhiking down to Spain. She was strong, independent and good-looking, a factor which helped get rides. We spent a week travelling through Germany and Southern France to arrive at Pamplona in time for the “running of the bulls” festival. Pamplona is a virtual twenty-four hour orgy of wine drinking and partying in the streets and plazas during this week in mid-July. Each morning the brave and the drunk, or the just plain foolish, run through a specially set up corridor in the city streets in front of stampeding horned bulls. If a person stumbles and falls he may get trampled or gored. Every year one or two persons is killed or injured in this manner. Fortunately, I was not drunk enough, or was too drunk, or just plain chicken. This was one ego-boosting experience I elected not to try.

After two days of that craziness we continued down to Barcelona and caught the ship to Ibiza, a small picturesque island off the coast of Valencia. We found an un-crowded beach on the back side of the island where we made our small camp. I had a little propane burner on which we prepared simple meals and coffee. The two of us spent a very restful, enjoyable five days in this spot, drinking wine, smoking hash, sun-tanning our bodies in the nude and making love under the moonlit, starry sky. These were the last days of our being together. From here, Terri was proceeding

on her own back to Barcelona and on to Italy by train before returning to California and college in late August. I was continuing my own journey down to Morocco and then back up through Portugal and Amsterdam for my return in early September.

It had been a pleasurable, casual relationship, at times intimate, but without attachment. We enjoyed each other's company physically and mentally and satisfied our mutual individual needs in the present moment and situation. When it came time for parting there was no attachment, regret, ill feeling or guilt; I felt very comfortable and free in a relationship like that. My experience in the Army of always being under someone's thumb — being told what to do, toeing the line, and so on made me appreciate freedom once again. I did not want to commit myself to anybody or any situation which would entail limitations or responsibility. I was living for myself and relished that freedom of movement.

I then continued alone down to Morocco where I sojourned for two weeks in the Atlantic coast town of Essouira. There were many European hippies here. In a tiny, nearly deserted village two miles south I met a small group of mostly French junkies and camped nearby for a couple days. I smoked chillums and rapped with them on occasion. One of them narrated his adventures of travelling across the mid-East from Istanbul to India describing all the ins and outs of travelling, all the good dope he smoked and wonderful and weird people he met.

From these conversations I decided on definitely planning to come back the following year, when my junior college program would be completed, and making a similar trip to India. But, for now, I had this return ticket and had to think about beginning the long journey back to Amsterdam. On the journey north, all I could think of was the next summer when I would finish school, tie up all loose ends, cut off obligations, and be free with no time limitations.

The day after arriving home from that trip I registered for the fall semester. I gave up my previous interest in data processing and began taking classes that would be useful in my future travels and at the same

time fulfill the requirements for a two-year general education degree. I continued the Spanish classes I had already begun, enrolled in classes in cooking, geography, cultural anthropology and world religions. I thought that if I was going to travel halfway around the world to India and possibly beyond, I should have at least a basic working knowledge of the geography, social customs, history and religious beliefs of those countries and people I would be encountering.

One day after the winter semester had begun, I was sitting in the middle of the quadrangle with a few friends, having just smoked a chillum and basking in the crisp morning sunshine. Thus seated, a young blond wearing big glasses walked up to me and told me quite openly, "I saw you in a dream." Well this came as a little surprise and I replied, "Well, why don't you sit right down here and let's talk about it." Her name was Gail and she had never seen me until a few days before when the new classes started. She related how she had this dream a couple weeks prior in which my face appeared clearly and then disappeared. We were in the same Spanish class this term and when she saw my face for the first time on the first day, she recognized me as the face in her dream. I did not know whether or not to believe her, but I went along with it. I had heard of these kind of psychic phenomenon happening, but at the same time I figured it was just a way for her to break the ice, for us to meet. I thought it was all quite interesting and she was cute, so we struck up a friendship and began seeing a lot of each other.

Gail was only nineteen and already had a three-year old daughter, and was living alone with the child in a rented house. She hired a babysitter to take care of the child while she was at college and working her part-time job. The father of the child was living in another town and they were never married. It was a case of the common teenage 'puppy love' affair and sexual promiscuity which flourishes in modern American society and ends up in so many unwed mothers, unwanted children, abortions, and much mental suffering.

I started sleeping with her at her house a couple nights a week. We had our Spanish class two days a week and on the night before I stayed at her

place and we would go to school together. After a while she began developing more attachment and possessiveness to me than I could handle. At school she always wanted to be with me, to hold hands and so on. I felt uncomfortable in this situation, probably because of my previous liberal experience with Terri and the freedom I enjoyed. It also cut into the amount of time I was spending with the guys. I still wanted to be free to go out with my friends to get loaded, drink beer, go to parties and so on. But at the same time I wanted to have a woman whom I could enjoy sexually. I guess I was not ready for a serious, personal love relationship with one person where I would have to exercise so-called adult or mature responsibility. Nevertheless, we continued our relationship, but I made it clear to her that I would be going on an unlimited, unconditional trip to India in a few months time. For all intents and purposes that meant terminating our close relationship.

Ever since my return the previous summer, I had been trying to talk some of my friends into coming with me on this next journey. I narrated to them all the adventures that I had that last summer and how great and free it was to be out on the road in those places. I explained that it would be an opportunity to expand their horizons out of the limited and routine boredom of their respective lives and menial jobs and perhaps give more meaning to their lives. I finally succeeded in convincing three of them to come on this 'Grand European Expedition' at least as far as Morocco. Most of them had too much attachment or involvement with jobs, girlfriends or educational pursuits to go indefinitely.

For the next couple of months the four of us were busy making our plans. As I was the only one who had been to Europe before I was sort of the main planner, giving advice and suggestions. I had an idea or fantasy of what I wanted to do to have fun and adventure. I envisioned taking a large amount of LSD and selling it in cities like Copenhagen, Amsterdam and Munich. I wanted to make enough money to buy myself a BMW motorcycle and ride across Europe and through the mid-East to India. Once in India I would just leave it somewhere and take off on foot or donkey cart to wherever the supposed magic and lure would lead me. After that I had no plans. I even

left open the option of never returning to the USA if that was what fate had in store for me.

In that last semester I took a class in world religions where we studied the philosophy and religious tenets of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism/Yoga and Buddhism. The teacher of this class was a middle-aged woman who said she was a Yoga teacher and had been to India doing research during her studies. We spent about two weeks studying each religion and had to write a term paper on the one that interested us the most. Buddhism was the religion I chose to write about because it attracted me more than the others. I went to the college and city libraries to research different aspects of the history, development and doctrines of Buddhism. I became very intrigued and fascinated reading and trying to understand the theories of kamma, rebirth, suffering, Nirvana and meditation. This was the first time I had really studied this philosophy, though I had heard about it in a more general way. These Eastern ideas about life, birth and death seemed more plausible, something I could relate to a little better than the standard Judaeo/Christian version. I had never been so interested and absorbed in writing a school paper and it even surprised me. Now I had a better appreciation and respect for the Buddha statue I still had in my room. I received the highest mark in the entire class, an A-plus, and the teacher wrote praising remarks on my depth of study and comprehension. However, the enthusiasm generated by writing this paper quickly faded away on the conscious level and I was again absorbed in my plans for getting the 'big trip' together.

Through a few contacts I found a person who could score for me four thousand tabs of orange sunshine LSD. Each orange barrel was potent enough for four persons to get off nicely, being four-way hits. This was what I wanted to take and sell in Europe to finance my fantasy of buying a motorcycle and riding to India. I paid eight hundred dollars for the whole lot. Four thousand hits were more than I had planned on but it was such a good deal I bought them all. One of the guys going with me offered to buy half of them and so we split it. I was planning to smuggle it into Europe by wrapping the tabs inside my socks put at the bottom of my pack.

The three others going with me were Barry, Fred and Rick. The four of us decided on the cheapest and most fun way to reach Europe. We were going to drive a delivery car from California to the East coast. From a certain agency we would be given a car to be delivered to the owner at a certain destination in New York or Boston. All we had to do was to pay for gas. Divided up four ways, it would amount to only about twenty-five dollars each. We decided to fly from New York to Stockholm and begin our odyssey in Scandinavia. Stockholm was chosen for a couple of reasons. One was that it is situated at the top of the continent and we thought we might as well see it all while we're at it. I had never been that far north in Scandinavia so this would be a good opportunity. Another reason, maybe the deciding factor, was that a good friend of mine knew a dope dealer in Stockholm who would probably like to purchase either all or part of the acid at a good price. That way I would not have to carry all of it around and could make most of the money at once. And that summer there happened to be particularly cheap tickets for Stockholm.

During the last year I had been buying grass and hash in larger quantities of a pound or kilo in order to get it at a cheaper price. I then resold the larger portion to get my invested money back and kept the rest as a kind of profit. In this way, I always had a sufficient stash to smoke myself and share with others. This is how I could afford to make up large chillums at parties and help everyone get loaded and I felt good doing it.

Friends often came over to the house to buy a lid of grass or a gram or two of hash. In the process we would usually smoke a sample in my bedroom, listen to my stereo and do our tiny business transaction, and then they would leave. This went on without my parents really knowing what was going on. They did, however, catch on that I was smoking pot because they could smell it. My mother was a vice-principal at one of the more rowdy junior high schools in Riverside and she was very aware of the drug situation. Young boys and girls came to her school stoned and even sold drugs at school to the other kids. My mother had to deal with many problem kids, pot smokers, pregnant fourteen year old girls and even kids crazed out of their skulls on LSD or angel dust. So Mom was alert and could fairly well guess by the way I acted sometimes that I was also a user.

Being loving, caring parents, they did not approve of my experimentation with drugs but they could not really stop me. They realized I was already a fairly matured man, being twenty-two with three years in the Army. The drug use did not actually create any serious problems in my daily life and my grades at college were above average. So Mom and Dad tolerated my lifestyle during this period and even allowed me to smoke in my room at home. They would rather have me get stoned at home than go out in public and possibly get in an accident or get busted. They hoped that sooner or later (the sooner the better) I would grow out of this need for drugs and return to a more stereotyped straight life with marriage, children and the whole bit. Perhaps my use of drugs had something to do with my gradual disinterest in obtaining a four-year university degree and planning out a lifelong career. My brother never experimented with dope-smoking and was following this standard middle-class lifestyle and doing quite well in that respect. He had his Engineering degree and was established in a secure, well-paying job as an electronics engineer, was married, expecting a kid, and had bought a nice house in a respectable suburban neighborhood.

My parents, of course, would have preferred me to follow in his footsteps but they never pressed the subject. Mom knew in her own way that each person is a unique individual and must follow his or her own inner calling and, therefore, left the final decision for what I would do with my life up to me. I explained to them that I was undertaking this around-the-world adventure to see how the other half lives and perhaps discover something inside myself or about myself which would open up new horizons or a new direction to take. I said, I did not know how long I would be gone but, if I discovered something new and interesting enough to hold me, it might be five or ten years, or perhaps I would never come back. They did not really believe this and thought that I would probably become bored or homesick and return to finish my next two years at a university.

The four of us were planning to depart on our drive east the day after my last final exam of the semester was over. This would complete my two year Associate in Arts degree in good standing and there was to be a formal graduation ceremony the following Friday night. But I did not want to even

wait the few extra days to participate in the ceremony to officially receive my diploma. I felt it was no big deal to achieve an AA degree, and did not attend — much to my parents' dismay.

The night before our departure there was a big going away party at the large house where Barry and Rick were living. Ten cases of beer were on hand and steaks were barbequed over a fire pit dug in the back yard. We originally invited only our old and close friends. But as usually happens, the word got out and about one hundred people showed up, some whom we didn't even know. I wanted to test the orange-sunshine acid I had bought so I crushed up twenty orange barrels and passed the pieces around in a dish. Everyone was drinking beer, smoking hash and grass and nibbling acid and feasting; the music was turned up full blast. Needless to say everyone got quite 'ripped'. The party got quite loud and boisterous and the straight neighbors called the police who arrived and told us to, "cool it". We turned down the music and tried to get the uninvited guests to leave. Things finally quieted down and the party mellowed out, leaving just close friends smoking their last chillum together before 'The Grand European Expedition'.



CHAPTER 3

ACROSS EUROPE

As planned, the four of us drove the delivery car from Riverside to New York. On my parents driveway I had bid farewell to my parents and a tearful Gail with big hugs and kisses. We then took off in the air-conditioned Buick on interstate 10 across the Southern California desert. A dope dealer friend of ours had given us a nice going away present — an ounce of good pot and a gram of cocaine to make the drive eastward supercharged with energy. Going casually and enjoying ourselves and changing drivers, the drive took us four days to reach New York. We flew to the Land of the Midnight Sun, landing in Stockholm in time to celebrate the “midsummer” festival on June 21st, which coincidentally was my birthday. While waiting in line to be checked through customs I was quite nervous. I had packed all the LSD tabs into a sock and placed it at the bottom of my pack. A few persons in front were being pulled aside and thoroughly checked and my heart began to beat harder. I tried my best to appear outwardly calm. As I came in front of the customs inspector he looked at me and my passport and asked to see my return air-ticket, how much money I had, and how long I would stay in Sweden. I showed him my passport and the five hundred dollars in traveler’s checks that I had and told him that I was planning to stay in Sweden only two weeks. He seemed satisfied and wished me a pleasant stay in Sweden and motioned me through. Fred, who was behind me and luckily not carrying any illegal substances was pulled aside and his pack gone through with a fine tooth comb. What an ironic start to crazier times ahead!

The first thing on the agenda was to find the Swedish guy who might want to buy a large portion of my orange sunshine barrels. I wanted to unload it because it was like sitting on top of dynamite, so I would not have to worry about it anymore. I had his address and with a little searching we found the apartment where he lived with his girlfriend. They were hippie types who made jewelry and sold it on the open street-markets as did many others in Stockholm. When he saw the little orange barrels his eyes lit up

and he seemed very interested and we talked a bit. He wanted to buy one thousand barrels and we agreed on a price of one thousand dollars or the equivalent in Swedish Crowns. But he did not have the money on hand and he said it would take him several days to raise the money from his interested friends. So the four of us decided to take off hitch-hiking through Sweden and Norway for one week. We mapped out a route to hitchhike north to Sundsvall and then across to Norway to see some of the fjords Norway is famous for and then down to Oslo and back to Stockholm, making a loop. I decided to leave the one thousand trips with this Swedish couple who said they would keep it in their refrigerator. He said he could begin selling them to raise the money also. Good hits of orange sunshine sold for ten US dollars apiece in Stockholm and there was a big demand. Being fairly naïve in these matters I trusted him and it sounded like a good idea. I certainly did not want to carry all that extra acid around with me and I had no place else to keep it. As it was, I still had 900 barrels left which I would take with me in order to sell if the opportunity arose. We then bought ten grams of hash from another local drug dealer who this guy directed us to and got ready to take off hitchhiking. To facilitate our hitchhiking we split up into two groups, Fred and I in one duo with Barry and Rick in the other. It turned out that our two groups got separated and we did not see each other until we reunited back in Stockholm at a prearranged time and meeting place one week later.

Rain dogged our heels for much of the week but we kept up our plan of hitching rides, waiting, and walking in the warm rain. At night we slept in old barns or other shelters in the rural countryside near the roads. One night after a long wet day we crawled into a big barn located behind a farmhouse to seek shelter and sleep. This barn contained cows so we tried to be quiet not to disturb them. But just as we were comfortably bedded down on the soft straw the farmer came out to the barn to check on his cows. To say the least, he was very surprised to see us. We thought he might get angry and tell us to get out. But instead he gave out a big hearty laugh and was very friendly. He did not know any English but after a few amusing minutes of hand gestures and futile words, we understood that he desired us to come into his main house to sleep where it was warmer. Fred and I were actually content where we were with our pile of straw and organic animal smells

and we were just about to smoke a bowlful of hash to cap off a long day. But the jovial old man kept insisting, holding his nose while pointing to the cows; so we reluctantly agreed just to please him.

The farmer's wife was overjoyed to see what her husband dragged in from the barn. She immediately fixed us up a big bowl of hot soup followed by a piece of homemade pie with a glass of fresh milk. This we devoured with great relish and gratefulness. We slept in what was the bedroom of their grown children and were given thick feather quilts for that cold rainy night. In the morning we were graciously served boiled eggs and thick slices of homemade bread with fresh rich butter and cheese, all produced right there on their farm. Fred and I had other similar encounters of compassion and friendly hospitality on this weeklong trip. The mountain scenery of Norway was spectacular and the fjords and fishing villages were just as I had seen on postcards. An added bonus was the nearly 24 hours of daylight which is present this far north in the summer which enabled us to travel virtually all night if we wanted to and still see the countryside.

Upon arriving back in Stockholm Fred and I went straight to the apartment of the Swedish couple and were greeted with an unpleasant surprise. The girl opened the door and hurriedly told us that her boyfriend had been busted by the police the day before and was now in jail. She nervously explained this story of how he had been peddling some of the LSD in the city square where all the hippies and tourists hung out and he was caught by the police. To follow up the bust detectives came to their apartment to search for more drugs. When they arrived unexpectedly at the door, the girl panicked and quickly flushed all the remaining orange sunshine barrels down the toilet. She further advised us in a shaky voice that we should leave quickly because the apartment might be under surveillance. I was shocked at this unexpected news and did not know quite what to think. For safety's sake, however, the first thing I did was to go across the street in a small park and bury the rest of the barrels I had in a hole in the ground which I inconspicuously marked. Then Fred and I went down to the central square where this guy was allegedly busted and which coincidentally was where we were to rejoin up with Barry and Rick. We sat down on some steps near the square to think about the whole thing. While

sitting there I saw what I believed to be this same Swedish fellow walking on an overpass above the square. He seemed to see me looking at him and then he quickly ducked out of view. I hurriedly ran up there to try and find him but to no avail, there were hundreds of people milling around. By now I had a sneaking suspicion that the story his girlfriend told us was a lie, a cover-up. I called the police to enquire if they had anyone in jail by his name and the reply was negative. Now I felt sure that I had been royally ripped off. But I was in quandary because I could not report this theft of my LSD to the police. I did not want to get involved with the police in any way. Fred and I were left alone and angry in this seemingly cold and crazy city not knowing what to do or where to go.

Shortly thereafter, however, we met Barry and Rick as planned. They had had similar pleasant experiences in their hitchhiking adventures. When I related the story of the stolen LSD Barry got very angry and wanted to go bust some heads, but I was able to calm him down. I personally was ready to write the whole thing off as a loss and a bad dream, to forget it and get on with our trip south. This same afternoon another buddy of ours from Riverside named, Jim, showed up on the square, having just arrived on a flight from Los Angeles. Jim worked for a travel agency and was making this trip mostly on company expense to visit different European cities in order to have first hand experience to tell his clients about. For him the trip was half business and half pleasure but his time was limited. So now, for the time being there were five of us hometown boys from Riverside together. It was difficult to find any cheap place to stay in the center of Stockholm and the local people seemed cold and empty. There were drunks stumbling all over the city square and in the subway corridors both day and night. The whole scene felt strange and kind of plastic to me. No doubt my bad experience had something to do with that mental projection. We had no burning desire to remain any longer so we planned to depart the next morning for Copenhagen. I went back and dug up the remainder of my acid and, in a last attempt to unravel the mystery of the rip-off; I went to the apartment of the couple. It was locked and nobody answered my prolonged knocking. I realized it was a hopeless situation and departed. With this financial setback I began to give up my fantasy of buying a motorcycle. I resigned myself to be content with just living in the present moment,

pedaling my remaining 900 orange sunshine barrels here and there and traveling by local transportation and hitchhiking.

In the evening the five of us headed outside the city to find a suitable place to sleep outdoors. Near a group of apartment buildings was a large grassy field where we laid out our sleeping bags and made our little camp for the night. Some local teenagers came over and inquired if we had any LSD for sale. They were bored middleclass kids with a lot of money. So to make up for my loss I told them it would cost fifteen dollars apiece. Without hesitating they agreed to this price, pulled out their money and bought five trips and then went triumphantly running back to their nearby apartment complex. The five of us had a good laugh over a big chillum and passed a pleasant warm night out in the open celebrating our reunion.

Barry, Rick and Jim took the train down to Copenhagen while Fred and I opted to hitchhike again. For me hitchhiking was more adventurous and a good way to meet regular folks and learn more about a country. It was certainly less expensive, especially here in Scandinavia and Europe. After two days and several different rides we arrived in Copenhagen and reunited with Barry and Jim at our prearranged rendezvous point. To our surprise, Barry informed Fred and I that Rick had abandoned the trip and was returning home. He had gotten homesick or something and decided to return to Stockholm and fly back home. He had already left. The four of us stayed a few days here enjoying the summertime activity. I recalled my previous sojourn here in the winter of 1968 while AWOL from the army. It was a much different experience now in the summertime as a free person mixing with the 'flower children'. A large tent city was set up on the outskirts of the city to provide a cheap, convenient crashing place for the throngs of young hippie travelers who were passing through on their way South, North, East and West. We also slept there talking with many people. We learned of a weekend rock festival that was happening that coming weekend outside of Copenhagen and we decided to make our presence there. Rock concerts and festivals were always a lucrative market for drugs. Barry still had most of his two thousand orange sunshine barrels and desired to start selling them off. We both figured we could sell a lot of trips at a good price and make all of our initial investment back plus a tidy profit.

In Copenhagen there are many bicycle rental shops and cycling around town is a popular mode of transportation with locals and tourists alike. The bikes are usually rather old with only one speed and worn out tires. I rented one for a couple of days and then an idea sprang into my mind. I would rent a bike and ride it all the way to Amsterdam, which was our next major destination. Most of the terrain in Denmark, and Holland is very flat and ideal for easy cycling. I imagined that it would be far-out to take about ten leisurely days cycling through the countryside of farmlands and quaint Danish and Dutch villages to reach Amsterdam about four hundred kilometers away. The rock festival at Roskilde was located about twenty miles outside of Copenhagen along the same route I would take. So I planned to ride out to the festival on a bike and continue on from there. The rest of the guys opted to stay with conventional convenient train travel. I enquired about renting a bike on a one way basis, perhaps turning it in Amsterdam at a co-operating rental agency. But it was not possible and the bicycles were not supposed to be taken out of the country. The rental shops usually did not require any deposit or identification. I guess they figured everyone was honest and the bikes, being so old, no one would want to steal them. Considering these things it did not take long for my mind to scheme up the idea to rent the bike for a month and just sort of keep it, riding it down to Amsterdam anyway. I did not think of myself as an out and out thief and I justified this devious appropriation by selecting a rusty old girl's bike with bald tires. In my mind it was not worth much more than the one month rental fee I would pay anyway. In reflection, *this was a good example of how the cunning mind and ego can cling to an idea and then outwit or override our moral sense.*

On the day the festival was to start I rented the bicycle in the morning, tied my pack securely onto the rack over the rear tire and set out pedaling the twenty odd miles out to the site. Barry, Fred and Jim took the train along with hundreds of other young festival goers. We met at the train station in the small town of Roskilde. I locked up the bike outside the fence which encircled the festival area. The four of us found ourselves a nice spot up against the back of the concession booths and facing the stage where we

made our little camp for the two exciting days ahead. The music had already started and people were smoking chillums and joints, dancing and jumping into a portable swimming pool which was erected to relieve the summer heat. Many women were going around topless. There was no police surveillance and dope smoking and dealing was done openly without hesitation or fear. I made up a sign which read, "California orange sunshine" and placed it in front of me. Within ten minutes I had sold five hits (orange barrels) at five dollars a-piece and within two hours Barry and I sold over fifty each. The word quickly spread about our power packed 'sunshine'. By the end of the weekend we had sold over five hundred. We also gave some hits away to freaks who pleaded that they had no money but obviously desired to get 'high'. We swallowed some ourselves, getting into the vibration of the whole wild, crazy scene. We also bought twenty grams of hash from another dealer and kept up a marathon of chillum smoking passing it to everyone who came by. It was a real fun time and everything went smoothly with no bad incidents. I had now made back all the money I had originally invested plus much more despite the rip off and still had over five hundred barrels left. I was satisfied.

On my way to Amsterdam I took my sweet time pedaling the rattling old bike but, nevertheless, I managed to cover about sixty or seventy kilometers a day. I remained pleasantly stoned most of the time, enjoying the passing scenery while ignoring the occasional car or truck whizzing by. Each evening around six I kept my eye out for a suitable spot to spend the night. These included a roadside forest, a lakeside picnic area, a village park and the reliable farmer's field. The route took me near the Isle of Sylt, a popular island for nude sunbathing for Northern Europeans. So I made a short detour and spent two days there myself hoping to get some of my California tan back. Unfortunately, however, it was overcast and drizzling most of the time but there were still plenty of hardy Danes and Germans bearing up the cool, gloomy weather. They laid out nude on large reclining chairs equipped with large umbrellas trying to eek out any ultraviolet rays slipping through the cloud cover. Not being that hard up for a tan, I sought refuge in a small crude shelter made of sticks and cardboard that I spied down the beach. I hid the bicycle in the bushes, took my pack and made myself somewhat comfortable in this low roofed hut on the beach. As it turned out

the hut had been built by some kids from a summer youth camp nearby and they came to play in it. They were surprised to see me inside but happy to learn that I was an American and they asked a lot of questions in order to practice their English. Later that evening they even brought me some food from their camp kitchen.

The kids had informed one of their female group leaders about me and she came down to have a look. She was in her twenties, a homely looking type and her English was not so good. But we talked for a while and she seemed to be starved for sex. She came back to the hut later that night after the kids had gone to bed. Between her pent up urges and my own horny condition it did not take long before we were passionately rolling in the sand satisfying each other's lust. In the morning a kid from the camp brought me some breakfast leftovers sent by my backdoor lover. As the day was again overcast and sprinkling I decided to move on, leaving before the woman came to see me again. I did not feel like facing any good-byes or 'will you write to me requests'. I just wanted to disappear as quietly as I had appeared.

After several more days of cycling through Northern Germany and Holland I cruised across Holland's great, long, man-made dike and coasted joyously into Amsterdam. I was now tired of all the pedaling and road dirt but the trusty old bike held up well and I really had a ball. I met Barry and Fred in Vondel Park as planned a few hours after arriving. Jim had since gone on his own way to attend to his travel agency work. Vondel Park was temporary home for hundreds of transient young hippie travelers from all over the world. The city allowed them to more or less camp in the park for free due to the lack of cheap accommodation in the city. There was a storage facility for people to keep their backpacks and other luggage and there was a club where food and drink was available along with music and dope smoking. I joined Barry and Fred who were camped out under a large tree by one of the many canals. There were many such small groups spread out over a large area. The social thing to do was to casually go around paying visits to different groups and getting loaded with each other. In the process travel tales were exchanged and much useful information gleaned. I

had left the bicycle leaning unlocked against a tree and by the next day it had been appropriated, to be useful to some other person.

Over the course of the next two weeks Barry and I were able to sell much of our remaining orange sunshine — they were ‘selling like hotcakes’. In this way I was able to live without touching any of my original five hundred dollars in TCs and saved substantially more. To console myself for making profit off others I gave some away to persons who gave me a ‘sob story’ of how they had no money. One day there was a free concert in the park and I crushed up about twenty barrels and went around passing out free pieces. Many people got pleasantly high that sunny music-filled afternoon and I felt good. By now my reddish blonde hair was hanging below my shoulders and my reddish beard quite bushy. I had finally acquired the long sought hippie image.

It was here in the park that I was turned on to the first in a series of popular books called *The Teachings of Don Juan*, by Carlos Castaneda. Someone gave it to me in exchange for a hit of acid and I began reading it in my spare quiet moments. It is a story about the author’s personal experience with peyote and other psychotropic plants. The story centers around a Mexican sorcerer named Don Juan, who tries to teach the author how to use these hallucinogenic substances to unravel the mysteries of the mind, for developing certain mental powers in order to aid self-realization. It is an interesting account of this UCLA Anthropology student’s trials and tribulations in getting accepted by the Mexican Indian spiritual teacher and undergoing this particular path of self-knowledge. I enjoyed reading the book mainly for the story content, not knowing at the time its spiritual implications. I had also used peyote (mescaline) and magic mushrooms but mostly for the blissful high produced and not so much for deep conscious spiritual discovery. This would come only after reading the subsequent books in the series and my own deepening experience.

One day a large group of Hare Krishna monks and devotees accompanied by their Indian spiritual master came into the middle of the park to perform a mantra-chanting session, and passed out free sweets. I had heard of this controversial group of Krishna Consciousness but had never seen any in

person. I decided, as usual, to get nice and high for the occasion, and ate half a barrel plus the normal chillums. There were a lot of people in the park that clear, warm Sunday.

The Hare Krishna's spiritual guru was a frail old man clothed in pinkish robes and had the traditional ash-colored markings on his forehead. He was carried on a decorated palanquin by his devotees and set down on a big stage specially set up for this occasion. Many of the monks also wore the pink garb with the forehead markings and sported the conspicuous tufts of hair or pony-tail at the back of their shaven heads. All this looked a little peculiar to me, as it was the first time I had actually seen them in person and close up. From my study in world religions I remembered that Krishna was a Hindu god and devotional deity to whom all believers pay homage, and they invoke his blessing by chanting his name, "HARE KRISHNA, HARE RAMA".

After some introduction they began chanting the Hare Krishna Maha Mantra with their lively accompanying drum beat, cymbals and body movement. As the beat picked up I felt myself being drawn into the rhythm and mood of the chanting. I started silently repeating the words and gradually as I got into it, I chanted audibly. It had a kind of intoxicating, entrancing effect on me and being stoned probably helped to catalyze the whole process. The chanting lasted about fifteen minutes and much of the crowd had also been drawn into the vibrant mood, swaying and even dancing or jumping up and down along with the monks and devotees. It seemed as though everyone had tuned into the same mental frequency and I felt very high and blissed out. I had heard that devotional chanting of this nature could get a person naturally high. But as I was stoned, I could not be sure if the attraction and good feeling was aroused by the chanting alone or helped along by the dope. Afterwards, the devotees walked among the crowd passing out what they called "prasad", a sweet mixture formed into a small ball. It was supposed to have been blessed by the spiritual devotion and hence, by Krishna himself. It tasted good at any rate.

A few days later I went to the Hare Krishna Temple located several blocks from the park. I had been informed that if you visit the temple about

lunchtime the monks in charge will invite you to partake of a meal, and they prepared traditional Indian food. Before the meal a devotional service was conducted with more chanting and readings from their holy scriptures. In the temple were many colorful paintings and statues of Krishna and other Hindu devotional images. I was more curious than devotionally interested, but I respectfully observed the proceedings while expectantly waiting for the tasty meal. Before departing I was surprised when I unavoidably overheard a few of the monks and devotees quarreling among themselves over some job assignments. It did not strike me as proper conduct between spiritual brothers and sisters and especially inside the temple in front of guests. I departed without any strong attraction or positive feelings towards the organized structure and little conviction that this practice was the way to Enlightenment or God Realization, whatever that meant to me at that time.

Among the many people we met in the park was an American guy who told us about a beautiful small island in the Canary Islands, called Gomera. He had lived there awhile and he described a very laid back, unspoiled, ideal picture of what sounded like the perfect place to get away from it all and a very cheap place to live. The summer would be nearing its end in Northern Europe soon and we would be ready to follow the sun and warmth south for the winter. So our little group began making plans for part two of our free-flowing odyssey — winter in the Canary Islands

For some reason that was never too clear, I decided to invite Gail to come over to Amsterdam and join me on my hitchhiking journey down to Spain and the Canary Islands. I guess it was because I had made enough money and could afford to buy her a round trip ticket and I also wanted to give her the experience of travelling through Europe and living in the Canaries for the winter. I did not have the intention of taking her to India with me as that would mean abandoning her young child for too long a time. I merely figured her to stay with us a few months on Gomera then return home on her own. I suppose I also missed a female's tender touch and desired a companion to accompany me hitchhiking south, remembering the previous summer's experience with Terri. After some deliberation on this, I called Gail long distance from Amsterdam and proposed the idea. She was overjoyed at the prospect and said she would quit her job at Sears and come

as soon as possible. She could leave her daughter at her mother's place for care during these three or four months. She already had a couple hundred dollars of her own saved and I would send her five hundred more to buy a round trip ticket from Los Angeles.

Barry and Fred decided to buy a VW bug and were going to drive it down to Cadiz where they would sell the car and take the boat from Cadiz to the Canary Islands. Gail and I would meet them in Cadiz to make the sea cruise together.

After my buddies departed, I remained there in the park more or less alone selling more acid. I wanted to make as much money as possible to finance Gail and I on our trip south and our boat passage to the Canaries. During these two weeks I met quite a few persons just returning via the overland route from India. From them I accumulated much useful information on visa regulations, cheap means of transport, places to visit and places to avoid, where to score good dope and so forth. This rekindled my enthusiasm for heading due east as soon as our winter sojourn in the Canary Islands was finished, or the following spring.

Gail arrived on schedule and I met her at the airport. It was nice to see her again and I brought her back to the park where we would stay a few days before leaving. She related to me how she had been deeply hurt because I had abandoned her and her feelings towards me had changed. She no longer felt inclined to have an intimate, sexual type relationship with me, but just to be good friends and travelling companions. I was somewhat taken aback by this frank pronouncement and could sense that some kind of change had taken place in Gail. I had been without extended female companionship for over two months, and was more or less looking forward to Gail's previous sexual submissiveness. But on that first night in the park together I encountered the reluctance and coldness towards sex which was to be the main focal point for a relationship plagued by negative feelings, open arguments and eventual heartache. And it was mostly fostered by my expectation, attachment and unwillingness to accept her independence and changed attitude.

It took us a week of hitchhiking to reach Barcelona where we stayed in a cheap hotel two days to rest from the long road trip. We dined in quaint sidewalk restaurants, drinking sangria and eating seafood. I was in the mood for making love but she was still resistive as she had been most of the trip. She eventually gave in to my persistence but because of the mood created by our differences on the matter, the experience was not enjoyable. We were now in a hurry to get down to Cadiz so we took a train, stopping in Granada to check out the Alhambra.

Once in Cadiz, Gail and I headed to the dockyard to inquire about the boat to Las Palmas and bumped right into Barry and Fred, who were happy as hell to see us. They had already purchased their tickets for a boat leaving the very next day and were praying that we would make it on time. Luckily the ship was not full and we were able to get our tickets. Accompanying Barry was an American girl named Penny whom he had picked up in Paris where they had stopped for a few days on their way south. Barry had talked her into coming to the Canaries with him. During their weeklong wait in Cadiz, Barry and Fred had made friends with some American sailors, to whom they had sold the car, and with whom they were staying in their off-base apartment. So we all went back there and had a grand reunion, toasting the addition of Gail to our Riverside gang, smoking hash, drinking wine and being rowdy.

The ship was a big comfortable ocean liner, and we were berthed in dormitory cabins for sleeping, which we used for an occasional group smoke during the two-day cruise. On arriving in Las Palmas, we checked out the schedule of ferries plying between the various islands, to find out that we had a two day wait before the next boat for Gomera, our final destination. To kill time we decided to take a quick tour around the island of Gran Canaria. We had heard of a nice campground at the beach on the back side of the island, so our little group climbed into a local bus and headed out there. Several other travelers were camped at the large spacious campground and we spent the first night here celebrating our arrival.

The inter-island ferry docked in the small serene harbor of San Sebastian, the principal port, at noon. Our destination was a village on the opposite

side of Gomera called Valle Gran Rey. We had to wait a few hours for the only bus to arrive for its evening return trip. The bus wound its way up the steep zigzag road through several small sleepy villages, neatly cultivated terraces, verdant hillsides, and through a forest which crowns the top of the mountainous island. The bus then descended a long winding dirt road coming to rest in front of the main bar and restaurant in town.

Along the mile or so of coastline are a string of houses, restaurant/bars and a few small hotels. When we arrived there were already about twenty young foreigners living in different rented houses in the main village and along the beach, and one or two reclusive types stayed up on the valley slopes. For the first two days the five of us camped among some bushes on the beach until we found a nice large house near the beach to rent. The house was located just down the road from a cantina owned by a fat jovial guy named, Marciello. Nearly every night we would go there to drink beer, often getting quite drunk.

Because the valley was quite small and the beaches limited, most of the foreigners who stayed for any length of time would get to know each other. Each little group had their own rented house and quite often there would be a party where everyone was more or less invited. After two weeks, Penny, the girl Barry had picked up in France, decided she had had enough of our (Barry's, Fred's and my) heavy partying lifestyle, and of Barry's flirting with other women. One day she just packed up her things and left Gomera to go back to Europe.

A month after our arrival I decided to move up into the rear of the valley and live alone. I had to get out of that heavy partying atmosphere myself, and also away from Gail for awhile, in order to clear out my head a bit and have some time to think about our relationship. Marciello's mother and father lived at the very back of the valley way up high on the mountainside and they were building another house nearby to rent out to tourists. It was not yet finished, with only one completed room, a separate toilet and a small, dingy room used for a kitchen. It was very basic and funky but I desired to live there awhile. It was in a village named La Vizcaina, beautifully situated high up the left side of the valley. On top of the

bedroom was a sun roof which afforded a majestic view across the valley and down the whole length of the valley to the beach about five miles away. The sun set perfectly over Hierro, the smallest of the Canary Islands some twenty miles to the south.

An old man named Manuel, and his frail wife Henrietta lived in a stone hut directly in back and slightly above my house. They were the poorest people in the whole valley, living in a very basic one- room stone hut where they had lived most of their seventy plus years. Manuel, despite his age, would go out every day to his few terraces and hillsides to work, collecting grass for his goat and carrying huge bundles of grass and sticks on his frail old frame. I helped him whenever I could and they invited me into their humble hut to share their scanty fare of sweet potatoes and pork-fat soup. Wads of old newspaper were stuffed into the cracks between the stones and sheets of faded newspaper were used as a kind of wallpaper in spots. It was delightful.

They had a big fat pig which they were fattening up for winter food, and the pigpen was only a few feet from the edge of my sunroof. The old porker used to snort and grunt a lot as if trying to tell me something. I grew fond of the hog and called her Petunia. When they slaughtered it, I was saddened. It made me reflect on fate and how each living creature, including man, is affected by its surroundings, prey to the will of others.

In time I got to know most of the villagers on that side of the valley up and down and became good friends with many. I was invited to several homes for dinner and wine-drinking. Drinking “vino del campo” was a favorite pastime of the men and it was difficult to leave their house without having drunk at least four or five glasses. The men were macho and believed that one was not a man unless he could drink a whole liter of wine at one sitting. By socializing like this I was able to greatly improve my Spanish, and the locals were delighted to hear me speaking their language so well. A few of the men who had difficulty pronouncing my name, Scott, started calling me “El Rubio”, the blond one. One man liked me so much he wanted me to marry his daughter and stay there on the mountainside in an

extra family house he would give. It was a tempting offer but I was not quite ready for such a move.

After three weeks of our separation I asked Gail if she would like to move in with me up there in La Viscaina. I thought maybe our relationship might improve in those changed surroundings. I had done a lot of serious thinking and realized that it was my possessive and sexual attachment which was the major cause for her alienation to me and I hoped to rectify it. I had come to understand something about the nature of lust and what a strong and unpredictable force it can be. Gail, however, had had enough. In the weeks of separation she had met many other people and was enjoying her freedom in that respect. I finally began to accept and resigned myself to the fact that our intimate relationship was over. But nevertheless, I couldn't help mulling over the whole situation from time to time, from different angles, and feeling guilty.

During this time I got a hold of a second book in the series of Don Juan's teachings entitled *A Separate Reality*. I read this second book with great intrigue as it described more intense experiences on these organic drugs. I tried comparing the author's mental experiences with those that I had when taking mescaline and magic mushrooms, but there was little resemblance. My experiences were mostly laid back, peaceful, blissful feelings closely associated with nature, while the author's were much stronger, vivid and even violent reactions accompanied by doubt and fear. Along the beach area we had found the *Datura* plant, one of the psychotropic plants, the root of which was used by Don Juan. On the experience and advice of someone, we made a tea by boiling vigorously the tiny black seeds contained in the spike-covered pod, and drank that. I never did get off very strong on the stuff but Fred claimed to have had a very vivid, dream quality, hallucinogenic experience which lasted several hours.

At the beginning of December Barry got a letter from his identical twin brother, Larry, saying that he would be flying over to join us within two weeks. When he arrived, I went down the valley to their house for a big welcoming party. Larry's presence added even more life and energy to the group at the beach as he also loved to get loaded, party hard, and chase

women, perhaps more so than his brother. It was an excuse for coming out of my mountain retreat a little more often as Larry was also a long time friend dating back to junior high school days.

Another book I came across and read while up in the valley was by J. Krishnamurti, entitled, *The First and Last Freedom*. This was the first time I had read anything by or even heard of this famous Indian spiritual teacher. It was also the first time I had read any book dealing exclusively with the mind, mental bondage, mental freedom, and meditative awareness. It caught my interest now that I had gone through this unpleasant episode with Gail, experiencing that mental confusion, frustration, and pain associated with lust and attachment. As Krishnamurti was from India it stimulated me to get on with my journey in that direction. I had already spent a lot of time sidetracked in Europe and the Canaries and I was beginning to get itchy feet. So Barry, Larry, Fred and I started making our plans to leave Gomera on the day after New Year's.

We decided to take the boat from Las Palmas to El Aiun, situated on the coast of the Spanish Sahara, a much disputed piece of desert south of Morocco. This was the closest and cheapest way of getting to Morocco. Flying was too expensive for our budgets, and we desired the unique adventure, which we had heard much about, of travelling across the sandy desert from El Aiun northwards. All of our Riverside gang was going except Gail. She and I had had a lot of discussion about this. She wanted to go but did not have enough money to support herself. I had stopped supporting her financially when she refused to come stay with me in the mountains and now she was living on the money she had brought with her. About all she had left was enough to take the ship back to Spain and the train up to Amsterdam where she could fly back to Los Angeles on her still valid return ticket. I encouraged her to do this, to rejoin her child that she had left with her parents, who were no doubt sorely awaiting Gail's already overdue return. That is what I had originally intended when I invited her to come in the first place. She did not, however, want to return, not just yet anyway. I thought that not taking her along to Morocco would force her to return soon. I suppose this line of reasoning was a deceptive subtle revenge by my ego, to get even.

On Christmas day there was to be a big get-together on the beach with all the foreigners in the valley. Early Christmas morning I brought out my remaining stash of orange sunshine, about twenty hits, cut them in half, and started walking down the hillside trail towards the beach. The trail meandered through several small villages and scattered houses where several tourist friends were living. I stopped by, wishing them a Merry Christmas, and offered a piece of acid which they joyfully received. Everyone met on the beach later in the morning.

On the beach, a little while later, I passed around the rest of the acid to those I had not yet met. Everyone except a very few gladly received at least a small piece. Most of us got off on a very beautiful high that sunny, warm, 'holy' morning, laying and sitting around on the sand and rocks and playing in the gentle surf. A large rock protruded above the surface about thirty yards offshore and many of us guys swam out to it. About ten of us sat there soaking up the sun's rays and tripping on the beauty around us — the sea, beach, mountains, valley, banana trees, and the azure sky. Periodically, some of us slipped off our rock perch for a refreshing dip and returned for more basking and stoned gazing. In my own personal experience I was feeling very close to nature, with my body and individual ego identity and petty mind seeming very insignificant, almost unreal, in the face of it all.

Later, some of the gals who were watching and tripping on us from the beach, described us as looking like a bunch of seals all clustered on the rock, diving off at different times and climbing back on. Knowing the way acid affects one's perception I laughed and agreed it must have been a striking resemblance. I wondered if seals had that much fun or if they were naturally stoned all the time?

On New Year's Eve, there was a big party at the house of some German friends. It was also a kind of going away party for our Riverside gang that was leaving the next day. Needless to say, everyone got really ripped on every kind of dope and liquor going around. At the midnight hour it was an incredible orgy of guys and gals in drunken embrace, changing partners one after the other, wishing Happy New Year, grabbing anyone of the opposite

sex, rolling on the floor necking and, in some cases, balling. This frantic orgy continued until the wee hours when we either passed out or wore ourselves out.

We had arranged to ride to San Sebastian in a taxi to catch the afternoon ferry to Las Palmas. The five of us finally managed to get our act together to leave about noon. It was a sad moment for Gail as she was reluctantly staying behind and would at least miss Barry, Larry, and Fred. She did not tell me exactly what she would do but for the time being she would remain at the house of some friends. Many came out to bid us farewell. Some of the other vagabond types also had the idea to make the trip to India in the spring. Ramon and old Manual, with whom I had developed an especially close friendship, were also on hand and were sorry to see “El Rubio” leave; they wanted to know when I would return. I tried to explain to them that I had to go to India for awhile and perhaps I would return some day. So with fond memories in my heart for this mesmerizing valley, Antonio revved his engine and off we left.



CHAPTER 4

MOROCCO, GREECE AND THE NEAR EAST

We nicknamed the ship we took to El Aiun, “the banana boat”. It was an old steamer the size and kind we imagined would have hauled bananas from the Canaries to North Africa during the forties and fifties. The journey took about ten hours with the old ship swaying to and fro, bobbing up and down with the large ocean swells as it lumbered its way to the North African coast. Almost all the passengers were young Western travelers like ourselves, on the ‘hippie trail’ following the seasons from one paradise to another. El Aiun itself is a small town, being mostly a military outpost. After clearing customs we wasted no time in getting a taxi to transport us out to Tarfiya, the so-called border station between Morocco and Spanish Sahara. It was really a joke, just a couple of dilapidated tin/cardboard shacks out in the middle of godforsaken nowhere. It is from here that northbound travelers get transportation to Tan-Tan, the first town in Morocco coming from the south. Jeeps and truck caravans carry people and cargo from Tan-Tan across the vast expanse of desert as far as Mauritania and Senegal, stopping here at Tarfiya to let off and pick-up passengers and clear customs/immigration.

When we cleared immigration once again there was a land rover waiting for passengers for the twenty-four hour haul over the desert to Tan Tan. The driver called himself Elydi, the desert fox. He boasted he knew the Sahara inside and out, saying he could drive to Tan Tan blindfolded. There are no established roads on this route but only faint tracks in the constantly shifting sand. We had used up all our combined stash of dope before leaving Gomera, knowing however, that plenty of good hash was readily available in Morocco. And sure enough shortly after getting out of the taxi here an old man in a scruffy jalaba came around to sell most of us tourists a chunk of hash. So before embarking on the long ride north we got pleasantly stoned. Elydi crammed twelve of us tourists into the land rover. I opted to sit on top with the luggage to avoid the cramped quarters and to have a bird’s eye view of the endless empty desert while breathing fresh air.

We stopped at 11 P.M. to sleep on the sand in our sleeping bags and recommenced at 4 A.M. About three hours later we began to see the first signs of human habitation — herds of goats and nomadic tents. Elydi, being a good tourist guide, stopped at one of these large tents where a family of Berbers lived. A man with a full graying beard and wearing a worn but elegant jalaba came out of the tent to greet Elydi and all of us curious tourists. A few children wearing tattered clothes popped out of nowhere to stare at us.

It seemed that Elydi and the man were friends and the whole group of us were ushered into the spacious patchwork tent. The woman of the tent, her face covered with the traditional veil of Muslim women, began preparing a big pot of tea. The inside of the dwelling was simple, with a Persian type carpet spread over a ground covering of gunny bags. We all sat on the carpet and sipped the delicious mint tea flavored with sage that was served from an old but handsome silver teapot in small glass cups.

Upon finishing my tea I went outside to gaze over the vast desert with several goat herds and nomadic tents dotting the area. Elydi and the man of the tent came over to me and started discussing something among themselves in Arabic. Then the man got my attention and made some hand gestures, stroking his long beard with one hand while pointing to my beard. Elydi roughly translated that this man had a liking for me and wanted to offer me his daughter for marriage. He would provide a tent for us to live in and a small flock of goats to get started. Perhaps the two men were only joking but they were awaiting my reply. Images of a life ever after in the Sahara tending goats and drinking mint tea flashed through my mind. But coming back to reality and my journey at hand, I politely declined the generous offer. Getting back in the land rover, we reached the small outpost town of Tan Tan in another two hours.

The next morning the four of us rode the bus up to Goulimine, the home of the “Blue Men”, Goulimine beads, and the weekend camel market. We had some difficulty in finding accommodation for the five of us but finally managed to secure sufficient floor space on a wooden loft above a crowded noisy teashop/restaurant. We stayed in Goulimine for a few days,

acclimatizing to the feel and customs of Morocco, doing a little shopping and learning a few words of Arabic.

Barry, Larry, Fred and I each bought a jalaba, the traditional almost indispensable dress of Moroccan men. They are full length robes made of wool or cotton or a mixture of both materials. They have long sleeves and a large hood and serve several useful purposes. Most importantly, the jalaba protects from the hot desert sun and blinding wind storms which frequently occur during the day, and insulates against the cold desert nights. It is also sometimes used to curl up in for sleeping, a kind of built-in sleeping bag. We bought them to wear because we wanted to try and fit in with the locals and appear less noticeable as tourists. Barry and Larry, with their black hair and beards almost passed as Moroccans. But I, with my long blonde hair and reddish beard, must have looked a little bit strange. The local men seemed to appreciate our fondness for their national dress and we got along fine with most of them, drinking mint tea, smoking kief², and practicing the few Arabic phrases we picked up from a book.

From Goulimine our group hired a taxi and went over to Sidi Ifni on the coast. Sidi Ifni used to belong to Spain and many of the Moroccans there speak Spanish. This was convenient for us because we could communicate much better with the local inhabitants. North of town there were vast stretches of deserted beach and we found a sheltered area at the base of some tall cliffs where we made a primitive camp. We wound up staying here for two weeks. I still had my one burner stove on which we cooked vegetables, eggs and fish that we purchased fresh daily in the town market and from fishermen. We also learned by watching the local boys how to catch the small octopus that inhabited the rocky ledges along the shoreline. If cooked properly it made a tasty soup. An army base was situated on the bluffs above about a mile back and often soldiers came down to the beach where we were camped. This was in their patrol zone. This made us kind of uneasy at first, but most of the soldiers were very friendly and happy to see us. They told us not to worry, that they would protect us from robbers. Some of the soldiers themselves smoked kief so we got along just fine.

² Kief: A mixture of marijuana and black tobacco.

From Sidi Ifni the little band from Riverside continued on up the coast passing through and staying a few days each in Mirleft, Agadir, Essouira and then headed to the pink city of Marrakesh. Marrakesh was a focal point or 'Mecca' on the Moroccan hippie trail. The cheap hotels were usually full of foreigners of every description, most staying stoned out of their skulls on everything from kief, hash, opium, heroin and acid. The local delicacy was large potent hash cookies made at the bakery and available in certain teashops. The central market or Souk was a unique, bizarre and wonderful place to wander with eyes glazed and spellbound. The open square featured hundreds of hawkers selling all manner of local and imported goods along with musicians, snake charmers, dancers, colorfully dressed water vendors with their giant leather water bags, and a plethora of mouthwatering food stalls.

From here the four of us decided to split up and travel in two separate groups. It was sometimes inconvenient traveling in a large group as we were and as we had been together a long time some friction inevitably arose. Larry and I choose to venture out by ourselves on a certain course through the Atlas mountains while Barry and Fred choose another route. We planned to meet up in Ketama, the famous hemp growing/hash producing capital in the northern Riff Mountains in a week's time. One late afternoon Larry and I boarded an overnight train from Fez to Tangier. We found a completely empty train compartment and stretched out our tired bodies on the wooden bench seats to sleep the long night away. We smoked a few pipefuls of hash to ease the discomfort and shortly thereafter fell fast asleep. I was using my small pack as a pillow but Larry had unwisely left his pack on the floor. In the middle of the night someone had quietly stolen Larry's pack. Upon awaking in the morning and discovering his pack missing Larry started shouting and cursing. Fortunately, however, he had his money, passport and other important documents still intact in the leather pouch he wore on his belt, and he was laying on his sleeping bag so that precious item was not stolen. Larry remained very bitter for quite some time and he learned his traveling lesson the hard way. Larry only re-bought a new toothbrush and a towel and an extra pair of underwear. My pack still had enough space for his sleeping bag and we shared carrying my pack.

We met the others a few days later as planned in Ketama. We stayed there a few days obviously staying quite stoned. It was here that Barry and Fred decided to throw in the towel. They had enough of travelling. Each had their own personal reasons for returning stateside. They had met a Dutch tourist with a Volkswagen van who was driving back up to Amsterdam and he agreed to take them. Amsterdam is from where they would fly home. Larry wanted to stick it out with me at least as far as Afghanistan. We were sorry to have Barry and Fred leave us but wished them a pleasant journey northward. Before leaving Ketama I bought a five gram piece of hash for our journey across North Africa to Tunis.

After a few bus rides Larry and I arrived at Ousda near the Algerian border where we stayed one day getting our visas. I hid the piece of hash in my shoe and passed through the checkpoints on both sides of the border without any problems. Algeria is quite a contrast to Morocco in that it had a long influence from the occupation of France. Many of the older people and young students spoke French and dressed in western clothing. Very few men in the north wore the jalaba or turban as in Morocco and women seldom wore the veil. They were more interested and curious about Europeans and Americans and liked to practice their French or English. Therefore, it was pretty easy for us to hitchhike and meet a lot of friendly people along the way.

A funny incident happened along the way while riding a bus into Algiers. Larry and I were sitting in the rear seat and were the only foreigners. The rest of the bus was filled mostly with young schoolgirls wearing white dresses and shirts with a tie and their black hair braided in pigtails. I had started playing on the wooden recorder I still carried and soon Larry and I became the center of attention. By this time my thick blonde hair had grown out and was hanging well below my shoulders. A few of the older girls were especially noticing this, which contrasted with all the black hair they had and were accustomed to seeing.

They were shy, but giggling and discreetly pointing to my hair and talking amongst themselves about it. One of them could not stand it any

longer and after much prodding from the others, she came up to me and wanted to actually feel my hair. This girl indicated that she even desired a strand of my long blonde hair, probably being a dare from the others. I good naturedly cooperated and granted her wish, plucking out a few strands and handing them over. She carefully placed them between two pages of her notebook and triumphantly hurried back to the giggling envious classmates, to show off her prize.

From Algiers we diverted our easterly direction and headed south toward the towns of Ghardia and Quargla at the edge of the Sahara. We wished to get a different view of Algeria, a more typical Arab way of life and perhaps more adventure and variety than the northern route afforded. After a few different rides on trucks we arrived in the late afternoon at a small town intending to spend the night there. Being conspicuous as foreigners we soon attracted a group of schoolboys who gathered around us while we were sitting at an outdoor restaurant eating our dinner of greasy mutton/vegetable stew and bread. After the meal we asked the boys where we might find a quiet place to sleep. After some deliberation amongst themselves they led us over to the schoolhouse to talk to the schoolmaster. The schoolmaster offered one of the rooms to sleep in where we could lock the door and be safe from being attacked or robbed. We would have preferred to sleep outside where it would be cooler but with the memory of Larry's rip-off in Morocco still fresh in our minds we heeded their caution and spent the night in the warm room on the hard schoolroom tables.

The next morning while walking to the outskirts of the town we came upon a column of five shiny black limousines parked along the road. The drivers were standing beside their cars smoking cigarettes. They were all clean shaven and dressed in dark suits with ties. We approached them and struck up some small talk with the idea in the back of our minds that they might give us a lift. One driver spoke a little English and I asked where they were going. He replied that they were driving the limos to the big oasis city of Quargla. The president of Algeria and other officials were flying there for a visit and the government cars were to be used by the dignitaries during their stay there. Quargla was the southernmost destination that we were hoping to reach and we tried to persuade the driver to give us a lift

that far. He replied that no riders were allowed. But with a little skillful talking by Larry the driver consulted his co-drivers, and they acquiesced in part to our request. They agreed to take us as far as the next town about fifty miles further south. They were afraid that they might get caught and reprimanded for taking us, but as we were American tourists they consented to bring us to the next crossroads junction where it would be easier to get a lift. The Mercedes Benz limousines were nice and spacious, richly upholstered and air-conditioned — a great welcome treat for us after the hot dusty truck rides we normally were getting. We were let off at the agreed destination, a desert crossroads town. The terrain here was different than the endless sand dunes of the Spanish Sahara. It reminded me of the Joshua tree area of Southern California minus the Joshua trees, but with big piles of rocks and boulder hills dotting the otherwise barren landscape.

With our thumbs out again we were given a lift in the back of a canvas enclosed truck along with two turbaned Arabs and their five goats. The goats had red dye spots on their wool which earmarked them for sale and slaughter in the next market town. I think the four footed creatures sensed their impending fate as they did not seem one bit happy. I felt sorry for them and tried to console the sheep by playing some tunes on the recorder. The two Arabs sitting in the back with us must have thought I was crazy caring about the imminent fate of their goats, as I had made it plain to them through sign language. I don't know if these were really deep feelings of compassion for the animals or just a way to have some fun with the Arabs and endure the hot boring ride, not being able to see out. We arrived in the next market town where the goats were being delivered in the late afternoon. I don't think many westerners like us had been this way before, judging by the curious, puzzled looks we received from the locals. The two of us must have been a strange sight indeed what with our jalabas, long hair and beards. While wondering where we could spend the night I eyed an outcrop of rocks just outside of town and suggested to Larry that we check it out. We were followed like two pied pipers up the hill by a band of small children and had to wait almost until dark for them to leave us alone and go home. From this vantage point there was a picturesque view of this Algerian desert village and the vast barren surroundings of rock outcroppings and dry river beds. The drawback, however, was that being so

close to the town the place was utilized by many of the town's people as a toilet. With a little scouting around we found a relatively large and clean enough area to spread out our sleeping bags. And amidst the odor of human feces and goat droppings with the attending flies and patrolling pigs we cheerfully smoked a pipeful of hash. We amused ourselves and took it all in good stride. After all, we were free and we counted our blessings while gazing long into the immense starlit sky.

While on top of the hill we had seen a railway yard with a long freight train parked in it. The next morning we descended the hill and walked to the railroad yard with the idea to perhaps hitch a ride on a train going to Quargla. We saw a long freight train preparing to continue its southbound journey and figured it would be going all the way to Quargla because our map indicated tracks going only in that direction. So Larry and I, being adventurous, tried to climb aboard for a free ride. But just as we were getting into an empty boxcar a conductor spotted us and angrily shouted at us to get down. Instead of trying to persuade the conductor as we had done with the limo drivers, we jumped off. Shortly afterwards and with a little disappointment we decided to give up our southerly direction and got back on the direct course northeastwards towards Constantine and on to Tunisia.

In two days we made it back to the main road running east/west across North Africa, about fifty miles west of Constantine. Near the road junction at the edge of an orange grove we stood with our thumbs out for a couple of hours without any vehicles stopping. Darkness was approaching and there had been a drizzling rain most of the day. We were wondering what to do when two young boys from the house across the street came over to us and motioned for us to follow them to their house. We did not know exactly what to expect but were open to anything new, so we followed the boys' home. The boys' father greeted us at the door and kindly invited us into his humble home where we sat down on straw mats on the furnitureless living room floor. He bade his wife, who was meekly standing in an inner doorway, to prepare tea for his guests. Between the man's limited knowledge of French and English and my rusty French along with Larry's two cents worth, we could sufficiently communicate. He and his sons had been watching us trying to unsuccessfully hitchhike for the last two hours.

And because it was raining and getting dark he felt sympathetic and wanted us to spend the night in his house. He indicated that he had seen us smoking a pipeful of hash while waiting for rides and he would like to try it. In Algeria marijuana was not cultivated so kief and hashish were not readily available nor did many Algerians use the stuff. But this man seemed to know what it was and was keen to smoke some. Larry and I had no qualms about it so I pulled out my long wooden-stem pipe and loaded the small bowl. The eyes of his wife and children were intently glued on us from the safe distance in the adjoining doorway. This was a comical situation for Larry and I and we played along with it with great pleasure. After a few tokes and some coughing our host became pleasantly stoned and we sat around smiling and laughing and sipping tea. Later that evening we were treated with a simple but delicious meal of rice, vegetables and mutton dutifully served by his wife and daughter.

Our host was an executive in the orange grove and packing shed business nearby. In the morning he arranged to have one of their truck drivers give us a ride into Constantine where they delivered oranges to the markets daily. Constantine is situated in a very picturesque location perched at the top of a deep narrow gorge which bisects the city. It is a fashionable and fairly aristocratic city boasting a large university with an international representation. There were many, young, educated and westernized students including plenty of pretty ladies. Larry and I had not had a decent bath or varied diet since leaving Algiers and we felt like splurging by staying in a hotel. But for some strange reason we had much difficulty in finding a hotel that would accept us. The first several hotels we tried abruptly denied us, saying that they were full with a tone that we were plainly not welcome. Maybe it was due to our vagrant appearance from having picked up so much road dirt and wearing our dusty jalabas. There were signs that the hotels were not completely full. After some persistence and almost pleading, one hotel clerk finally but reluctantly gave us a room, "But for only one night", he said. Once in our simple room we each took a long overdue hot shower and relaxed on the bed for awhile.

In the early evening after putting on our only change of clean but wrinkled clothes we strolled out onto the sidewalks of this distinct city. We

contented ourselves with a little sightseeing, admiring the spectacular gorge and trying to make up our fickle minds as to which of the multitude of international restaurants we would choose to satisfy our latent culinary lust. We finally agreed on a feast or “beggars banquet” of Italian food washed down with wine.

The next morning after a late breakfast of fresh fruits, yogurt and bread we headed out of the city to continue towards the Tunisian border. It was a slow day for hitchhiking and we only got as far as a small crossroads twenty miles from the Tunisian border. Here was a checkpoint with a policeman stopping vehicles for an identification check. Larry and I hung out here for awhile making small talk with the friendly policeman. As it was nearly dark he suggested that we spend the night in a teashop located across the road. He talked with the teashop owner and persuaded him to allow us to sleep inside because he feared for our safety sleeping outside. In the morning the policeman would get us a ride with a car going to the border.

Inside the teashop we were faced with an awkward situation. As usual in these predominantly Muslim countries only men were inside. They were sitting in small groups at separate tables drinking tea and playing an Arabic version of checkers and cards. We were greeted by hard cold stares from most of the men who looked up momentarily. Nobody said anything to us as we sat down at an empty table in one corner. A few hours remained before the place would close for the night when we could sleep. After an uneasy thirty minutes we went outside and smoked up the remains of my hash to ease the nervous strain. We stayed outside in the fresh cool air gazing at the stars and rapping for about an hour trying to kill time. We would have preferred to stay outside and sleep in the nearby bushes but to do so would have created a stir and displeased the kind policeman. Now, being mentally numbed we went back inside. From what we could gather, the place seemed to be the Arab equivalent to a gay bar but much more subtle. We tried to decide how we would react if approached and propositioned. Both of us mentally projected a bigger deal out of the whole situation and nothing happened.

In the morning the policeman was able to get us a ride in a car with a man who was going all the way to Tunis, the capital/port city of this tiny Arab country. We had hoped to arrive here just before the departure of the twice weekly ferry which plies between Tunis and Palermo, Sicily, but we missed it by a matter of a few hours. So we decided to fly to Palermo. There were cheap daily flights and we didn't particularly want to wait three more days for the next ferry. Tunis was not so interesting a city for us, comparing it with places like Marrakesh or Constantine and we were glad to leave as soon as we could. We were able to book a flight for the very next day. That afternoon we took a stroll around the streets of Tunis appeasing our deprived appetites on snacks, sweets and ice-cream that was available on every corner. Deep within the central bazaar Larry found and bought a pintsize backpack, the size of a daypack, to replace his stolen pack. It was just the right size to hold his sleeping bag, towel and a few articles of extra clothes. He was getting used to traveling light and this small pack limited the ability to accumulate unnecessary things. I was also relieved at this because it reduced the weight of my pack that I had been carrying most of the time anyway.

It was now about April 1st, and we were getting in kind of a hurry to get to Greece, moving closer to Afghanistan. Larry sat next to an American couple on the short flight to Palermo and had struck up a friendly conversation with them. They were living in Naples and had rented a car which they had driven to Palermo from where they had flown to Tunis for a week's vacation. Now they were driving back to Naples. Larry mentioned that we had been hitchhiking most of the way across North Africa and were headed to Brindisi to catch the boat to Athens. After consulting with his wife the man offered to give us a lift as far as they were going in our direction. This was a blessing for us because it was raining cats and dogs when we landed and continued to do so for the next twenty-four hours. We had a pleasant, relaxing time riding in dry comfort across the green breathtaking grandeur of Sicily. During our conversations the man related his experience of visiting Mt. Athos, the long jutting peninsula southeast of Thessalonika in Greece. This was the first time I had heard of this quite famous place, home to many strict Orthodox Catholic monasteries. His knowledgeable descriptions of the routine, contemplative life of hermit

monks, as well as the rugged beauty of the steep cliffs was quite interesting. I even had a passing thought of perhaps visiting there myself while in Greece. There were, however, certain restrictions and stipulations for visitors: only men are allowed to enter the area and they must have their hair cut short. In other words, they did not want casual hippies coming there. This being the case, I abandoned the thought of visiting soon. I still had too much attachment to my long hair and hippie image and my motivation was not one of any serious religious nature. But perhaps this was an indication of what was stirring in my subconscious mind and a hint at the future.

The couple dropped us off on the Italian mainland where the road turns north towards Naples and by the next day we arrived at the port city of Brindisi. We arrived in the busy Italian port just in time for the overnight ferry to Greece. We were now back in modern western civilization after being somewhat out of touch for the last six months with the European Continent with its masses of tourists. The two of us were still clad in our slightly wrinkled dusty jalabas and looking pretty road worn which, to the hippie vagabond set, was a mark of status. As we strolled up the gangway we received a long curious gaze from the Captain who was standing by viewing his boarding passengers. We managed to evoke a warm smile from him as we passed by beaming him wide grins from behind our shaggy beards and weather-beaten faces. The ship was crowded mostly with young European, American and Canadian students doing their spring educational tour around Europe and Greece. It was a pleasant overnight cruise lying out on the upper deck drinking beer and casually rapping with other travelers. We had smoked the last of our hash before entering Tunisia, so this is the one 'occasion' that we had no dope to smoke, yet we enjoyed it none-the-less. In the morning the ship glided through the blue green water of the Aegean Sea and the scenic islands of western Greece, docking at Patrai.

Patrai is situated at the mouth of the Gulf of Corinth on the northernmost point of the famed region of Peloponnesus. I had studied about the ancient history of Greece in school and now I was finally here to experience first hand the aesthetic beauty of ancient Greek architecture, sculpture and the immaculate charm of its many varied islands. It felt reassuring as the boat

docked there because now I was getting closer to Turkey, the gateway to Asia. It was still early in the day, and Larry and I decided not to hang around. As did many others from the boat, we went to the railway station and boarded the Athenai Express for Athens. We alighted a few hours later, happy as larks, in this sprawling cosmopolitan city, a link between past and present.

Larry and I remained in Athens one week, staying in one of the numerous cheap hostels located near the main downtown area. We had to obtain a visa from the Iranian consulate and get an inoculation against cholera. I was also waiting for five hundred dollars to be sent from home. Despite the money I had made selling orange sunshine, I was also down to about three hundred dollars of the original five hundred I had brought in travelers' checks. Because I was going all the way to India and perhaps further, I desired to have enough on hand to last for at least a year or cover emergencies. I had written to my mother a couple of weeks prior, instructing her to wire the money from the accumulated savings in my bank account to a branch Bank of America in Athens. This money came in very handy later in an unexpected tight squeeze.

During that week of rest and relaxation from our long travels we did the usual sightseeing to the Acropolis and other monuments and city attractions. We satisfied our gastronomic craving in the international restaurants, and snacked on yogurt and honey, ice cream and *souvlaki*. We spent many leisurely hours sitting in the sidewalk cafes sipping beer or the Greek counterpart called *retsina*, while watching the world of people go by. In the outdoor cafe in front of the AMX, hundreds of young, worldwide travelers sat drinking coffee, soft drinks or beer while reading long awaited mail from home. Here they met others like themselves, swapping travel stories and useful information, showing off their prize collection of exotic clothes, jewelry and other trinkets brought from afar. Many were completely broke, having arrived at this international crossroads by land, sea or air from Europe, India, Africa or elsewhere. And, like myself, some were waiting for money to be sent from home in order to continue their worldwide gallivanting.

Before leaving Athens I decided to cut about six inches off the length of my hair. I heard that the Muslims of the Middle East were not especially fond of long-haired hippies and I didn't want that to be a potential cause for any negative confrontation. My philosophy of travel was to try and get along well with the natives of each country and blend in as much as possible. My hair was also becoming increasingly time-consuming and troublesome to keep untangled and clean travelling the way we were. I was, however, still attached to my hippie image and wished to retain a length that would keep me in that category — covering the ears and resting on top of the shoulders. So I went to a men's hair stylist, and after three gradual cuttings guided by my careful scrutiny and moments of indecision, the job was completed to my satisfaction. It felt surprisingly good to be free of that extra length and weight of hair.

Larry and I decided to modify our original route and skip Istanbul. Instead we would head directly to the south coast of Turkey to Marmaris by boat with a stop over on the Greek Island of Rhodes. We would then proceed due east along the south coast eventually connecting up with the main Istanbul/Teheran train route in Northeastern Turkey. From most of the overland travelers that we had spoken to, Turkey and Iran were the countries least praised or appreciated. We heard that Turkish men were the most obnoxious and Iranians a bit crazy. Both countries were tough on drug users and getting busted meant long severe jail time. So we didn't plan to linger long in these two places but wished to get to Afghanistan as quickly as possible. From Athens this seemed to be the shortest and probably more scenic route through Turkey.

We took the inter-island ferry and spent a couple of days on the large, rugged, island of Rhodes before taking another boat over to the Turkish city of Marmaris. This was our first step on what is considered the big continent of Asia. Larry and I had not had any dope to smoke for several days and hoped to score some Turkish hash here for our continuing journey (the movie, *Midnight Express*, had not yet been made). We had to wait a few hours until the next overnight bus going east. While walking around it wasn't long before two boys approached us and whispered, "hashish, hashish". This was what we wanted to hear. Looking around to make sure

no people were watching, we asked the boy to show it to us. He pulled out of his pocket a small piece of green paper thin pressed hash sealed neatly in clear plastic. It looked like the real stuff so we paid him the equivalent in Turkish Lira of one dollar. Then we went down to a mostly deserted section of the beach outside town to smoke some and get stoned before the long bus ride.

From there we rode a series of local buses eastwards along the coast to Iskenderun and then headed north by train to Tatvan. In this comparatively remote area of Eastern Turkey, Larry and I were the only Westerners on the train and we had a compartment all to ourselves at first. Once the train was underway, Larry rolled up two hash joints to smoke on the long ride to Tatvan. I pulled the curtains across the window on the door and locked the door. We left the outside window open to allow the distinct smell of hash smoke to blow immediately away. Halfway through the first joint there was a big noise outside in the corridor and then came a loud knocking on our door. We instantly became paranoid. I threw the burning joint out the window and Larry hid the other joint and remaining hash under the seat. Larry peeked through the curtain and saw some soldiers wanting in our compartment. We both looked at each other scared as hell that this was a bust. Having no alternative I opened the door to let them in. The four Turkish soldiers who barged in looked quite surprised to see us Western hippies way out here in this off the beaten path tourist route. One of them apparently was a prisoner as he was handcuffed to a sergeant. The other two soldiers were carrying loaded rifles.

Larry and I nervously made room for them to sit down and waited to see what would happen. The sergeant began speaking to us in Turkish. By his pointing to our long hair and beards and using other obvious sign language we understood that he wanted to smoke some hash and figured (correctly) that we had some. We became very uneasy and did not know quite how to respond. Perhaps a faint odor from the hash joint still lingered which he smelled and recognized. Or possibly the look in our eyes and nervousness gave us away and the fact that the door had been locked may have created suspicion. The sergeant indicated that he liked to smoke 'charees' and seemed to be almost begging us to turn him on. He indicated that we should

not worry, they were our friends. All four of them were laughing and joking with each other, even the prisoner. Somehow I sensed that they just wanted to get loaded like anyone else, remembering my own time in the army. And it was a long ride to our final destination. Exchanging glances it was obvious Larry was thinking the same thing I was, 'what the hell'. So I reached down and pulled out the second joint from underneath the seat and held it up for the sergeant to see. His eyes lit up like he had struck gold and he ordered one of the guards to stand watch outside the door. Larry and I were greatly relieved to say the least, and Larry lit it up. It was real comical to watch what went on while we smoked the joint together. The sergeant even held the joint up to the prisoner's mouth so he could take a couple of tokes and all three of them got happily high. We all laughed and tried to communicate the best we could. I took out my map of the Mid-East and pointed out the route we had taken from Greece and where we wanted to go in Afghanistan. They were surprised that we young Americans could just travel about like this in foreign lands without fear or loneliness. The sergeant indicated on the map where they were going. It seems that the soldier in custody had assaulted an officer while drunk and they were taking him to the army jail in the next large city, Diyarbakir. It was all very funny for Larry and I and we laughed about the incident for a long time to come.

Tatvan is situated on the west end of Lake Van in Northeast Turkey. We had to wait here overnight to connect up with the Istanbul-Teheran express which acts as the Asian extension of the famous but now defunct *Orient Express* (London to Istanbul). The train pulled into Tatvan at seven A.M. right on time. The passenger cars were packed with the first springtime rush of travelers headed on their Eastern pilgrimage. With some searching and smiling, the two of us managed to squeeze into one of the crowded compartments. The journey took us within sight of the historical Mt. Ararat which looms majestically above the relatively flat surrounding terrain and geographically still in Turkey. On the opposite side of the huge mountain lies the border with Russia. Mt. Ararat is reputed to be the site where Noah's Ark came to rest after the Biblical version of the great world inundation way back in who knows when. There is claimed to be actual

physical evidence of this near the top of this almost seventeen thousand foot snow-capped mountain.

From stories we had heard we had no burning desire to spend much time in Teheran. There was only one hotel where the foreign travelers stayed and it was packed with young people going to and returning from India. Larry and I stayed here two days and gleaned useful travel tips on good places to eat and sleep along the way, interesting side trips, current visa regulations, etcetera. One of these tips was to take the overnight luxury bus to Mashad near the Afghan border where we had to stop and obtain a visa for Afghanistan. This sounded like a better alternative to taking the crowded train. The buses took the north eastern route, passing near the Soviet Border before dropping down to Mashad. It was also the place to score quality turquoise which was mined in the desert mountains nearby. Many turquoise factories are here where you can look over endless supplies of assorted, beautiful stones. So, after our brief two days in Teheran we departed by luxury coach to Mashad.

Upon getting off the bus at the bus stand, all of us tourists were swamped by boys trying to lure us to particular turquoise factories, thinking as usual that we intended to buy large quantities. While we were here Larry and I decided to go have a look. We also learned via the travelers' 'survival hotline' that it was a good investment to pick up a card of small pure color stones to take back home. A card is a pre-selected assortment of sixteen or eighteen stones stuck to a piece of hard paper. This amount is enough to have a necklace and matching set of ear rings or finger rings made. Buying them here at the source could mean a tidy profit when sold in big Western cities. Two cards could almost pay for one's trip to the East.

Larry and I visited a couple different factories taking our time to examine various cards and thumbing through boxes of individual, large turquoise stones. We finally each bought one card with the idea of taking them home to sell or give as gifts. While looking through the boxes of loose stones, the latent but powerful potential of desire and greed that lurks in the subconscious mind, began to work in both of us. *Quite independently of each other's knowledge, Larry and I managed to inconspicuously nick a*

large stone of our liking. We slipped them into our respective pockets while the unwitting shop keeper was tending to other business. I justified this petty theft in my mind by purchasing the card and telling myself, "Just one stone won't really matter." Later when the two of us were alone and discovered that we had done the same thing, in the same way, with the same thoughts, we had a long laugh. This was another example of how the devious mind works similarly in the minds of different people in a given situation to satisfy the ego's desires.

After obtaining our visas and visiting some of the beautiful mosques in Mashad we set out by bus to the Afghan border. We cleared customs and immigration on both sides by the late afternoon and had to spend the night there at Islam Quala just inside Afghanistan. Herat, the first major city is about forty miles, a good hour's ride from the border. Afghani van and bus drivers ferry travelers into Herat but not in the evening. They had a clever agreement with the few hotels there not to take any passengers to Herat after 5 P.M. In this way, everyone arriving after that must spend the night there -and their money in the hotels. This gives the hotel owners a nightly business of which a cut is given to the vehicle drivers for their cooperation. And the drivers are assured of a full load early in the morning. Islam Quala was the first place to score the famous potent Afghani hash or charees as it is called in this region. It is incredibly cheap here compared to European prices and readily available from the hotel owners or the young boys who act as their touts. So actually it was not such a bad place to spend our first night in Afghanistan.





CHAPTER 5

BUSTED IN AFGHANISTAN

Larry and I stayed in Herat three days acclimatizing to the marked contrast in culture and personality that we encountered here compared to Turkey and Iran. I began acquiring my personal hippie version of Afghani dress, a desire I had harbored since seeing other returnees in Athens. According to the image in mind, I ordered from a local tailor a pair of orange silky cotton baggy pants and a pink Afghan style shirt. To accompany this I bought a readymade multicolored, flowery, embroidered vest. And to top this off, I bought a white silk turban literally right off the head of an elderly Afghan gentlemen, which happened to catch my fancy. The respectable old man, who was now bald, must have thought I was nuts for insisting to have this turban. But as the monetary offer was increased to undermine his initial, stubborn refusal he reluctantly relinquished it. This was another illustration of how the subtle craving mind will do anything to get what it was after grasping a set image. I could have bought the same ten foot piece of material in a shop, probably even cheaper, but I just had to have this vintage original.

During these three days Larry and I spent many hours walking up and down the streets of Herat, stopping to talk with some of the shop owners. On a back street, we were invited into a cloth weaving factory to smoke a hooka (large water pipe) with a group of weavers who were taking a short break from their hand looms. They got a kick out of our joining them for a blow and ordered a round of tea. Through our limited communication attempts they told us that smoking hash helped them to concentrate on their work sitting all day at their routine labor without getting bored or noticing time drag on. I could relate to this as I had used the same means to get through my three years in the army. And I suppose I was still using it in this same way, boosting or dulling my mental state to unconsciously mask the deeper dissatisfaction with myself or life which must have existed below the surface.

Kandahar was a pleasant, small city in the southern desert and we spent two weeks here. We rented a cheap room at the Paradise Hotel on the road leading into town. In a radius of two or three miles there were several nice places to go for a day's outing to beat the fast approaching summer. These spots included a wooded picnic area by a fast flowing river, a canal and a large reservoir used for the city's drinking supply. Larry and I rented bicycles and rode out to these peaceful spots for swimming sunbathing, picnicking, napping and of course getting stoned.

One day we met a young local man whose family owned a small opium poppy farm. He invited me and Larry out one day to observe the process of extracting the fresh opium tar from the fat mature pods. Of course, we could not leave without sampling some of the sweet substance offered to us; we were regarded to be prospective buyers of a large quantity. But neither Larry or I were much interested in scoring big with opium. We politely talked our way out of it by mentioning that we would rather have charees. And it just so happened, as is also usual here, these people had an 'uncle' who had a hemp farm and hash factory. Although we had no intention of buying a big quantity of hash either, at least not immediately, we took the name of their 'uncle' who had a small shirt shop just down the road from our hotel.

This started us thinking and shortly our plans for the near future started to shape up. By this time Larry had definitely decided to return home. He was running low on money and he felt obliged to help his father and Barry run the new family liquor store. And knowing his fondness for the fair sex whose soft caresses he was missing, he was getting homesick for the lady friends he had left behind in Riverside.

I, on the other hand, was concocting a fantasy to take a kilo of best quality Afghani hash along to India with me. I would go up into the Himalayas somewhere and find a quiet, picturesque spot and just stay stoned as long as it lasted. I knew that hash was also cheaply available in Pakistan, India and Nepal. But I wanted to have the best, number one, Afghani, something to be one up and coveted by the rest of the western freaks. Larry also decided to risk taking two hundred grams with him back

to Greece. He would sell half of it there in order to get extra needed cash for a leisurely trip back to Spain from where he was to fly back to the States. He would take the remaining one hundred grams with him back to Riverside to personally use and turn on his friends.

We planned to smuggle the dope to Pakistan through the southern border crossing sixty miles south of Kandahar. We both figured this would probably be the easiest and safest exit point, being the most remote and least traveled by foreigners. In Quetta, sixty miles inside Pakistan, Larry and I would finally part company. He would then head west across Southern Pakistan crossing into Iran near Zahedan and continue back to Athens. I would travel up to Lahore and cross into India near Amritsar and then head up into the Himalayas according to my fantasy.

During this time in Kandahar we began looking around for some good quality charees and went to meet the owner of the shirt shop we had heard about. The shop turned out to be just a front for the man's dope business. It consisted of a few dusty shirts hanging up in the front window of an empty room. In the small back room the man had a big hooka set up. The belly of the water pipe was a large, round, clay jug with a long straight piece of bamboo protruding from the side and reaching up to chest level. A saucer size clay bowl was fitted on top of the jug to complete the whole thing. This shop was conveniently located on the street leading out of town where most of the hippie hostels, including our Paradise hotel were strung out. Whenever any westerners walked by on their way in or out of town he would invite them in for a blow on the pipe hoping to sell them some hash later.

Larry and I went inside several times to smoke the man's charees to see if it was what we wanted. It was very potent and we decided to score from him. He would charge only fifteen dollars for a kilo. Larry and I had not seriously considered by what fool proof way we would smuggle the dope across the border. In our talks with the dealer he assured us that he had helped many tourists like ourselves sneak hash out of the country. He told me he could have half a kilo sewn neatly into an afghan vest to be confidently worn through customs undetected. This method, he boasted,

had worked many times. The other five hundred grams I decided to sew into the flat bottom of my rucksack. Larry was going to take his two hundred grams strapped over his crotch and anus. We told him we were going to Kabul and would be back in a week.

Larry and I rode the big orange tourist bus to Kabul, the capital, where we remained one week. We stayed in one of the plentiful cheap hotels which cater to the shoestring budget overland travelers and hundreds of hippie freaks were holed up here. Many were recuperating from long, tiring journeys to or from India, recovering from a bout of hepatitis, preparing to move on, or were just plain too stoned or burned out to do anything, period. The added bonus and favorite pastime in these hotel/restaurants was food tripping on the western style food and digging the long missed oldies rock music which was provided. Chillum smoking was the order of the day from early morning till the last person nodded out in the late hours.

Larry and I spent a lot of time walking around window shopping in the many interesting tourist shops dealing in antiques, carpets, traditional Afghan clothing, jewelry and all manner of trinkets and even western goods. At a silversmith each of us had a wide, thick engraved silver band custom fit and mounted with our big prize Iranian turquoise. This was to be the first of several rings I began acquiring and wearing to evidence the countries I had visited and to embellish my hippie image. Larry selected material and a tailor to make five or six fancy embroidered kaftans and a traditional white Afghan outfit. He would carry all this and more back home to give as gifts to family and friends.

Once back in Kandahar we again took up residence at the Paradise hotel and shortly thereafter paid a visit to our 'candy man'. The hash was ready and we made preparations to leave.

The vest came out nice enough though a bit stiff and heavy, but while wearing it, it looked quite innocent. I sewed the other half kilo securely into the bottom of my rucksack and it also seemed unsuspecting enough. Larry made a jockstrap type of holder out of strong cloth into which he neatly sewed his two hundred grams and adjusted it on himself to fit nice and

snug. He figured this would be the last place or least likely spot to be checked. In these last moments of preparation I began to feel a little uneasy about the whole thing but I dismissed it. I told myself that it was too late, I must go ahead and do it.

At this point, I think our critical faculties had been dulled by the heavy smoking and other occasional drugs and we failed to exercise reasonable caution and discrimination in going about this risky business. We had not even really made an effort to inquire from the other freaks about the feasible conditions at the Spin Buldak border, whether hippies were checked closely or not, etcetera. We just matter of fact took it for granted that the whole operation would be 'easy as pie'. We had no second thought as to the trustworthiness of our supplier.

When we left in the morning for Spin Buldak it was already warm and by the time we arrived at the border around noon it was very hot. Larry and I had sat in the rear seat of the bus and caught the sun fully on our backs which made us perspire. This caused the hash in the vest I was wearing to heat up. The vest began to give off a subtle odor, at least to Larry who first noticed it and worriedly brought it to my attention. A little discreet sniffing confirmed this. But by now the bus was already pulling up at the first checkpoint which was the Afghan customs. The bus stopped and Larry and I, being the only foreigners, were ordered to get out and report into the customs building with our luggage. Just as we got off the bus a lone western backpacker came out of the customs building presumably having arrived before us on another bus and passed his inspection. He grinned at us as he walked past and climbed aboard the bus which then headed on towards the Pakistan side. Larry and I sheepishly glanced at each other and shrugged, still conscious of the faint fragrance of hash hanging around me. It was now too late to do anything about, it, except hope and pray that it would go undetected.

The two of us were ushered into the inspection room where four customs officers were casually waiting. The first thing one of them asked rather frankly and routinely was, "Do you have any hashish?" Such a quick, direct and accurate question caught us off guard and we didn't know which of us

should respond. I was more or less speechless and sensing this, Larry promptly replied in the calmest, most convincing manner possible, “No Sir, we do not use drugs, we just want to go to Pakistan.” Evidently the chief inspector was not convinced of this lie and not wanting to beat around the bush, he proceeded to start searching Larry beginning with his small pack. No doubt to an observant eye we both appeared somewhat nervous and guilt ridden and the smell emanating from my vest was getting stronger. I had to helplessly stand aside and watch the proceedings with a growing apprehension of the inevitable outcome.

Failing to find anything in Larry’s pack the officer began searching his body. All the while Larry was trying to divert the inspector’s attention by talking casually about the weather, etcetera. The inspector, however, was not side-tracked by this small talk and continued to search striking alarmingly closer to home. It seemed as if he was deliberately leaving Larry’s crotch for last, and Larry was beginning to jubilantly imagine that he would make it. After a slight hesitation the officer turned around and put his hand firmly onto Larry’s private parts. His eyes lit up on the surety of his find proclaiming, “Hashish!”, and our hearts sank.

I knew I was next and the butterflies in my stomach were overpowering. The inspector then turned to me while sniffing the air and within a matter of minutes, found the hash in the vest followed by the stash at the bottom of my pack. The escapade was over; we were caught red-handed, busted bigger than life. We immediately resorted to the ‘ace-in-hole’ — bribing, known in Asia as *baksheesh*. We tried offering the chief inspector fifty dollars and increased it to one hundred but to no avail, he was not interested. He said he was sorry this had to happen, he was just doing his duty, but he told us not to worry, that he would try and help us and everything would turn out all right. But for the time being we would have to spend the rest of the day and night in a small detention room and the following morning be sent back on the bus to the police station in Kandahar. This did not make much sense to me. If he really wanted to help us he should have accepted the baksheesh and let us go. I wanted to believe him that we might be free in a day or two, but deep down inside I knew it was not going to be so simple.

In the morning we were put on the first bus back to Kandahar and taken directly into the police station. Shortly we were interviewed by a police captain who was assigned to handle our case. He spoke good English and politely regretted to inform us that we would have to stand trial for the attempted smuggling. The two of us would be remanded in the local jail until such time. We never again saw the customs inspector who busted us, but who had promised to help.

The “little jail” as it was called in the local language was located across the main road from the police headquarters and down a few foul smelling back alleyways. As we approached, escorted by two constables, we saw only a high mud wall with a double strand of drooping, rusty barbwire running along the top. The entrance was a decaying wooden double door kept locked with a chain and padlock and manned by a sleepy looking guard wearing another old Russian uniform. At his side was a vintage rifle with a bayonet fixed on the barrel. Across the narrow alley from the entrance was a man seated at a table who checked prisoners in and out. All in all, the laid back scene did not look too horribly terrifying.

The moment Larry and I walked inside, the first thing we heard and saw was a group of men standing under the shade of the only tree, hacking and coughing. It was the old familiar sound of hooka smoking and a voluminous cloud of smoke hung above their heads on this hot, windless afternoon. When they caught sight of us they began beckoning us to come over for a blow on the big hooka. Not seeing any reason why not, me and Larry exchanged glances as if to say, “This is prison? Well, let’s make the best of it”; and we went over and commenced getting blasted. The prisoners got a big tickle seeing us two foreigners getting zonked with them.

The jail was a square, roofless, dirt floor compound formed by the high mud wall with rooms located along the perimeter. Each room slept about ten men. A foul smelling open latrine area was situated in one corner while a nice clean bathing room with a deep fresh water well graced the center of the courtyard. It was primarily a fend-for-yourself living arrangement as nothing was provided. Prisoners had to bring their own bedding, usually a

straw mat and a blanket, and their own cooking utensils. They had to arrange food to be brought from the outside by relatives or friends or bought for them by guards or policemen working here. If a prisoner had no money or outside help he was generally looked after or, more precisely, made a servant by a group of other men. Different groups of men always hung out together for eating, sleeping, socializing, etcetera.

As it turned out we had to wait two weeks until our trial came up. Our passports had been taken from us as well as all our money in travelers' checks. We were permitted to keep enough Afghan currency to purchase our food or other personal articles. We usually gave some money, plus commission, to a willing guard who went to the market and bought us bread, peanuts and fresh juicy grapes or other fruits and vegetables which constituted our primary snacking diet.

Fortunately, one of the long timers spoke enough English for our communication purposes. He had been a captain in the Afghan Army before murdering his wife for which he received a life sentence. He was sort of the King Rat of the jail and had his own private room which was tastefully furnished with thick Persian carpets over the dirt floor. In one corner resting on a big pillow was a sitar. He had acquired it from a former European prisoner who had been busted while returning from India. Ali Baba, as Larry and I nicknamed him, compassionately took us under his wing for the first few days, sharing his food with us and familiarizing us with the social customs, etiquette, and routine of prison life here. Quite a few foreigners had been confined here for smuggling dope and other offenses. The last ones were two French guys who had just been released one week prior. He said the average time foreigners spent in the jail was two weeks to one month depending on their circumstances. This was encouraging because we had not heard anything about Afghan jails. We had only heard about the horror tales of Turkish and Iranian prisons where foreigners sometimes spent years for similar charges as ours, in a much more hash and dismal environment.

Being westerners, we were somewhat of a novelty and the other Afghans treated us something like guests or VIP's; (very important prisoners). Each

of the little cliques took turns inviting us for an evening meal usually consisting of mutton, vegetables, bread and fruit. Larry and I would often donate some vegetables of our own to be thrown into the cooking pot. It was a friendly, convenient arrangement until two groups started quarrelling over whose turn it was to host us! After the first week or so when we had eaten with most of the groups at least once, the novelty wore off and we were left to fend more by ourselves.

Larry was undergoing a lot of self-created mental suffering worrying over the outcome and wanting to go home. He cursed himself and blamed me somewhat for getting us into this mess. He was able to console himself a little by playing Ali Baba's sitar. Larry knew how to play the guitar, so after playing with it awhile he was able to produce some decent sounds. I was taking our predicament with a mellower, 'take it or leave it' attitude. I knew I had gotten myself into this mess and was prepared to accept the consequences (my kamma); that is once I learned that life here was not all that bad and that we could probably be out within a few weeks.

Each morning Larry and I were escorted to the nearby police station to meet with the Police Captain who was handling our case, to answer questions and fill out forms. We also had our fingerprints and mug photos taken. The Police Captain informed us that these along with the record of our upcoming trial would be sent off to Washington presumably to the FBI and for use by U.S. Customs agents. The equipment used for the fingerprinting and photographs along with a few pair of steel handcuffs we saw bore the familiar mark, "Made in the U.S.A." He also told us that it is was OK to smoke *charees* in Afghanistan but smuggling it out was illegal, hence our trouble. Many of the men in the jail were doing time for cultivating marijuana and opium, which had been officially declared illegal to justify the huge sums of foreign (U.S.) aid given to Afghanistan and Turkey to help eradicate the sources of America's drug problem. The relatives of some of the inmate 'hash farmers' brought them bags of fresh hash resin from their farms which they then pressed into smokable chunks. They showed us two novices how and we passed away the time rubbing up small 'hash paddies' and then, of course smoking it.

The big hooka was left most of the time underneath the big shady tree as a kind of symbolic semi-permanent fixture. When a group of men wanted to use it, it was there. One of the servants kept it in good working order, changing the water in the jug daily and cleaning the stem and bowl. Though Larry and I used it on a few occasions participating with the others, we contented ourselves most of the time by using our Moroccan pipes, a chillum, or making joints and smoking by ourselves. Needless to say the two of us remained pretty glazed over during those two weeks in captivity. I also became sick with intestinal disorders which I attributed to the greasy mutton stew we ate. My guts were tied in knots much of the time and I had to run to the stinking latrine quite often. Staying so bombed helped me to get through it.

The local jailhouse entertainment consisted, in part, of a half crazy or retarded prisoner whom the others had tied to a tree by a six foot rope. This confinement made the man jump around and shout senseless things, appearing madder. This amused the men who sat around laughing and taunting the poor fellow to more antics. It was a real sorry sight but nothing on our part could be done to stop this cruel, morbid torment. It helped me stop and think about the differences in culture and ethics that are found in each country and how it is influenced or created by religious beliefs and social conditioning. I also reflected on the differences between human beings themselves and wondered about the cause for it.

Several times each day the devout Muslim inmates assembled on a special raised platform in the direction of Mecca to perform Namuz, their prayers. It was inspiring for me to see this as I had seldom given much serious thought to religion and religious rituals. It helped me to reflect a bit about the meaning of life and what happens after death. When lighting the chillum we sometimes intoned the words, "Bom Shiva, Bom Shankar", a chant used by certain Indian sadhus in the Himalayas for blessing the high attained by smoking the ganja. I had picked these phrases up from hearing European freaks doing it in the park in Amsterdam and elsewhere. But Larry and I were merely parroting or blindly reciting these words out of ignorance and more for our own amusement rather than anything religious or spiritual.

On the morning of the trial, Larry and I were marched across town to the courthouse buildings situated in the middle of a huge park with many trees. The courtroom where we were to be tried was on the second floor of this three story building. In the courtroom the judge, an elegant looking old gentleman with a white beard and turban, was sitting on a raised platform in a big chair. The two of us were instructed to sit on the carpeted floor in front. Ours was clearly an open and shut case. We were admittedly guilty in the first degree. I was fined five hundred U.S. dollars for possessing a kilo and Larry was fined two hundred dollars for his hundred grams. Fortunately we had the money to pay the fines. If not it would have meant an indefinite amount of time in jail, meaning until the fine was paid.

Larry now had only enough money to make it back to Madrid for his return flight. I now had to make a quick decision concerning my own immediate future plans. I had hardly adequate funds to travel to India and live as planned so I had a few options. I could remain in Kabul and write to my parents requesting them to send me another five hundred dollars there, or I could travel to New Delhi on what I had and have the money sent there. I was, however, not too keen on having the money sent to either of these two places because of the good possibility of it getting lost. I had heard stories of travelers waiting weeks and even months to receive their money which had been misdirected or hung-up somewhere in between, or just plain lost and never received.

I finally decided that I did not want to wait with worry and doubt in such places as Kabul, Delhi or even Teheran. After discussing this with Larry, I made up my mind to return with him to Athens where I would have the money safely directed as I had already done once before. From Athens I would immediately return via the quickest train and bus route, not dallying in Afghanistan and proceed forthwith to India. So, I thoughtfully wrote to my parents truthfully relating the whole episode of getting busted and asked mom to again wire five hundred dollars from my account to the Bank of America in Athens.

In these few days Larry and I thought of ways to get some extra money for our trip back to Athens. One of the popular scams in the tourist black market was selling one's unsigned travelers' checks to a dealer for half their value; then declaring the checks stolen and reporting it to the refunding agency to receive a full reimbursement. Larry sold his one remaining fifty dollar check unsigned, for twenty-five dollars, to one of the numerous money changers found in the large Kabul cloth market. I however, was contemplating another way that I thought to be more profitable. When I had previously cashed a check at a certain bank in Kabul the clerk had not even checked my passport or bothered to watch me sign. So an idea formulated in my greedy mind which I figured would work. With Larry's cooperation I had him practice my signature and then he actually signed my name on my one hundred dollar check prior to entering the bank. The clerk as before, neither asked for my passport nor was nearby to watch me sign. I just faked as though I was signing and it was cashed without any questions. Both me and Larry would report our respective TC's stolen when we passed through Teheran where we hope to quickly receive the replacement money. The way I was figuring it the American Express Company would believe the check had been stolen and forged with no reason to suspect otherwise. With this 'black' money we both would have a comfortable margin of cash to continue our travel back to Greece.

In Teheran we immediately went to the American Express Office and filed our request for the refunds which we received without difficulty within two hours. Now that I had a little extra money I was not in such a hurry to get back to Athens. I knew it would take two or three weeks for mom and dad to receive the letter I sent them from Kabul, overcome the shock of the bust and then send the money. I even had a passing train of thought that perhaps they would not want to send me the money. Maybe they would think I had destroyed my mind on too much dope and would desire me to come home. Not sending the money would force me to give up the rest of my trip to India. I would then have no recourse but to return to Riverside, regain my senses and do something constructive like finish my last two years of college. These thoughts went through my mind while daydreaming on the long train ride from Teheran to Istanbul.

In Istanbul Larry and I parted company. I decided to travel through the Greek Islands for about two weeks waiting for my money to arrive at the bank in Athens. But Larry had to reach Athens in time to catch the boat to Barcelona which was rumored to be within a week. For Larry and I, our long and multi-adventurous companionship had come to a natural parting of the ways. Each of us was continuing in our own way to fulfill our present needs both materially and mentally. It was another experience of how all things, including personal relationships, must eventually change according to evolving circumstances. In a way, I would welcome this change from our close, sometimes, strained, mutually dependent traveling association. At times we had our differences with egos confronting each other. But for the most part, those misunderstandings were resolved and forgotten by smoking a bowl and laughing it off. We did our last minute reminiscing, gave each other slightly tearful bear-hugs, blessed each other's new adventures and parted company without looking back.

From talking with another traveler I decided to stop off at the small island of Skyros for a week's sojourn on the beach before continuing back to Athens. On the overnight voyage from Thessalonika to Skyros there were many young people returning from different destinations in Asia, some coming from such far away exotic places as Sri Lanka and Bali. Each proudly wore their collection of clothes and jewelry including myself, wearing my pink Afghani pants, matching shirt and vest and sporting the large turquoise ring on my finger. For the occasion I also wrapped up the white turban on top of my head with my blonde hair sticking out underneath and the long tail of the turban blowing in the evening breeze, which satisfied the ego. During the moonlit cruise I struck up a friendly conversation with a German guy who was likewise breaking journey on Skyros. We found a relatively deserted stretch of beach at the base of the tall cliffs about a quarter mile outside the main town, also named, Skyros. There was a young couple going nude here so I assumed that nudity, at least at this particular stretch of beach was permitted or tolerated by the local Greeks. I was eager and quick to shed my clothes to expose the whole body to the warm rays and skinny dip in the refreshing cool turquoise green sea. This turned out to be the perfect place to hang out and relax for a week.

Each afternoon the two of us would go into town to eat a substantial meal and buy bread and fruit to bring back to the beach for breakfast the following day. While sitting in a typical Greek outdoor café we met two American College girls from New York with whom we shared a pitcher of wine. They both had come to Greece together for a one month summer vacation and were staying in a large beach house with two middle-aged Greek women and their two children who also were on a holiday from their husbands and housework. Out of compassion and sympathy the Greek women had taken these two unaccompanied American girls under their motherly wing.

I became quite friendly with one of the Americans, named Linda, fancying her good looks, well proportioned body and long black hair along with her New York accent. Desiring to know her better I invited both of them down to the beach one night for a little beach party. Manfred, the German guy bought a big hunk of goat meat from the butcher and barbequed it over a pit fire we dug in the sand. I bought a couple bottles of wine to help loosen things up a bit and to aid in swallowing the meat. I also pulled out my small stash of hash I had bought in Istanbul and we smoked a few pipefulls for this special occasion. I was quite horny after eight months of sexual inactivity since my last intimacy with Gail on Gomera. It was apparent that Linda was also feeling desire in that department and we were mutually attracted to each other. The party progressed and when the time was ripe, Linda and I walked down the beach and found a deserted spot where we spent an hour or so satisfying our pent-up lustful urges on the yet warm sand followed by a refreshing skinny dip under the romantic light of the nearly full moon. I don't think that Manfred and Penny, Linda's friend, hit it off so well. When we returned to join them Penny consulted with Linda and soon thereafter they returned to town.

Before leaving Skyros Linda and I took advantage of this non-attached, present moment situation and conveniently arranged a second lustful meeting of body and mind. This time it was skillfully planned to take place on the large bouncy bed in their beach house when Penny and the others were at another beach swimming.

It turned out that the Greek women were returning to their homes in the suburbs of Athens on the same ferry I was taking. One of the Greek women with whom I had also talked kindly invited me to stay at her house for a couple of days if I liked, and I gladly accepted her offer. Linda and Penny were going to stay at the house of the other Greek lady. The ferry docked at the port of Kimi a few hours drive from Athens. The husband of one of the Greek women met us at the port with their big station wagon so there was room for us extras. Manfred, however, had stayed back on Skyros. I wound up staying at their luxurious home for three days while waiting for my money to arrive and during this time another fantasy formulated in my mind. The husband was an executive in a big Greek shipping company and I imagined myself working my way to India on one of his cargo ships going through the Suez Canal to Mombassa (East Africa) and then to Bombay. I thought I would even postpone going to India to travel around the world for a year or so wherever the ship would take me. It sounded romantic. I asked the man if he could help me get a job on one of his company's ships. He flatly informed me that without official seaman's papers it was next to impossible to get a job on a merchant ship. From talking to other travelers I knew there were loopholes in this regulation and one could buy phony seaman's papers. I tried several ways of discussing this with him but he did not seem to be interested to help me in this matter. I had lost considerable weight due to ongoing stomach problems and was looking like such a skinny hippie freak that I probably did not appear to him to be macho or strong enough to handle a seaman's job. He himself was a big heavy set man and a consummate drinker and typical business magnate with all the attendant problems. Because of our opposite appearances, conditionings, habits and non meeting of the minds I failed to win his genuine friendship or confidence enough to warrant his serious effort to give me a job. As a result, I gave up that short lived fantasy and refocused my attention on getting to India as fast as possible.

All of these recent experiences let me see how the clever mind can efficiently and almost unconsciously remember and categorize people, places and things according to certain observable traits or behaviors; how the ego is very adept in recognizing an advantageous situation and tries to manipulate the facts or circumstances for its own benefit. It also illustrated

the impermanent fickle nature of the mind and its desires — how easily one idea (going to India) can be quickly dropped to chase after another (working on a ship).

When I checked my mail at the American Express in Athens there was a letter from mom and dad, though mom always did the writing for both of them. I knew what to expect and opened and read it with slight apprehension. Mom explained their horror and shock of the attempted dope smuggling and subsequent confinement in the Afghan jail. They were surprised that I even got out at all or at least that easily. They had periodically read stories in the newspapers about Americans in Turkish and Iranian prisons on dope charges, about the long severe punishments meted out. They would have imagined me in the same predicament had I informed them before my trial. That is the reason I had waited until it was over before writing to them.

In addition to this, the letter further related that they had received a shocking notice from the American Express Company headquarters stating that I had tried to swindle them of one hundred dollars. The imagined foolproof scheme of cashing the reportedly stolen travelers' check royally backfired. For some reason the AMEX central office did not buy that story and accused me of fraud, quite rightly of course. They informed my parents that I would immediately have to repay the one hundred dollars or to be summoned to court. Mom and dad were again highly horrified and did not really understand all the circumstances surrounding what had actually occurred. But they did not wish to aggravate the touchy situation and quickly pacified the AMEX by sending their rightful money. With these two seemingly terrible criminal blunders coming so close together, my parents were deeply disturbed. They felt I must have had entirely lost all sense of right and wrong, shame and reason and had stooped to the lowest of low. They were immensely disappointed, confused and ashamed of me and they certainly did not tell anyone else, as they had about my other lawful adventures. However, mom did wire my money which arrived a few days later.

Now that everything was out in the air concerning those two events, the guilt and worry that I was carrying around in my mind and even to a certain extent in my body, were mostly released and I felt much better. It was now a matter of resolving not to try such foolhardy illegal stunts in the future which would jeopardize my freedom and well-being and, at the same time, cause my parents mental turmoil. As they had with my court-martial in the army, I figured their despair and grief would eventually subside and the events all but forgotten.

While in Athens those few days I bumped into a German guy named, Stephen, who had just returned from Gomera. He had some current information on the fate of Gail. She had since gotten herself pregnant by a local Valley Gran Rey resident whom I also had known well. Now Gail was married to him. This news shocked me somewhat and I thought, "That was real quick work," seeing how it was only seven months since I left. I felt sorry for her and thought she may have done that for spite, to assert her self-independence. I wonder if she would now ever return to California for her four year old daughter who was probably asking her grandma, "Where is mommy?" Again latent guilt feeling arose concerning my role in that unfortunate ending, which started so nicely back at RCC with our initial, what I had thought to be innocent, love-making affair.

One afternoon, for ego's sake, I again dressed up in all my hippy regalia, including turban, and walked around Syntagma Square one last time before packing it up in a box to send home the next morning. Of all my prized acquisitions I was keeping with me only my old useful jalaba and the turquoise ring. Of my original items brought from home I kept one pair of levis, Mexican huaraches, green wool army short and rain poncho. These I figured would come in handy in India, in the cool Himalayas. The other showy stuff I sent home for remembrance and use in the imagined future. The novelty of wearing it wore off and the burden of carrying unused things was not worth it. I desired to travel as light as possible as I had seen others doing who were returning from the East.

I decided to take the fastest most direct way back across Turkey and Iran. I would fly from Athens to Istanbul on a cheap student fare ticket and then

take the Istanbul-Teheran express train to Teheran and bus it the rest of the way to Kabul. The morning after arriving in Istanbul I happened to see an English language newspaper to learn frightening news. The evening before when I had left from Athens airport an Arab terrorist group threw two hand grenades into the Turkish airline check-in lounge killing two persons and wounding four others. This location was exactly where I had been standing only about two hours before the bombing. The passengers hit by the explosion were waiting for a flight to Tel-a-Viv. This was during the volatile period in 72-73 when an unusual spate of terrorist bombings and hijackings occurred, including the killing of the Israeli Olympic team members during the 1972 Munich Olympic Games. Reading this news, which came so close to home, made me stop and reflect more about fate and I wondered why I was spared by such a short margin.

The next morning I took the ferry across the Bosphorous to the train terminal on the Asian Continent. The long train was fully packed and I shared a compartment with five others: two German guys, an Austrian with his French girlfriend and an English fellow. One of the Germans, named Klaus, had been a big hash dealer in Berlin, dealing exclusively with Afghani hashish. But this was the first time that he was actually making the long journey to Afghanistan himself. This was sort of like a pilgrimage for him and he was visibly excited. He had brought some charees with him to smoke on the long train trip and he was happy to share it with everybody. As the train pulled out of the station we smoked the first of many chillums, celebrating the final leg of Klaus's pilgrimage. I was a little paranoid by his enthusiasm and unconcern about such blatant dope smoking on the train. I was not personally holding any dope but if the compartment was raided by the conductor, police, or soldiers all six of us would be likely to get into trouble. All I wanted was to get across the Mid-East and into India as quickly and un-hassled as possible. I finally got over the uneasiness and relaxed into the flow of the present situation, getting real stoned and came to enjoy the diverse and lively company. Nothing came of it. In Teheran we switched to riding the big comfortable overnight bus to Mashad and after procuring our Afghan visas continued on to the Afghan border.

Now a very strange and tragic event occurred. As the bus approached the border Klaus got more and more excited about finally making it to the 'land of charees'. But after processing through the Afghan side Klaus became suddenly very silent and withdrawn. It was already after 5 P.M. and as on my previous trip through here we were again obliged to spend the night in a hotel before proceeding to Heart in the morning. Klaus immediately went into a hotel room and more or less passed out on a rope-strung bed. He was very pale and weak and did not even feel like smoking the first ceremonial homecoming chillum. When he refused this we knew that something was definitely wrong with him. His lifelong friend, Hanz, was the most worried and upset over this unusual turn of events and remained with his dear sick buddy throughout the long night. In the morning Klaus was feeling a little better but still did not feel up to smoking his first chillum on Afghan soil, so we knew he was far from well. After the early morning bus ride into Heart the five of us checked into the two-storey hotel at the main intersection and sat down at a table in the restaurant for breakfast. Klaus was looking white as a ghost and staring blankly into space. All of a sudden he quietly slumped over and fell off the chair onto the floor. He looked dead as a doornail. This really freaked us all out. Hanz was yelling around ordering an Afghan man working in the hotel to go fetch a doctor quick. After twenty minutes a doctor of dubious sorts came only to routinely pronounce Klaus officially dead.

At this point more paranoia arose in me about being around if and when the police came, fearing that we may all be questioned and possibly detained. I had just gotten out of one mess here with it written in my passport and I did not want to have anything to do with the police. Therefore, I decided to take a slow walk around town and come back a little while later. When I returned two hours later I found only Monique, the French girl, who had been anxiously waiting for me. In her broken English and half hysterical tone she related the following account of what had happened. The police came to write out a brief report as a matter of formality, asking Hanz a few routine questions regarding his deceased pal. (My exaggerated concern for myself was merely an empty mind bubble.) Hanz wanted to have Klaus's body flown back to Germany to his parents in Berlin if possible but it would have to be taken to Kabul. Ordinarily there

was a daily flight from Heart to Kabul on Ariana Airlines but, due to mechanical failure (not uncommon) and no substitute plane, the only recourse was to go by taxi. So Hanz bought a wooden coffin and placed the body in it. To accommodate the long coffin in the taxi, the rear seat of the small car was removed and the box shoved through the trunk. A policeman went along as an escort sitting in the front seat next to the driver. Hanz and Ronald, Monique's Austrian boyfriend, had no choice but to sit on top of the coffin. Like that they had sped off into the mid-morning sun on the ten or eleven hour journey to Kabul. Monique had not wished to ride with the box and Ronald felt obliged to accompany Hanz in his hour of need, as I was cowardly playing truant.

Monique did not feel up to making the long bus trip to Kabul that day and asked me if I would stay back and go with her to Kabul the following morning, to which I acceded. On arriving in Kabul the next evening we checked into a hotel where we found Hanz and Ronald sitting at a table smoking a chillum with some others. After some conversation we learned the whole story and ultimate fate of the late Klaus. The long hot ride to Kabul took almost twelve hours as the driver and policeman made periodic stops for tea, meals and chit-chat with their friends along the way. Because of the heat the cadaver began to rapidly decompose and the smell emanated from the thin wooden box. To overcome the foul stench Hanz and Ronald smoked several chillums while seated atop the coffin. (I couldn't help but inwardly laugh at this, and felt that ole³ Klaus would have probably approved.) Upon arriving in Kabul at about 10 P.M., they went directly to the airport to enquire about any flights to Europe. The authorities regrettably informed Hanz that the corpse was far too deteriorated and could not be allowed to be flown out of the country and there were no flights leaving for anywhere until the next day anyway. Hanz had gone to the German Embassy that morning and reported the sad incident and sent a telegram to Klaus's parents telling them the heartbreaking news — they would never see their son again.

³ Ole (adj): Old. [Good ole boy: A usually white Southerner who conforms to the social behavior of his peers.] (Noted by Dhammavamsa)

That afternoon Hanz had arranged for the reeking coffin to be taken in a horse drawn wagon to what had been nicknamed, 'Boot Hill'. This was a section of the Kabul cemetery where the remains of tourists having died here were put to rest. Quite a few other Westerners were buried here; some having died from drug overdoses, a few had been murdered, and others like Klaus succumbed to sickness or accidental death. Hanz informed us that Klaus had a history of a weak heart inherited from his father's side of the family. All the excitement and psyching himself up on our overland journey must have exerted too much strain on his fragile heart, perhaps dying of a heart attack. Now, having just returned from the cemetery they were in the process of smoking a marathon of chillums in Klaus's honor. Monique and I joined in this hippie version of an official state of mourning.

I was now back to where I had been three months ago and was anxious to enter upon the last leg of my long awaited journey. The next day I boarded the silver bus bound for Peshawar, traversing the infamous Khyber Pass into Pakistan and another long overnight bus haul brought me to Lahore, a hop skip and a jump to the Indian border. I had to remain in Lahore until the next day in order to obtain a three month tourist visa for India. In the large two-story hotel, I shared a dormitory room with two English guys. One of them had been traveling around a few years on the Indian Subcontinent and was skilled at the ins and outs of getting about on the cheap. He traveled very lightly except for the guitar he carried, having only the thin white cotton pants, and vest that he wore plus a thin blanket folded over his shoulder. He also had a small cloth bag in which he kept his valuables, chillum and charees. His hair was cut real short to minimize the heat and dirt problem and he had an old pair of repaired thongs on his feet. I was able to extract a lot of useful information from this seasoned veteran during our one night together. He knew all of the popular spots where most of western hippie freaks went to absorb beautiful scenery, good dope and inexpensive, carefree living — his favorites being Manali and the beaches of Goa.

Upon receiving my Indian visa the following afternoon I rode the last short distance by bus to the Wagah border. The immigration official who looked through my passport regrettably informed me that I had failed to

obtain a certain road permit which was needed by tourists to traverse the short distance between the Pakistan check post and the Indian checkpoint. When India was partitioned and Pakistan formed in 1947, there was a lot of conflict, and still, is over the official border. So somehow this quarter mile stretch of land has been regarded as a kind of no-mans land and there came to be the need for this road permit. It was issued free, but only in Lahore. I had vaguely heard about needing this permit but I had forgotten. Because I did not have it, the immigration official told me I would have to return to Lahore and pick it up at a certain office. There was an alternative, however, he could be a nice guy and help me if I could also help him with a little 'baksheesh'. He had a standard bribe payment of ten rupees (about one US dollar) for western tourists. The permit was never checked after leaving here so it was really no big deal. He only made it seem important but he did have the authority to prevent me from advancing towards the Indian side only a stone's throw away. To avoid the delay and nuisance of making a round trip to Lahore, I decided to pay the baksheesh and get into India.

Walking along the tree-lined road to the Indian checkpoint was very pleasant. While seeing the coolies in their khaki shorts and red shirts I could sense a distinct change occurring. The air about the place, the officials and people hanging around seemed more laid-back, relaxed with more smiles on their faces. The immigration official who checked my passport and visa smiled and wished me a pleasant journey in India. Somehow I knew that it would be just fine. It was now a full year and two months since I had left the USA.





CHAPTER 6

INDIA

From the travel tips accumulated I headed directly to Amritsar and specifically the Golden Temple for my first night. The Golden Temple is the holiest of the holies for Indian Sikhs, the center more or less of the Sikh religion. It could be compared to Mecca for the Muslims, the Vatican for Catholics, Jerusalem for the Jews and the Bodhi Tree in Bodhgaya for Buddhists. The Golden Temple offers a free place to crash, bathe and eat for all people regardless of race or religion, etcetera. This open, indiscriminative hospitality is a manifestation of one of the principle tenets of their religion, an offshoot of Hinduism, that all living life is part and parcel of the One God. Because of this generous offering the Golden Temple has become a major stopover on the overland freak trail. The only stipulation is that you must be respectful of their religious customs; this takes a while to be learned and appreciated. The head must be covered when inside the sacred area and shoes removed. The main shrine is a beautiful, golden dome structure sitting majestically in the middle of a giant square tank of water. At the right time of day the reflection of the dome in the water is superb.

Inside the sacred shrine, which is reached by a connecting walkway, devotional chanting was being carried out by priests and devotees; around the tank scores of people, young and old, sat and recited holy passages or quietly meditated. Religious devotion was in the air and it was a good experience for me to come into contact with it and try to feel it. It was as though this summed up the whole meaning or purpose of ancient India, considered by many to be the birthplace of religion, to go within and discover God — the essence of life. My brief visit here left an indelible impression in my mind which was becoming increasingly disenchanted with the normal humdrum rat-race of so-called modern civilized society and my own confused mind.

The rest of Amritsar, which means “Holy or Immortal nectar”, is basically just another big, crowded, noisy, dusty Indian city. So, with an imagined picture of Manali’s cool mountains, I went to the train station the following morning for my first experience of India’s trains. I had heard that it was easy to ride free in the second class, unreserved railcars; the reason being that they are generally so crowded the ticket collector is unable to walk through the tightly packed narrow aisles and therefore unusually doesn’t even try. I was not going to deliberately try and ride free but I arrived at the station just as the eastbound train was pulling out. Being new to Indian railway stations I did not know how to quickly find the correct ticket counter, as there are separate counters for different destinations. So I ran to the platform and jumped onto a crowded second class car as it was beginning to move away. Because of the crowd I had to stand near the door, body-to-body with pushing and shoving Indians. I remembered what I had heard about riding free; experiencing first hand this packed condition I could see why; still I felt a little guilty and nervous about getting caught and I watched for the conductor, especially when the train pulled into a new station.

Having studied my map, I planned to take what appeared to me to be the fastest, most direct route up to Manali; this would take me by train to Ludhiana and then by bus through Simla into the state of Himachal Pradesh. About half way to Ludhiana, as the train was pulling out of a big station, a ticket collector in his white trousers and dark jacket jumped into the very car in which I was riding, in fact right in front of me. He immediately asked me for my ticket while ignoring the others; my heart sunk down into my stomach and I was at a loss for words. I decided to explain exactly what took place at the Amritsar station, with a little extra embellishment, saying, “I wanted to buy a ticket but...” I tried to plead my newness and ignorance to the Indian railway system hoping to sound like a poor lost tourist. I figured this would justify my ticketless travel, making it sound unavoidable or at least unpremeditated. In spite of all this melodrama, he would not believe the story or have any pity on me; he adamantly told me I would have to get down at the next large station and appear in front of the station master for a hearing on the matter. Continuing in the next breath he added that there could be a less time consuming and

less expensive way out — if I paid him the train fare plus an on the spot baksheesh of fifteen rupees. I knew that I was guilty and did not want to lose time by having to break the train journey to defend my case in front of the station master. I recalled the convenience and relief felt when I had just simply paid the meager bribe at the border, so here too I opted for the quick, easy way out and received my bone fide ticket up to Ludhiana.

I finally managed to squeeze myself with my rucksack down the aisle and was offered a seat on the packed bench by some young turbaned Sikhs who wanted to practice their English. They asked the routine set of questions that I had first encountered in Turkey, plus a new one, “What is your mission?” Many Indian people think that foreign travelers must have some specific, goal oriented purpose for which we have come to their country. It is difficult for them to conceive that we just want to be free and travel around to experience whatever India has to offer, as it comes up, without having a one-pointed purpose. I replied to the inquisitive but polite young men, “My mission is precisely not to have a mission.” Though this retort was not entirely true, considering my current intention of going to Manali, I had no real long range, overall goal, at least on the conscious level.

Manali was just as I had pictured it from the descriptions I had heard—picturesquely nestled at the foot of the high Himalayas. The bus stopped at the bus stand in the middle of the long, busy, main street, lined on both sides with teashops, eating hotels and small businesses. Many Tibetan refugees, since the 1959 Chinese invasion of Tibet, have made their resettlement here and their characteristic dress and lifestyle was quite evident. The first thing I did was to go to one of the cheap hotels to acquire a room for the night. In the first one I tried there was an American guy down with jaundice occupying the only dormitory room. His eyes and nails were noticeably yellow and he was too tired to even get out of bed; a couple of his friends were attending to his needs and keeping him company. Not wanting to remain long in his presence by having to sleep in the same room I went to another hotel where I was able to rent a bed in an unoccupied dormitory. My intention, however, was to rent a house or a room in a house outside of town for a month and to stay loaded.

After a day of searching I found a suitable room in a big log house a short distance up the hillside above town. The Tibetan family who owned it lived on the top floor while the bottom floor was left unused in order to rent out to tourists. They offered to rent it for a mere fifteen dollars a month. This sounded like a real good bargain so I moved in the following morning. Quite a few other western freaks were staying in similarly rented houses in the surrounding hillsides.

Manali was a favorite resting place for Western hippies because the area sported wild marijuana growing all over the place. You could just go out, find some plants and rub the sticky pollen off to make your own hashish. It was a lot of work however just to rub off enough resin to make a couple of grams for day's smoking. But some Indians as well as Western freaks make a living doing so, selling it to people like me who were too lazy to do it themselves. So I bought a sizeable chunk. Being from California I was quite content to pick the mature pollen laden buds to smoke in a good ole joint or mix with hash to smoke in a chillum.

There was a nice hot springs/bathing house located over the bridge and up the road past the Tibetan shanties, up a delightful creek-bed path and into the forest. Here for a small fee one could sit in the pools of hot mineral water to soak out any sweat or dirt or maybe soothe the itch of stinging nettles. Up higher on the mountainside lived an old, wise Tibetan Lama in his small monastery to whom westerners went to visit or receive some instruction in Tibetan meditation. I personally was not enthusiastic enough at that time to make the trek further up to check him out. I did, however, score two hits of acid from some freak and taking one, I spent a lovely half day wandering and exploring the high slopes and small valley of a nearby mountain. This was the first time I had tripped since leaving Gomera and it felt nice to experience some light, airy states of mind.

After two weeks living like this I began to feel very tired and lethargic. I then noticed my urine becoming a reddish-brown color and felt sure that I had contracted 'hep'. For more than two months I had been exposed to persons who had been suffering from it or whose outward symptoms had not yet appeared, so I was not surprised that I would come down with this

very common liver ailment. Just to get official confirmation I went down to the local missionary dispensary where an English doctor gave me the standard urine test. My skin, nails and eyes soon turned the characteristic ghoulish yellow, my faeces the pale white color and my energy level was thoroughly zapped. I followed the normal procedure for cure I had heard from others and from the doctor -taking 'Liver 52' pills, laying off greasy, fried foods and alcohol, and plenty of bed-rest. There is not a whole lot more one can do for this kind of mild hepatitis. Being so weak most of the time I managed to muster up just enough energy to cut up a big batch of vegetables and cook it all up in a large pot of soup. I made enough in the morning to have the leftovers warmed up for lunch and supper. With foresight I had stocked up a sufficient supply of grass which had to tide me over for the duration, which turned out to be ten days. It was recommended, however, that hepatitis patients should not smoke but I could not resist the strong habit I had cultivated for so long. After breakfast I usually sat out on the porch and smoked a joint or chillum by myself. I would sit there and gaze over the nice view of the tree tops, valley and town below until I grew too tired to sit any longer. I would then go back inside and lay down to sleep for a few hours until lunchtime. This process I repeated after lunch until supper and again after supper until falling asleep for the night.

After about a week I slowly began regaining my strength and the yellowish color of my eyes cleared up. In a few more days I had all my strength back and the other symptoms returned to normal. I knew I was over it and was now getting itchy feet to hit the road. Before coming down with 'hep' I had bumped into Ronald, the Austrian guy, on the street in Manali. He had recently arrived from Afghanistan and was living in his own rented house nearby. His girlfriend, Monique, had since went on her own way for whatever reasons he did not divulge. Ronald came by once a day or so while I was sick to help me cook or run to the market to buy fresh vegetables and we decided to travel together following the hippie trail to Nepal for the fall trekking season.



Burning Ghats at Varanasi

The journey took us down to Delhi where we stayed a couple of days to obtain our visas for Nepal, then on to Agra where we stopped, like all good tourists to see the Taj Mahal. The next morning Ronald and I had to literally fight our way onto a super crowded train which we rode eastward to Banares. Banares, or Varanasi, is the most ancient of the still active big cities in India and is considered by devout Hindus as the holiest and preferred place to die. The city is built alongside the west bank of the sacred river Ganges and Hindus come from all over India to bathe in the water which is believed to be blessed with special purifying qualities. When a Hindu dies it is auspicious to have the corpse soaked in the river before cremating it right there at the river bank on the burning ghats. If a person dies in the night, the next morning the corpse is carried on a stretcher by friends or relatives down to the burning ghat in a procession where Brahmin priests conduct the last rites. The richer the deceased or his family the more elaborate is the whole procedure from start to finish. Everyday

perhaps a hundred or more bodies are cremated in this fashion from early morning to late night.

We stayed in Benares a few days and I spent time at the burning ghats viewing the cremations. When I was a kid, I sometimes laid in my bed before sleeping at night, trying to imagine what it would be like to die; the idea of never being able to experience the human world as we know it was a little scary. Now as I watched the bodies burning up, going from life to ashes in a matter of hours, it initiated more reflection on the nature of existence. I pondered the reason for birth and death and the insignificance of the physical body in the wake of death with the immediate onset of decomposition. I recognized the fragility of the material body and how each person, animal and thing has its allotted life-span and one cannot be exactly sure when that end will come and then what happens after death? I speculated on what happens to the mind; did it go somewhere else or did it just kind of disappear and cease to exist altogether? At this time I could not come up with any convincing answers to these puzzling esoteric questions.

I also spent time sitting close to the river's edge along the bathing ghats watching the multitudes bathing and washing their clothes joyously in the holy water, while listening to the incantations of worshippers, fortune tellers and religious songs being broadcast from loudspeakers at the top of the Temples. I tried to absorb myself into what I felt was a religious vibration or psyche of all those thousands of devotees with their minds turned to God. In one of the many cloth shops in this area, I acquired my first religious identify in the form of a lightweight shawl, decorated with different combinations of Hindu and Buddhist symbols and mantras. I had seen a number of westerners with these and desired to have one for myself, to look quasi spiritual. I meticulously searched through piles and boxes of them trying to make up my fickle mind as to what color and design combination I wanted. I finally selected a light yellow color dotted with the Sanskrit letter for OM and images of a seated Buddha. I began wearing it draped around my shoulders, copying others, and occasionally used it as a headband to tie back my growing out hair.

One afternoon I took the short bus trip out to Saranath, the historic site where Gautama Buddha preached his first discourse after his Enlightenment entitled, “Turning the Wheel of Dhamma”. It was very serene and uncrowded in the large, nicely kept park. After walking around viewing all the imposing monuments and ruins I tried to go inside the main Temple but for some reason it was locked up. So I sat down in a clump of giant bamboo nearby to smoke a joint that I had previously rolled up. I thought a bit at first if it would be disrespectful or sacrilegious to smoke dope in this Buddhist holy spot. I knew that certain Hindu ascetics smoked ganja believing it to aid in their meditation or something to that effect, but I was not getting any special spiritual understanding or inspiration by it. I asked myself why I even needed to smoke this joint as I already felt very relaxed and peaceful; I admitted to myself that it was most probably due to the strength of my habitual use and always wanting to get high at each new exotic place or somewhere reputed to have special power. In spite of my questioning and disinclination, I was powerless to stop and lit it up while looking around to see if anyone was watching.

While there, I tried to remember what I had studied and heard about the Buddha and his teachings, the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path; but it still didn't make any profound sense or ring any bells. I speculated what Enlightenment would be like, “Was it the ultimate, permanent high?” I despaired of having to smoke dope and use psychedelics all my life to get high and wondered where that would eventually lead. I recalled my experience with Transcendental Meditation and how they stressed that using drugs was incompatible with meditation and deep down inside I agreed with this. I hoped to eventually be able to stop smoking and taking other drugs and get back to some form of meditation as I had told myself earlier when I had left off with TM. It was now more than two years ago and I was smoking more but enjoying it less, as the saying goes. But I did not yet know of an alternative, a powerful enough incentive, or the helpful supportive conditions to initiate such an effort.



Ronald and I chose to enter Nepal from the less used border crossing north of Gorakpur and proceed straight to Pokhara for our trekking. From Benares this was the shortest and most direct route. Just inside Nepalese territory about twenty miles away in Lumbini, lay the site of the Buddha's birth. Having just visited the Deer Park at Sarnath, I was inclined to make the side trip to visit this second sacred spot for Buddhists. I guess, however, that my conviction or faith in the Buddha was not strong enough to stimulate or warrant the effort. Ronald did not have any desire to see Lumbini. He had not even gone to Sarnath while in Benares; he did not have any interest in Buddhism or in anything religious. What finally clinched the matter was a bus bound for Pokhara waiting at the border which was filling up quickly. Actually it was already packed like sardines and a couple of men were sitting on top of the roof. Ronald and I decided to climb up and join them as there was plenty of room and it was a great way to see the beautiful mountain scenery and breathe fresh air. We were able to smoke a joint and enjoy a front row, unobstructed panorama of the mighty

Himalayan peaks as we approached Pokhara. The view of the Annapurna Himal was splendid, with Mt. Machhapuchhre, the “Fishtail”, looming up like a skyscraper flanked by five or six other peaks in this group, all reaching up over twenty-two thousand feet.



CHAPTER 7

NEPAL

Pokhara sits in a most charming setting located at the end of a large, long valley at the base of imposing Himalayan Mountains, which looms conspicuously behind. Phewa Tal, a sizeable lake, nestles at the base of the surrounding foothills just outside of town. Beside the lake are the many hotels, restaurants and shops catering to the shoestring budget travelers, most of whom came to go trekking. Boats and canoes are available for rent to row or paddle out across the deep blue mirror like water — a favorite pastime for the tourists and the locals alike on a Sunday afternoon. Ronald and I stayed in one of these lakeside hotels a few days to relax from our travel and absorb the beautiful setting and laid back atmosphere, while preparing to take a trek into the mountains. Along the lake road Nepalese boys came selling pieces of hand rubbed charees while old women and young girls tempted tourists with fresh Himalayan magic mushrooms. Not being able to resist I bought some of both to take along with me on the trek to ingest at some beautiful spot.

The nice thing about hiking here is that the trails have been used and developed for centuries as the highway network connecting the many small villages that dot the mountainsides and high ridges. All supplies are of necessity carried in and out of the mountains by foot on the backs of porters and mules. An almost constant procession of porters, local villagers, mule trains and the swelling stream of foreign trekkers can be seen moving up and down the mountains highways and byways. In most of the main villages and important junctions there are hotels or lodges which offer a night's accommodation with good meals for a modest charge. The casual hiker needs not carry a lot of heavy camping equipment and food provisions if he or she takes advantage of these convenient, hospitable facilities.

Ronald and I were planning to take the route from Pokhara to Jomsom which usually needs about ten days for the roundtrip of more than a

hundred miles; however, we were planning to go only as far as we could comfortably manage with our meager belongings. I did not have any proper hiking boots and my rubber soled huarache sandals provoked blisters with prolonged use; I mostly wore a pair of thongs. My only warm clothing was the trusty jalaba and army poncho which together served as a makeshift bedroll. For the occasion I bought a cheap thin blanket from the bazaar just in case it was needed.

By evening we made it to the large village of Naudanda situated atop the high ridge behind Pokhara. This ridge affords a fantastic panorama of the whole Annapurna Range including Machhapuchhare. A few of us who had been walking on and off together throughout the day smoked a chillum to ease our fatigue and watched the magnificent sunset. Ronald, however, had not been feeling so well toward the end day and had to push himself to make it. We stayed in a lodge that night intending to hit the trail in the pre-dawn. I had the fantasy to drop a hit of acid which I had scored in Manali and to 'trip in the Himalayas' under the waning half moon. Ronald said he would not get up so early if he was not feeling better in the morning.

When I woke him at 4:40 A.M. he groggily told me he definitely could not make it and would have to stay back to get more sleep and rest. Last night and even now I had a flashing thought that maybe he was coming down with hepatitis, but I immediately brushed the threatening intrusion out of my mind. My self-centeredness was preventing me from considering the needs of Ron; I did not bother considering to postpone my departure, to see how he would feel later in the morning after a good breakfast. I was all set to go; the sky was clear with the half-waned moon lighting up the mountain peaks; I felt that I must go ahead with my acid walk as this was a once in a lifetime chance. Ron must have picked up on my strong urge to go; he reluctantly told me to take off without him and he would try and catch up with me later in the day when he got his strength back. I said I would walk slowly and stop to rest frequently and wait in the next major village until he caught up. With this, I greedily swallowed the hit of LSD and strode down the ridge under the star filled heavens.

After about fifteen minutes of walking I stopped and sat down facing the moonlit peaks and smoked a joint to help 'get off' on the acid. This boosted my mind and I had a delightful time strolling alone in the pre-dawn in the shadow of those great majestic mountains. It was exhilarating and tranquil tripping along when not a soul was moving on the trail. The silence was interrupted only by my own occasional thoughts and by the roosters crowing from the nearby villages. At this time I stopped again to contemplate the sunrise. I tried to feel the sleeping world waking up again, imagining the sun's rays re-vitalizing all forms of life, shining indiscriminately and equally upon all creation. Out of these ruminations arose, as if out of nowhere, thoughts stained with guilt about having left Ronald behind. But I consoled myself saying that he would be OK and that he would come along later that morning or afternoon, though deep down I had doubts. I would wait for him at Birethandi, the next major village and junction of mountain trails, which I would reach within a few hours.

After waiting in Birethandi for about five hours finally a few trekkers arrived who I recognized from our lodge the previous night. They had news about Ron. My hunch that he might have 'hep' was correct; he hired a mule to carry him back to Pokhara where he would stay in the hotel and recuperate. By this time I had more or less come down from the acid high but was still somewhat 'spaced'. This news caused me a bit of vexation and I struggled with the decision whether to turn back or not.

My selfish desire finally won out and I decided to continue my trek. I justified this by thinking there would be plenty of people at the hotel to help him as he had helped me in Manali. At the hotel he could get proper food cooked. I reasoned that, "he wouldn't want his illness to burden me, to be the reason to terminate my trek which he knew I had planned for a long time." Deep down, however, I knew that I should have returned, even if just to give him moral support and someone to talk to.

In another two days of trekking I reached the village of Tatopani, which means hot water. Down by the roaring river below the village were a few hot sulphur springs. This is a popular stopover for trekkers to rest their weary bones after days of sometimes strenuous hiking. There are a number

of hotels which cater to westerners by serving pancakes, spaghetti, apple pie, corn flakes, boiled eggs, French toast, fruit curd and honey, coffee and so. On the way I had passed a porter humping a full case of coke bottles on his back which he was delivering to one of the hotels here. That means he must have lugged it up and down the hills for at least three days from the nearest motorable road. This made me pause to reflect on how strong the power of habit and desire is in man to make him go to such extremes to satisfy. I selected a hotel about which I had been told and was given a nice room on the second floor which had a balcony over looking the mountains and river canyon. After those few days on the trail subsisting on *dhal*, *bat*, *subji*, biscuits, tangerines and bananas, I was ready for this 'back home' food in which I liberally indulged.

The first thing I did the next morning was to go down early before others arrived, to the hot sulphur pools near the river and soak my tired limbs, especially my feet. I smoked a joint to get nice and numb before stepping gradually into the quite hot water where I spent a sensuous, relaxing twenty minutes almost oblivious to time. I had to consciously force myself to get out, aware of the fact that it can be harmful to soak the body too long in such hot water.

I decided to stay in this pleasant place a couple of days and planned to eat the magic mushrooms that I had brought along, the following day. The day was warm and clear and it seemed to be just the right occasion for that organic high, sitting beside the rushing river close to the hot spring for a periodic soak. For breakfast I had the hotel cook prepare an omelet with the mushrooms mixed in, and it came out quite tasty. I took along everything I might need — the jalaba to sit on, a towel, a few juicy tangerines, chillum, charees and matches. Luckily no one else was down there yet, so I had my choice of spots; I selected a sandy stretch of riverbank a few feet back from the water's edge where the river had formed a shallow pool cut off by large boulders from the main current. The main river tumulted down the canyon riverbed crashing with thunderous roar. The view up the valley of a picture perfect snow capped mountain made the spot an ideal setting for getting high with or without drugs. The overwhelming power and vastness of nature in its innocent beauty was enough to silence troublesome thoughts.

After settling down, the first thing on the agenda was to ritually prepare and smoke a chillum, consecrating the combined mushroom and hash high with “Bom Shankar,” to insure it being guided by Lord Shiva towards spiritual awareness; whether it is true or not, the ritual blessing justified my good intentions for getting loaded. Within thirty minutes I was getting off, pleasantly absorbing the pervasive beauty and tranquility characteristic of psychedelic highs in that kind of nature locale. After I had done a round of hot spring soaking and splashing myself in the river water, kicking back in the warm sunshine, I was joined by another westerner who sat down nearby. By and by we began conversing, exchanging the usual polite traveler’s talk. He was a young Englishman who had been in India awhile before coming up to Nepal as I had done and had just arrived in Tatopani that morning.

In the course of our conversation, Jim began talking about his experience at a ten-day meditation course he had just finished participating in while in India. At this point, I became more attentive and listened with interest as he explained in detail about this certain meditation practice which is called vipassana. It involved concentrating the mind inside the body and systematically becoming aware of the different sensations that occur. He described how they started at the top of the head, focusing attention there until some sensations like itching, tingling, warmth or just anything arose. From the top of the head, the attention shifted downwards to the ears, eyes, nose, mouth, one at a time while feeling the changing sensations in each of the areas separately. Leaving the head, the attention continued down into the shoulders, arms, hands, chest, back, stomach, into the legs and eventually to the very tips of the toes. Jim described the process with such vivid detail that in my very sensitive state of mind, I became intrigued and absorbed. He said after the first five days of the meditation course when his concentration had greatly improved he began feeling more and more subtle sensations, what he called body vibrations, coming and going or arising and vanishing. He experienced his body as being an amorphous mass with the elemental particles of matter undergoing something like atomic birth and death. In fact, at a certain point the feeling of his body being something tangible, solid or whole seemed to disappear altogether; he could not

explain too well, as he said the experience was difficult to put into words. All along, my mind was so attentively fixed and delighted with this narration that I also lost the awareness of being in a definite body until I thought about it again.

Every night during the ten-day course, the teacher, a Burmese man named Goenka, gave a talk on some aspect of Buddhism, or Dhamma as he called it, with the emphasis on the idea of universal impermanence and Buddha's Four Noble Truths. Each evening concluded with a 'metta meditation' or radiation of loving kindness which was chanted by the teacher, in which compassionate thoughts are sent out to all living beings. Practicing metta meditation was supposed to help break down one's own ego-centeredness, weaken or eliminate accumulated anger, resentment and hatred, and allow one a good peaceful night's sleep without disturbing dreams.

After Jim had finished relating all this to me, I told him that I had once practiced TM but had suspended it due to my dope- smoking habit. Only now did I tell him that I was high on mushrooms, and the description of his meditation experience struck me especially deep. I also conveyed to him my growing disenchantment with using drugs to get high, and I thought meditation might perhaps be a way to make the mind clear and high naturally. He tended to agree. He told me that his teacher, Goenkaji, as he was respectfully addressed, conducted these ten-day meditation camps every month in different locations around North India; when I went back to India I might be able to attend one of them.

Jim then said that there was to be a one-month-long course in Tibetan meditation held near Kathmandu starting on November tenth, about three weeks away. The teachers were two Tibetan Lamas who could speak adequate English and had been teaching Tibetan-style Buddhist meditation to westerners for the last five years; they had many devoted western followers including several who had become monks and nuns. These one-month courses were reported to be a very strong or powerful introduction to Mahayana Buddhism, having a potential life-transforming affect upon many who complete the training. My intellectual understanding between the different schools of Buddhism such as the Mahayana and the Hinayana

or Theravada was at this point very vague. I immediately became very enthusiastic about this sudden opportunity and developed a burning desire to attend this upcoming course. It was as though something broke through or a connection was made in my heart or mind, that this was what I had been unconsciously waiting for. I did not exactly know what it would entail, but I knew deep down inside that it was something I needed to experience.

I pressed Jim for more details about the Tibetan course; but he could not tell me, as he had never taken it himself. He was contemplating the possibility of attending, but he was still practicing the vipassana meditation that he had just learned and was having good results. The teacher, Goenkaji, did not encourage mixing or practicing different meditation techniques; so he would probably wind up not attending.

All of this exciting dialogue had lasted about thirty minutes, a passage of time to which I was almost oblivious. Now, coming back to less verbal activity, I realized I was still quite high and just wanted to relax and reabsorb the feelings of nature and try to imagine what a real meditative state might be like. Before withdrawing within, out of habit and social politeness, I inquired of Jim if he would like to smoke a chillum, thinking it would be more for him than me. He politely refused, saying he had given up the habit since beginning to meditate as it interfered with his ability to concentrate. And so with that we both just sat there in silence, Jim evidently practicing his meditation; and I enjoyed the expansive feeling of being part of the nature all around; I wondered if this might be what the state of Enlightenment would be like? Afterwards, Jim had a soak in the hot springs and washed in the river and then departed to continue his planned trek to Jomsom as it was still early in the day. That was the first and last time I ever saw him; it was as if he had just popped in out of nowhere and then just disappeared instantly into nowhere again. That brief but momentous encounter, coming at what seemed to be the perfect time, was to be the spark that triggered off my conscious active pursuit for what proved to be the changing direction and radical turning point in my life.

That night as I lay spaced out on my bed, all I could think about was getting back to Pokhara and proceed to Kathmandu to sign up for the meditation course. I was afraid if I waited too long the course might become full, with a limited number of participants; so I wanted to register early. I decided that the very next day I would start out on the return hike. It took only two days via the alternative trail through Beni and Kusma to reach Pokhara. At the hotel, I inquired about Ronald and found that he had gone to Kathmandu the previous day. His case of hepatitis apparently been a mild one and had recovered sufficiently at the hotel after six days. Early the next morning, I myself got on a bus and was in Kathmandu late that afternoon.

The next morning, I took a long walk out to a suburb of Kathmandu called Boudnath, named after a huge, ancient, Buddhist stupa which sits just off the road in the middle of many shops. A large, newly constructed Tibetan Buddhist monastery rises among the rice paddies behind the stupa. The site where the meditation course was to be held was on top of a hill another mile or so behind the monastery, reached on a footpath meandering through more paddy fields and clusters of homes. The hilltop area itself is called Kopan and is a monastery, school and headquarters for the International Mahayana Institute, the organization that conducts the yearly retreats. When I reached the top of the hill, I found the place nearly deserted except for a handful of people doing work here and there. I located the reception office and the person in charge of registering prospective participants for the upcoming course. This was a young Canadian woman who had become a Buddhist nun; her head was clean-shaven and she was wearing the traditional burgundy colored robes of the Tibetan Monastic Order. She greeted me with a smile and was very polite and informative in answering the few questions I had concerning the course. My exaggerated concern and hurry for coming out of the mountains so quickly to register early were unwarranted. Only thirty people had so far registered out of a maximum allowable of about one hundred and seventy-five.

The nun informed me of the rules to be observed during the session. There was to be no use of drugs, no intimate contact with the opposite sex and a minimum of irrelevant conversation with other participants. We were

not allowed to leave the hill premises to go into town without the expressed permission of the course manager — and this only for an emergency. During the second half or last two weeks, which would be a period of more intensive practice, we were expected to observe the ten Buddhist precepts. These included such things as not harming any living creature, not stealing or telling lies, not wearing any jewelry or perfumers and not eating food after the final noon meal. Only a liquid beverage like tea or coffee would be served in the afternoon and evening during the last two weeks. These rules, the nun explained, were intended to help eliminate negative thoughts, attachments and vanity from the mind which hinder the practice of meditation.

These rules seemed appropriate and worthwhile to me, especially the one of not smoking dope. This, I thought, would be the real test of my strong, six-year smoking habit. Sometimes I had wondered if I might be addicted to the stuff; there had been a lot of speculation whether or not marijuana or hashish was mentally habit-forming and addictive. During most the last four years, I sure liked getting loaded and figured I could quit if I wanted to — but I never wanted to; there was always another good occasion or justification to get loaded. Was this a sign of being hooked? Anyway, I would not be bringing any stash with me or have access to any to act as a temptation, so I felt it would be easy to stop for this one month. But could I stay on the wagon or even want to once the retreat was over, when I was free again to make my own decisions? Would this be the opportunity I had been more or less waiting for — to replace the drug habit with something more fulfilling and meaningful?

I hung around the hilltop for an hour or so, feeling the place out which was to be my home for one month. The hilltop commanded a superb view of the whole Kathmandu valley on the front side and part of the Himalayas on the back side. Although I had no experience or understanding in this matter, I felt it would be a fitting place for a meditation retreat. I was psyching myself up for having a good experience, whatever might be in store. I had no real idea about the exact content of the course, what we would be learning and meditating upon. I tried not to speculate or create any fixed expectation about what it would or should be like. I met a few

other westerners who had arrived early to help with the preparations to accommodate the influx of so many people. There was a lot of work to be done setting up big tents, digging pit latrines and so forth. The sleeping accommodations would be in tents and in nearby houses around and at the bottom of the hill, with men and women using separate quarters. The lecture and group meditation hall was to be a huge tent structure yet to be set up. A few of these helpers were working in exchange for taking the course free because they were short on funds. Although the hint was put across, it did not occur to me to volunteer my time and labor to help in this preparation. On the other hand, my mind, being in the habit of thinking about itself first, started to plan out what I should do for the next two weeks to enjoy myself until the course started.

The first thing I did was to go back to Kathmandu to spend a few days checking out this quaint city. Kathmandu is well known on the Asian tourist circuit as a must to visit — an ancient city set like a jewel at the foot of the mighty Himalayas, teeming with mysterious ancient Hindu and Buddhist temples; a haven for road-weary travelers where hotel/restaurants with grandma's home-made chocolate cake and apple pie are thicker than fleas on an Indian dog. I had heard about the famous Swayambunath or "Monkey Temple" way back in Amsterdam, where monkeys abound on and around this Buddhist Stupa/Temple complex and the hill atop which it sits. It is more than two thousand years old, very holy and very powerful, graced with the "Eye of Transcendental Wisdom" painted at the top. Sadhus reportedly smoke chillums on the steps leading up the hill, preferring to smoke the dope which the western hippies bring. Westerners can learn the "Bom Shiva, Bom Shankar" chillum blessing ritual from them. I was also hoping somehow to locate Ronald or perhaps bump into him on the street. I still carried slight guilt feelings for having abandoned him in his hour of need and wondered if he was disappointed or angry with me. I knew, however, that it was now too late for excuses or apologies; but I at least wanted to meet him and consciously clear it off my chest. I also wanted to take another one-week trek into the mountains nearby, returning just before the course started; and I would have to extend my visa for at least another month. So all of those things and more I wanted to accomplish during this 'free time'.

That afternoon, I took a walk down “Freak Street”. This is a street within an area of several streets that crisscross each other near the Durbar Square where many cheap hotel-restaurants are located. Many shops sell Nepali and Tibetan clothes, bags, used trekking gear, and a variety of Tibetan religious artwork and ritual paraphernalia. There were always loads of long-haired freaks hanging out in this area where dope was also cheaply available. The aroma of chillum smoking could usually be smelled when walking past the cafes, most of which allowed open smoking and provided classic rock music to keep their clients in a stoned, happy mood. Thus it is obvious how this street acquired its unofficial name. I also added my freaky looking self to the colorful collage of walking weirdoes and gave in to the temptation to satisfy my own latent food craving.

While in this area, I kept my eye out for Ron. Sure enough, before long I saw him sauntering down the street. It was as if our two minds met. I walked towards him and greeted him, but I waited to sense his reaction before I said much or inquired about his condition. As I somewhat expected, he did not seem very open or well disposed towards me. He quickly began berating me for deserting him to chase after my own selfish pursuits. He thought we had been friends, but what were friends for if not to stick around and help out in such situations. He reminded me that he stuck by me in Manali until I was on my feet and that he probably had contracted the germ while taking care of me. I knew I deserved most of the tongue-lashing that I was receiving and did not offer any defense or rebuttal, but quietly let him get it off his chest. All of this took place in about three minutes while standing there in the middle of the street with others looking on. After finishing his tirade and calming down, both of us sat down in a cafe and talked more naturally for a little while longer. I offered him my apologies for whatever it was worth and told him about the meditation course I was going to attend. He replied that it might do me some good as far as opening my heart up to others’ feelings and needs above my own and accepting responsibility, and he wished me luck in that respect. He was leaving Nepal shortly and would travel down the east coast of India to Puri and then eventually over to Goa for the wintertime beach scene there. We parted company without hugs or tears.

This incident had a deep impact on me. It woke me up to try and be more aware of how I interacted and related to other people, stopping to put myself in their shoes to see how I would feel. This same lack of awareness on my part had also been largely responsible for the deterioration and eventual heartache between Gail and me. It also helped see how fragile, unstable and temporary human relationships as well as other mental feelings and emotions can be, being subject to so many unpredictable factors. I wondered if the meditation course would open my heart more in these respects.

The next afternoon, I walked out to visit Swayambunath. The access from town is via a narrow dirty street, across a bridge over a polluted smelly river and up a long cobblestone street lined with many shops selling Nepali clothes and bags. At the base of the hill begins a pathway of stone/concrete steps rising steeply up to the top underneath a canopy of trees which covers most of the hillside. Many small stupas and Buddha statues flank the path much of the way up.

Here I had an unexpected and rather frightening encounter with the pesky monkeys which inhabit the forested hill and by which the Temple got its nickname. Having no familiarity nor a prior warning of their habits, I had bought a bag of roasted peanuts still in the shell to munch on while on the way. I was still holding the half-full bag as I started ascending the steps when all of a sudden, out of nowhere, I was ambushed by a gang of large monkeys. Two of the biggest apes came real close, growling and flashing their sharp teeth, making gestures with their arms and head that they wanted the peanuts. By now I was surrounded by the others; and the ones in front began inching nearer and nearer with greedy intentions, making lunges for the bag — they were not monkeying around. I did not know what to do and became quite nervous and even downright scared. I thought if I tried to hand one of them a few peanuts the others would attack me for the rest; I did not think they would have settled for me just walking past them. In a moment of sheer desperation, I threw the whole bag up in the air; and the monkeys all scrambled for the scattering morsels. I immediately made a quick exit, running a short distance up the steps. Fortunately they were

satisfied and did not pursue me; and with my heart throbbing noticeably, I continued the climb up, throwing occasional glances back. That was a good lesson on the power of greed and conditioning, as those monkeys' minds were one-pointedly bent and determined to get those peanuts. In myself, it revealed the strength of the ego's instinct for survival using the reflex emotion of fear to kick in the adrenaline in stressful or threatening situations

The stupa at Swayambunath is much smaller than the one at Boudhanath, but is decorated with much gold-plated adornments and festooned with the traditional Tibetan prayer flags. All around the base are fixed metal cylinders called prayer wheels, which devotees spin as they circumambulate the dome in the mandatory clockwise direction. It is considered bad luck or even sacrilegious to circle Buddhist stupas or temples counterclockwise. Printed on the prayer flags and on pieces of paper inside the wheels are Tibetan mantras, mainly OM MANI PADME HUM. It is said that turning the wheel sends the power of the mantra out into the universe to purify evil influences, relieve universal suffering and help all beings attain Enlightenment — or something to that effect. I circumambulated the customary three times, giving the wheels a spin just for the heck of it, at that time not really knowing what it meant nor having conscious religious devotion. Buddhist stupas originated at the time of Gautama Buddha's death, when they were erected as a memorial to enshrine his bone relics following his cremation. Their purpose is to evoke inspiration by remembering the Buddha's great Enlightenment, Wisdom and Compassion. So the stupa is considered to be a symbol of Enlightenment itself.

A monastery sits next to the stupa where a group of Tibetan monks perform their periodic ritual pujas characterized by intermittent chanting and loud, raucous horn blowing, drum beating and cymbal clanging. During the puja (offering) service, a dense smoke and pungent smell from burning incense permeate the atmosphere inside; and if you peer inside, it looks, sounds and smells very exotic and mystical. The walls and ceiling are elaborately painted with Buddhist artwork that makes little sense to the uninformed or uninitiated. The monks in their burgundy robes sit on raised

platforms playing their instruments. The pujas, which are performed several times a day, are supposed to invoke the presence or blessings of the various Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and to purify the place of any evil influences and aid the monks in their meditation. After the puja it is possible to go inside for a closer look at the extensive colorful artwork, and there is the customary donation box to help maintain the temple and feed the monks.

I hung around on top of the hill for a couple of hours, checking everything out while waiting for the sunset. I hoped to meet some of the Hindu sadhus I'd heard about with whom to offer and share a chillum while watching the sunset over the vast Kathmandu valley. This was another fantasy I wished to fulfill, but I had not yet seen any. Monkeys were roaming and jumping all over the stupa and surrounding buildings and retaining wall as if they owned the place — after all, it is not called the 'Monkey Temple' for nothing. Some tourists were throwing them bits of food, but these fellows were not so aggressive and audacious as their brothers and sisters down below.

I did not see any Hindu sadhus, but I did meet a French freak who had similar intentions of getting loaded. He was an old hand at this; he showed me to a secluded spot outside the retaining wall which we climbed over where there was enough room to sit down cross-legged with a nice view overlooking the city. We rapped while I prepared a potent mixture and then handed the chillum to him to ceremoniously light up. While I held the matches to the full bowl, he let out a long chant of "Bom Shiva, Bom Shankar" and other names I hadn't heard before; as he handed me the chillum, the thought, "Will this ever end?" arose in my mind only to vanish as I intoned my own Bom Shiva. We both got so stoned we did not speak or move for about thirty minutes. As if by some preordained coincidence, the monks in the temple began their late afternoon puja; the pleasant sounds of the trumpets, drums, bells, cymbals and low-droned chanting seemed to permeate the atmosphere in all directions. I wondered if the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas (about which I knew little) would hear the call. I queried myself, "Is there a real difference between the various deities in Hinduism and Buddhism? Are they real entities, or do they merely symbolize something higher, a spiritual unity?" These questions I would only begin to

understand later. For now, darkness was enveloping the magical valley; the puja had finished; and it was time to return to reality — we had to walk back down the steep hill into the busy city.



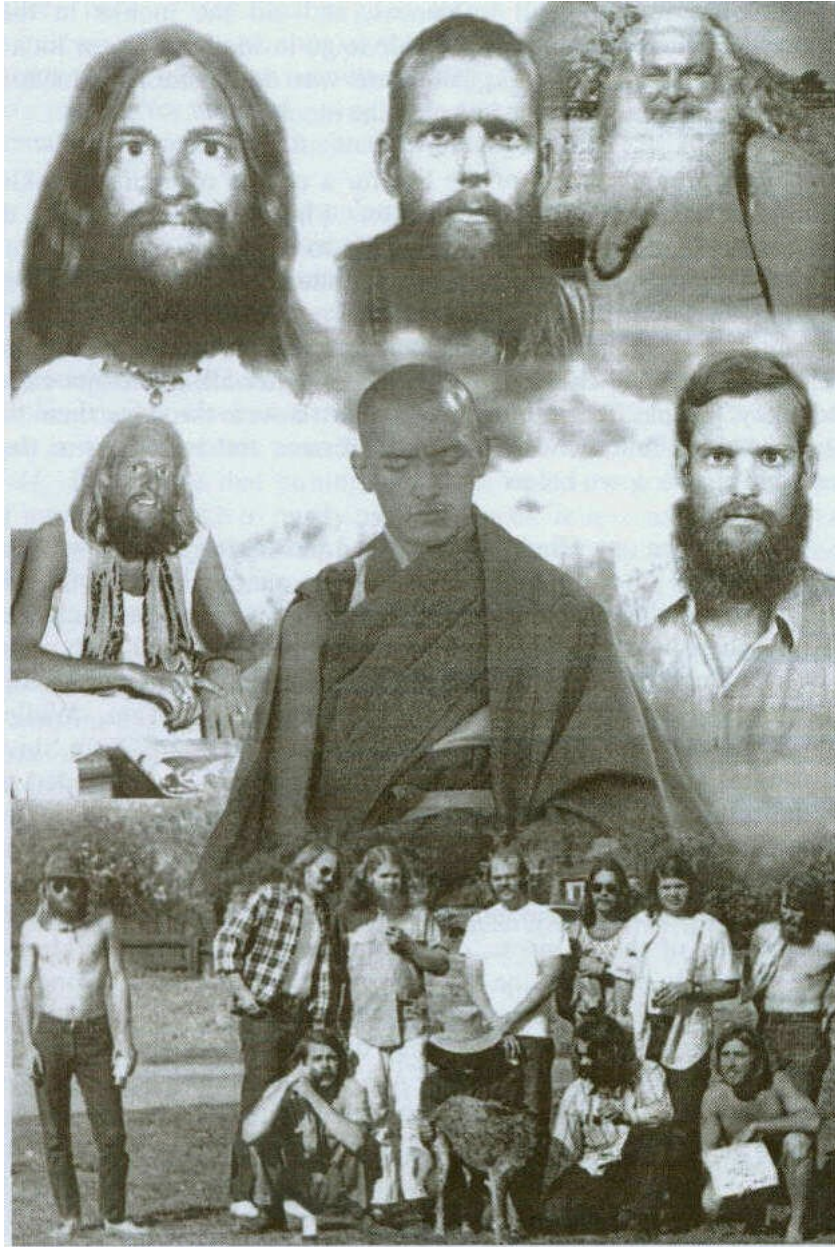


CHAPTER 8

OPENING THE EYE OF DHARMA

I arrived at Kopan in the afternoon on the starting day and was assigned to sleep in a house at the bottom of the hill, a five-minute walk to the top. The building had two large rooms and was totally empty except for a thick layer of straw which covered the earthen floor, acting as a wall-to-wall mattress. The building had been rented from the neighboring villagers for this purpose. I think ordinarily it was used for sheltering cows and buffaloes in cold weather or to store grain. Twenty men altogether would be sleeping here. We brought our packs to select, on a first-come, first-served basis, a spot on the straw floor which would be our bed for the next month. There was a single water tap nearby where many of the villagers went for collecting water in pots and for washing, and all of us were supposed to use it as well. Several other rented houses around the hill were used likewise, and several large tents were set up on top of the hill near the kitchen area. About one hundred and fifty people were expected.

A light meal was served to everyone between 5 and 6 P.M. The formal opening began at 6:30 with an introductory talk by the Lama who would be our principal teacher for the month. Inside the meditation tent at the front was erected a large altar draped with yellow and gold cloth and decorated with all kinds of religious ornamentations — vases of flowers, candles, offering bowls, incense holders, etcetera. In the middle and slightly above the rest was the guru's seat, where the Lama sat. The seat was quite large, looking more like a throne, having a thick cushion and draped with fine cloth. A short ladder enabled the Lama to climb onto the top of the seat to sit down. On the canvas wall behind and above this seat hung many colorful paintings of the various Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and the Wheel of Life. These *thankas* also had wide borders of yellow and gold cloth around them with tassels and frills. There was a large, framed picture of the Dalai Lama hung directly above and in the center with white scarves laid over the top edge and hanging down each side.



In the tent everyone was seated upon his or her own pillow, folded sleeping bag, blanket, etcetera on top of the straw-covered floor. The tent was almost packed full with an end count of about one hundred and seventy persons. Being new to all this and feeling a little shy, I picked a spot near the back, facing the teacher's seat. I wanted to get a good look at the Lama but far enough away not to be too visible. Most of the newcomers like me sat in the back half and far sides of the tent, while the western monks, nuns,

and lay devotees of the Lama sat near the front. The distinctive fragrance of burning incense wafted aloft and permeated the tent, and we quietly waited in hushed anticipation for the Lama to enter. We had been instructed by one of the nuns to stand up when he came into the tent. The whole setting and mood appeared to me to have the look and feel of mystical sanctity.

When the Lama entered everyone rose quickly to their feet, and most of those in front bent forward with their two palms touching as a gesture of respect. Being unfamiliar with this eastern protocol, I and many others in the back just watched intently as the teacher walked in and came to the front of the altar where he stopped. He then faced the pantheon of Thankas with the Dalai Lama in the middle and prostrated himself on his hands and knees touching his head to the ground, and then stood back up. He repeated the prostration twice more. He then climbed up the ladder onto the seat; and arranging his bright burgundy robe so that his right shoulder was bared, he sat down cross-legged. Once seated, the devoted ones up front, led by the monks and nuns, prostrated themselves fully flat on the floor three times in his direction. Again, we newcomers merely looked on with reservation or ignorant curiosity.

The word Lama in Tibetan language refers to a spiritually advanced monk who has become a recognized teacher or guru. Another term reserved for Lamas who have special spiritual powers or qualities is Rinpoche, meaning, “precious jewel.” It normally refers to one who is on the Bodhisattva Path and has the power to be reborn after he dies in any place that he wishes in order to continue his work of saving sentient beings.

Lama Zopa⁴ was young looking, about twenty-five, was short and thin, wore glasses; the top of his head sported a quarter inch of straight, black hair. He carried a small parcel of Buddhist texts wrapped in orange cloth which he set down in front of him, and now he was sitting in silence with his head bowed slightly. He reminded me of what we used to call in school

⁴ Lama Zopa Rinpoche was born in 1946 in Thami, in the Mount Everest region of Nepal, not far from the Lawudo cave where his predecessor had meditated for the last 20 years of his life. Lama Zopa Rinpoche is now the Spiritual Director of the Foundation for the preservation of the Mahayana Tradition and oversees all of its activities. (Noted by Dhammavamsa, September 2004)

an intellectual, book-worm type or a boy genius. I wondered what he was doing and speculated that he was either meditating or gathering his thoughts together before speaking. When he finally spoke, it was evident that he could speak English reasonably well, this being the fifth consecutive year that he had been teaching these courses.

Upon arrival we had been given a book written by Lama Zopa in English. It was to be used as a companion textbook for the teachings we would be receiving. Lama would be giving his daily lectures or discourses based on the graduated material given therein, containing all the topics, philosophy and meditation subjects to be covered for the whole month. The title written on the cover of the yellow book was "*The Wish-fulfilling Gem and the Golden Sun of Mahayana Thought Training*". It had a simple line drawing of a rising sun, with rays of light radiating off. The different subjects of meditation are designed for seeing the nature of suffering in the world which has its roots in the individual mind, to alert oneself to the need for ending this unnecessary, self-created suffering in oneself, and to help the whole world of suffering humanity likewise. The big emphasis is on what is called Bodhicitta. Bodhicitta is the non-selfish motivation to attain Enlightenment or freedom from suffering in order to have the power and ability to teach others the correct path. The emphasis is on saving all sentient beings, working selflessly for the benefit and spiritual welfare of all creatures with a compassionate heart. This is the main motto of the Mahayana school of Buddhism. In his first talk to us that evening, Lama Zopa went over this as a general introduction to what we would be studying in more detail over the next month.

I now had a vague idea about what I was getting myself into. Even though I had tried to not have any preconceived ideas about what the course would be like, this description was not anything I would have expected. I did not make any judgments pro or con but tried to keep an open mind. I thought, "If it is good enough for these Lamas and for the large number of their western disciples who appear to be contented and happy, maybe it will be good for me." With these musings, I walked down the hill under a dense canopy of twinkling stars along with a few of my new roommates and laid down on the bed of straw.

The first two weeks were to be a little easier in terms of strictness, diet and length of daily program. It was to act as a preparation for the second two weeks, considered to be more intensive. We awoke at 6 A.M. to wash and meditate by ourselves on our bed or in the meditation tent. After breakfast we were to read in the yellow book until 9, when Lama gave the first discourse of the day which lasted about one hour. After a short break Lama Zopa then led us through a group meditation on that particular subject. Following lunch, there was a rest interval until 3 P.M. during which we were encouraged to read some more or meditate by ourselves. At 3 we reassembled in the central tent for another discourse and another group meditation session. After the light dinner, Lama delivered his evening Dharma talk and led the final group meditation, followed by some Tibetan chanting to close off the evening.

The talks and book material in the first few days concentrated on the nature of the individual mind and how it has been involved in unlimited suffering of various kinds, degrees and intensities since time without beginning. The source of this individual suffering, thus collective suffering, lies in the three mental poisons of ignorance, greed and hatred. Ignorance is being under the imagined illusion, delusion and influence of the individual ego, feeling we exist separately in this world of subject/object relationships. Because of this deep rooted ignorance, the mind has become firmly enmeshed in attachment and craving to things which please and having aversion/hatred for the things which displease. Once these habit patterns are moulded, the imagined ego or “self-cherishing I” will do anything under the sun, breaking all moral laws if needed, to appease that greed and hatred. The mind, thus poisoned and driven by these three root defilements, has propelled itself, so to speak, along with the bodies it creates for its use, through the innumerable rounds of birth and death, termed Samsara. There is no original starting point discovered, when the whole process of mind and body began and evolved. It has been going on since “beginningless time.” Even though an exact beginning to Samsara as a definite point in time and space (as in the Christian theory of creation) is not evident or determined, the Buddha did find or realize a definite ending. This cessation or termination of the process of birth and death is called Liberation,

Enlightenment or Nirvana. This positive state, beyond the ego-mind, is realized or attained by eradicating or purifying the root of ignorance, attachments and aversions from the originally pure mind. This leaves it spotless, Enlightened and liberated from the limitations and ills of conditioned existence.

Lama further expounded on the doctrine of karma, the natural law of cause and effect and how it operates in the body/mind within the context of the whole samsaric process. Negative actions by the body, speech and mind are initiated by the three poisons (ignorance, greed and hatred) as cause. These actions leave traces or seeds which will give rise to all kinds of physical/mental suffering in the current life, with the capability to generate rebirth in what are called the lower realms of suffering, of which the animal world is one. Positive actions stem from the opposite — wisdom, nonattachment, and non-hatred/friendliness/love. They give rise to all kinds of pleasurable effects and happiness in this life and generate rebirth in the upper realms, of which the human world is considered one along with various heavenly abodes. In this Tibetan teaching, there are six general samsaric realms or worlds of possible existence which the book described in elaborate, vivid detail. They are all conditioned, impermanent, temporary states, being complex, mentally created environments generated by each one's past accumulated actions or karma. The ideal in practicing Dharma or the spiritual Path is to release oneself from all these planes of limited, conditioned existence to realize and merge into the deathless Nirvana.⁵

I guess I had studied about most of this, at least in a general way, when I wrote that paper on Buddhism back in college; but I had more or less forgotten it. Because of all the detail it appeared quite new to me or struck me in a new way. In view of the westerners' predominant Christian background, there would ordinarily be an initial skeptical resistance to such an apparently contrary, atheistic philosophy which this seemed to present. I tried not to immediately rationalize, compare, and reject, nor blindly accept it. I figured it was most importantly intended to get us to stop and think

⁵ From here on many Sanskrit and Pali terms will be introduced and retained because most do not have concise translatable meanings in English. The meaning of these words should become clearer as they are repeated over and over.

about it a little. The purpose in having the periods of meditation set aside after the talks was to give us the time, opportunity and group support to sit down and reflect/contemplate these truths within us. There was nothing else to do, nowhere to go; we had come for this, though we may not have expected it. Therefore, the mind had no excuses; and it was more easily able to acquiesce and get down to this real nitty-gritty.

In my own meditations, I could easily see how my past self-centered greed, lust and attachments had had so many rebounding effects to myself and those around me. It was especially apparent in such fresh memories as the painful relationship with Gail. It was my lust and attachment which caused most of it and was responsible for changing her whole life now as well. And the foolish stunts I tried in Afghanistan were for the most part motivated by greed and ego. These negative actions came right back in my face like spitting against the wind, and they were felt half way around the world in my parents. Then there was the very recent episode with Ronald, where again unmindful, self-centered desire played the key role in bungling up that friendship.

I also contemplated world events in the past and present and saw how this law of karma, especially the negative aspect, has reaped havoc on a global scale. By considering all these factors together, I could begin to more easily imagine how this strong mental force, powered by the ego's thirst and will to live, could be involved in the cycle of Samsara; the mind did not just originate out of nothing in this life nor will it just dissolve or become extinguished at death. The theory of karma and rebirth began to make more logical sense than the Christian theology of God's creation. I was now being drawn in with more earnest interest.

Each time Lama came into the tent for the Dharma talk, he would stop in front of the altar and perform three prostrations before taking his seat. The students then executed their three full-length prostrations in his direction. On the first night, I had merely watched with curiosity, not understanding exactly why they were doing such an odd thing. I could sense some resistance to it, thinking that it might mean totally surrendering to the teacher; and I was not sure if I was ready for that yet. The next day,

however, I felt compelled to go through the motions of prostrating anyway, just so I would not look out of place.

On the second day, one of the western nuns gave us an explanation about the purpose of prostration and why it is performed in this manner. She explained that it served a few purposes. The most obvious and important is to pay reverence to the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, the Three Precious Jewels, to which we go for refuge. The second aspect of prostration is that we humble ourselves before a symbol which represents absolute purity, goodness and wisdom. It is ego-centeredness, the “self-cherishing I,” that is the stimulus for greed and hatred and the biggest obstacle on the spiritual path. Therefore, we have to undermine and break down the strong ego barrier in our mind; and, by prostrating ourselves, we symbolically offer up our ego. Buddha statues, thankas, the sacred scriptures, stupas and living gurus all can represent or serve as the embodiment of the Buddha or the state of Enlightenment and thus are suitable objects for our prostration. The important factor to bear in mind while making the prostration is that we are offering up the ego, attachments, jealousy, anger and other negativities which prevent our progress, which block the light as it were.

After the first few days of meditating and experiencing in myself the strength of my ego, attachments and negative thought patterns I began to appreciate this practice and began voluntarily and even conscientiously performing the three full-length prostrations. Most everyone else who had remained standing the first night were also doing likewise; it was as if a subtle magnetic force or something was running through all of us, bringing us down to our knees and chest, prone on the floor. I even grew to enjoy and look forward to it; I could feel the effect it was beginning to have at taming my assertive “I” and softening the mind to a more humble and receptive state to effectively listen and absorb the teachings.

The next meditation theme we contemplated was the “Perfect Human Rebirth.” This is the idea or fact that to be born as a human being is a difficult and rare occurrence. Being born in the human realm is due to having accumulated much positive karma in the past, having practiced

morality, charity and friendliness. And the human life is the best opportunity for practicing more of the same and developing wisdom. In the human life, feelings of both pain and pleasure, sorrow and joy, depression and elation are intermittently experienced; and the human mind is at a particular level of evolution where it is able to become aware of these differences, to reason out between opposites. We can change the pattern of our thoughts and actions if they are found to be faulty. Animals cannot do this. Let alone merely being born in the human realm, one must also have other favorable circumstances which facilitate Dharma practice. People who are born mentally retarded and deformed or handicapped in other ways will have little chance of learning about spiritual development or meditation. And more than half the world's population is born into such poverty or remote places where just staying alive takes all their time and energy. They have little chance to read books on philosophy, religion, or attend meetings and lectures where such things are discussed. Even if we have the time, freedom and opportunity to read and hear about mental development, Dharma and liberation and meet wise people, how many actually take advantage of it? People in the affluent western countries where the conditions are favorable are too engrossed in their selfish personal lives, blinded by their indulgence and infatuation in sensuous delights; they are caught up in the web of attachments, aversions, prejudice and ego-building that they have woven themselves into. When most of them hear about the Dharma, which necessitates morality, selfless compassion, simplicity and egolessness, they pull back; they shy away. Wasting this perfect opportunity by foolishly strengthening one's negative habits and prolonging suffering in samsara is like spitting at heaven.

Lama Zopa gave us several lectures on this subject to go along with the detailed account in the yellow book, and we devoted a few days on this meditation. I was really taken up by this contemplation. I took notes during the lectures, jotting down all the important points and read over many times this section, memorizing the list of the "Eight Freedoms and Ten Receptacles of the Perfect Human Rebirth." And armed with this, I became engrossed in and took delight in meditating on this subject, spending sufficient time pondering over the implications of each factor. I even lost track of time, remaining absorbed for the full hour meditation period and

lost the sense of my body and being in the tent with others around me. The reason or logic behind devoting a few days and many hours contemplating each theme is that it takes time for the untrained, un-concentrated mind to penetrate a new idea and see below the surface of it. We were supposed to meditate on each topic until the surface meaning gave rise to a deeper, non-verbal, inner feeling, until we were convinced, which in turn spawns a sense of urgency to act accordingly. And sure enough, before long there began to dawn in me a sense of the logic and truth of what all this was getting at.

Most of time while meditating, and even while listening to the talks, I would try and sit in the cross-legged position. At first it was rather uncomfortable and painful to sit for long periods; I would adjust my legs to try and relieve the pain and rearrange the sitting cushion thinking that might help. After several days, the legs and body gradually got used to the abnormal stress; and I could sit still for longer periods and was able to concentrate on the subject of meditation without so much interruption. It was during these periods of comfortable, sustained contemplation that I experienced a great joy and ease which boosted my interest and enthusiasm, deriving deeper understanding and conviction on the subject. However, I had to exercise awareness on my negative mind, as it would try and rear its subtle, deft and ugly head from time to time. Sometimes, I caught myself daydreaming, imagining what we would be having for lunch or dinner and mulling over the past. I also entertained lustful fantasies about some of the women taking the course. Sometimes, I would be curious and want to open my eyes to look around at the others, to see if they were fidgeting about; I compared myself to them to determine who was meditating better, forgetting that this itself was a manifestation of the ego and restless mind. Each evening before retiring and in the morning upon waking, we were encouraged to sit on our beds to meditate on the current theme. Most of the time, I could get into it and concentrate well, having the ease to sit for a long period. Sometimes, I noticed my ego playing 'last man on the pillow,' trying to outsit the others and be the last one to lay down or stop meditating. All these instances helped to gain a direct insight into myself and develop understanding and faith.

During some of the break periods while waiting in the chow line and walking to and from our sleeping quarters I sometimes felt like asking others how they were taking it all in. Indeed, this was a popular topic of conversation among many of the students who could not resist the temptation to talk. Some had studied and practiced other forms of philosophy and meditation and were comparing and making their own criticisms. Others complained about the sleeping arrangements or the toilet and washing facilities or the food or the strictness of the schedule, so on, and so forth. When I was within hearing range of this idle chatter, I could not help but overhear and sometimes deliberately eavesdrop. I could see in myself the strong tendency to make my own private judgments, sometimes feeling opposition and resistance to what was said and sometimes agreeing. I began to understand how talking is a very strong habit, much of which is initiated by the ego's desire to assert one's views, brag about oneself or flatter others with ulterior motive and out of sheer boredom or restlessness. Not being able to contain the urge, I occasionally spoke briefly with one or two of the guys sleeping in the same house to whom I felt the closest. But I tried to keep the topic on Dharma itself, comparing their reactions to these different teachings with mine or how their meditations were going. I guess I needed some acknowledgment or support that I was on the right track.

Despite my original resolve, I had, at the last moment, brought along with me a small piece of hash, enough for only one good joint. I knew I did not want to actually smoke it but I guess I was using it as my 'security blanket' — just in case. In the first few days, the memory of getting loaded popped into my mind and I would remember the stash I had tucked in the bottom of my rucksack. After I gained sufficient interest in the meditation these recurring thoughts dropped away altogether. This illustrated that only when the mind is bored or unchallenged or wants to escape its present state of dissatisfaction, does it need to get artificially loaded or high. This new, exciting interest in meditation had now taken up the slack or filled the vacuum and I had almost totally lost the urge and forgotten about it.

In the second week we began contemplating in more detail, the reality of impermanence and death. On the surface it is evident that everything in nature and in man's created world will change, decay, dissolve, disappear

or die. However, the implications and imminence of this ever present process has been ignored and relegated to the back of the common man's consciousness so that he lives oblivious to the fact or without heed. In Lama's lectures and in the reading it was stressed that when we die we cannot take even a single hair with us to the grave or to the next world. The only thing that is carried to the next life is our accumulated ignorance or wisdom, desire/attachments and habit patterns which will manifest themselves accordingly. Furthermore, the time of our death is uncertain. The material body made of the four elements is so fragile and dependent on so many external factors as well as past karma accumulated in the mind that we may die unexpectedly. There is a saying by an ancient Tibetan Sage, "Tomorrow or the next life, who knows which will come first."

Coming closer to home, even in our daily life, we can experience the frustration, the disappointment, sorrow and pain that this ever present truth of instability and change can bring to the mind which is caught unprepared — clinging and grasping at straws. This aspect of present moment impermanence in its relationship to confusion and suffering is even more relevant than relating it to the time of death and the next life. It was the recognition and growing awareness of this impermanence as it was occurring in my mind and all around me that had the greater impact. As I paid more attention to this, I began to relate in still a deeper way to the Buddha's profound Dharma.

To accompany this teaching we were given a particular type of death meditation to practice. We imagined ourselves undergoing the process of conscious death from the last hour to being reborn according to our last thought or strongest habits. This included visualizing the deluded negative mind being spontaneously reborn into the lower realms as an animal, a hungry ghost and in the various classifications of hell. We had read the vivid descriptions of the depravation and tortuous suffering experienced by the creatures in those realms. And in meditation, when we came to that point, we were to try and visualize it with as much color and detail as possible, going through each, one at a time. We were to try and create or arouse a simulated feeling for what the suffering would really be like. The purpose for this was to activate in the mind a sense of seriousness about

how we die, to motivate us to keep our mind purged of the kind of negative thoughts which would generate our rebirth there.

My initial reaction to doing this meditation was somewhat skeptical. I recalled articles from western psychologists who talked about the dangers of this mental manipulation. They said it could trigger off psychic shock and other unpredictable mental and physical disorders in certain types of people. I did not necessarily believe in all the vivid descriptions or even that there were such miserable hells existing somewhere in time and space, some of which were really outlandish. I figured that, whether real or not, these contemplations were a skillful ploy for goading people to wake up from their folly. I had already experienced much usefulness in the previous meditation exercises we had been doing and because of this, I was beginning to more or less surrender any resistance of my western conditioning to the Lama. I had faith that he knew from some kind of personal experience what he was talking about and, therefore, tried to do the meditation as thoroughly and with as much vivid detail as I could muster up.

In a few people, this kind of subconscious probing did indeed trigger off spectacular physical and mental reactions. During one of the group meditation periods on this subject I heard someone begin to cry which turned into uncontrolled sobbing lasting for sometime. I found out afterwards via the gossip grapevine that a girl had been doing the crying. The meditation had indeed gone deep and touched a very sensitive nerve or perhaps past life memory, triggering off the uncontrollable crying. One English guy really freaked out; he left the hill and went into Kathmandu. Rumor had it that this guy, wearing only his underwear went into a restaurant on freak street, stood up on a table and pissed all over the floor. It seems he was subdued by a couple of good Samaritan Christians before the police came and was escorted him off to the seclusion of a 'home for lost souls' which the Born Again Christians had set up there in Kathmandu. What this illustrated is that we all have so much accumulated suffering and traumas from the past locked up inside the subconscious mind which must be released or purified before we can attain real mental freedom, the end of all suffering.

During these first two weeks everything that I had been hearing, reading about and meditating upon gradually began to take some kind of shape and started to have an increasing affect on me. In the beginning all these Buddhist ideas remained in my head as ‘out there’ philosophy. Now, it seemed to be shifting from the brain down into the heart as a wordless feeling; it was starting to move inside upsetting the applecart of the routine mind. Each Dharma talk, each new theme of contemplation, each period of meditation was like another piece of a jigsaw puzzle being fitted into place or like a pimple coming to a head. It was as though something deep down inside was beginning to loosen itself from the obscure murky depths and rise to the surface. It was a vague feeling and I could not get a hold of it or put it into words, being very subtle and evasive. It was similar to the experience of having the answer to a question on the tip of the tongue but not being able to recall it enough to express.

On Thanksgiving night this crescendo came to a climax. I was sitting there as usual, listening to Lama speaking about the deepest meaning of religion and was very absorbed in what he was saying, feeling quite relaxed and buoyant. All of a sudden, after a particular sentence, it was like the last piece of that jigsaw puzzle was fit into place, like that ripe pimple bursting. After an initial few moments of something like mental shock, I exclaimed to myself, “Wow, wow, wow, I’ve been ignorant all of my life!” The whole esoteric meaning of religion or purpose of life seemed to become clear, to reveal itself. It appeared to be the un-mistakable answer to all which I had unconsciously wanted to know. I sat there no longer even paying attention to Lama’s discourse. All I could think about was how stupid, ignorant and spiritually blind I had been all of my life, deludedly following my ego’s desires and caught in the web of conditionality. After Lama finished his talk and everyone went out for the break, all I could do was lay down and continue to feel the liberating effects of that experience. It felt like a five hundred pound block of cement which I had been carrying on my shoulders for a long time, was just pushed off. I wrote down in my blue notebook, *“This is Thanksgiving Day, the first day of the rest of my life. Today I am reborn.”*

When I finally went out into the moonlit night I was feeling as though there was no place to go, nothing to do; everything seemed in itself perfect and sort of timeless. The rest of the students were beginning to walk back to their sleeping quarters. I did not feel sleepy, but was quietly, restfully awake and feeling close to the peaceful vastness of the universe above, longing to return to it, whatever 'It' was. I wondered if any of the others were having such an experience, or was I left alone in my own mind. It was similar to some of the 'highs' I had experienced when on psychedelics, especially mescaline.

I began wondering what I should do now. The realization that to purify my mind and try to attain Nirvana was in the forefront. It seemed that nothing in the way of so-called world or normal life would interest me anymore. The previous ambitions to travel around to satisfy my curiosity and so forth just had the rug pulled out from under them. I even entertained the idea that maybe I should now become a Mahayana Buddhist monk. Then something deep inside said, "Hold on, let's just sit on this awhile; wait and see; this initial burst of faith and elation is due to the uniqueness of the experience and perhaps, tomorrow or in a few days, I may not feel the same way." This was an example of the old rational self coming to the rescue. So, with this temporary resolution, I started slowly pacing down the hill to my allotted space in this impermanent world, acknowledging that it's been a long time in coming and it will be a long journey ahead. I felt a deep sense of gratitude, respect and warmth to Lama Zopa for helping to open my eyes and 'showing me the light', setting me on what I felt was the right track.

Since the start of the course, the number of students had gradually dwindled down to about one hundred and fifty. For the twenty or so who dropped out, perhaps it was not what they expected; maybe they felt it was too strict, too heavy on dogma, guru devotion, and ego-surrender. Certainly, anyone with a strong, stubborn ego would have found it difficult what with all the prostrations and so forth. It was a case of 'separating the sheep from the goats' in terms of trust, conviction, and motivation to persevere. By now, if one was not serious there was no point in sticking around. In the upcoming two weeks we would be getting down to the serious business of cultivating the precious jewel of the Bodhicitta, the *sine qua non* of Tibetan

Mahayana practice. We would be contemplating themes which are geared for bringing an intimate awareness to the sufferings of all sentient beings and to instill a sense of duty forged by great compassion to relieve their suffering. To undermine and break down our inflated ego, the “self-cherishing-I” was to be the primary task.

The day after that momentous Thanksgiving night, as if by coincidence, the final two weeks commenced. During this period we had to formally take the Three Refuges and Ten Precepts which we recited each morning in the tent at 5:30. Included in the Ten Precepts are the first five:

- (1) Refraining from killing any living creature
- (2) Refraining from stealing or taking what is not given
- (3) Refraining from unlawful sexual behavior (adultery)
- (4) Refraining from telling lies and untruthful speech
- (5) Refraining from intoxicating the mind with liquor and stupefying drugs

These five moral guidelines are just common sense for harmonious living in society and are based on the law of cause of effect. They are the basis of most great religions and philosophies of life and advocated by all the great Sages of yore. The last five precepts are peculiar to the practice of Buddhist meditation and are designed to keep the mind simple and contented. They are:

- (6) Refraining from eating solid food after 12 o'clock noon;
- (7) Refraining from singing, dancing, attending cinemas and sporting events, etcetera,
- (8) Refraining from wearing jewelry, garlands, perfumes and other body adornments;
- (9) Refraining from using high luxurious chairs and beds; and
- (10) Refraining from handling money and engaging in business transactions.

These are normally observed when undergoing intensive periods of meditation and they help reduce vanity, attachment and sloth. Starting each

day with the Three Refuges and Ten Precepts was a way to reinforce our awareness and motivation.

In order to comply with the precept not to wear jewelry, I had to remove the two rings I was still wearing. Knowing these rings and other hippie identity such as my long hair were a source of attachment and supported the ego, I decided to get rid of them altogether. That first day of taking the Ten Precepts, I gave the rings to different people who ironically wanted them. I thought to sell them at first, but then did not even want to occupy my mind with such worldly matters. Anyway, we were not supposed to engage in any money transactions in accordance with the tenth precept. As for my long, golden locks, this I was more hesitant about sacrificing. I knew that if I really wanted to practice non-attachment the best thing would be to cut my hair off. I now experienced a struggle between my old ego-self and the new emerging, fledgling, egoless Bodhisattva. I reasoned with myself, “How could I ever become a future Buddha, having to undergo limitless deprivations and sacrifices if I could not even part with my hair?” Fortunately or unfortunately, depending on how you look at it, that same day my scalp began to itch. With the aid of a friend, I discovered to my chagrin, that I had acquired head lice. It was a big disturbance during meditation to say the least; I could not resist the urge to scratch sometimes. And now I was confronted with the big decision — what to do about it?

The first solution that came to mind was to shampoo the hair which would kill the lice but not their eggs. Someone told me soaking the head in kerosene would kill both the lice and their eggs. But then I remembered I had just taken the precept not to kill any sentient beings. So I consulted one of the nuns to ask her if this counted. She confirmed what I already knew saying, “Yes, lice are surely sentient beings.” I now had only two alternatives: I could simply shave off all my hair which would immediately solve the problem without killing the lice; the other was to just leave the hair with the lice intact and suffer through it, perhaps growing used to the discomfort. Well it needed only the next period of meditation, sitting in sheer agony and gritting my teeth, to make the decision. I felt this was the omen or impetus needed to resolve this dilemma I had been grappling with.

During the noontime rest period, I had one of the guys cut off as much of my hair as he could with a pair of scissors. As the long hair fell off a few old clinging memories flashed across the mind. But I easily dismissed them as I began to feel the lightness and cool breeze against my temples, ears and neck and finally on the crown of my head. It felt really good as though another burden had been dropped. I brushed the short stubble remaining to remove any stubborn lice and eggs, being careful not to harm them, and then proceeded to wash my near bare scalp with soap and water. It felt terrific! The contrast was so great and the troublesomeness now absent that I thought I would not want to ever grow my hair so long again. I now felt almost naked both physically and mentally. However, I still retained a vestige of my old image with my beard and jalapa that I wore most of the time, but I was satisfied — at least for the time being that I had done enough. After all, I did need something to wear in the cooler days and the beard did not have lice.

I had most likely picked up the lice from the mats or straw beds on which I had slept on my treks or maybe from the hotel in Kathmandu. It was a common sight to see two or three women sitting on the porch of their house picking lice off of each other's head along the trekking trails and in rural villages. Many westerners suffered from this menace having picked it up from beds of cheap hotels here and all along the Asian travelling circuit. Hepatitis, lice and intestinal disorders were the common ailments contracted by the hippie wanderers in Asia, and now I had suffered through all three—still troubled by occasional bouts of diarrhea. I was now a member of the club! During the lecture meditation period that afternoon, I was slightly self-conscious. I wondered if people would recognize me and what they would think. A couple of persons made some brief comment but most seemed not to notice; they probably had enough occupying their own minds already. In the following days, a few more freshly shaven heads appeared, on men and women alike. What motivated them I don't know, but the meditations seemed to be working.

The first powerful theme of meditation to cultivate Bodhicitta, to break out of the ego's shell and open up the heart, was to remember the kindness of our parents. This began by recognizing the love, care and selfless

sacrifice which our own parents in this lifetime have raised us with. Mother nursed us with the milk from her own breasts for many a long day, cuddled us, showered love and affection on us, and protected us from physical danger when we were yet a tender, tiny baby. The parents worked and toiled twenty odd years to provide us with a wholesome upbringing, education, material satisfaction and so forth. And for the most part as children we merely took all that for granted without showing any gratitude to them. This is especially true in modern western society. We were to further reflect that it would be physically impossible for us in the rest of the current lifetime to ever fully repay all of that kindness. Even if we were to carry our parents on our shoulders and spoon fed them until they died, it would not be enough.

This contemplation for me was somewhat of a tear-jerker. I could relate to this as I recalled and reflected on my childhood. I fondly remembered how mom and dad always took us kids on summer vacations, giving us the opportunity to learn more about the world, encouraging us in schoolwork, Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, the Y.M.C.A. and so on. I remembered how, during my adolescent surfing days, dad would get up before daybreak to cook us breakfast and prepare the car for the beach trip — all while we slept in from a night out. These events and much more I recalled with clarity and realized that I had taken it mostly for granted and rarely voluntarily offered to do anything in return. Instead, as a teenager and young adult I caused them a lot of worry, vexation and disappointment by disobeying their advice, running around with the guys, getting into mischief, doing things which they were not proud of and acting irresponsibly. It opened up in me a whole new attitude and way of understanding and relating to my parents. Granted, now that I was no longer at home, perhaps it was easier for me to change my feelings like this towards them.

Another aspect of this meditation was to consider that the best most profitable way to repay that kindness would be to instruct them in the Dharma. A whole universe of precious gems would not be as benefiting or rewarding as setting their hearts at ease with the refreshing, liberating knowledge and practice of Dharma. Therefore, the best way to truly help

mom and dad would be for me to realize the fruit of Dharma practice and then pass it on to them. The meditation ends by imagining your parents before you while radiating white light to them — purifying their body and mind raising them to the state of Enlightenment. I enjoyed doing this, and while radiating the white light, I tried to visualize mom and dad seated in the living room back home in Riverside. I imagined that they would be watching television or eating dinner or whatever else they might be doing at that very moment, taking into account the twelve-hour time difference. I even got carried away in my Bodhisattva fantasy and tried to visualize myself actually manifesting in front of them in the living room, telling them, “Don’t be scared, I’ve attained Enlightenment and have come to help you.” I wondered if they might actually be able to feel this mental thought energy I was trying to send their way.

This and other similar mental games I would be playing were mostly fantasy and wishful thinking, probably having no real impact on anyone except myself. I did these mental exercises, however, with what I believed was a sincere motivation as I had been instructed. On the other hand it could have been a subtle form of self-deception, building up the ego instead of breaking it down.

Continuing in the same vein we expanded our Bodhicitta by contemplating the idea of “All Mother Sentient Beings.” Since beginningless time ourselves as well as all other sentient beings have been rotating through the six Samsaric realms; this has been long enough for every individual being to have been the mother of each other many times over in our unlimited previous lives. Knowing this we should therefore kindly look upon and regard every living creature just as we affectionately regard our present mother; this includes our present father, brothers, sisters, other relatives, friends, teachers, strangers; yes, even the person at work you can’t stand, enemies and the beggars on the street. Thus regarding them we should forget what they are like now, and offer them respect, love, and sympathy. In this way, ideally, all our differences, prejudices, and ill-will towards other classes of people and creatures will be undermined and melt away, leaving only unbounded goodwill, friendliness and compassion for all. The meditation ends by again visualizing our parents surrounded by

beings in the six realms, radiating white light and imagining them all attaining Buddhahood.

To carry the Bodhicitta development to its climax we practiced “Taking and Sending”. All suffering sentient beings from the ten directions are visualized sitting around us as before. Utilizing the breath once again, while breathing in through both nostrils we imagine taking into ourselves all the pain and suffering of body and mind from all those beings, relieving their sufferings by way of mental transference. Then by the purity and power of our own Enlightened mind we transmute that suffering into white light and send this purity/wisdom back out to them on the outgoing breath through both nostrils. In the end we are seated on an open lotus in the sky surrounded by all the other beings who are now Buddhas on lotuses also. And the whole universe of beings is enlightened to the tune of, “And they all lived happily ever after.”

During these last two weeks I was appreciating many of the Ten Precepts especially the rule of not eating after 12 noon. I found it to be conducive in reducing the mind's appetite not only for food but to other sensory desires as well. It helped me to become more contented with the little we had and my body felt lighter. It provided an insight into how overeating makes the body and mind sluggish and dull. I was able to remain more alert longer at night, to sit longer in meditation on my bed before sleeping. In the morning I could get up more quickly and felt more refreshed. Standing in the long line to receive breakfast and lunch meals was a good opportunity to watch the ego/mind at play. I could see the curious urge to want to find out what was to eat, as if it would really matter. The meals were always well balanced, wholesome and delicious, so there was no need to worry about not getting enough nourishment with only the two meals a day. The kitchen usually prepared enough food for everyone to get a sufficient quantity plus a limited amount for seconds for those who wished. Some persons would hurry to be at the front of the chow line in order to finish eating their first helping quickly to get back in line for seconds, in some cases even before others had gotten first. At the beginning I could see this same habit urge in me though I never followed suit and stuck with only one plateful.

As the big emphasis was on weakening the ego and putting the welfare of others before oneself, I began deliberately waiting until ever everyone else had queued up before taking my place at the end of the line. Several others had the same idea, however, and it became a kind of contest of who could walk the slowest to be the last in line. To combat this subtle ego game, as I eventually perceived it, I reverted to simply standing where I casually happened to fall into line. Practicing the Ten Precepts allowed me to observe on a deeper level how the body and mind are interdependently related to each other. I perceived in myself and others how the two have become overly conditioned and dependent upon external sensory stimulation and the memories they evoke. I experienced and understood how attachments and desire/craving forged the sense of “I”, thus separating us from the whole, keeping the mind heavily weighted down and obscuring the Truth.

The retreat was now in its last few days. The inspiration and faith in the Dharma that I had experienced on Thanksgiving night was still quite strong, though the initial euphoria and devotion had by now mellowed out. I still had the strong inclination to pursue the study and practice of the Buddhaddhamma to the expense of other worldly attractions and ambitions, though the idea of becoming a Mahayana monk had since faded. I had enjoyed immensely and still was, these Tibetan practices which had converted me more or less into becoming a Buddhist. I was confident that I had finally discovered a worthwhile and fulfilling course to pursue in life. I did, however, recall the encounter with Jim at Tatopani, the key event in my coming to Kopan, and his vivid description of his personal experience with vipassana meditation. I had heard since then that vipassana was a technique of the Hinayana or Theravada Buddhists and was a more direct, penetrating system of body/mind exploration or self-discovery. I had an inkling to experiment with this alternative method in order to broaden my perspective and to experience a different aspect of the body and mind, a complementary approach to gaining insight/wisdom.

On the last morning, Lama expounded in a very clear, meaningful way the need for taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Most of us, not knowing any recourse, have taken refuge in the material world as our

source of identification, security and pleasure gratification. We have created a restricted world around acquiring a family, job, friends, money, social interaction, a self image and a striving ambition in a competitive society. But, because of the inherent impermanent nature of all these things, being subject to change at any moment, they don't provide a dependable or secure refuge. At most they offer only '*one night's shelter*', a temporary, fleeting gratification for the grasping mind, whereupon we must strike out again in our exasperating search for security. Only the Three Jewels are dependable, objects for refuge, because they do not change — being beyond time, space and conditionality. The real Buddha, Dharma and Sangha are the three aspects of the one Truth or Unconditioned Dharma which is the seed within each living being. It is this state of Original Enlightenment that exists as an inherent potential that we must recognize and take refuge in. All of the Buddhas and Gurus of the past, present and future are merely physical manifestations of that Ultimate Reality.

However, as most of us are still living in the world of relativity with our minds yet weak, we need something more tangible or concrete to relate to. It is for this reason that the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha of the physical plane have come to be useful, to help get us on the right track, to stimulate our inspiration and motivation. So we take refuge in the Buddha Shakyamuni as the Supreme Teacher whom our living Lamas and Gurus are embodiments. We take refuge in the Dharma by studying the various scriptures as our guidelines for thought, speech, action and meditation. And we take refuge in the Sangha, the order of monks and nuns who have dedicated their hearts and lives to the Teachings. The Sangha keeps the Dharma alive as verifiable Truth, to whom we can approach for encouragement, inspiration and guidance. He went on to explain the five precepts and their significance in the process of mental development. They are voluntary self-imposed restraints which help to increase awareness of ourselves within the environment, to keep us in harmony with the law of cause and effect and to decrease unwholesome states of mind while increasing wholesome ones. If we should happen to break one of the precepts it does not mean the end. We should acknowledge the error or lack of awareness and resolve to try a little bit harder to be more aware, to avoid carelessness in the future.

After the talk we were going to have the opportunity to formally Go For Refuge and take whichever of the five precepts we felt we could personally try and keep for the rest of our life. This ceremony was something like becoming an official Buddhist. Also, for those who wished, the Lama would be giving out Tibetan Buddhist names. It is an ancient custom in Eastern Spiritual traditions when a seeker is initiated, he or she is given a Dharma name by the Guru. This symbolizes the conscious break from the old identity and ways of ignorant thinking, negative habit patterns and so forth. It is a kind of spiritual rebirth and the new name generally has a meaning relevant to the budding qualities of the novice disciple which is sensed by the Guru.

Since that Thanksgiving night, I had already unofficially considered myself as a spiritual seeker. However, as an additional support and as a token of my heartfelt gratitude to the Lamas, I chose to officially become a Buddhist and take the Three Refuges. Now, I had to decide which of the precepts I felt I was ready to try and scrupulously observe for the rest of my life. Well, I knew I never would want to intentionally kill any living creature and would try not to steal anything again. These two, I believed, I could honestly endeavor to maintain the rest of my life. About the other three—lying, sexual misconduct, and becoming intoxicated by drink and drugs, I could not be so sure. I did not necessarily wish to do those things, but knowing about unexpected, extenuating circumstances, the power of habit, and my yet unsure strength of mind in these respects, I opted to hold off. I figured that while still in Asia travelling around, it might be necessary to tell a ‘little white lie’. For instance, when I was trekking, I had to distort the truth about my non-existent permit and getting caught on the India train without a ticket necessitated some fast talk. I could not be sure something like that would not happen again. And I was not exactly clear about what the term unlawful sex meant — perhaps meaning having sex with only one’s legal wife. In this case, I was not certain if I would not meet a woman somewhere, sometime and feel like sleeping with her. As for drinking liquor to become drunk I was sure I could abstain; refraining from taking mind stupefying drugs, I was unsure. I asked one of the western monks if this included ganja, hashish, and psychedelics like mescaline,

LSD and magic mushrooms. He said that though they were not specifically listed the Lamas considered them taboo. I knew I hoped to kick the whole drug habit once and for all, but again, I could not be exactly sure that sometime in the future I might wish to get 'high'. I did not want to make a lifetime commitment to something that I was not quite certain about. Therefore, I thought to wait and take these last three precepts at a later date when I felt the time was right.

Considering myself having been spiritually reborn and to go along with officially becoming a Buddhist, I chose to receive a Dharma name. There was a bowl filled with enough names for everyone if needed, and Lama would draw one out for each person as he or she came up before him to receive it with his blessings. During the actual ceremony we chanted the traditional formula for accepting the Three Refuges as we had done each morning for the last two weeks. When it came time for the precepts each person recited the verses pertaining to the ones he or she was individually undertaking and kept silent for the rest. Then in a kind of random order those who desired a name got up and came before Lama. The names were supposed to specially suit each person but the way he seemed to pick them out by chance, I didn't see how it could. The name given to me was *Thubten Torgme*. Thubten is a respectable prefix which everyone receives, while Torgme is a Tibetan word meaning 'no resistance'. I quite liked this name and felt that it meant I would have little resistance in achieving my desired spiritual goal. Whether this would be true or not, only time would tell.

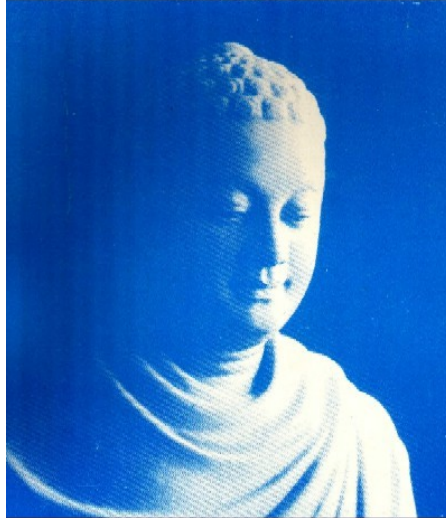
The retreat formally ended with a colorful, elaborate puja in which several more Tibetan Lamas participated. As in the pujas at Swayambunath there were lots of trumpeting, cymbals, bells, drums, endless chanting and mounds of food offerings. The whole atmosphere inside the tent seemed charged with a spiritual energy that triggered my imagination. I pictured Buddhas and Bodhisattvas being summoned from all quarters of the universe, filling the tent and bestowing their blessings on all of us new fledgling Bodhisattvas. It was a fitting finale to the most emotion packed, mentally uplifting and enlightening month I had ever spent. On the surface I was a little sorry that the retreat was over, that I would be leaving the

pleasant, protective surroundings of the hilltop to which I had grown fond and somewhat dependent. On the other hand, I was ready to leave the security and protection of the retreat environment to be on my own again. I was curious to see if I would be able to maintain my awareness and commitment to Dharma without anyone except my own conscience looking over my shoulder. I felt this would be the real test to see if I could maintain my present state of well-being and not need to smoke dope and indulge in other ways, feeding a sensual appetite in the outside world.

Now that the course was officially over, we were free to openly converse and socialize with each other. We could establish closer ties with people we had seen and felt attracted to but to whom we couldn't speak. The hill was a beehive of activity with one hundred and fifty people preparing to go in a multiplicity of different directions. Many were exchanging names and addresses, discussing travel plans and forming new travelling companions. I was in no particular hurry to go anywhere and casually hung around meeting and speaking with several different people trying to decide what I would do next.

There was a rumor spreading that early in January the Dalai Lama was going to be in Bodhgaya along with thousands of his Tibetan followers. He would be conducting a Kalachakra initiation for everyone in attendance. The Kalachakra is a special high level Tantric initiation that only the Dalai Lama is ordained or divinely authorized to perform. It is performed only a few times in his lifetime when he feels that a World crisis is impending. The power generated by this initiation is believed to be able to counteract or offset the negative forces in the world and hopefully avert such an apocalyptic catastrophe. Most of the western monks, nuns, and lay devotees, were planning to be there for this rare, auspicious occasion. At this time also, the Dalai Lama was going to personally conduct an ordination ceremony for a whole group of westerners wishing to become monks and nuns in the Tibetan tradition. Most were students in this very meditation course. This started me thinking again about myself becoming a Mahayana Buddhist monk. This would be a real special opportunity to be ordained directly by His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama himself. But, then, I searched out my inner feelings and discovered some resistance or

caution about joining such an elite, organized group as I perceived it would be. I needed some time to be by myself continuing the practice on my own and following my own inner needs which I thought I could know. At any rate, I began planning the journey down to India to be in Bodhgaya at that time and perhaps attend the mass Kalachakra initiation. That afternoon after most of the others had departed, I nostalgically said goodbye to the hilltop and wandered aimlessly back across the flat rice paddies to Boudnath and into Kathmandu.



CHAPTER 9

JOURNEY TO BODHGAYA

I wound up staying in Kathmandu about two weeks, renting a room in a small hotel where I tried to keep up my daily meditation practice. On the second day I got the urge to go into one of the hippie cafes and smoke that small piece of hash that I had kept all this time. I wrestled with this telling myself I shouldn't do it, that this would be reverting back to my old habits and so on. Then I argued that it might be interesting to see the mental reaction to sitting in one of the cafes listening to old rock music. And I was curious to see whether I would get high in the same way as before or just exactly what it would feel like. The piece of hash was starting to burn a hole in my pocket, or more correctly in my mind, now that I was out of the protective environs of the course. I finally gave in and selected a cafe down a side street where familiar music was playing and where no other westerners were seated. I felt self-conscious and slightly guilty and hoped I would not be seen by anybody who had been at the retreat. I could easily see how the mind remembers and old habits reassert themselves as I rolled up a joint and smoked it. The joint did not seem to do much except make my mind cloudy and dull. I also did not enjoy the music as it was too loud for my newly sensitized ears. I suppose this was the test I had been hoping for, to prove to myself that I no longer needed the stuff, that the meditation had some positive effect. People normally get 'high' or intoxicated because they are not satisfied or content with the present moment, the present state or condition of their own mind, so they want to change it. But I became so absorbed in the study of Dharma and meditating that the present condition was enjoyable enough to not want to change it, or get 'high'. I was already high. So I was beginning to see how getting involved with and developing one's mind in the Dharma could be an effective means for overcoming the need to 'get high'. This was exciting.

During this first week I wrote to my parents. Just before the retreat had started I had written them about my intention to take the meditation course, but had mentioned it in a passing kind of way. I could have just left it at

that and not inform them of my new radical transformation, saying that I was just going to continue touring around and exploring different parts of India for the next year or so. But I felt that not telling them my new feelings about life and the real reason for staying in India — to continue my meditation practice and related studies, would be evading the issue; sooner or later the matter would have to be dealt with. I also considered that not telling them the full truth would be a subtle form of lying. I had not formally taken that precept but I was aware of the chain reaction and habit-forming process these ‘small things’ could create and therefore wished to avoid it.

Because of the deeper regard and respect for my parents, derived from the meditations on that subject, I wished to share with them and the rest of my greater family the new found path I was now embarking upon in life. I was, however, somewhat apprehensive that they would not understand why I would want to forsake the Christian religion for, of all things, Buddhism! Their Christian conditioning coupled with their superficial and probably distorted knowledge of Buddhism, would not make it easy for clear communication. Added to this was the fact that much negative exposure of Eastern as well as Western religious cults was in the media. A lot of tinted publicity was being given to a few sensational groups: Hare Krishnas soliciting at airports and dancing in the streets; Moonies with their eccentric Guru; Jesus Freaks being accused of kidnapping and brainwashing teenagers of middle-class families resulting in the deprogramming controversy. Non-mainstream religions and offshoot cults such as these were usually regarded with suspect and negativity by the majority of conservative Americans. Taking all of this into account, I was in a quandary as to how they would initially react if I told them outright that I had been converted to being a Tibetan Mahayana Buddhist. It may surely well have blown their minds, or at least caused them much confusion, consternation and doubt. This I did not wish to do especially in light of the already shocked state they were just recovering from with my fiascos in Afghanistan. This again, could have very well been, “the straw that broke the camel’s back’.

I decided to break the ice in a more roundabout and less drastic manner. I merely mentioned in the letter that I enjoyed the meditation course and it re-awakened my previous interest in meditation which they were already aware of from my brief TM practice. I explained that for the time being I would return to India to do some further meditation and study of Eastern philosophy while visiting historical places of interest in that vast ancient country. This, of course, was more or less true and it seemed to be a toned down middle path explanation of my intents and purposes.

In conversations with some Westerners who had just arrived from India I found out that S.N. Goenka was conducting a vipassana meditation course in Bodhgaya at this very time. He would be conducting another course in a town named, Prataphgarh, near Lucknow in the middle of January, and I set my sights on attending. But first I would make a pilgrimage to Bodhgaya. The day prior to leaving, I received a letter at the Post Restante from Larry. He wrote that Barry was working at the new family liquor store/delicatessen and the business was going well. He was happy to be back in the good ole USA but was envious of me trekking in Nepal and wandering around India. He was starting to deal in American Indian turquoise jewelry and said he might try and work in a business trip over to the East to score a quantity of precious stones. It seemed a bit strange to me as I read about his worldly, materialistic ambitions as my own life now seemed so increasingly distanced from those concerns. I wondered if Larry would understand if I told him about my metamorphosis.

Having spent nearly three months in this alluring mountain Kingdom, I was somewhat reluctant to leave. But I guess the purpose of coming or having been led here in the first place had been served. One chapter in my life seemed to have come to a close here and a new phase was opening up. I reflected that life is merely a flow of events; each situation, person and place we find ourselves confronted with or attracted to offers something to learn and grow from, consciously or unconsciously. Each experience is a temporary resting place, 'one night's shelter' for the ego/mind. When that purpose is served we must not cling to it, but move on if appropriate, going with the flow. Bearing this in mind I left Kathmandu the day after Christmas to begin the next leg of this unpredictable, unfolding journey.

The bus stopped at the half way point on top of the mountain range separating the Kathmandu valley from the terrain and plains of India. Here at Daman, there is a rest area and a view point with a telescope. On a clear day much of the Eastern Himalayan skyline with Mt. Everest can be seen in the far distance. I was hoping to catch my first glimpse of Sargamatha, the Nepali name for the world's highest mountain, but nature was not cooperating. After crossing into India I stopped in the dusty town of Raxaul for a supper of rice and curry, curd, chapattis and bananas. I then walked out of town where I found a likely spot to sleep under a spreading pipal tree. This is the same species under which Siddhartha Gautama had sat when he attained Enlightenment at Bodhgaya. I spread out my makeshift bedroll of army poncho, jalaba and blanket and sat down for a little reflection. In spite of the fond memories of Nepal, it felt good to be back in India. But this time I had a new feeling and motivation — I was on a religious pilgrimage. With these thoughts and a very peaceful air, I radiated white light to all beings before stretching out, happy as a lark.

I awoke with the chirping birds and crowing cocks at sunrise and sat for a period of meditation followed by some yoga exercise underneath the friendly atmosphere of the tree. After a breakfast of cold chapattis and bananas saved from the previous evening, I continued down the road to find a suitable place for hitchhiking. Shortly afterwards a lorry came along which I flagged down in Indian fashion by waving one arm up and down. The driver wanted me to sit up in the cab with him and his two companions. This would have made it crowded in the smoke filled cab and I let him know that I preferred to ride in the back. He pointed out that the back was dirty without a clean suitable place to sit down. But I insisted, showing that I would sit on my poncho to avoid getting dirty. Reluctantly he let me have my way and I climbed into the back where a sooty canvass covered a bunch of large sacks of cement. I tolerated the bumpy, dusty, three-hour ride into Muzzaffapur and when he stopped in town the driver asked for no payment; he even insisted that I drink a cup of tea with him and his partners which he paid for. I was quite thirsty after the long ride and gratefully accepted his friendly offer. Maybe because I was a foreigner alone in a big country like India that he took pity on me. With more similar experiences I found out

that this friendliness/hospitality to strangers stems from their ancient Hindu culture which regards the guest as God. I thanked him for his kindness and he pointed out the road towards Patna where I wanted to go.

It was still early in the afternoon and I casually began walking in the warm sunshine down the tree lined country road. I eventually stopped at a roadside village to drink another cup of sweet milk tea and munch on fresh samosa. Samosa are pieces of boiled potato wrapped in dough and deep fried in oil — the equivalent to the American French fries. I then tried hitchhiking again standing at the end of the village. After about thirty minutes without success a young man dressed in the traditional white dhoti and long sleeved shirt approached and started conversing in good English. He was the local homeopathic doctor and he had a clinic in a small room in this village. He lived, however, in a larger village a few kilometers away where he had his main clinic and he came here only a few days a week for half a day. He was very amiable and invited me to his office to rest my feet.

Inside his humble clinic he bade me sit down on a wooden chair and he sent an attendant boy to bring tea. In the meantime he offered me some bananas and we talked more. He asked the usual questions, “How many brothers and sisters do you have, and what is your mission?” This time I felt I had a more definite purpose for my travels and I told him I was studying Buddhism and on a pilgrimage to Bodhgaya. This delighted the educated doctor who was a Hindu by birth but he had a great fondness for Lord Buddha and his Dhamma teachings. He informed me that Hindus believe Buddha was the ninth Avatar or incarnation of the God Vishnu. To them Gautama Buddha was merely a reformer of Hinduism because he attacked the corrupt practices of ritual animal sacrifices popular in those days and he denounced the caste system. Hindus don't think the Buddha had any superior philosophy or Truth to preach that wasn't already found in Hinduism (in the Vedas or Upanishads). This was the first time I had heard this Hindu belief and it did not strike me as being accurate in view of what I had just learned. But I did not have sufficient knowledge, intellectual, scriptural or experiential about this, so I did not offer any rebuttal or debate. I found out later that the idea of the Buddha being an Avatar of Vishnu is adamantly refuted and considered heresy by staunch orthodox Buddhists.

The doctor invited me to go home with him and stay the night in his own village. He informed me of a lesser known Buddhist pilgrimage spot, Vaishali, which was only several more miles on the other side of his village. If I wished he would take the following day off and escort me on a guided tour of the ancient ruins. I thought this would be a good opportunity to experience more of rural Indian life, learn some history and make it part of my pilgrimage. He ordinarily rode a bicycle but now he pushed it alongside as we walked and leisurely chatted. The country road meandered through lush green checkerboard rice paddies and stands of sugar cane gleaming in the bright setting sun. The water buffaloes and farmers laboring out in the soggy fields made me reflect on the law of kamma and rebirth, appreciating my “perfect human birth”. Three of the good doctor’s friends came along on their bicycles and stopped to walk with us for awhile. They were curious to find out who I was and then they took off cycling ahead.

Upon arriving in the small, typically poor village, I immediately became the center of mass attention. No doubt I was one of the first westerners who had passed through here in a very long time. The doctor was busy telling several people who I was and what my mission was. At least fifty people came near to get in a good long stare at this red bearded sahib toting a backpack. My host arranged for me to sleep in the privacy of his medical clinic, a slightly bigger room than the other. Two wooden benches were put together to suffice as a bed and I could use his table and chair for some reading prior to sleeping. Surprisingly, this small rural village had electricity. The doc went off to his own house across some rice paddies somewhere and brought back food for me. At first I had told him not to bother as I didn’t care to eat that night, but he insisted. I did, however, appreciate the chapattis and curried potatoes which he brought in a tiffin container. Before sleeping I meditated on “All Mother Sentient Beings” and finished by radiating extra white light to my kind host and the poor villagers, wishing them the ability to reach Enlightenment.

In the morning the doctor brought me a breakfast of chapattis, dhal and a cup of fresh warm buffalo milk. He also brought along the principal of the

local college, as most secondary schools are called here, to meet me. He would accompany us to Vaishali. The principal was also an ardent admirer of Lord Buddha and he desired that I wait until the following day to deliver a lecture on Buddhism to his students. This request sounded almost absurd. For one thing, I did not have all that much confidence in my general knowledge of Buddhist philosophy or its history in India. And I had not had any previous experience in public speaking. Therefore, I had to politely decline. Without actually lying, I explained that I must be moving on from Vaishali that afternoon to Patna on my way to Bodhgaya. Little did I know that some seven years later, I would return and competently deliver that lecture as a Buddhist monk.

The ancient ruins at Vaishali are located outside of the town itself. As we cycled through the large, spread out archeological area, my knowledgeable guides described the various sites and inscriptions and their relationship to Buddhist history. During the course of Gautama Buddha's forty-five years of walking about teaching in this part of Northern India, he rested here many times and preached Dhamma. A monastery was built for him and his order of mendicant monks to reside in during their stay. All that remains now of this 2,500 year old monastery complex is a slightly raised mound with scattered depressions filled with broken bits of brick, indicating where buildings once stood.

The three of us partook of the picnic lunch which the doctor had thoughtfully brought along in the shade of the trees at the rest house. In the mid-afternoon my kind, informative friends deposited me at the bus stand in town where I waited for a bus to take me the remaining twenty miles to Patna. I thanked them, especially the doctor, for all the warm generous hospitality he showed to me since our meeting. I conveyed to them how it was a unique opportunity for me, as a westerner, to gain first hand experience of rural village life and glean odd bits of Indian history, philosophy and beliefs. This experience helped me to see the value of travelling in an unrestricted way. If I was with one or more companions, going by long train rides, staying on the principal tourist routes and so forth, I would have much less chance for such encounters with 'down home folk'.

The bus took me to Hajipur on the north bank of the great Ganges River from where I took the ferry across to Patna, the capital of Bihar. The river here is extremely wide and the ferry travels upstream a few miles taking about an hour. Many Tibetan pilgrims with all their gear piled up were sitting on the floor of the crowded boat. I found a convenient spot to sit down near a large group of them. It was dark by the time we disembarked. Most of the Tibetans piled into three-wheeled taxis and bicycle rickshaws to whisk them away to the train station. After some moments of wondering what to do, I decided to take a leisurely walk through the city to the train station where I would perhaps sleep and take the morning train to Gaya. I inquired from some educated-looking young men, the directions to the railway station and started off walking.

At the railway station all the Tibetans from the boat along with hordes of others were sprawled out all over the floor. They were grouped in their little bands drinking buttered tea and cooking their dinner on kerosene stoves. As I was scouting out a spot to lie down, some of the Tibetans who recognized me, called me over to join them. I managed to squeeze out a space to spread my bedroll beside them and drank a cup of butter tea which they happily offered. I appreciated greatly their friendliness. Before lying down I thought to sit and meditate, but then I reasoned that it would only attract undue attention and noticed the ego involved, so I decided against it. It was difficult to get comfortable on the hard cement floor of the crowded noisy station and I laid awake rolling from side to side for some time. Early in the morning, I literally had to battle my way into an unbelievably cram-packed unreserved carriage for the four-hour trip to Gaya Junction. I was never so happy to get out of any vehicle in my whole life. The auto rickshaws that go out to Bodhgaya wait until they have as many passengers as can be tightly squeezed inside and this is usually about ten. The distance is approximately ten kilometers along a narrow road following near the course of a wide river bed. I could get only few quick glimpses of the passing landscape due to the limited visibility of riding in the covered back portion of these three-wheeled contraptions.

The small village and adjacent temple complex was a beehive of activity with people coming and going. I sat in a tea shop near the entrance to the sacred area to sip a cup of tea and snack on Indian sweets while watching the busy scene. Rickshaw loads of Tibetans were arriving continuously. They could be seen trudging up the road in their ragtag bands with all their worldly possessions on their backs heading up to the Tibetan camp. Tourist buses were visible everywhere and throngs of people paraded in and out of the main temple complex. Beggars were plentiful and conspicuous doing a brisk business exploiting the sympathy and compassion of the Buddhist devotees. The Sri Maha Bodhi Temple, built in the seventh century A.D. and standing about fifty meters high, towered in majestic silence above all the hustle and bustle.

After sitting thusly for some time, I felt it would be appropriate to go inside the temple and pay my respects to the Bodhi tree under which Siddhartha sat when attaining Supreme Enlightenment. The temple and tree are in the middle of a giant sunken compound enclosed by a wall and railing reached by descending a flight of steps from the main entrance. At the bottom of the steps hangs a huge iron bell which devotees ring for different reasons. Ordinary persons ring it to indicate the number of times they have visited here on pilgrimage. Bodhisattvas ring it three times to wake up the sleep-like state of ignorance in all sentient beings. I rang it three times keeping the latter idea in mind. Beyond is the entrance way through tall wooden doors into the inner sanctum where sits a huge impressive gilded Buddha statue. In front of the entrance many Tibetans were absorbed in executing full length prostrations upon door size pieces of wood while mumbling mantras. Hordes of people were circumambulating the towering edifice in the mandatory clockwise direction. Tibetans were conspicuous with the twirling of prayer wheels or counting repetitions of *OM MANI PADME HUM* on their mala. Leaving my thongs aside but still carrying my rucksack I joined the procession and slowly and thoughtfully circled the temple three times.

The Bodhi Tree is situated at the backside of the temple enclosed by a fence and festooned with many Buddhist flags. Within the enclosure between the foot of the tree and the temple is a concrete block which is

called the Vajrasana. It designates the exact spot where Siddhartha Gautama had sat that fateful night. Most devotees stop here in front of the holy tree to light a candle, a stick of incense or reverently bow with their palms together. Some even bend over further to touch their head to the railing or edge of the offering table which sits in front. After my circumambulations, I left my pack in a corner and went inside the inner sanctum to perform three prostrations in front of the Buddha image. It was very crowded with others doing likewise and some sitting motionless on the carpeted floor in silent meditation or chanting mantras. It was inspiring to witness and participate in all this religious devotion concentrated in this one area in and around the temple. There were, however, a few groups of casual Indian tourists, presumably Hindus, who included Bodhgaya on their holiday or religious tour itinerary. For the most part they walked around, some of them anticlockwise, inconsiderately chattering and gawking at the prostrating Tibetans and others seen meditating here and there. All together, the whole scene was an odd assortment of people from almost everywhere, including a number of westerners like myself.

Bodhgaya is important as it marks the spot or symbolizes the place where the search for Truth or life's meaning is brought to its culmination, its climax. It was here under the pipal tree that the former Prince Siddhartha stopped wandering in his futile search through the lands to find Truth. Under the Bodhi tree he made his last ditch effort. He resolved not to move from his seat until by his own mental effort, digging deep within, he either perished or attained Supreme Awakening. And on that auspicious full moon night he did, in fact, surmount all the dark forces of ignorance and awoke into unsurpassable, unquestionable, irreversible Enlightenment. That was the night he stopped searching. He was now a Buddha, one who is Supremely Awake.

All of our lives we go on and on trying to satisfy our dreams, desires, and expectations. We change our friends, our lovers, our job, house, city, state, and even country hoping to find that perfect life situation and happiness. But the perfect situation, perfect contentment, fulfillment can never be acquired by manipulating the external environment. Someday we will have to stop and begin looking inside ourselves to realize the source of our

dissatisfaction and at the same time the source of perfect contentment. This is what Siddhartha did and this is the deeper significance of Bodhgaya, meaning the site of Bodhi or Supreme Wisdom, Truth. We all have Bodhgaya within ourselves as it was the site of Enlightenment which we should really try and reach or uncover. This is the ultimate pilgrimage, coming back home to the innate source of true freedom and lasting happiness. These are some of the thoughts I ruminated on while spending another hour or so sitting off to the side under one of the adjoining Bodhi trees.

I then took a walk to explore the greater Bodhgaya area which sports many Buddhist Temples. Nearly every Buddhist country in the world has built a temple and/or rest house within a half mile of the main complex. These are intended primarily for the convenience of the tourist/pilgrims from those respective countries. If there is extra room, however, especially during the off season, then others are often permitted to stay for a short time.

Back in the Tibetan Temple, the industrious, improvising Tibetans had set up a sizeable tent city with makeshift hotels and restaurants made with big roomy army-type tents and bricks. Adjacent to this tent city area was an old walled-in cemetery where I saw a Tibetan man and two boys camping out under some large trees. I thought this might be a swell place to make my own temporary camp where I could practice my meditation and yoga exercises amidst the graves. I was not sure of the local customs or rules regarding sleeping in cemeteries, but I knew it was a recommended practice by austere yogis to overcome the fear of death. So I climbed over the wall and located a likely spot away from the few existing grave markers and between some scrub bushes which afforded a bit of seclusion. Here, I spread out my bedroll and sat down to rest and appreciate the quaint surroundings removed from the hustle and bustle of the main tourist area. I hoped I would not be thrown out or overrun by others with the same idea.

A week remained before the scheduled arrival of the Dalai Lama and it was now two days prior to New Year. The temperature here on the plains of North India was moderate with cool nights and pleasant mild days. My jalaba proved ideal for wearing around especially at night when I sat for

meditation. In the mornings I arose at dawn and did some yoga exercises there on my bedroll either preceding or followed by a period of meditation. Following this, I rolled up the bedroll and took my pack over to one of the Tibetan restaurants where I had breakfast. This usually consisted of Tibetan bread, a bowl of curd, bananas and tea. I arranged with the restaurant owner to leave my pack there and then would stroll over to the Maha Bodhi Temple. I carried my shoulder bag containing passport, TCs, loose cash, folded blanket to sit on, and water bottle — everything I would need for the whole day if needed. Once inside the Temple complex, I would ring the bell three times and then proceed into the inner sanctum to offer my three prostrations and sometimes sit quietly and meditate. Then, I would go outside and circumambulate the Temple/Tree three or more times and often sit directly under the sacred tree for awhile to meditate and try to feel the holy vibrations.

Many of the other Western ‘Dhamma bums’ stayed at the Burmese Vihar (rest house). There is a block of small individual cells which can be utilized by persons wishing to undergo a self-retreat and there is a meditation room upstairs. This is where U. N. Goenka had conducted the vipassana course I had heard about. The course had ended only a week before. Several persons who had participated were continuing their private practice. I heard about an American guy from New York named Joseph. He had been practicing vipassana meditation for several years and evidently had it down quite well. He happened to be in Bodhgaya at this time and he gave a talk at the Burmese Vihar one night. Being interested, I went along with quite a few others to the upstairs meditation room where the talk was being held.

Joseph sat on the floor cross legged at the front while the rest of us casually sat around. He was tall and lean with fairly short brown hair and he sported a neatly trimmed beard. He spoke slowly and articulately on the subject of mindfulness and insight awareness. He explained the need to focus attention on the moment to moment movement of our body and the activities of the mind in order to understand ourselves better. He described how slowing down and observing the movements of the body in an exaggerated slow motion can help us become aware of more detail, to detect and understand the relationship of the body and mind. He

demonstrated by slowly lifting his arm up and down, explaining that while doing this we can observe how the body is totally dependent on the mind for its ability to move. To lift or lower the arm only a few inches requires many separate but interrelated mind/body commands and minute movements. Tuning our awareness into this process allows us to eventually directly perceive all the aspects of our body and mind. There is a special form of sitting and walking meditation which helps to cultivate this moment to moment detached observation. Joseph explained that the purpose of this training was to give an intimate experience of the Buddha's fundamental truths of impermanence, suffering and no-self. This helps one to understand on a deeper level the significance of the Buddha's Four Noble Truths. And if practiced enough, this sustained awareness would allow the mental space and skill with which to overcome many of our negative habit patterns, mental problems and self-imposed limitations, and could eventually bring Enlightenment.

This talk aroused my interest in vipassana even more. This specific method of mind training seemed to be a direct, less mystical and ritualistic approach than the Tibetan practices for developing Wisdom. There was no mention of various Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, no need for saving all sentient beings nor repeating mantras or creating complex visualizations. This was the Hinayana approach to one's own selfish liberation that I had been warned of as being inferior. I wondered if there really was that much difference between the two in terms of actual freedom from suffering and compassion for others. I had been told that even Goenkaji recited a loving-kindness radiation every night during his courses.

To make things a little more confusing there were also two kinds of vipassana meditation techniques which people were learning. The method Joseph described was somewhat different to the technique that Goenka taught, with each affording a different angle of insight. As I was already planning to attend Goenka's course I figured to learn that technique first, going slowly, one at a time. But for now I just continued doing the Tibetan meditations from which I was still deriving inspiration and understanding.

New Year's eve came and went without any great significance or celebration. In India they go by the lunar calendar and celebrate the Hindu New Year in April. There was, however, a little get together at the Japanese Temple for gong ringing and a traditional snack of New Year's noodles served at midnight. Everyone was welcome to attend this informal gathering but I chose to listen to the one hundred and eight strikes of the huge gong from my cozy secluded spot in the cemetery. I contemplated the meaning of the New Year from my new perspective. I reflected on Samsara and the perfect human rebirth, seeing the new year as a time to renew and strengthen one's determination to perfect one's Dhamma practice. I recalled the stupid foolish things I had done during the past year out of extreme ignorance and resolved to try harder to avoid such negative actions in the future by developing more awareness/wisdom.

By this time Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa had arrived along with their entourage of Western disciples. They set up a camp of two tents in one corner of the Birla Dharmshala compound. Hundreds of Tibetan mountain people from Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan were arriving each day and the tent city was growing by leaps and bounds. A second tent city was arising on another vacant tract of land near the museum. The religious fervor was increasing in intensity and preparations to hold the mass Kalachakra initiation were underway. It would be held outside in a large open area in front of the Tibetan Rest house and a special stage for His Holiness was being erected. Every afternoon about 5 o'clock Tibetan monks, numbering over a hundred, would assemble under the Bodhi Tree to perform a mass puja with all their instruments and paraphernalia. Hundreds of small loaves of bread were stacked on an offering table and given away afterwards to the monks and participants. Just before dark hundreds of small oil lamps were lit and set up in a large square area where attendants continuously watched over and refilled them when needed. Other pilgrims brought their own candles and incense and placed them all around the entire temple compound. Seen from a raised vantage point it was a very impressive spectacle with literally thousands of flickering lights and the thick aroma of burning incense. Many hundreds of devotees circumambulated on the three different pathways which go around the square. Tibetan monks, nuns and laypeople were fervently executing the prostrations hour after hour. Several

really energetic Tibetans, both men and women, even prostrated themselves around the compound laying their body flat out on the ground with arms stretched beyond their head. When standing up they moved the feet to where the hands had been and then prostrated another full body and arms length. They repeated the entire process over and over while chanting a mantra and slowly but surely made a complete circuit around the temple on one of the pathways. Being so absorbed they even went right through mud and dirt. The purpose behind this austere practice was to humble their ego and purify the negative mind. It was quite inspiring to see all this overt religious devotion, though my own personal feelings were expressed in a slightly less dramatic and less conspicuous way. Every night I went over to the temple for a few hours to participate in and imbibe the atmosphere.

Because of so many pilgrims converging on Bodhgaya at this time it was inevitable that more people would take up abode in the cemetery. By now all the rest houses, including the Burmese Vihar, were totally filled up to the max. There was a subtle tendency in me to regard the cemetery as 'my domain' and I felt a sense of being intruded upon when newcomers came to size up the place. I recognized this as an activity of the self-cherishing mind and to counter it I deliberately encouraged a couple of other Westerners who were surveying it to stay here. They appreciated the suggestion.

During this peak tourist season beggars from the surrounding towns and cities make their own pilgrimage here. But their motive is not so much devotion to the Buddha as it is to make some fast easy money. One of the principal virtues in Buddhism is charity and the legitimate disabled beggars as well as the poor villagers capitalize on this by putting on their best act in front of the pious devotees. They line up outside of the main temple entrance wearing their most ragged clothes (perhaps their only clothes) looking as destitute and helpless as possible holding a tin plate or cup. Enterprising Indians have found self-employment as money-changers by setting up booths. For a slight commission they change one, five, or ten rupee notes into five, ten or twenty-five paise coins for the tourists who want to feel like big spenders. For one rupee (ten U.S. cents in 1974) one could give ten paise to ten persons or five paise to twenty persons and feel quite satisfied.

Other more independent and destitute cripples and lepers lurk around the teashops/restaurants, souvenir stands, and rest houses. They approach while you are sitting at a table eating or drinking or buying something. This makes you feel more guilty if you do not give something because they have caught you red-handed stuffing your face or shopping bag. If you don't give something right away they keep on standing there waving or banging their tin cup or will even follow you around pleading mercilessly. It can get real nerve-wracking. It is a good opportunity to observe your reactions, to see the attachment, aversion or resistance to give. You know that what you've spent on yourself is ten times or a hundred times more than this unfortunate person has, and to give twenty-five or fifty paise is really nothing for the average tourist. But to watch the struggle go on in your head can get ludicrous at times. Sometimes you find yourself giving something not out of genuine compassion or generosity, but just to get rid of the miserable wretch. The real insult or heartbreaker comes when after you do give something, they say it's not enough and demand more.

It was good for me to experience these situations and observe these reactions in my own mind. Sometimes I would try and judge the person, if they really were in desperate straits and deserved it and hesitating as to how much to give. At times I saw my stinginess and self-centeredness thinking of what I could buy for myself with the money not given. Sometimes I justified not giving by reasoning that it would only make them more dependent on tourists. That may be true, but some of them genuinely have no other recourse and would probably perish without this scanty income. I usually felt more inclined to buy the person something nutritious to eat or drink rather than simply give money. Occasionally I saw beggars using the money to buy beedies or cigarettes and this really irked me. Situations like these help bring up to the surface aspects of the mind which ordinarily we don't have to confront so abruptly or honestly. And sometimes it can be unpleasant to acknowledge or accept. When negative thoughts are not seen as negative, then no guilt or tension arises and we simply habitually react without heed for the long range consequences. But when one comes to know negative unskillful thoughts as being such and one begins to consciously deal with them, then the big battle starts. This is the inner

struggle to discriminate between right and wrong, wholesome and unwholesome thoughts and actions in the light of the law of kamma. It is the beginning of conscious mental purification or the spiritual path, from the Buddhist point of view. This is the time when many seekers hold back from getting too deep into meditation. The mind is very clever at making up well meaning excuses to cover up the unwillingness to change.

On the fifth of January the Dalai Lama arrived with much fanfare, and two days later the Kalachakra ceremony began. The program started with several talks by his Holiness mostly during the first two days. Not being able to understand while he was speaking made it rather boring for me as the talks were generally quite long. Fortunately, however, the stage was in front of the cemetery and I had a clear view of the proceedings sitting on my bedroll. In this way I could lie down and relax whenever I got tired of sitting and more or less ignore the whole thing. We were informed when the most important parts, the actual initiation ritual and power transference from the Dalai Lama was about to begin. During this crucial time our mind had to be very concentrated and receptive, tuned in to what he was chanting. A special mantra was given to us on paper which we were supposed to recite at the same time. This invests the power of the mantra to the aspiring Bodhisattva which will be his or her secret weapon to combat the evil forces in the unconscious mind and external world. I did not necessarily believe in all this but I went along with it anyway and did feel exhilarated for a short while afterwards.

A couple of days were reserved after the ceremony for individual blessings by the Dalai Lama. A long line of people, comprised mostly of Tibetans, stretched for almost a kilometer from where His Holiness was seated on his throne inside the Gompa. The line moved at a snail's pace and it meant a few hours wait standing in the warm sun. I also wanted to go and receive his blessings but decided to wait until the line went down on the following day. By the afternoon of the second day, the end of the line was at the gate of the rest house and reduced to only a ten minute wait and I took my place to receive the hallowed blessings. Each person was marshaled quickly in front of the shoulder high throne upon which His Holiness sat, to offer the traditional white scarf and respectfully bow. He

would sometimes touch the devotee's head or say something if he deemed it fitting, then moved to the next. When I came in front, I offered my white scarf and reverently bowed my head with palms together. I was hoping he would touch my head, thinking that I might feel something like an electric current passing from him to me. He did touch my head but I didn't feel anything noticeably out of the ordinary. I did, however, feel satisfied that I had fulfilled what I had considered an inner obligation.

I now started thinking about what I would do after the Goenka course which was only ten days in duration. One of my original fantasies of living naked on the beach in Goa began to come back into the forefront of possibilities. This had been a prime motivation for my coming to India in the first place. With all the initial emotion and preoccupation of becoming a Buddhist in Nepal and coming to Bodhgaya, the idea had all but faded into the background. As there seemed to be a lull coming up in terms of definite plans, the idea of Goa became appealing. It could be a suitable place to live simply in a thatched hut on the beach and practice my meditation and yoga. I had qualms, however, as to whether this would be compatible with Dhamma practice. I wondered if it might be enjoying myself too much and increasing sensuality. I also knew that a plethora of drugs was readily available there which could be a strong temptation. But if I could resist all the sensual lures it would show the strength of my practice.

There was also other influencing factors for heading south to make the stopover in Goa feasible. I had heard that there were a couple of vipassana meditation centers in Ceylon where conditions were favorable for intensive practice. One of the centers was reported to have a good teacher who spoke English. The technique taught was the same as what Joseph had described in his talk that night. It was also supposed to be relatively easy to obtain a visa for six months, especially if one intended to study Buddhism. The Ceylonese or Sinhalese people were predominantly Buddhist and the government was supportive of foreigners in this respect. And it would be very cheap to live there pursuing these endeavors. When my Indian visa would expire at the end of March, I obviously had to go somewhere. This seemed to be the most viable alternative, a natural next step. Also the Ajanta caves which I had heard a lot about were situated on the way south

towards Bombay which I was interested to see. So this was the temporary plan formulating in my mind. However, all of this would depend on the outcome of my experience at the Goenka course, if indeed I was even accepted. When I had first arrived in Bodhgaya, on visiting the Burmese Vihar, I was told that it was necessary to send in a postcard as a advanced registration for the upcoming Goenka course in Pratapgarh. Rumor had it that the course might already be booked full with a limit of seventy persons. So I had immediately sent in a postcard but had received no confirmation as yet. Several others were in the same unsure predicament but we planned to proceed to Pratapgarh anyway on faith that we made the list or in hopes of some last minute cancellations.

Before departing Bodhgaya, I paid my last respects at the Bodhi Tree with some prostrations and meditation in the inner sanctum. This was to reinforce in my subconscious the motivation to carry 'Bodhgaya' with me wherever I went. I knew, I would return someday. Despite the large crowds and busy commercial like atmosphere in the streets, a certain underlying peace and charm pervades this special spot. When I first had come into town in the back of that auto rickshaw, I did not get a proper orientation or mental preparation for the arrival. Speeding in so quickly and blindly, I was not able to create the reverential attitude which befits a pilgrimage. So I decided to depart in a more peaceable manner by walking the ten kilometers or so back to Gaya. It was a very pleasant stroll in the cool morning air alongside the bank of the now dry river. I was able to get a nice feeling of the rural countryside and tried to imagine how it must have been during the time of the Buddha, 2,500 years prior.



CHAPTER 10

ANICCA, ANICCA, ANICCA

The way to Pratapgarrh took me back through Benares where I arrived in the evening. Considering myself a Buddhist pilgrim, I felt it appropriate to stay at yet another Burmese Vihar in Benares situated conveniently near the train station. There were still three days before the course started so I remained to once again to absorb the unique religious atmosphere this ancient holy city exudes, especially evident down by the bathing ghats. I went again to the burning ghat to contemplate the inevitable reality of death with my new Buddhist perspective, which made it more interesting. One afternoon, I took one of the row boat ferries across the wide river to the great sand bar. Here it was practically deserted except for some washer men and women doing heaps of laundry and laying them out in the hot sun to dry. I washed my own soiled clothes and had a soak here where the water was considerably cleaner than on the busy city side. Bathing in the Ganges is said to purify one's past sins or negative kamma. However, this was not my motive nor was I going to count on it.

On the last day, I made another excursion the few miles out to Sarnath but this time with more understanding and devotion than on the first visit. The main temple was open and I went inside and examined the wall murals depicting the important events from the life of Prince Siddhartha and later as the Buddha. These helped me get a closer, warmer feeling for the Buddha as a real person, identifying with his human emotions and struggle to achieve human perfection.

Two Buddhist monks from Ceylon (Sri Lanka) were in charge of the temple. I talked with one of the monks who spoke good English and told him of my plan to visit his country to further my studies in Buddhism and especially meditation. He was quite friendly and we chatted awhile and he encouraged me to do just that. He gave me the names of a couple of big temples I should visit. One of them, he said, housed the actual eye tooth of the deceased Buddha and suggested I go there to pay my respects to that

holy relic. Before leaving I bought a few booklets on different topics of Theravada philosophy which were displayed and for sale in one corner. I figured I would save these for reading on the long train or bus rides ahead.

Back at the Vihar that evening, I met a few others who were going to Pratapgarh on the night train. One of these persons was, Stephen, the German who I had met in Athens and who had informed me about Gail on Gomera. He had also come overland to India and had gone trekking in Nepal. He had also had just taken the previous Goenka course at Bodhgaya and as were many others, he was planning to take his second consecutive vipassana course. He had registered early and therefore already had his confirmation notice. But he had begun to not feel too well and was not sure if he would be able to physically manage all the rigorous sitting the course entailed.

The course was to begin the following afternoon. It was rumored that the course was way overbooked and that late registrants, most probably, would be turned away. I kept my fingers crossed. Scattered through the train that night there were many small groups of westerners headed for the same destination and purpose as I. The course was being held at a newly built meditation center on the outskirts of this typical dusty Indian town, across a river spanned by a bridge. Upon arrival we joined the long lineup for final registration — paying the fifteen dollar fee, assigned a sleeping space and in some cases, finding out if we were even accepted. I soon discovered that my name was number two on the waiting list of about ten persons. I was told to hang loose as there was a good possibility of several unexpected cancellations. I was heartened at this news and laid back on a pile of discarded straw to anxiously wait. Sure enough, after about an hour, I heard my name called out in confirmation of a space.

At the registration table I saw Stephen again. He informed me that he had just cancelled his place in the retreat. He was feeling weaker and speculated that he might be coming down with hepatitis and thought it better not to even start the course. This would allow for one more person on the waiting list. He said he would go back to Banares and wait there to get better. I could definitely relate to this logic and wished him a speedy recovery. I

then went to my assigned tent and spread out my bedroll on the thick carpet of straw reminiscent of Kopan and stretched out. I speculated whether it was Stephen's exact cancellation which had rescued my name from the waiting list. I felt sorry for him, but I also knew that such was the mysterious law of kamma.

This was the first time that a meditation course was being staged at this new retreat facility and the buildings were not fully completed. There were twenty individual 4' by 8' cells on two sides of a long building which were usable and several large army tents were set up as at Kopan to house the remaining participants. The group meditation hall was a big brick structure yet unfinished, but would be used anyway. A padding of thick straw covered the dirt floor and interspersed bamboo poles helped to hold up the cross beams of the ceiling. Altogether there were ten men assigned to the tent I was in.

A bell was rung to call everyone into the meditation hall for the official start of the course. We had to bring our own pillows or padding to serve as our sitting cushion over the covering of straw. The men and women were separated on different sides of the rectangular room. This segregation of the sexes was to help minimize the possibility of lustful thoughts arising. If one had strong sexual inclination and was sitting next to the opposite sex it could be the impetus for unnecessary distracting thoughts and fantasies. Although this was not done at Kopan, I could very well understand the sense to this.

We all sat facing one end of the empty bleak room where the raised teacher's platform was and waited silently in expectation for the entrance of our teacher, Sri U. N. Goenka. He entered shortly followed by his sari-clad wife and they both took their seats side by side on the dais facing us. I was a little surprised to see his wife there beside him; perhaps it was to show that meditation does not mean abandoning one's family or forsaking the world as it is sometimes misconstrued. He was short and plump with thin graying hair neatly combed and clean shaven. He wore an ankle length sarong, the common traditional dress of Burma and other Asian countries. This is a modified, more dignified version of the white dhoti worn by

Indians. Overall, Goenka presented a very neat, well groomed, cultured appearance. Somehow it struck me funny that this unassuming, cherubic man would be the guru of thousands of people.

Goenkaji began by explaining in brief the need to take the Three Refuges and five precepts as a means for surrendering the ego and making the mind non-aggressive and receptive for the teachings. We actually recited the traditional formula in Pali used by the Theravada Buddhists, repeating it three times after him. This was quite different from the way we did it at Kopan. He then explained the rules to be followed during the retreat. Strict silence was to be observed among the student meditators — again, to help keep the mind more concentrated and focused inside. We were not to practice any other type of meditation or even yoga exercises which we may have learned and currently be practicing. I had heard of this rule from former students at Bodhgaya, so I was prepared for it. I could see the logic behind not mixing other meditation techniques, but I couldn't understand why doing a little exercise would hurt. The teacher said it would create unnecessary, extra distraction and dissipate our hoped for one-pointed concentration. It was interesting to see in my mind the initial resistance thrown up to this request which contradicted my opinion, but I reluctantly took his word for it. A light evening snack of milk and a piece of fruit would be served in place of a meal. This, of course, I was used to and enjoyed from the second two weeks at Kopan where we ate nothing at all after noon.

He went on to describe how the ten-day period would be divided into two phases. There would be an initial three days to develop one-pointed concentration and the remaining seven days for cultivating vipassana insight awareness. Vipassana means seeing the true or elemental nature of the body and mind and the whole material world, perceiving it as it really is, not just the way we have been taught and habitually construe it or wish it to be. This clear, penetrative seeing requires a concentrated, calm awareness which is able to detect what occurs in the body and mind from moment to moment in a sustained way. The technique we would be using to develop this concentration is termed Anapanasati. This is a Pali word which

refers to feeling the flow of air as it passes in and out at the tip of the nostrils. We would be starting this practice that very evening itself.

After this introduction which took about an hour, there was the break for the evening milk and fruit. We then came back inside the hall for the first one hour meditation period to practice the anapanasati breathing for which we were given brief instructions. We should try and sit in a comfortable cross-legged position keeping the back straight and head level, with the hands one on top of the other resting in the lap. The attention was to be placed at the tip just inside the opening of the nostrils trying to feel any sensation that might arise there. It could be the warmth of air as it touches the inside of the nostrils or perhaps on the upper lip, or little pin pricks or itching sensation in or around that limited area. We were not supposed to think about, interpret or react to them in any way, but to just observe or feel as each sensation arises and passes away, comes and goes. Each time the mind got lost in daydreaming or became upset by body aches or other distractions we were to simply bring the awareness back to the tip of the nostrils and start observing again. For the beginners he said, this would probably happen many times over in the course of the one hour, but that we should not become frustrated or discouraged. With practice, the mind would gradually settle down and relax and the ability to remain focused at the tip of the nose would increase.

I was accustomed to sitting for an hour with out much problem doing the Tibetan meditations which utilized thinking and visualization. But now, I was not supposed to deliberately think at all but merely listen or feel attentively. The habit tendency to start thinking was still present and I found myself inadvertently caught up in irrelevant trains of thought. That first hour I must have only spent a total of five minutes, fifteen or thirty seconds here and there actually concentrated at the tip of my nose. Every so often Goenkaji verbally reminded us to bring the attention back to the nostrils. This was very helpful; otherwise, I may have stayed lost in thoughts altogether.

As the hour progressed, I heard quite a few people squirming around, adjusting their legs due to pain. I also felt some physical discomfort and

shifted my legs slightly, but not as to be audible to others. A little bell was rung to signify the end of the hour and everyone chanted in unison, “Sadhu, Sadhu, Sadhu,” in a long drawn out tone. Sadhu is a popular expression in Burma and Sri Lanka amongst Buddhists and it implies that something is auspicious or ‘it is well and good’. This was the standard way we would close each group meditation period.

Before concluding the evening program, Goenkaji chanted a few Pali stanzas and recited his own version of loving-kindness or “Metta” meditation. While we were still seated in that quiet meditative mood, in a very melodious and emotional tone he wished, “May all beings be free from anger, ill-will, animosity, pride and conceit; may all beings be well, safe, and happy.” The sincerity and gentle manner in which he spoke had a balming effect on our sensitive minds. Any resentment or ill feelings we may have had towards anybody was greatly weakened or eliminated by this genuine, moving plea for universal friendliness and love. This state of mind is termed ‘Metta’ in Pali and this is a popular form of meditation in Theravada Buddhist countries. The teacher would conclude each night in this manner. We were to just stay open and receive it and if possible send the same thought/feelings back out. I found many similarities in this to the Bodhisattva compassion practice.

In the course of the next two days, the ability to keep my attention around the tip of the nose gradually improved. The longer I could sustain it, the frequency of wandering thoughts became less and less and my body and mind became more deeply relaxed. The rate of breathing also slowed down considerably and it became difficult to feel the faint touch of air as it passed in and out. During these moments of deep tranquility my whole body/mind system felt very light and airy. Everything seemed trouble free and perfect. Sometimes strong rushes of warm energy would spread through me like ocean waves breaking gently on the shore. Occasionally a pin prick of light like a star in the dark sky or a firefly in the night would appear behind the closed eyes. At other times a faint dull glow of light appeared inside my head. All these experiences lasted only a few seconds or so, repeating sporadically over the last half hour of the sitting period.

In the group interview, I questioned the teacher about these experiences. He explained that these phenomena were merely signs that a moderate degree of concentration and mental calm had been achieved. Others in the group reported having similar and even more fantastic phenomena occur in them. He cautioned all of us against giving any importance to or preoccupying ourselves with these things, as they would only present another distraction and be an obstacle in our meditation progress.

On those first nights, Goenkaji gave us a talk on different aspects of the Buddha's teachings concerning mental development from the Theravada standpoint. He elaborated on the need for observing the five precepts and how a moral life fits in with the whole practice of meditation and in daily life in general. He emphasized the need for having a firm faith and confidence in the Three Refuges to keep our life on the straight Dharma path.

He spoke about the difference between the Buddha's teachings and other theistic religions, stressing that the Four Noble Truths were based upon direct insight into the deepest reaches of the mind and reality. Buddhism is not future oriented, seeking happiness in a distant or future world, but is concerned with creating or realizing heaven on earth or perfect contentment, fulfillment, and happiness here and now. The body and mind can be our personal, portable laboratory and test tube in which we conduct our own investigation into the true nature of ourselves. The two mental tools used for this are concentration or mental calmness (samatha) and detached awareness which clearly comprehends what is occurring (vipassana). Concentration is like adjusting the lens of a microscope to focus in clearly on the specimen to be examined. Awareness is like the eye of the scientist that then observes and investigates the hitherto hidden elements and movements comprising the specimen which results in full comprehension. This is more or less how the Buddha arrived at his profound insight into the nature of the body and mind, finally realizing the ultimate reality of existence itself.

On the afternoon of the third day we switched to vipassana and Goenkaji guided us through the body just as it was described to me by Jim at

Tatopani. We began by placing attention at the crown of the head focusing on a spot the size of a quarter (US 25 cent piece). Awareness was kept here for a few minutes to detect any sensations that might arise. Whether we had felt anything or not, he then had us shift awareness down to the right ear and concentrate there likewise for a few minutes. He verbally guided us in this manner, using a calm, almost hypnotic, tone to the left ear, the nose, eyes, mouth, chin, neck, back of the head, shoulders and down each arm separately to the fingertips. Then it went from the chest to the stomach, hips and into each leg to the toes, all the while trying to feel any sensation whatsoever that might be arising in each area. The whole process took about one hour.

With him talking to us through step by step it was fairly easy to follow because his voice constantly reminded us to come back to the current spot, even if just briefly. I found my mind trying its best to dart off in between. Goenkaji guided us this way for the next few group sittings until we got the hang of it and could remember the procedure ourselves.

Once the ability to feel sensations became steady and keen we were instructed to begin moving the awareness in a more general way which he called, “sweeping”. This is done by starting at the top of the head and literally sweeping awareness steadily down through the entire body without stopping at any particular spot. Having arrived at the toes, awareness is immediately returned to the top of the head and the process repeated. When proficiency is gained you can sweep from the toes back up through the body to the top of the head and back down to the toes again, repeating this over and over and over. After sweeping for awhile, it can be left off to simply observe and intimately feel the whole body as just a mass of changing sensations in a more general way.

In one of the nightly Dhamma talks, Goenkaji elaborated on the concept of Anicca. Anicca refers to the process of incessant change or flux that all material and mental phenomena undergo. All matter including the physical body is made up of the four primary elements of Earth, Water, Fire, and Air. These combine in various proportions and densities to produce the atoms, molecules, cells and gross tissues, bones etcetera, of the body. They

are continuously undergoing modification and change or cellular birth and death. It is the contact, movement and interaction with each other which produces the physical sensations and feelings that we experience.

With this concentrated vipassana awareness, we tune inwards to the cellular, even atomic, level of activity in our own body. By doing this, the reality of impermanence is driven home and has a deeper impact on us. We begin to see the body and all objects in the physical world as being merely an organized heap of four impersonal elements. The idea is to cultivate a detached, on-looking awareness to this process of change and allow all the sensations, whether painful or pleasant, to arise and pass away without trying to interfere. We should not even cling to the pleasant feelings as these also are fleeting. Clinging, trying to hold onto them, only breeds confusion, frustration, suffering, grief and despair of all kinds and intensities. Everything that arises must also of necessity pass away, this is the natural law. Real mental peace and contentment comes when the mind releases its passionate attachment, identification and dependence on this unstable, uncontrollable flow of impermanence.

In addition to realizing the impermanent nature of the body, this awareness allows us to understand the unstable impermanence of the mind as well. While sweeping, the inevitable arising of random thoughts, feelings, emotions, and habit reactions can be seen occurring primarily by themselves without our conscious willing or power to prevent. Thus, we begin to view life in a different perspective, more attuned to the law of nature in and around us. This allows for more detachment, creating the mental space and wisdom which reduces the frustration and sorrow we would otherwise bring upon ourselves in daily life. During the group sittings our compassionate teacher would occasionally inject the words, Anicca, Anicca, Anicca — just in case we were daydreaming or had forgotten. At the close of the sitting he would often chant a poetic stanza in Pali expressing words of wisdom to the effect, “All conditioned things are impermanent; when one sees this with the eye of wisdom, this is the way to purity.”

As I went on practicing this sweeping, my body became more relaxed and the mind increasingly more concentrated. I began to experience many kinds and levels of sensations. It was like discovering and exploring a whole separate reality within the body and was fascinating to observe. I felt many pleasant enjoyable feelings and also many uncomfortable, downright painful ones. The painful sensations came mostly from the joints in my hips, knees, ankles, and spinal vertebrae due to the long and frequent sittings. When doing the Tibetan meditations my mind had been so absorbed in thinking that the pain went largely unnoticed as we were ignoring the body. Or, I would simply relieve discomfort by adjusting the posture more or less automatically with little consciousness of it. But now, where the objective was to deliberately feel the body with all of its sensations, the pain became much more obvious and prominent; it was not so easy to brush aside, ignore or forget. I found my mind putting up resistance and an increasing struggle against it.

Upon awakening at 5 A.M. we were instructed to sit on our sleeping place and practice this sweeping awareness on our own for an hour or more until breakfast. At night before sleeping we were advised to lay down flat on the back and sweep from head to foot to head. Sweeping the body while stretched out straight set up a soothing current throughout the body/mind system which was supposed to effect a cleansing process, something like sweeping dirt out the door. This would help put us peacefully asleep, and it did have that affect on me. Goenkaji claimed that this technique was responsible for curing certain body illnesses in himself, specifically migraine headaches. Other persons have attributed the remission of tumors and the reduction of high blood pressure to a daily practice of 'sweeping'.

At about this time, as if by coincidence, Goenkaji introduced the 'resolve sitting'. This was a selected period during which we were to make a vow or determined resolve to ourselves not to move, to keep the body as perfectly still as possible. He explained that deliberately making special effort not to move any part of the body for the whole hour would eventually strengthen our concentration and deepen the awareness. The pain would no doubt get more intense as we forced ourselves not to give in and relieve it, but in the long run it would yield a greater mental strength. If the conscious vow is

not taken, at least by beginners, the awareness and fortitude would not be strong enough to combat or overcome the habitual tendency to 'get rid of the pain'. It was also a good powerful way to gain deep insight into the ultimate nature of painful feelings. I found this discipline very helpful and insightful. These vow periods made me confront pain more directly, knowing it was a matter of just suffering with it, or finding an effective, skilful means to deal with it. As instructed, I started diligently viewing and regarding the body as merely an impersonal conglomeration of the four elements while observing the sensations come and go. By doing this, my tolerance to the discomfort and pain gradually increased and a certain 'mental space' emerged. In this mental space, I was able to observe more clearly the body/mind relationship in regards to pain. As long as we go on identifying the body as 'I', 'me', or 'mine', the mind will tend to habitually and spontaneously react to the feelings and stimulations arising. Through conditioning, the mind has labeled some sensations as pleasant and some unpleasant, and it reacts with attraction or aversion respectively.

The more I kept an objective distance to the four-element body with its internal sensations, the connection between the body and mind was weakened or partially disconnected. With this, I began to experience a definite relief from the discomfort and pain I had been subject to. The sensations and feelings were still arising and passing away but in the background of detached awareness where they had less intensity. I no longer fretted or paid them so much personal attention and was able to sit for the entire hour quite comfortably without deliberately moving. I could appreciate and enjoy the occasional reminder, Anicca, Anicca, Anicca. This helped me realize that reactions and concepts of pain and also of pleasure are, for the most part, in, by, and for the mind. It illustrated how each person creates his or her own personal heaven or hell right here on earth. With these insights, I was starting to get closer to the real nitty gritty, gut level, practical meditation, I felt, I had been looking for. This gave rise to periodic feelings of inner joy, which in turn increased my motivation. I vowed to make every sitting a 'vow period'. I became more emotionally moved by the tear jerking metta our compassionate Gurujī radiated each night.

After the normal one hour sitting period we could continue sitting through the break time if we wanted. On many occasions I did remain sitting in my own extra resolve period. I wanted to see how long I could endure the sometimes burning, grueling pain in the knees and back which invariably arose after forty-five minutes or an hour. Others did the same, voluntarily extending their motionless sitting beyond the one hour. Again, I could see my ego at work trying to make a competition out of it, who could sit the longest. While rigorously sitting like this, one by one, I could hear others giving up, abandoning their self-imposed misery and leaving the hall. I detected my subtle ego again playing 'king of the cushion', attempting to outsit at least one more person. Even though this was perhaps a negative motivation, it did encourage me to stretch out the time a little longer — anything helped. I tried to endure as long as was humanly possible but when I could just not take the tortuous pain any longer, I too 'bailed out' and went outside for some fresh air.

On one occasion, I had some kind of breakthrough. I had been sitting for almost two hours with concentration and detached awareness quite strong, watching it all go by in a general way. There was intense pain but I was calmly holding it at bay. All of a sudden my awareness broke through the pain barrier into a light airy silence. The feeling of the body was almost non-existent, including the sensations which were coming and going. I felt like I was suspended in mid-air and weightless. A soft luminous glow filled my head, though there were no distinct boundaries of head or body. I could not even deliberately move or think, but remained silently, wondrously aware, though there was not much to be aware.

All along, I continued to have a case of loose bowels, a residue from the original disorder in Afghanistan, but I was able to control it most of the time. Now for some reason, in the last few days of the course I began to feel the familiar stomach uneasiness return. This caused me slight apprehension, thinking it might get worse or disrupt my meditation. The toilet facilities here left a lot to be desired, having been erected hastily for the retreat. There were not an adequate number of stalls for the amount of people. During the rush hour in the early morning and during the breaks, two or three persons were often lined up waiting at each of the three stalls.

Fortunately, my tent was situated nearby the latrines. One morning as I got up with the morning bell, I felt the danger signals which warned me of imminent bowel release. Grabbing my towel, I rushed in the predawn darkness to the latrines only to find, much to my chagrin, people already waiting.

There was no time to lose. I desperately looked around and spied a likely spot behind a small bush in the cover of darkness behind my tent. Without thinking twice, I hurried as inconspicuously as possible but before I reached the bush it happened. I was horrified to say the least and my white cotton pants were soiled beyond further immediate use. I didn't even want to keep them to wash later. So after wiping myself relatively clean with the unsoiled part, I buried the pants in the soft dirt behind the bush.

Now I was naked except for the shirt I was wearing and the towel I had luckily carried with me. Fortunately I was near the tent. I wrapped the towel around my waist and crossed the fingers, hoping that my tent-mates would still be asleep or that none had, heard, seen, or smelled anything. Cautiously and disconcertingly, I sneaked back into the tent and to my consolation found the others either still sleeping or out of the tent. I quickly snatched my jalaba to put on and then went to the wash area to discreetly clean more thoroughly. I then returned and sat down on my bed with the others to meditate. Needless to say, I could not concentrate on sweeping at all. I continually worried that the smell from the buried pants might escape and drift over to the tent or that the dogs might pick up the scent and go dig it up. But neither of these two concerns came to pass. Luckily I had another pair of cotton pants because the daytime was too warm to always wear the jalaba.

All morning I could not concentrate very well, reflecting often on what happened, and I remained slightly embarrassed and self-conscious. At times though, the whole incident appeared humorous and I couldn't help but laugh at myself while I re-created the episode in my mind. I seriously hoped that it would not repeat itself, which it did not. But I did have to cut one of my extra vow periods short, to make a beeline to the john to take care of urgent business.

In one of the later Dhamma talks, Goenkaji spoke about the Noble Eightfold Path, the fourth of the Four Noble Truths. This is the Buddha's prescription of skilful thinking and meditating which enables a person to experience a greater freedom in life and eventually Enlightenment. It is comprised of eight aspects of mental and physical training which are the whole practice of Buddhism on the practical level. The Path starts with Right Understanding. This means having at least a good intellectual knowledge and appreciation for these very Four Noble Truths, especially understanding the law of kamma with all its ramifications with respect to the mind and suffering. This serves as the initial impetus or motivation to begin the spiritual quest or at least to improve the quality of one's mind and life. Right Understanding is followed by Right Thought or Aspiration. One repeatedly ponders over the Dhamma, aspiring to the goal, while giving up gross negative thoughts and pursuits. This understanding and aspiration must now be integrated and manifested into one's daily life by practicing Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood.

These eight factors are best illustrated as functioning like an eight spoked wheel. All must be equally strong to make the wheel turn or roll along the ground smoothly, effortlessly, and effectively. If one spoke is missing or very weak the wheel will roll unevenly or wobble. Even so with the practice of the Noble Eightfold Path. Each aspect of training helps to support and strengthen each other. As one's understanding and commitment grows through steady effort, the life of Dharma gradually gathers momentum until the goal, Nirvana, is reached or realized. The Buddha even called his first sermon at the Deer Park in Sarnath, "Turning the Wheel of Dhamma."

Hearing these Theravada teachings explained in this clear, simple but meaningful way, along with practicing this form of meditation, added a new dimension to my understanding of Buddhism and life in general. The Noble Eightfold Path seemed like such a logical step by step formula or process for spiritual growth and awakening from the beginning to the end. One just has to get started and 'do it' by oneself; Buddhas only point the way. In fact, the Buddha's last words before he passed away were an exhortation to

the monks and lay devotees who were standing around crying. He said, "I've expounded the Dhamma in all possible ways, nothing is hidden; take this Dhamma for your refuge; light the lamp of Dhamma within you; don't depend on anyone else to save you. All conditioned things are impermanent; work out your salvation with diligence." This was the way I was beginning to see and accept what I had to do. With my growing leanings to these Theravada or Hinayana teachings, I could almost envision Lama Zopa and Lama Yeshe shaking their heads in disapproval, but I couldn't seem to do anything about it.

The days seemed to go amazingly fast. I was bewildered that within a few days I would have to leave the peaceful environs of the meditation center and go back out into the hectic Indian city scene, hassling with rickshaw-wallahs and railway stations. There had been an almost constant presence of local curious Indians outside the fenced in compound. They spent long periods of time staring inside at all of us as we walked around on the breaks, stood in the outdoor chow line, and ate our meals sitting around outside. I amused myself by thinking that these simple minded rural folk were probably wondering what in the heck we white skinned foreigners were doing in here. At times I felt sorry for them and included them in my Bodhisattva meditation at the close of the evening. While Goenkaji was lulling us through his recitations of Metta, I took the liberty to complement it by adding the Buddha visualization and white light radiation. I didn't figure it would hurt anything and I found the combination very stimulating.

On our last night together, Goenkaji gave us an inspiring talk on the subject of Metta and he led us through a longer than usual metta meditation which we all actively participated in. Because of the emotion evoking, almost mesmerizing tone Goenkaji emitted, I got extra 'blissed out' by this particular sitting. It brought a lot of people, including me, near the point of tears. This was due to the obvious deep sincerity and true Metta we felt our Guruji was unreservedly radiating to us and all sentient beings in Samsara.

In the closing talk the following morning, Goenkaji gave us practical advice on how to continue cultivating this vipassana meditation on our own. He mentioned there were many popular forms of meditation being

taught these days by various teachers and gurus. He said mixing different techniques was not beneficial or conducive to steady progress. It would cause one to become confused, alternating back and forth, dissipating one's concentration power. He advised that if we found this particular vipassana technique useful and helpful in aiding our insight and detachment, then we should simply stick to it and develop it fully. There was no need to bother running here and there to learn other systems.

He suggested that when we left here and went back to our respective countries and daily life, or even if we continued to travel around, we should try and sit at least two times per day. Ideally this should be done for one hour in the early morning upon waking and one hour in the evening before sleeping finishing with a short metta meditation. This would be enough, in most cases, to maintain our interest and concentration level so that wisdom and detachment could gradually increase or at least not fade away completely. It would also help greatly to go on at least one ten day intensive teacher-led or self-retreat each year or more often if possible. This would act as a 'wisdom battery charge' and time to dive deeper within. He said this minimum amount of practice was sufficient for laypeople in their daily life who cannot afford to spend all of their time meditating like monks in the forest. He also reiterated the need to continue observing the five precepts in our daily life. Without these sensible restraints, the life would become chaotic and our heart unfulfilled.

Before leaving the course, everyone had the opportunity of meeting individually with the teacher. This was to offer our thanks and appreciation, for the wonderful gift of Dhamma he so generously showered on us or ask any questions on our mind. When my turn came, I conveyed to him how this sweeping technique had revolutionized my meditation practice and offered my deepest thanks. I also asked him if it would be OK to instruct others in this simple practice, referring specifically to my parents. He replied that it would be OK, but only for mom and dad or other close family members who otherwise would never have an opportunity to learn. He warned, however, not to change or modify the technique but to explain it exactly as he had taught it. He cautioned against thinking of myself as a teacher and start teaching openly, advising that I should just try and be

content with doing this practice for myself and develop it as far as possible in order to reap the hidden benefits of long-term practice. This sounded like good advice. I respectfully bowed my head with the two palms together in the customary manner and took his leave feeling refreshed and elated. I was now ready to hit the road.

In the last few days of the course, the tendency to start planning and fantasizing about what I would do next arose several times, but I did my best to disregard it.

I did, however, make up my mind to definitely head down to Goa. It was now the beginning of February and the mild, pleasant, winter beach season would soon draw to a close, becoming uncomfortably hot and humid along the southern coastline. I hoped to get in a month or so of pleasant weather living naked on the beach where I could continue this meditation and get back to more yoga exercises which I had sorely missed. Goenkaji said that it was OK to do yoga exercises on our own as long as we did not get too preoccupied with the body and let it take time away from the meditation sittings. From Goa, I would most probably continue on over to Ceylon where I could go on more intensive retreats at the established centers there. But first things first, I went back to Benares by train along with many others from the course and again stayed at the Burmese Vihar.

From some of the other westerners I was able to find out useful info on the best way to get down to Goa and put together my proposed route. I would travel by train down to Bombay and from there take a ship cruise to Panjim, the capital of Goa. On the way south, however, I planned to make the sidetrip to visit the magnificent ancient Buddhist caves at Ajanta. Most of the people I talked to raved about how 'far out' they were, a must if one was anywhere in the region. As I considered myself a Buddhist pilgrim of sorts, I figured it would be appropriate and historically interesting.



CHAPTER II

AJANTA CAVES, AURANGABAD

The train pulled into Jalgaon on schedule early in the morning and I alighted. The station platforms were very quiet and people were laying out here and there sleeping. Upon looking around I discovered a suitable spot on the floor in the second class waiting room where I spread out my bedroll. I took advantage of the pre-dawn quiet and did an hour of sweeping meditation and metta radiation before the activity and noise began with people moving about in expectation of arriving trains. I observed my ego wanting to continue sitting so that people would see me as a meditating yogi. I thought it would be good for these Indian people to see someone, especially a foreigner, practicing their ancient traditions which, by and large, they have ignored or forgotten. I tried to determine the real motivation for this showing off. Was it purely egoistic pride to appear more spiritual than them, or was it out of genuine compassion, so they would not forget their rich spiritual heritage and maybe start questioning themselves? Perhaps it was a little of both, along with, of course, doing it for my own sake. This was a self-examination that I would be confronted with many times.

I decided to try hitchhiking towards Ajanta which was about one hundred miles away but stopped first to eat a breakfast of fresh puree. On the way out of town I passed a small colorful Hindu temple where I paused to observe the activity. Two bare chested Brahmin priests in their white dhotis were busy performing the morning puja, washing down the statues of the gods inside while ringing bells, lighting incense and chanting the sacred Sanskrit mantras. Several local devotees were on hand to receive the gray and red powder that they applied to their foreheads. There was a pleasant air of devotion and feeling of sanctity about the shrine. This caused me to consider the purpose of all this external ritual and worshipping gods. What is God anyway? Is it the creative energy or universal consciousness principle that activates the manifested, conditioned world? If so, why the need for all these statues, pujas, rubbing powder over the body and so forth.

I did not really know enough about Hinduism to make a judicious judgment. I would only better understand this later on in my experience at an active Yoga Ashram. For now I felt that vipassana meditation seemed much more direct and simple.



The Ajanta Caves were carved into the face of a giant crescent shaped cliff of solid granite and evolved between the sixth and twelfth centuries A.D. The immense undertaking was initiated and carried out by, to say the least, devoted and energetic Buddhist monks. There are twenty-nine individual caves in all. Most of them were used as dwelling quarters, shrine rooms and meditation halls. Many large size Buddha images are carved directly into niches in the granite chambers. Many also have wall paintings or frescos depicting various Buddhist themes, some of which are surprisingly well preserved.

The caves are on one side of a narrow gorge. The river that carved its snake like path through this area falls from the top of the cliff at the head of the canyon into the *cul de sac* below, forming a pool. The stream flows from here on down through the canyon below the caves. At the base of the cliff is a well kept park with lush vegetation and picnic tables with the stream and waterfall pool nearby. As I gazed upon this picturesque setting I spied what looked to be an ideal spot for spending the night under the full moon, as it just so happened to be. I saw the park employees walking up a steep path to a lookout point on top of the cliff opposite the caves. I followed them up to the top and found a cozy little viewpoint complete with a concrete bench and covered roof. From here the view across the Gorge to the caves was fantastic. The whole horseshoe shaped curve of the canyon wall with the doors to the caves, could be unobstructedly scanned from end to end. The head of the canyon with the waterfall, the park and pool below looked exquisite from this angle. I speculated that when the moon came out it would light up the whole area and be an incredibly enchanting sight; I instantly knew that this was where I would be that full moon night. Upon

searching around, I found a bunch of dried weeds which I pulled up and made into a crude mattress for a more sleeping comfort.

The trail from here followed near the edge of the cliff top back to the start of the gorge where the waterfall is and continues beyond about a half mile to a village. Most of the park attendants and casual laborers lived in the village to where they were now returning. As I was sitting at the viewpoint watching the sunset a couple of these fellows stopped to chat. In adequate English they told me this was an inhospitable place to sleep as it got cold at night and there were snakes in the area. They inquired what I would eat and I showed them my bananas and peanuts. The two shook their heads at the scanty fare and evidently took pity on me. One of the friendly chaps invited me to accompany him home to eat a home cooked meal of rice, chapattis, dhal, and vegetable and sleep on a rope-strung bed. It was tempting but I declined his sympathetic offer of humble hospitality. I did not wish to budge from my bird's eye view, anticipating the moon rising very soon. Respecting my obvious strong desire to remain, the fellow said he would bring me some milk and chapattis in the morning on his way to work.

As the full moon rose in the sky the soft light gradually filled up the entire canyon; the entrance of the caves could be seen in plain detail with the tree covered park and waterfall pool below looking very enchanting. It was indeed one of the most breath-taking sights by moonlight that I could remember ever having seen, equal to the Himalayan skyline from Naudanda ridge behind Pokhara. A wish, "I sure would like to be tripping on psychedelics now" came into my mind, and I immediately recognized it as being merely an old strong habit pattern. I was becoming so captivated and inwardly tranquil by the beautiful panorama unfolding before me that I thought I probably couldn't get much higher, even on drugs. The scene was inducing a natural psychedelic high and I was becoming filled with a new kind of energy that I hadn't experienced before, except maybe on mescaline. I speculated that maybe it was due to the special exhilarating energy of the full moon combined with the meditation and yoga practice I had been doing over the last two months. I even tried sitting cross-legged to meditate with my eyes closed but found it difficult to resist looking at the gorgeous spectacle.

I tried to imagine what it must have been like to live here during that flourishing period when hundreds of monks were working and meditating in the caves. It is believed that the monks grew their own food in fields on top of the cliffs. It boggled my mind to try and fathom how any religion or religious leader could inspire people to undertake such a stupendous, seemingly impossible, project; I reasoned that it had to be great. But I was just beginning to scratch the surface of that greatness. As the moon reached the zenith and began descending in the west the inner energy which had filled me to overflowing gradually diminished. The night was cool here on the Deccan Plateau and my trusty old jalaba provided the right touch of cozy comfort as I laid down on the improvised bed of soft weeds.

I awoke at the crack of dawn feeling refreshed and sat for an hour session of meditation. I began with a few of the inspirational Tibetan prayers and the white light/black smoke breathing purification before getting down to the vipassana sweeping. I ended with a white light metta radiation to all sentient beings. As I was finishing up, as if by coincidence, I heard the sounds of the men coming from the village beyond the waterfall on their way to work. They sounded happy and carefree, whistling and singing as they made their way along the rim of the canyon. The fellows who offered to bring me breakfast arrived with a Tiffin container with fresh buffalo milk and a few cold chapattis. I gratefully accepted this and partook of it thoughtfully as my benefactors looked on with smiles on their lean brown faces. I was really beginning to get a warm feeling for the impact of ancient religious culture in the hearts of these Indian people, especially in the rural areas. They tried their best within their humble means to treat the guest as God.

I was still so mesmerized by the aesthetic beauty of the place that I decided to remain another day and night. I took a second, slower, self guided tour through some of the more interesting caves, sitting periodically in an obscure dark corner to meditate. While meditating in one of the interior cells a groups of tourists came very near. I thought if they looked in and saw me it would probably surprise or shock them. One of the children did peer inside and evidently made out my dark outline and recognized me

as a real person instead of a stone statue. He called out to his mommy and daddy proclaiming his unusual discovery and the whole family came to take a peek at this strange sight, sitting like a stone Buddha. I could not help but chuckle under my breath at their naivety as they whispered back and forth to each other trying to figure me out. The desire arose to open my eyes just enough to peek at them but I fought off the temptation. I thought if they saw me open my eyes it might destroy the image in their minds of me being absorbed in deep samadhi, oblivious to the world, as I wanted to be seen. I realized this was another crafty exhibition of the ego but, nonetheless, I continued to sit motionless until they departed. In these little games it was difficult for me to know if whether what I was doing to weaken the ego was, in fact, subtly increasing it. This play of the ego would only be sufficiently understood and skillfully dealt with after considerably more practice and experience. Until then, I had to work on it by trial and error, as in everything else.

In the afternoon I hung out in the park beside the gurgling stream and had a stimulating shower under the cascading waterfall. Later on, a lone French traveler named Charles showed up in the park and inevitably we met and struck up conversation. He informed me of a secluded un-crowded beach at the very north of Goa which boasted a fresh water pond only fifty feet from the seashore. There were little huts around the pond built and abandoned by former travelers, which could be utilized by anyone if not already occupied. It sounded like an ideal place to suit my intended purpose.

During the course of conversation he pulled out a stash pouch and proceeded to roll a joint of Kerala grass.⁶ Upon seeing this, I noticed the desire to smoke a little come into the mind, knowing that he would no doubt offer to share it with me. At first I questioned myself if I should or shouldn't. I wondered if it would be violating the fifth precept of not taking intoxicating stimulants. I knew both of my teachers, Lama Zopa and Goenkaji, would not approve and I knew it would only be going back to an old habit. I had smoked that hash joint in the cafe in Kathmandu and hadn't enjoyed it. Was that a sign that I would never enjoy it again? Maybe I

⁶ Potent marijuana grown in the South India state of Kerala.

didn't need it anymore; last night I was so naturally high without anything except nature. I was confident that I was now not attached to or psychologically dependent to the stuff, nor was I intentionally seeking it out. But I reasoned that it might be interesting to see how it would affect me now after this long interval. After all, it was only a grass joint without the unpleasant side effect of tobacco and I might get a pleasant little buzz on which I could experiment with meditation. I had not taken the fifth precept as a life vow anyway and I was sure I wouldn't lose control of my mind. I would just take a couple of tokes to be sociable while remaining in the flow of the present situation. Refusing to smoke might upset the friendly vibes between us and Charles might think I was a spiritual snob; it would also indicate a kind of aversion in my mind — an aversion against smoking.

All of these thoughts, pro and con, arose within the time that it took Charles to finish rolling the big fat joint. I was amazed how quickly and efficiently the mind could recapitulate all those past events and feelings about dope smoking and come up with an answer in a similar manner as a computer. I gave in to this remnant of old habit and tried not to let any preconception of being a 'meditator' or being 'Holy' inhibit the ability to accept whatever it may bring. I was able to relax into it and did get a noticeable pleasant high. It helped to silence a lot of the internal dialogue I was having and I became more sensitive to the sounds and movement of the nature around. It was similar to the state of consciousness I had experienced after one or two hours of sweeping meditation during the last retreat, when I would get up and walk outside. I came to the rough conclusion that, at least this time, the smoke aided as a substitute for the otherwise long process of sitting and struggling with the ego's chitter chatter, in order to reach that same state. But I knew it definitely was not a substitute.

I then detected in my mind the desire to hang around Charles, maybe suggesting both of us sleep up at the lookout point, so I could perhaps smoke another joint with him that evening. That was the last straw! I decided there and then to go my own way before a habit formed again. Once was OK, but wanting to smoke a second time meant attachment and I realized that I was perhaps not yet so strong in that respect. It is easy to give up or forget about something when the influence is absent but when

opportunity knocks, it all tends to rush back, sometimes with even greater force. I vividly described the hilltop viewpoint and my experience there under the full moon the previous night, recommending that he try it. And he agreed that it did sound nice and that he would probably do just that. I would sleep at the waterfall pool at the base of the canyon wall.

Before it got dark the two of us walked over to the parking area to stock up on fruit to last till the following day. On the way back I pointed out to Charles the trail ascending to the lookout point and bid him a pleasant evening. He offered to roll me a joint to smoke later that evening by myself but I cut it off with a polite, “No thank you” and walked off before I had a chance to change my mind. Before my close encounter with the Dhamma, I never bothered with these kinds of moral decisions or trying to control the mind. I simply did whatever came into my mind without necessarily questioning or judging it as being right or wrong, skilful or unskillful. But now, with this meditation practice and gung-ho spirit to purify the mind or whatever, all this scrutinizing and mental detective work took on more significance. It became more or less an urgent task, and very interesting to boot.

For convenience I rode a local bus out to the main highway from where I began thumbing south. After a truck ride of fifty miles a Government of India jeep stopped and gave me a lift the remaining distance to Aurangabad. I had not heard much about this city and was figuring to just walk on out the other side and make it to the Ellora Caves that same day. While walking through the city I saw an interesting looking place that appeared to be a tourist attraction. People were paying fifty paise to go inside a high walled compound which enclosed something resembling a mosque. Being a bit curious and not in such a big hurry, I purchased a ticket and entered. It turned out to be a memorial for a Muslim Saint called, Panchakki. To escape the heat of the day I went into the cool chamber containing the tomb of whoever it was, and sat down cross-legged on the mat covering the floor. Several Muslim men were quietly contemplating so I thought this would be a suitable place to meditate awhile. In the meantime, many people came in and out.

When I went out onto the street about an hour later a young man approached me and started a polite conversation. He spoke fluent English and explained how he had seen me sitting in the tomb meditating, and inquired if I was a Muslim. I told him no, that I was a Buddhist. He exuberantly replied that he too was a Buddhist and that he was very happy to meet me. He invited me, or rather insisted, that I come to his house to meet his friends and discuss Buddhism. I tried to explain to him that I was hoping to make it to Ellora that same day but he practically begged me to delay a day or two. He said not many foreigners came by this way, especially Western Buddhists and this was a good opportunity for him to be of service. He added that this was a nice city where all religions were freely practiced and religious harmony prevailed, with a lot of good people and interesting sights to see. There was also a big Buddhist College and new University which he would take me to visit.

This enthusiastic, educated, polite young man whose name was Sardar, seemed to be sincere, and he was the first professed Indian Buddhist I had yet met. As I was in no particular hurry, I decided to go with the flow and went along with him. He led me on a fifteen minute walk to the outskirts of town where he was living. On the way he talked almost constantly, telling me all about himself, his Buddhist friends and the city. Sardar was a student at the new Marathwada University and was working as an aide for the Vice-Chancellor. Most of the students attending the University and at the nearby Milinda College were Buddhists. Milinda College was started by the late Dr. B. R. Ambedkar who championed the conversion of over a million low caste Hindus to Buddhism, starting back in 1956. The conversions were initiated mostly for socio-economic reasons and not because the people believed in the Buddha or his teachings necessarily. Most of the converts probably had little or no firm intellectual knowledge of the Four Noble Truths or knew even who the Buddha was, at least in the beginning. But, nevertheless, they sincerely wanted to improve their lives, and if it meant changing their religion and becoming a Buddhist, then they were open to it and willing to learn.

Sardar lived within the house of a Muslim family and was anxious for me to meet his esteemed Muslim friend. Mr. Quaz-Sir was a schoolteacher and

a very devout Muslim, though he respected and honored all great religions. He was very keen on hearing my own views on Buddhism and was even interested to learn the practice of meditation. He cordially invited me to have dinner with him that evening. I could not refuse. That night I slept up on the flat roof of the house in order to be alone and have a quiet place to meditate and to enjoy the incredible display of twinkling stars. I was informed by the professor of chemistry who I met the next day that the air around Aurangabad contained the highest percentage of oxygen and was purer than anywhere else in India, and perhaps the world — according to him.

In the morning Sardar took me to visit the college and University where he introduced me to many of his friends and professors. At the University I met and had tea with the Vice-Chancellor and a few lesser administrators. On my enquiry they explained about the curriculum and degrees offered in Buddhist studies, Pali and Sanskrit. An idea now sprung into my head about the possibility of studying here myself sometime in the near future. I wondered if this University would be recognized as an accredited institution for which I could receive the G.I. Bill of educational benefits. I knew it was applicable to many foreign Universities and I was still entitled to three more years of benefits. I toyed with the idea of using this free money and take a degree course in Pali and Buddhism. It might please my parents as a second best, and it would be a good way to remain in Asia for a few more years and even get paid for it! On my request I was given a tour of the large well stocked library where many students were diligently studying. It was interesting to observe my mind racing ahead to the future and creating fantasies about going back to college. I asked the VC about transferring my two years of junior college work so that I could enroll at the third year level. He seemed to think it might be possible but I would have to arrange to have the transcripts sent here to be examined. He informed me that getting a student visa from the Indian Government could take some time.

The Chemistry professor who told me about the purity of the air was keen on learning the practice of meditation but there was nobody around who could teach them. He politely asked if I would teach him the basics, and out

of compassion, I agreed. Another of the professors earnestly wanted me to give a lecture on the practice of meditation to his Buddhist Philosophy class. Now I felt I was a little more capable and experienced to deliver a reasonably intelligent and accurate talk on the subject. I hoped it would give them a deeper view about meditation than they had evidently been getting. I also figured it would be a good experience for me to stand in front of a group and give a lecture, in order to see my own ability, nervousness or other reactions. I hadn't done something like this since my speech class at junior college, so I accepted the invitation and it was arranged for the following morning.

That night I went to the Chemistry professor's house and taught him the simple practice of anapanasati breath awareness as I learned in the first three days of the Goenka course. The two of us sat silently together for about fifteen minutes while I reminded him to bring his awareness back to the tip of the nose if his mind wandered astray. He enjoyed the brief experience and I encouraged him to try and practice it for twenty or thirty minutes, once in the morning and once in the evening. Knowing his busy schedule and family life, I figured this would be all he could manage if he even continued at all.

It was funny how all of a sudden I was being elevated to a position of authority on the subject of meditation and being asked to teach. I had been a Buddhist for only the last three months whereas some of these people had been converted to Buddhism several or more years prior. It helped me to realize how superficial their understanding was and how starved they were for some practical guidance and inspiration. Their Buddhism was mostly an intellectual pursuit and a group identification among the college crowd, but of no real fault of their own. I couldn't help but have sympathy for their predicament but I did not want to get too personally involved. I remembered Goenkaji's parting words to me against teaching. I knew I still had a lot of work to do on myself and I did not wish to commit myself to something I was not really prepared to do, which could have been easy under those circumstances. So I decided to continue on my carefree way the next day after delivering the talk in the morning.

I spent a lot of time that night trying to decide what I should talk about and how to introduce the main topic of meditation. This would be the first time that I was to give a more or less impromptu speech about anything to a group of people and I was understandably somewhat nervous. I was not a scholar or authority on the subject nor did I have any special spiritual attainment. I simply had a little theoretical knowledge supported by a bit of practical meditation experience, which put me in touch more closely with the reality that the knowledge was merely pointing to. Most of these converted Buddhists were familiar with the Theravada approach rather than the Mahayana or Tibetan style. So I thought it would be more effective to introduce the subject through the Theravada teachings and vipassana meditation. I decided to start off by explaining the Four Noble Truths in a way they could relate to. I would then describe from my own limited experience something about the actual mechanics of vipassana practice, cultivating a calm mind by concentration, from which to become aware. This would be the framework of the discourse while the precise, step-by-step words and explanation I would just have to come up with or improvise as it went along.

In the morning Sardar walked with me over to Milinda College for the lecture scheduled at 10 A.M. By this time the word had gotten out that an American Buddhist was going to deliver a talk on meditation. All of a sudden I found myself entering an auditorium where about one hundred and fifty persons, mostly young men were waiting. It had grown from a single class talk to a formal lecture for the whole college or whoever wanted to come. Other classes had been cancelled especially for this so-called rare occasion. I could feel myself becoming quite nervous with butterflies in the stomach as Sardar led me up to the stage.

Sardar gave the customary introduction about who I was and how he came to meet me and persuaded me into staying with him these two days and so on. All this while my heart was pounding noticeably and my mind became cloudy and I was at a loss where to begin. This physical and mental reaction or stage fright took me by surprise and I wondered if I would be able to speak properly or coherently or if the audience would notice it. I closed my eyes and took a few slow deep breaths while telling myself to

relax, relax, relax. It seemed to be effective and slowly the outline of what I wanted to say came into focus and the heart beat slowed a little.

I shakily began by thanking my kind host, Sardar, for his introduction and the professor who invited me to speak and arranged the assembly. I started the subject matter with a brief synopsis of Prince Siddhartha's life, stressing that his motive for abandoning the royal life was to discover the origin and cure of suffering at its deepest level. Once I got into speaking I relaxed more and the words gradually flowed almost effortlessly, much to my pleasant surprise.

I went on to describe how much of our individual physical problems and pain has its roots in the mind; each person, in accordance with one's accumulated ignorance, greed and aversion, self-creates for the most part, his or her own sorrow or happiness. I then explained how by meditation we can develop awareness which allows us to control the mind's negative, unwholesome outflow and cultivate the wisdom that can set us free. I ended by describing the metta meditation and how wisdom and compassion are like the two wings of a bird, strengthening and complementing each other on the path of spiritual awakening. I wished them all the best for happiness and fulfillment in their new found religion and lease on life, and encouraged them to take up the practice of meditation.

At this, one young man stood up and asked if I would remain in the area for some time to ground them in the practice of meditation. I replied that I was still practically a beginner in all of this myself and did not feel qualified or self-assured enough to teach others on a formal level. I related how I was continuing my own inner search and practice of the Noble Eightfold Path, doing what I thought to be helpful and conducive for my inner growth. And at present, I was trying to follow the flow of impermanence by keeping on the move, not getting attached or stuck anywhere in travelling or in thinking. I did not tell them, however, that I was on my way to live naked on the beach in Goa. I did inform them about U. N. Goenka and his ten-day meditation courses, and suggested they write to him and invite him to come to conduct a retreat in this area. Sardar closed the meeting by thanking me for sharing with them my understanding

of the essence of Buddhism and inspiring them. Everyone seemed very appreciative and I was quite satisfied with the outcome.

I rather enjoyed the brief, whirlwind tour in this amiable city of Aurangabad. It would not be the last time I saw the place. I later found out that the Marathwada University was not on the official list to receive the educational assistance and so I dropped that fantasy. Getting a University degree in Buddhism was not my deepest heart's desire, nor did I consider it necessary for understanding the essence of Dhamma.





CHAPTER 12

GOA

By following the travel plan, I arrived in the middle of bustling Bombay in the late afternoon. The primary objective for coming here was to take the overnight boat down to Panjim. But as the name Bombay conjured up exotic images in my mind, I wanted to have a quick look around, just to say, I'd been there. I had not heard anything very favorable about Bombay from travelers except that there were a couple of cheap hotels located around the Gateway of India. The first thing on the agenda was to go straight down to the dockside and inquire when the next boat for Goa was leaving. I was glad to hear that the next sailing was the following afternoon. I was able to secure passage at this time for second class deck accommodation and then made my way across this huge city to the Gateway to India. I easily located the hotels I sought and, in one, I managed to get the last bed in the crowded dormitory.

In the morning I took a walk in the modern downtown business district which surprised me with its wide streets and ultra modern office buildings and well stocked stores. As I browsed through a large bookstore I picked up a book entitled *Yoga Self Taught*, written by an Indian Yoga teacher named Sri Yogendra. After skimming through it I decided to buy it. It seemed to be well written and it had a lot of pictures. I had already been practicing a few simple yoga exercises, but this book showed many new postures that appeared useful and more difficult. I was ready to try some different challenging positions to push my body a little further in flexibility. It also gave a short but clear explanation of the philosophy behind yoga — being a complete practice which purifies and integrates both aspects of the body and mind to achieve Self-Realization and Moksha⁷. The postures and exercises were neatly illustrated and it described a system of rhythmic breathing which coordinated in and out breathing with the movements involved. It looked and sounded interesting and seemed to add a new

⁷ The Hindu equivalent of the Buddhist's Nibbana - liberation from the rounds of birth and death; sometimes called Brahma Nirvana.

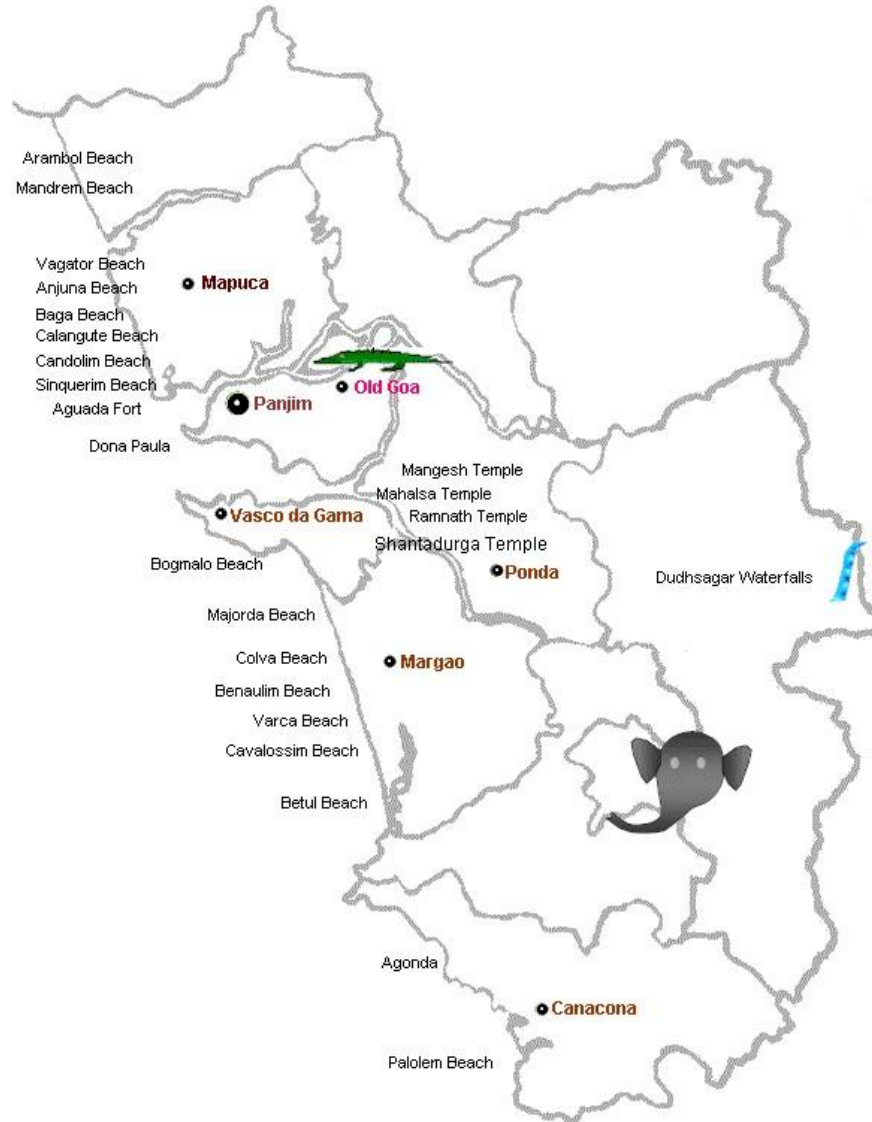
dimension to the practice that I was not aware of previously. I figured I would have a lot of time and a perfect environment living on the beach to systematically go through it and the prospect excited me even more.

I arrived at the wharf a little early hoping to be among the first to board in order to select a good spot on the deck to spend the night. There were already a lot of people in line evidently with the same idea, many being westerners like myself anxious to reach the long awaited paradise. When everyone was finally on board there was ample room for each person to find his or her preferred niche. I chose a spot aloof from the other foreigners who were already preparing chillums to celebrate sailing over the high seas to the hippy-mecca. The ship embarked right on time, cruising on out of Bombay harbor leaving behind the Gateway of India.

I leaned against the upper deck railing and watched the outline of Bombay grow smaller in the distance. I indulged in romantic thoughts of sailing southward over the tropical waters of the Arabian Sea bound for the palm fringed beaches of Goa. I flashed back with traces of nostalgia to the days in Gomera when our merry band of Riversiders were planning this epic pilgrimage. With a touch of pride, I wondered what my ole high school chums were up to back in smog choked Riverside. Just to rub it in I had sent off to Barry and Larry that morning a postcard depicting the Gateway of India and mentioning the coveted destination. I consoled them in a joking vein that I would do my best to enjoy it for all of them, by smoking a ceremonial chillum in their honor upon arrival and drop acid on the March full moon beach party, which we had all formerly envisioned.

The ship cruised within sight of the coastline dotted with lights from occasional villages. I stayed awake for a few hours gazing into the starry sky in reflective thought and watched the waning crescent moon rise over the sleeping subcontinent. I finally curled up in my cozy jalaba on the wooden deck and let the gentle undulations of the vessel's forward motion lull me to sleep. In the early morning while the moon was still high over the watery western horizon I awoke and sat for a period of meditation, closing with a sincere outflow of metta in all directions. The sun's orange orb rising over the palm-fringed shores of India's south-west coast was picture

perfect. We were now nearing the end of the voyage as the ship sailed past the inviting beaches of North Goa into the idyllic tropical harbor and state capital, Panjim.



The whole state of Goa is very small compared with other Indian States, having a coastline of only about sixty miles. But within this relatively short space lie some of India's most beautiful and popular beaches. Some time back in the sixties the exodus of western vagabonds coming East somehow discovered this tucked away touch of paradise. And ever since, the popularity and fame of its beaches, which boasted a free lifestyle of open nudity and dope smoking, grew. The more popular beaches where the

majority of the foreigners stayed were strung out along several miles of coastline north of Panjim. During the winter months on the full moon a tradition of having a wild party lasting all night evolved. The story has it that during the Christmas full moon rock groups from Europe showed up with their equipment and put on free beach concerts for the party. And apparently they brought loads of LSD along as well. Speakers and amplifiers were left behind for the sake of future parties. In other months live music is substituted by a tape player and supply of late sixties/seventies era rock music. Anjuna beach was the site of the big parties. Although I was not keen on joining in with all the crowd with their partying and so on, I at least wanted to check it out, if just out of curiosity.

My first destination, however, was the secluded beach at the north end of Goa, called Arambol Lake of which Charles had informed me. As it was still about three weeks until the full moon I thought to stay there to get in a private retreat of meditation and yoga, going to Anjuna beach in time to catch the notorious full moon party. By then I would have about two weeks left on my visa, just enough time to journey down to the tip of India and swing back up the east coast to Rameswaram where the ferry leaves for Ceylon. This was the tentative plan forming in the back of my mind.

Before heading out to Arambol Lake I purchased two meters of lightweight orange cloth to wear as a mini sarong to replace my cotton pants while at the beach. I got off the bus at a small village following the instructions Charles gave me, proceeding through a cluster of squalid thatched houses to the beach a half mile beyond. Here I encountered the notorious Goa pigs roaming here and there searching out fresh human excreta or other less delectable filth they could gobble up. I amused myself by speculating what sort of negative kamma caused rebirth in such a state.

The solitary restaurant where I would be taking my one daily meal was situated where the palm grove met the beach. It was a small thatched structure with an eating area and a kitchen of sorts in the back. I took a rest inside sitting at one of the tables and decided to try out the raw vegetable salad, knowing it would be the last food I ate until the following noon. The joint was empty except for the young Indian fellow who ran it. Fruit and vegetable salads were all that he prepared; he didn't even have the usual tea

or soft drinks. Charles had told me about this restaurant. Instead of taking provisions with me to cook I decided to walk the short distance each day about noon and eat just one meal of a fruit and vegetable salad. That was supposed to be a good Yogi's diet. The salads cost only one rupee each.

The salad was substantial and tasty, consisting of cabbage, carrot, cucumber and tomato all chopped and mixed and flavored with a dash of lemon and salt. I complimented him on it and said I would be coming probably every day around noon to eat one of each for my daily meal. I inquired if it would be possible to obtain drinking water from him for my bottle when I came each day and he agreed. He brought the water he used from the village well a short distance away. Before leaving I queried him as to how many foreigners were currently at the lake, hoping it would be a small number; I was comforted when he reckoned less than ten. I thanked the amiable fellow saying I'd see him tomorrow and set out on the final leg around the rocky headland.

As the trail snaked its way through the rocks, I began to see crude shelters perched on top of the cliff above. In one of them, I noticed two persons apparently smoking a chillum while the other three or four spots appeared to be abandoned. When I emerged onto the beach proper, I paused to pull off my clothes to feel more at home. I saw only a few persons scattered over the comparatively short stretch of beach. At the far end a few hundred yards away was another bluff which, sealed the area off giving a sense of seclusion. To the right, about thirty yards from the shoreline, was the edge of the fresh water pond where I sat down to scan the intriguing surroundings.

Situated around the perimeter of the pond at the water's edge were several makeshift campsites and simple shelters in which a few people could be seen. Smoke from a wood fire silently curled into the air, disappearing into nothingness. It was a small lake, almost round and approximately thirty yards across. It was situated between two parallel tree covered ridges which began at the beach and reached inland on both sides for about half a mile, forming a narrow isolated valley covered with dense foliage. The source of the fresh water came from a stream originating somewhere at the rear of the

valley. The whole place was truly a serene setting of immense natural beauty with so few people to enjoy it. The paucity of nature-loving freaks was uncanny in view of the fact that hundreds of them were crowded together at Anjuna, not that far away. I didn't know the reason for this but I was delighted. May be it was just nature's way of keeping this spot extra special for those who were destined, as it were, to make it here.

When the initial wonder wore off, I took a walk around the lake to look for a likely camping site to use as a base to keep my gear. I found a suitable spot which had been used before, on the opposite side; it was a small, cleared area beside the water's edge surrounded by trees and bushes completely hidden from outside view. After a little rest I went out on the beach for a sunset meditation. Five or six people were on the beach some distance away toking up their chillums. I heard one of them invoking the familiar "Bom Shiva," which caused me to chuckle, thinking I was beyond it now. And with an image of myself as a 'real' yogi, I assumed the meditative pose, and watched the bright orange sun sink over the horizon of the Arabian Sea. Just before dark, I returned to the campsite to fetch my jalaba, blanket and water bottle with the intention of sleeping on the beach. I was quite tired now and managed only a short metta meditation prior to stretching out to gaze at the constellations as they were exposed clearly above.

I awoke with the first rays of dawn and sat for an hour of sweeping followed by the usual few yoga exercises in the warm morning air. On the west coast of India the sun rises over the subcontinent and here on the beach the sun cannot be seen until about 7.30 or 8 A.M. when it clears the surrounding cliffs. After exercising, I laid out to rest until the sun's warm rays finally began bathing my naked body. It was so relaxing I dozed off again and woke up when it had become too warm and ran to dive into the cool refreshing sea.

To remove the crusty feeling of drying salt, I skinny dipped into the fresh water of the lake conveniently nearby. It was a real nice contrast. The water was quite shallow and contained many thick patches of water plants so was not so suitable for regular swimming. Instead, I sat cross-legged on the

sandy bottom a couple feet from the edge in sounder deep water, absorbing the cool current from underneath while the sunshine reflected off the mirror surface into my face. I got the best of both worlds at the same time and tried to merge these two distinct feelings into one unique experience. A young female had come equipped with an air mattress and was floating silently over the placid water sunning her backside, at the far end amongst the tall reeds. It was such a tranquil scene.

Back on my beach blanket, I began reading the first chapter in the yoga book. It was so interesting I carried on for almost an hour, looking over the illustrations. The author described how the body and mind, two aspects of our being, are integrated into one organic whole for all intents and purposes. When both function harmoniously in mutual cooperation then health and well-being is a natural result. At the highest level it leads to Self-Realization — that we are not separate from the whole, but are the whole, in terms of all pervading Cosmic-Consciousness. Deep rhythmic breathing helps to purify the nervous system and serves as the basis for many of the body movements and postures. He introduced a system of breathing coordinated with the physical movements. Various postures bend and stretch the body in most major ways. There were helpful diagrams and pictures along with the explanations to make it clearer. It looked and sounded very scientific and promising and I would start that evening working on a few.

On returning from lunch at the restaurant I took a rest in the shade of my campsite during the heat of the afternoon. In the late afternoon, I went through several of the new yoga exercises coordinating them with the breathing as instructed. The standing movement/postures stretched and loosened up the spinal vertebrae and other joints to a degree the previous exercises I had been doing had not. They were fairly simple forward, backward, side bending and lateral twisting movements, but when synchronized with deep rhythmic breathing it had a new, invigorating effect, giving an extra boost. I could feel rushes of sensations which I interpreted as the life force (prana) spreading all throughout the body. I followed the thirty-minute workout with a five-minute relaxation lying stretched out on my back as instructed in the book. Though I had by no

means executed them perfectly this first time, I could see the potential of doing it this way. More concentration was required to coordinate everything so the mind had less idle time to wander; I felt more totally in the present, in a semi-meditative state, clearly aware, and this encouraged me. Following the relaxation, I sat up in the cross-legged posture and went right into a period of near effortless sweeping and sunset gazing.

During the next three weeks, I followed basically the same daily routine, sleeping on the beach under the stars and woke up for an hour of mediation at the crack of dawn. I then spent an hour or so going through the regimen of yoga exercises according to the book, adding two or three new ones each day until I was doing the whole series of twelve. I finished with the relaxation period just as the sun rose above the tree tops bathing the bare body with warm soothing rays, followed by a refreshing morning swim of floating on my back beyond the surf line. The rest of the morning was spent with reading, body surfing, floating, sunbathing and occasionally taking a walk exploring the area.

Upon returning from lunch I retired to the shade of the campsite for a respite from the hot afternoon sun. During this rest period, I usually tried to get in some meditation. But it was often disconcerting to observe the mind resorting to making up excuses to cut the sitting short. The most common and hardest to overcome was tiredness, to which I more often than not succumbed after a brief, half-hearted resistance. I would then lay down with the good intention of continuing the sweeping awareness prone but usually wound up dozing off to sleep. I would wake up feeling a little guilty, but consoled myself thinking the light diet was making the body weak and causing the early afternoon tiredness, so out of compassion for my body I deserved a short rest. And this may have been rightly so. But dammit! why did this drowsiness have to occur right when I was trying to meditate every time?

I remembered Goenkaji's talk on the five hindrances to meditation which I had also read in one of the pamphlets I had picked up at Sarnath. *Sloth and torpor is one of these strong hindrances or impediments and it manifests*

as lethargy and mental inertness especially when trying to meditate, stopping awareness dead in its tracks. It is like a cloud of dense fog enveloping the mind and body. The meditator's job is to recognize it as such and drive it out of the mind or dissipate it with strong awareness, to break on through to the other side so to speak. If one is successful the mind achieves a state of clarity, lightness and alertness with which to carry on. I would try doing this but usually without much luck. On other occasions, because of sheer restlessness or uncontrollable daydreaming, I would cut the sitting short with the excuse to read, wash my clothes in the stream or any number of off-the-wall deceptions. Restlessness is another one of the hindrances. I knew all these phony excuses were signs of weak will power to sit longer because I had sat longer, much longer, in the afternoons during the Goenka course.

These experiences underscored the value of group meditation courses and afforded insight into another aspect of the mind. In a group you are more or less compelled to sit for the duration of the designated period, so the mind resigns itself to the ordeal. When alone, however, when the teacher or others aren't around to notice, it is easy to give in to the ingrained habit patterns the hindrances have created and bail yourself out. Essentially it is an escape, running away to avoid the unpleasantness, discomfort or pain of a particular situation. And this is what the mind tries to do consciously or unconsciously most of the time from gross to very subtle levels. This deeper insight into the pleasure, seeking/pain-avoiding reaction syndrome, being the real essence of suffering in the Buddha's teachings, would come to me more clearly later, after much more experience. For now, I had to deal with these pesky hindrances the best I could.

In the late afternoons, I usually made it a point to sit or lay at the shoreline to let the incoming tide wash up against my naked body. I allowed the gentle force of the inrushing water heave my limp body to and fro, trying not to resist, letting go of everything. It was relaxing and insightful until an extra big wave broke sending water and sand surging over my head into the nose and eyes, causing me to choke or sit up briefly

to clean the irritating sand. The gnats and big horse flies also tried my patience and afforded insight on feelings and sensations.

One day at the restaurant I met three young Germans, two girls and a guy, dressed in red/orange clothes with whom I struck up a conversation. Each wore a mala of wooden beads around their necks which had a picture of a bearded yogi hanging from it. They were disciples of a popular Indian Guru named Rajneesh. I had seen some of these orange clad neo sannyassins⁸ before but did not know too much else about it. They told me a little about their Guru's radical Tantric philosophy. Rajneesh says that sex is our biggest hang-up and so much suffering is incurred by the way society and established religions have conditioned us in this regard. Most of us have repressed or suppressed the basic natural instinct thinking it something sinful or naughty in the eyes of God or some other power. This has created the common neurosis that is especially evident in the West, but found in the East also. Therefore, to overcome sexual hang-ups, he expounds his own version of Tantra which includes overt sexual indulgence.

Rajneesh had his main ashram in Poona, east of Bombay where these Germans had lived prior to coming to Goa. There was also a small branch center at Anjuna beach. When newcomers arrived at these ashrams they were usually encouraged to go into the Tantric room. This was a room with mattresses covering the floor where males and females stripped naked and balled their brains out with different partners. The purpose behind this was to wear out the lust for sex or at least overcome any prudishness or inhibitions. This was how Rajneesh got so famous and was dubbed the "Sex Guru" by some writers. There were also classes in other disciplines such as Tai Chi, Sufi dancing, karate, yoga, Zen and even vipassana meditation, plus various encounter/therapy groups, to gain a more refined concentration and awareness.

These young 'neo-sannyassins' were intending to stay at Arambol lake for several days to get away from the crowd at Anjuna beach. That afternoon one of the girls caught sight of me practicing yoga in the

⁸ The references *I*, *II*, ...*X* are listed in the appendix "Numbered Notes".

afternoon which I was not necessarily hiding. When I had finished and returned from a dip in the sea, she came merrily skipping up to me in her birthday suit wearing her mala with the picture of her Guru bobbing between small tanned breasts. She acted carefree as if nothing in the world bothered or inhibited her and she blurted out, “Hi,” and plopped herself down in the sand next to me. She said she had seen me doing yoga and was herself just beginning to learn and asked if I might show her some of the exercises I knew. I could not help but amusingly speculate to myself, “What kind of yoga⁹ does she really want to practice?” I answered that I was also just a beginner but would be happy to show her what I knew. I demonstrated a few of the exercises for stretching the legs and spine and twisting the spine from side to side while explaining the breathing which accompanied the movements. I explained that these helped to release pleasant rushes of energy throughout the body giving a momentary sense of euphoria. She enthusiastically tried these under my helping supervision and got off on it. She thanked me and said that practicing these would help arouse her kundalini¹⁰.

The talkative young German hung around and queried me as to what spiritual path I was following and I replied for the sake of clarity, that I was a Buddhist. To this she spouted her Rajneesh Tantric philosophy of how we must express our desires in whatever form they wish to come out and that life was to be lived as a great celebration of joy. She said her Guru Bhagwan belittled Buddhist monks and nuns who he said are denying their natural instincts to enjoy the world (specifically referring to sex and their vows of celibacy). She went on to say that sex was beautiful and the world should be fully experienced and enjoyed without feeling guilty. During this conversation I could feel a sexual arousal in my mind and body and I had to discreetly change my sitting posture to hide the erection I felt coming, which I’m sure she picked up on. I told her that the Buddhist practice of detachment and non-indulgence was useful for certain people at certain points in their life, and that I was still working on the thorny issue which I had to resolve for myself.

⁹ The word yoga means literally to join or yoke together; I had in mind tantric Yoga.

¹⁰ In the science of Yoga, the dormant spiritual conscious force which lies at the base of the spine and which is aroused through certain Yoga practices; to be explained more, later.

She enticingly invited me to come to their hut near the pond to smoke a joint and celebrate the joy of life with them that night. Evidently their threesome was a bit lopsided and this chick was the loneliest of the trio. I realized that latent sexual desire was indeed in me as I could feel it burning in my gonads and lurking in the back of my mind. Not wanting to appear too eager about the prospect, I replied casually that I would perhaps come over and join them after my evening meditation. She then joyously jumped up and said, “OK, see ya later”. Needless to say, that sunset meditation period was interrupted and foiled by recurring thoughts on the matter.

Knowing the desire was there, I was now in a quandary as to what therapy to apply. I had taken refuge in the Buddha and his precious Dhamma Wisdom and only just now heard about Rajneesh with his radical Tantric methods. Both ways had their own logical basis and appeal but I was still basically a beginner in terms of having effective control over my old habit desires. However, I wanted to remain open to learn new things which is the way I felt we learn for ourself. So I decided that if the opportunity came up to engage in a sexual encounter with one the female sannyassins, I might just take it up but I would not deliberately waste time and mental energy scheming on it.

Just before dark a campfire was lit in front to the trio's hut. Shortly thereafter I donned my orange waistcloth and sauntered over. The guy was busy rolling up a big fat European joint complete with tobacco while the scantily clad girls were preparing a potful of milk coffee over the wood fire which they would pour into a thermos to save for later. We exchanged greetings and I sat down around the fire as they finished their busy work. I had decided beforehand that I would smoke a joint with them if offered and go with the flow of whatever happened without having second thoughts or guilt feelings. When they got settled down I was handed the joint to light up, as I was the guest. I reluctantly accepted and to fit in with all this quasi-holiness I ceremoniously lit it with a big “Bom Shiva, Bom Shankar.” Surprisingly, I got pretty stoned off the few tokes I took and without the adverse effects of the tobacco that I had experienced previously.

The four of us continued to sit around the fire chatting for quite a while into the night and drank the coffee made for this purpose. As the campfire died out thoughts of having sex with Grita, the youngest, and the one I'd taught the yoga to, occupied my mind. And, as if reading my mind, she suggested to me that we go for a walk together on the beach. I was ready for some fresh air and knowing her probable motive, I readily agreed. The other two, who were something like boyfriend and girlfriend, were going their own separate way.

At the far end of the beach we sat down on the sand to gaze at the stars on this warm night. Without wasting much time Grita made the first offensive advances on me to which I openly submitted and reciprocated. Barring details, we passionately explored each other leading to the final consummation. I could feel a great surge of lustful energy being released from inside of me and tried to exhaust it as much as possible. At the same time, however, I was not really enjoying it as such but more just letting the pent up urges out. I tried to keep the experience on an objective level with as much detachment as I could maintain though I wasn't always successful. Grita was hard to satisfy as she had been having more experience during her two months at the ashram. I was tired and somewhat bored after the first round and did not especially care to go on. But as I was doing this primarily as an experiment to discover and hopefully wear out deep rooted latent sexual desire, I conceded to her unsatisfied desires, wishing to eradicate any residual traces.

After a brief rest to rekindle my vital forces, I managed to more or less force myself through two more rounds, following which I was thoroughly depleted and largely disgusted with the whole affair. I wondered if this was an indication of whether I had licked the entire problem once and for all. At least I figured that this would be enough for quite a long time and that the Theravada vipassana technique would be effective for dealing with any residue. For the next two days, until Grita and her two companions left I avoided socializing with them for fear of being lured or tempted again.

By the third week, I had become quite proficient at the yoga exercises and could feel the benefits in terms of increased sense of lightness, energy and

general well-being. This was no doubt augmented and boosted by the light, limited yogic diet of fresh fruit and raw vegetables I had faithfully maintained. Both of these factors aided my ability to concentrate during meditation and overcome most of the inner hindrances and other disturbances. I was able to reach and maintain a satisfyingly high, steady state of mind, similar to that which I experienced during the latter days of the Goenka course.

In this last week two Austrian guys arrived and took up dwelling in one of the shelters on the opposite side of the pond. They were also interested in learning yoga and spiritual things and came to talk with me. We became friendly and they invited me on a couple evenings to come to their camp to share a meal of chapattis and boiled vegetables which they prepared over a wood fire. On these occasions I broke the one meal routine and ate this little bit, thinking to be compassionately sociable and perhaps out of the lure for fresh chapattis. They were new to Eastern Dhamma teachings and began to kind of regard me as somebody who was experienced in these matters. Because I wore an orange cloth, lived alone practicing yoga and meditation, ate only one light meal a day, I must have presented that kind of image.

I explained to them what I knew about the various approaches to Dhamma and they requested me to instruct them in yoga and meditation. So in the morning and evening I showed them several of the yoga exercises and gave them the basic instruction in the anapanasati breath awareness, something to get them started. They were eager and sincere learners as I had been and it felt good sharing the little I knew. It developed into sort of a big brother/spiritual friend relationship from which both sides seemed to mutually benefit. I had to be careful, however, in checking the tendency to put on a false front, pretending to know more than I did. In those circumstances it could have been easy to fall into the ego trip and trap of playing the guru, being “Mr. Spiritual”.

The two Austrians were also planning to attend the full moon party at Anjuna Beach but were going back there a few days earlier. I had already decided that I would go to Anjuna only on the day before the full moon, but we hoped to meet there. I did not really have the desire or purpose to

personally, wantonly indulge in the wild orgy but I had made up my mind to be in the vicinity if only to observe from a distance. This would hopefully satisfy and erase the long standing fantasy and expectation which had been faintly lingering in the back of my mind since leaving Amsterdam. I figured this would be in keeping with Rajneesh's philosophy. I also had a residual inclination for ingesting psychedelics that night if the opportunity presented itself. I had heard that lots of LSD somehow appeared during these parties. If you don't find it first, it usually finds you. I wondered if it might help reveal something deeper or expand the mind, which was now oriented to spiritual horizons.

On the day before the full moon after the early morning routine and taking a swim, I prepared to depart. I felt almost reluctant to leave this little piece of untrammelled paradise. The spot had served its purpose well for me, and now I would leave its unspoiled beauty and charm to others who would come behind. On the beach, with my knapsack on my back, I paused to take one last nostalgic scan across the pond and magic valley and set out around the rocky point. I had decided to walk to Anjuna. This entailed walking south along the coastline for about ten miles which included fording an inlet and taking a rowboat ferry across the wide Chapora River. On the other side in Chapora village, I rested in a cafe for a cool soft drink and some tasty Indian sweets. This was a treat because of my long abstinence and I could see the old desires arise, but I temporarily sided with Bhagwan against suppression and indulged.

Anjuna was still another two miles or so via a footpath over a hill which passed through a couple clusters of houses and restaurants catering to freaks. Here, I bumped into another very familiar face — Ronald. We were both surprised to see each other and I paused to speak with him. His arm was in a cast and he quickly related his sad story. While stoned on heroin, that he was now hooked on, he had stumbled over some rocks and fallen on top of the arm fracturing it. He had traveled from Nepal to Calcutta and down the east coast to Puri with a French female junkie. She was the one who got him started on the nasty habit. In Puri she somehow ripped off his passport and money and absconded, taking all their heroin stash as well, leaving him in a pitiful situation. Since then he had made his way to Goa by

panhandling from other tourists, as was the fate of many western junkies in India. From his run down, haggard appearance and demeanor Ron seemed to be rapidly metamorphosing into another victim of the Asian drug scene.

He very bluntly asked me to give him some money as if I owned it to him. Because I felt pity for him and maybe even having a residue of guilt, I gave him fifty rupees. This was an opportunity to practice charity as an aspect of my Dhamma practice. I had spent practically nothing during the last three weeks and could well afford to part with it. I didn't bother to tell him of my own travels since Nepal as he did not ask. I did mention I was on the way to Ceylon but he didn't seem interested to hear. Upon handing over the money he hurriedly went off, presumably to score a badly needed fix. I reflected again on the accumulated kamma each person has and the various directions it can take one in his or her life, each being wholly unique in that respect. I flashed on the perfect human birth and counted my blessings.



CHAPTER 13

FULL MOON PARTY AT ANJUNA BEACH

With a sense of expectation I arrived at Anjuna beach to behold the world's largest international nudist colony. Hundreds of tanned bare bodies laying, sitting and walking all along the wide sandy beach bordered by an army of tall swaying palms. Not wanting to appear 'square' I tugged off the orange waist cloth, slung it over my shoulder sauntered down the long beach checking out the whole scene. Here and there groups of people were smoking chillums and I even saw a couple copulating right out in the open. There were thatched huts at intervals serving as restaurants as the one at Arambol lake. Near the far end at the base of a cliff I rested from the long day's journey. As I was sitting there my attention was drawn to a familiar face. A guy who was laying face prone nearby sat up and looked around. As if magnetically pulled we both looked at each other with simultaneous recognition. It was Martin, an American that we had met and partied with in Morocco more than a year ago. I easily remembered him with his conspicuous long fluffy red hair and big bushy beard. Because of my radical change in appearance without my long blonde hair it took his memory a few seconds to match up my face with my name. We quickly got together and began relating our individual experiences during the past year and enquiring about the whereabouts of the other's former traveling companions. Martin and his friend Bill had also come overland to India through Afghanistan, gone to Manali and other places in India before ending up here at Anjuna beach. They had been here two months already. They had a little camp spot inside a big clump of bushes nearby. And they had picked up two good looking female traveling companions. I related to him my conversion to a meditative lifestyle and having more or less dropped off using dope. I briefly described how meditation could help the mind lose its dependence for getting high with drugs and could eventually reach a state of constant highness, though I personally had not reached that level. Martin replied that it sounded interesting but he was not yet ready for the kind of commitment and discipline he imagined it would take. He was still enjoying staying stoned most of the time. He had already been at

Anjuna for the last two full moon parties. He described the wild scene as I had heard it before, with everyone tripping on psychedelics and the stereo rock music blaring from big speakers. I told him that is why I had come, to experience it firsthand for myself.

Martin invited me to stay that night with him and Bill and their two blonde friends but I politely declined. I did not want to put a damper on their fun and games with their girlfriends and I preferred to sleep out on the open beach under the stars anyway. I did, however, go inside the cozy bush camp to say 'Hi' to Bill and meet their lady friends. Bill, of course was surprised to see me and we chatted awhile. He enquired if I would like to smoke a reunion chillum, but I told him I'd take a rain check. Not having eaten since morning I was hungry and wished to get something to eat. I left my pack with them and took off to reconnoiter the area. There were a number of thatched hut teashop/restaurants on the beach which served tea, soft drinks, fried potatoes, vegetable and fruit salads and curd. I went into the nearest one to eat a vegetable salad topped off by a fruit salad with curd. It was quite delicious and hit the spot. Inland a short distance via a sandy footpath and among towering coconut trees were many houses, huts and businesses catering to the large transient and semi permanent hippie population. Many foreigners rented houses from the locals and lived here the whole winter season from October to April. Further on was the tiny village of Anjuna which sported a post office, a bus halt, bicycle rental shops, and a few small shops to buy basic supplies. Two miles away was the large village of Mapusa where most of the resident housekeeping hippies came to do their shopping at the weekly market on Saturday. From Mapusa buses could be taken to most points in Goa. This is where I would come in a couple of days to catch a bus southwards out of Goa.

That evening at sunset I gave in to Martin's and Bill's invitation to smoke a chillum for old time's sake in memory of our ole buddies Barry, Larry and Fred. Without feeling guilty, I got quite stoned on the black Afghani hash they had and enjoyed it. Shortly afterwards the sound of a guitar and singing came from about one hundred yards away near the teashop. People were beginning to straggle over in that direction as if lead by a pied-piper. Martin informed me that it was the nightly free feed and sing-along revival

put on each evening by a group of Born Again Christians (Jesus Freaks). About ten of them, all Westerners, lived in a house on the south side of the rocky bluffs about a twenty minute walk away. They used the house as a convenient base to launch their Bible thumping crusade into the 'den of iniquity' around the corner (Anjuna Beach). Each night the group cooked up a big pot of food, usually soup or stew of some kind with rice and chapattis and freely offered it to all who gathered around. While preparing the food a few of the members played guitars and led a spiritual sing-along and encouraged everyone to join in. Just for the fun of it I strolled over and sat down in a cross-legged position as if to meditate. I was still feeling the effects of the chillum and was content to simply sit with my eyes closed listening to the folk-type singing while feeling my body and breathing.

I especially enjoyed on song which went something like, "You must be like a tiny baby to get into the kingdom of heaven." On hearing these words I opened my eyes to see one of the female group members holding a baby in her arms and swaying from side to side. The tiny tot looked so pure and innocent with a big busting smile and laugh from his cute little face. I interpreted the words of the song according to my Buddhist understanding. In the first year of a baby's life it is without conscious self-centeredness, hatred, prejudices, and conditionings of normal life, which are thrust upon him or her when growing up in society. Therefore we have to return to this childlike state of innocence; the mind must be purified of the self-cherishing ego and the mental poisons in order to realize the state of true mental freedom or Nibbana. This I equated with the "Kingdom of Heaven within you". I tried to listen to all the songs in this liberal manner, not taking words like Jesus, God, sin, heaven, salvation, etcetera in the usual Christian dogmatic sense. I read or felt between the lines as it were. I felt no need to sing as I was contemplating on the deeper meaning which I thought was more important. I aroused joyful ecstatic feelings in myself in this way while sitting quietly for about thirty minutes. It was humorous to note that most of the skimpily clad freaks showed up just before the chow was dished out, therefore avoiding the gung-ho revival and departed quickly after eating. Though I had eaten only a couple of hours earlier I couldn't resist the more substantial meal of rice and vegetable stew which I believed would do my skinny body good. Afterwards the group members distributed

themselves among the remaining people to talk on a one to one basis. Having had the experience with the Jesus Freaks in Palm Springs I knew what to expect. But wishing to be polite in deference to their generous hospitality and feeling more confident to talk with them with my newfound Dhamma knowledge, I stood my ground while most of the other hippies split. One of the male members sat down beside me and asked if I believed in Jesus Christ. I replied, "Yes, I believe that he was a great Bodhisattva and Enlightened being." This guy gave me a puzzled look and said, "But do you accept him as the son of God and as your personal savior?" To this I responded, that if a person follows the teachings and example of Jesus, such as renunciation, self-sacrifice and love for all, one could save himself or herself through those thoughts and actions alone; this would be in effect accepting him as one's savior. This caused the fellow some consternation and he quickly pulled out his Bible to begin refuting me by quoting the following passages: "I am the Truth, the Light and the Way; No man gets to God in Heaven except by me; I and the Father are One." He stressed that we cannot attain salvation by merely our own efforts, no matter how pure we think we are. I tried to explain to him that Jesus said, "The Kingdom of Heaven is within you", so therefore we should be able to find it for ourself through meditation. I added that the Buddha had said many of the same things but used different language. Before I could even finish he butted in to refute me again with more witty Bible passages. He retorted that immoral man cannot discover or reach Heaven by his own strength; meditation was of no avail in this serious matter of salvation.

I could have gone on contesting this guy, but I knew from previous experience that I would be wasting my breath and simply kept quiet. After a little more Bible thumping rhetoric he came to the conclusion that I was not convertible at that time. He wound up his efforts by advising me to think about it seriously and accept Jesus Christ before it was too late. I thanked him and told him that I would think about it. He then got up to search out another 'lost soul'.

After stopping by Martin's camp to pick up my rucksack I went down the beach away from everyone else. I sat for a period of sweeping meditation to feel the flow of impermanence in and around me and closed with a short

metta radiation before stretching out on the warm sand under the infinite firmament. I awoke before dawn and sat for an hour meditation followed by some yoga exercises. Just as I was finishing up, planning to have a dip, a male and female came walking towards me across the sand. They were stark naked except for a cloth slung over their shoulders and a mala around their necks; the guy carried a long narrow, double ended drum. They came right up to me while I was still sitting on my laid out bedroll and asked if I might care to assist them. I then noticed the familiar picture of Bhagwan Sree Rajneesh attached to the bottom of their malas, which I had seen on Grita and her friends at Arambol Lake. This couple were also Germans and followers of Rajneesh. They explained that they were going to do a form of “chaotic meditation” which was accompanied by a drumbeat. All I had to do was beat the drum slowly at first and gradually speed up the beating in harmony with their bodily movements. They would be standing and moving about most of the time and then collapse on the sand which would signal the end of the active part and to stop the drumming. I told them that I had no prior experience with this sort of thing but I would do my best to oblige them. The guy handed me the long drum and said to just beat it as the feeling or rhythm came out of me naturally while keeping in tune with their movements. I positioned it lengthwise across my lap in the cross-legged posture while they removed their malas and placed them on top of the cloths which they had laid upon the sand.

I began beating the drum slowly as instructed as the two of them commenced breathing forcefully in and out. Then they started shouting “Hoo” over and over again. By and by they began swaying their naked bodies to and fro in all directions each in their own way and I synchronized the drumbeat with their increased momentum. As the whole thing picked up speed they began jumping up and down flinging their arms and head all about, falling to their knees and pounding the sand with their fists, shouting, cursing and really just freaking out, letting it all hang out, as the saying goes. I did not know what to make of all these spontaneous antics and gyrations but I was getting a ‘contact high’ from them and becoming intently absorbed in my supporting function. It was as though all three of us were unconsciously tuned into each other. I could not tell if they were following the beat of the drum or the drumming was following their

movements, it seemed to be happening under its own power; I was no longer consciously controlling the hands doing the beating. It was as though we were being carried away by some mysterious force in an ecstatic frenzy, and I could sense it building up to a natural climax.

After about fifteen minutes this crescendo came to a head, a climatic point where the three of us abruptly stopped simultaneously. As I made the last accented beat the two near hysterical bodies froze in their tracks and quietly sank limply onto the soft sand and lay motionless. Having exerted a lot of energy myself I likewise went limp allowing the drum to roll off my legs and I laid out in the sand. The gentle rays of the early morning sun compassionately bathed our fatigued, depleted bodies. My mind was quiet, suffused in its own inner glow and peacefulness. The whole body/mind organism felt to be rejuvenating itself from the inside and outside. It was a beautiful feeling of being completely in harmony with all the laws of nature within and without. The three of remained in this meditative relaxation for about fifteen minutes before slowly regaining normal active consciousness. The couple thanked me for my mutual participation and said they could feel my positive vibrations throughout. I replied, "It was my pleasure." We then ran and jumped into the sea for an invigorating swim out beyond the surf.

This German couple had been living at the same ashram here at Anjuna which Grita and her two friends had been at. In fact they knew each other. They explained to me that this "chaotic meditation" was something akin to primal scream therapy designed to vent all of one's pent up emotions or childhood traumas. According to their Guru, Rajneesh, this is done in order to first release the gross physical and mental tensions or obstructions before undertaking the more conventional passive kinds of meditation. This chaotic meditation was the primary practice in which everyone living in the ashram participated in every morning. They repeated some of Rajneesh's basic Tantric philosophy which Grita had explained and described the 'Tantric room' at their ashram. They said there were used books by Rajneesh for sale in the ashram and invited me to come by for a look if I was interested. They then got up and departed in the direction from which they had come.

I carried my belongings back to the bush camp where Martin invited me to partake of a big pot of fruit porridge the gals were preparing on their one burner gas cooker. I related to them the early morning episode with the chaotic meditation. Martin gave a chuckle and explained that the Rajneesh freaks came to that deserted stretch of the beach quite often to do their, “jumping up and down”, as he called it. He said these beaches offered an ideal location to practice their chaotic meditation, indulge in free sex and smoke their brains out if that was what they needed. He said that female neo-sannyassins were well known for their promiscuity and easy game for any guy, sannyassin brother or not, who desired a free, unattached roll in the sand. Because Martin had been here three months he knew about their overt activities. He himself was not too impressed and thought they were a bit weird, along with the Jesus freaks.

After the nourishing breakfast I took a long walk in my ‘birthday suit’ to the north end of the beach, jumping into the sea a few times along the way. It felt natural and wonderful to freely roam in the raw without having to hide or feel shameful about what nature has given us. It was a beautiful sight to see all these people from around the world meeting and intermingling, leaving behind their accumulated complexes and getting back to grass roots. On returning I bumped into another familiar face. It was Antonio, a Spanish long hair whom I had met way back on Gomera and again in Kabul with his new traveling partner named, Pablo. Antonio invited me to smoke a chillum with them at their small thatched hut nearby. I had no real desire to smoke because I was already feeling pleasantly and naturally high. But I suppose due to old conditioning and social instinct, I reluctantly accepted and we went up to their hut. Antonio prepared a big chillum using Manali hash and a large quantity of tobacco, the latter to which I was very sensitive. After two tokes I became queasy and feeling like I would become sick to the stomach. But not wanting to ‘smoke and run’ I endured the nauseous discomfort for a few more minutes until I felt I couldn’t hold it any longer. Then I hurriedly thanked them, said good-bye and ducked outside to breathe fresh air. That seemed to do the trick. Upon walking it off I began feeling better, but my head was not as clear and cheerful as before. I cursed myself for being so stupid and giving in against my better judgment. I chalked it up to being that strong unconscious latent

force of habit which can bully around and triumph over the best of one's good intentions. I also thought it might be telling me something — to strengthen my resolve and quit the nasty habit once and for all. I flashed on what I had heard about Rajneesh's Tantric philosophy of indulging until you realize the futility or emptiness of a habit or until becoming sick or OD'ing¹¹. Going that far might be a strong enough shock therapy so that the desire, urge or habit simply falls away by itself.

I then strolled into the tiny village of Anjuna to visit the small Rajneesh center. I was met by the German guy from the morning beach session who showed me around the multi-room house. In the main reception room were several framed pictures of their beloved Guru in various poses which I gazed at for a few moments. Except for his balding head he fit in with the stereotype image of an Indian Yogi/Guru. His white robes, graying/white hair and beard, serene facial expression and penetrating eyes gave an air of mystic about him, hinting at some underlying profound wisdom/realization. In a corner on a table were a number of used books for sale and I looked through a few which caught my eye. The titles were: *From Sex to Super Consciousness* and *The Book of Secrets*, both by Rajneesh. A third book was, *The Way of Zen*, by Alan Watts, an English ex-clergyman turned Zen exponent. I had heard about Zen, a school of Japanese Mahayana Buddhism and was curious to read more about it. The books were quite worn, showing signs of much use and the price was cheap. I decided to buy the first two mentioned and leave *The Book of Secrets*, which was too thick and heavy to lug around. I figured these would be useful reading material on my upcoming travels south. The German guy also pointed out the 'Tantra room' that was reserved for persons having strong sexual urges, which according to their Guru needed to be let out. Obliging partners could almost always be found.

All this emphasis on sex seemed overly exaggerated to me. I did not have the kind of overt persistent obsession with sex that Rajneesh and his 'orange people' and others, for that matter, were so concerned about. Of course, I still had some sexual desire as was evident from my relationship

¹¹ OD'ing: Overdosing. (Noted by Dhammavamsa, October 2004)

with Gail and the more recent experiences with Linda on Skyros and Grita. Sure, I had the occasional short-lived lustful thought usually triggered off upon seeing a voluptuous western chick or beautiful Indian women. And I had the infrequent erotic dream which ended in nocturnal emission. But otherwise, I did not think about sex very much nor was I consciously occupied with it. While meditating, if a thought of lust arose I would try and ignore it or saw it as being, Anicca, just a fleeting programmed habit reflex in the mind which comes and goes due to appropriate stimulation. Admittedly, these are manifestations of latent desire and deeply rooted instincts which most ordinary young healthy men and women have from time to time. In my case, whether these were indications of subconscious repression or suppression, I did not know. I did not consider the matter in that light. Maybe this book, *From Sex to Super Consciousness*, would enlighten me further on the subject. Now it was getting time to prepare for the full moon party. People were busy preparing the site by setting up the tape player and big speakers on wooden platforms on the sand about two hundred yards from Martin's camp.

At sunset I sat on a mound of sand nearby in the difficult lotus posture and began doing some deep rhythmic breathing to get the energy flowing. I contemplated the image of being a perfect yogi and tried to feel the prana life force coming in with the breath and filling up my body. This was a good way of getting a high feeling because of all the oxygen that invigorates the blood and stimulates the brain. As I was really getting into it, I heard the first sounds of the evening's rock music. A few minutes later a long haired freak wearing only a G-string and toting a shoulder bag appeared in front of me. He had a big grin on his bearded face and held out a tiny piece of paper to me saying, "happy trails." He had appeared so suddenly out of the clear blue that I was dumbstruck, and could not say anything to thank him; it did not even seem necessary. I lost sense of time and orientation for a few moments and before I knew it, I had swallowed the paper acid trip and the guy seemed to vanish into thin air in the way he had come.

I almost could not believe what had happened and I did not really try to figure it out. I was soon getting off on the acid and was losing the solid

feeling of being in the body, feeling like only a bag of air. The music sounded magical as if it was dancing lightly over the air waves and the sky was splashed with pastel colors which held me rapt for some time. The deep breathing I had been consciously regulating was now continuing under its own power. The whole body was tingling and pulsating with a subtle energy, really coming alive, though there was no definite body shape. I could not deliberately form any thoughts and the ego's influence was largely in abeyance. I could not even voluntarily move the body. My whole individual physical existence was becoming very tenuous; it was uncanny but at the same time very beautiful.

After what might have been thirty minutes, I was aroused by the distinct, familiar music of Led Zeppelin. This had been one of my favorite acid rock groups and now those associated memories motivated me. Somehow I managed to bring myself back into bodily control sufficiently enough to stand up, with the intention of walking in the direction of the alluring sounds. The shoulder bag with my valuables and the orange waist cloth that was hanging over my shoulder felt a burden and even ridiculous. I did not know what to do with them and almost dropped them to the sand to be rid of the nuisance. But then a flash of worldly reason reminded me of the bothersome reality. So I stuffed the cloth into the bag and carried it along as I glided lightly and effortlessly over the sand as if in slow motion.

It was dark but the party site was lit up by several campfires and lamps. Many people were already roaming around and assembled in the vicinity. As I got closer the music grew louder in my ears but it was not disturbing. At the edge of the main center of action, where the light was not so bright, I halted. It was an effort to keep the body standing and I let it sink to the soft sand, arranging the body into a relaxed cross-legged position, and just left it there to sit by itself as it were. The burden of the 'I' centered, reactive mind was absent and what basically remained was a spacious state of awareness that belonged to nobody in particular, although a faint trace of 'I' floated around somewhere in the remote background. Quite a few freaks were wildly dancing writhing their naked bodies to the driving beat of the loud electronic music.

In the course of the night I heard such appropriate golden oldies as The Doors — ‘*Light My Fire*’; Jefferson Airplane — The Moody Blues — ‘*In Search of the Lost Chord*’; The Beatles — ‘*Magical Mystery Tour*’; Jimi Hendrix — ‘*Are You Experienced*’; and Led Zeppelin — ‘*Stairway to Heaven*’. Evidently some experienced head was monitoring the party’s vibes and selecting the albums accordingly. Hearing these nostalgic classics at this time with this sensitive expanded awareness was quite moving. I was able to detect, relate to and appreciate the esoteric meaning of these songs in a very intimate way, deeper than I had before. Though I had heard all these before on many previous occasions when stoned on psychedelics, I seldom had been in a state of mind detached and calm enough to listen word by word to comprehend the full meaning in a spiritual way. Or if I did, it was with no firm intellectual background in metaphysical or spiritual matters, nor genuine feeling, so that the impact was superficial. All along I had figured these tunes were speaking about something beyond normal vision, but for the most part they remained just far-out, psychedelic, mind-blowing songs which characterized the hippie generation.

Besides the dancers, there were many small groups of people sitting together, most of them smoking chillums — “Bom Shiva, Bom Shankar” was heard here and there. I was sitting about five feet away from the nearest group and someone held out a chillum to me thinking perhaps I was lonely sitting there by myself. But in my experience that was farthest from the truth; I didn’t need anything at this point. It felt like the awareness/life force that was in me was the same that energized the wild dancers, went in and out of all the chillums and the people smoking them and just everywhere electrifying the air. The awareness I was experiencing was merged or part and parcel of the whole scene, the cosmic dance of life. It was a kind of beatific vision and the highest, most expanded state of consciousness I had ever experienced.

This peak experience lasted for some time. When I was gradually able to form thoughts again, I wondered if that might be what the state of Enlightenment was like. I could not imagine Nibbana being any freer or better, except for being a permanent state. I felt that because I had been practicing mediation and yoga with my major interest oriented in this

direction, the acid helped allow me to go deeper into it. I knew I would come down but enjoyed it while it lasted without attachment, just being there in the present moment. This profound experience convinced me of the possibility and reality which could be achieved by spiritual or Dhamma practice; it 'put the icing on the cake' as the saying goes; it removed any trace of lingering doubt, if there was any, about the efficacy of such practices to achieve it. It reconfirmed my commitment to continue the way I was to achieve this state or something similar on my own naturally. I felt I would no longer have recourse for taking such drugs again to prove any point or try to get higher.

When the peak experience began to wear off around midnight, the idea arose to take a walk out on the beach under the bright moonlight. The sparkling water was very inviting and I waded in to get the feel of it. It was a weird sensation of being barely able to distinguish the dividing point or separation line between the water and the body. The water seemed to pass right through the transparent, substanceless body outline. I had to warn myself not to become too carried away and lose rational contact with ordinary reality. I took caution in the water not to accidentally drown, and come out after a few minutes.

At some point I heard some shouting, "Joseph, Joseph¹²," and turned to see the two Austrian fellows. They had also ingested some acid and had gotten quite high and spaced-out. They had been looking for me to ask questions about their strange experiences, as this was their first trip on psychedelics. One of them related how the feeling of his body had disappeared and he lost orientation to time and space; he became quite frightened that he might not be able to return into his body or that he might even die or lose his mind. The other boy did not have such a strong personal experience, but the fear and near freak out of his buddy rubbed off on him. By now they had both calmed down as the effects of the drug wore off. They wanted me to explain the experience, thinking I might know. Being myself still in mental outer space, I was not in a position to formulate any coherent thought about it. All I managed to finally utter was, "It's all

¹² The name I was going by since leaving Gomera; my actual middle name.

emptiness; it's all illusion; and it's all in the mind," repeating it two or three times to my own astonishment.

The moon was near the end of its descending arch across the sky when the music finally ended. About twenty other odd persons remained awake throughout the night, walking on the beach, swimming, balling, (in the case of couples), or just laying in the sand too zonked to move. I spent this time sitting or laying in the sand or strolling near the shoreline; I reflected on the past, present and future in respect to kamma, how each person is on his/her own individual trip to evolve or devolve in the process of samsara. After watching the moon sink into the ocean, I plunged into the sea for a refreshing morning swim and waited for the sun to rise above the trees to soak up the warm rays and soothe my wearied limbs, and dozed off awhile. I did not try to do any formal sitting meditation or yoga as I was still too spaced for such endeavors. Anyway the entire night had been a meditation period as far as I was concerned.

The following day I bade farewell to the hippie scene at Anjuna beach and continued my southward journey towards the horn of India. I followed the coastal route through Kerala riding local buses, stopping in the late afternoons to find a beach. In this way I could continue my evening and morning meditations and yoga exercises and have a free place to sleep.

One afternoon a strange incident occurred as I was entering a small village bordering the beach. I saw several men up ahead on the path suspiciously watching me as I approached. As I got nearer I noticed them talking amongst themselves and throwing me unfriendly looks, while calling other village men over to join them in the growing group. I did not know quite what to make of it and kept on walking until they stood blocking the path in front of me. They began shouting at me in their native tongue which of course, I couldn't understand. They pointed to the pack on my back, which it seems, they wanted me to open to show them the contents. I became somewhat uneasy and tried to ignore the men by walking around them but by now I was encircled and some of the men started grabbing at the back pack and shoving me. I couldn't make heads or tails of their strange menacing behavior and was getting downright scared.

Evidently they were quite concerned with what I might have inside the pack as they kept poking at it. I finally decided to take it off and open it for them to satisfy their feverish curiosity. The angry ringleader of the group rifled through the contents but did not find what he was apparently searching for, and the group then began to calm down.

At this time a young well dressed man who spoke English came to my rescue. I asked him what in the heck that scene was all about and he questioned the men. It seems that the village men had taken me to be a rogue sadhu, as I was wearing the orange cloth along with my bushy beard. In these parts child stealing was not uncommon especially by wandering vagrants posing as holy men or sadhus, which they had mistakenly taken me for. They thought I might have a baby or small child in the backpack that I was trying to kidnap. This was too much; I could not believe my ears that those simple minded villagers actually thought I could have a child stuffed into the small pack and have the gall to walk right up to them in broad daylight. It was absurd to say the least. I could not help but have compassion and pity for them who had to live in such fear and suspicion.

The young man invited me to come to his house not far away. He was very sorry for my inconvenience and rude conduct of his fellow countrymen and he insisted that I should spend the night with him to recuperate from this hair-raising experience. It was already about 4 P.M. and I felt I could use or even perhaps deserved a kind offer like that and gratefully accepted. The guy's name was Dinesh and he lived in a modest house, by Indian standards, with his aging mother, younger brother and two teenage sisters. Dinesh was a professional singer and performed occasionally in nightclubs and other functions in the towns and cities in Kerala. He even had a few records to his credit. He was happy to hear that I practiced yoga and meditation and he mentioned that his father had also been a yoga enthusiast before he passed away a few years earlier. In India it is usually someone's relative or friend that practiced such spiritual disciplines, rarely the person you actually met. There was a well in the back of the house and Dinesh suggested I take a good old bucket bath and he provided me with soap and a towel. I had not had a proper bath with soap and fresh water for some time and gladly took advantage of this

opportunity, indulging with many bucketfuls of cool fresh water and scrubbing the body clean.

That evening I dined with my host on a sumptuous meal of rice, dhal, a few different vegetable curries, chapattis and curd with bananas for desert, all graciously served by his mother and sisters. Later in the evening Dinesh took me to a village carnival cum annual religious festival, that was happening all that week. It was complete with caparisoned elephant, colored lights and blaring music, game booths, food stalls and throngs of people from all the neighboring villages. Dinesh went primarily to visit with some of his friends to whom he introduced me as the 'American yogi'. After thirty minutes of walking around and being stared at, I became bored with the whole thing and persuaded Dinesh to return home with me. It was interesting, however, to see how rural Indian folks entertained themselves. I amused myself by speculating how these deprived people would react to seeing the Ringling Bros Circus or some such really fantastic spectacle.

By noon the next day I reached land's end at Cape Comorin. The Hindu name for the tip of India is Kanyakumari, meaning Virgin Goddess. There is a big Hindu Temple there where devotees come to worship the virgin goddess who in Hindu mythology later became Parvati, the wife of Lord Shiva. This is not the only reason why tourists come here. It is also a unique spot from where one can see, on the full moon evening, the sun set and the moon rise over the water at the same time. It is a favorite for Indian newlyweds on their honeymoon. Here at the tip of India is the confluence of three great bodies of water, the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal. A few hundred yards offshore is a small rocky island upon which sits the Swami Vivekananda Memorial. Swami Vivekananda is one of India's more recent illustrious sons, famous for being the first Indian to introduce Eastern religious thought in the West. He represented Hinduism and India at the World Parliament of Religions which was held in Chicago, Illinois, way back in 1893 and he stressed the interrelatedness and tolerant harmony between all religions. It was on the rocks surrounded by the three great seas that Swami Vivekananda got the inspiration to attend the auspicious convention and bring the Dhamma to the West. He was the foremost disciple of the great saint, Paramahansa Ramakrishna, who

attained Enlightenment realizing the essential nature behind all religions. Swami Vivekananda started the Ramakrishna Mission in order to spread his Guru's inspiring message of spiritual and religious unity. Today there are Ramakrishna Missions all over the world.

I opted to stay in the hotel near the bus stand, mainly to have a safe place to keep my pack while sightseeing. There was no other suitable place in the vicinity to sleep, on or near the beach. The seaside area was all taken up with the huge temple complex, a statue of Mahatma Gandhi, the boat harbor and rocky shoreline. In the early afternoon I walked around and checked out the whole area and went inside the temple. Inside there was a bookstore selling the entire assortment of books put out by the Ramakrishna Mission, most of them written by Swami Vivekananda. I spent some time browsing through them and bought a couple small books that looked interesting. One of them was entitled Raja Yoga written by the Swami, which upon reading, I found very insightful and worthwhile reading. It helped give me a deeper understanding into the entire scope of Yoga, elucidating the various steps involved to achieve Moksha.

In the late afternoon, I took the short boat ride out to the rock memorial where there is a well kept temple and impressive statue of Swami Vivekananda. There is also a meditation room which I went into and sat for a period of meditation. While sitting there in the lotus posture feeling or imagining the powerful and holy vibrations, I was somewhat startled by something that touched my knee. Upon opening my eyes slightly I beheld an old woman who must have thought I was a sadhu or holy man. She had crawled over to me and touched one knee with both her hands. This is a customary act of devotion and respect accorded to gurus and saints in the Hindu tradition. The pious old lady was also muttering some words which probably had the same meaning as Sadhu. I did not move but kept sitting in the perfect lotus posture, not wanting to spoil the woman's image of me being in deep samadhi (absorbed concentration). When I went back outside I spent some time at gazing due south across the dark blue Indian Ocean, on the other side of which lay the south pole. It was indeed a special magnetic place and I could easily see how Swami Vivekananda was attracted to these

rocks and braved the treacherous water to swim out, meditate and ruminate on reality.

Early the next morning, I began taking a series of buses that eventually brought me to Rameswaram. Rameswaram is situated on an island about a mile across from the tip of a long curved finger of land jutting out from the Indian mainland. The Palk Straits separate India from Sri Lanka by approximately thirty miles. The only way to get to the teardrop shaped island of Sri Lanka, except by flying, was by boat from Rameswaram. The old ferry, S. S. Ramanujan, made the round trip three times a week and it was usually filled to capacity. The service originally commenced to ferry back and repatriate the thousands of Tamils who had been living or working in Ceylon in the central tea plantations or in the northern half of the island. The convenient boat service was also used by the Buddhists of Sri Lanka who make their pilgrimage to the Buddhist holy places in North India, and by the many shoestring budget western travelers like myself who traveled between India and Ceylon.

I arrived on the morning of the scheduled departure of the S. S. Ramanujan hoping to secure passage for that day itself and proceeded directly to the harbor ticketing office. As it turned out the boat was already booked full and a mob of people were lined up at the entrance to the customs/immigration building waiting to begin the exit formalities. I was able to buy a lower deck third class ticket for the next sailing two days hence and resigned myself to passing the time in this desert-like oasis. That would be just two days before my visa expired. I walked back near the railway station and checked into the Dhammsala or pilgrim's rest house where I was allowed to keep my pack. I then spent the remainder of the day exploring the town, temple and surrounding environs.

South of town, I noticed some giant sand dunes that rose above the entire area. They struck me as being a possible ideal spot for doing yoga and meditation in the mornings and evenings and even for sleeping out at night. Before sunset, I fetched the pack from the Dhammsala, which was by now chock-a-block full of people and found my way through the fisherman's village to the base of the extensive sand mountains. On the way, I paused to

buy the usual supply of bananas, peanuts and sweet bread and filled the water bottle, in anticipation of staying out overnight. It took a good twenty minutes to trudge up and over a few large sand hills to arrive at the summit of the highest one which was also the closest to the sea. The view was superb, overlooking the town, the boat harbor with its myriads of fishing craft and all around. The refreshing gentle sea breeze blew over the area to provide a pleasant respite from the humid heat. The only drawback was that these deserted dunes, being relatively close to the fishing village below were used as the public latrine. And this drew the infamous pigs sniffing and snorting, acting as the clean up crew. With a little searching though I found a clean area on the very top of the dune where I laid out my bedroll.

The sunset that evening was quite splendid as this spot afforded a three hundred and sixty degree view of the horizon. As I did my yoga and meditation, I had the sense of being totally alone, isolated and insignificant amidst the ocean of sand. I imagined myself merely as one grain of sand amongst the billions, alluding to my own and each person's individual existence in the infinite ocean of Samsara. This feeling filled me with indescribable joy and a kind of inner strength knowing that there was a way of transcendence from the limitations and tribulations of the mundane world.

The morning was especially beautiful with the sun rising over the eastern seaboard. I did an extra long session of meditation beginning in the predawn followed by yoga exercises with the sunrise over the watery horizon and deeply breathing the cool fresh air. I had company with the villagers who came to the giant sandbox for their morning call of nature with the pigs trailing not far behind. It was probably a rare sight for the villagers to see someone like me out here on this sand hill all alone and they came close to gawk with curiosity. When it became uncomfortably hot by about 8.30, I packed up and trudged back down into town to have breakfast and pass the rest of the day.

In a *cha* shop, I met a clean shaven lanky Englishman who had just arrived on a train from Madurai and was also bound for Ceylon. We talked for a couple of hours over tea and snacks. He was travelling alone carrying

a large backpack and had made his own journey down from the north and had visited many of the same spots that I had. He was just beginning to take up an interest in yoga and meditation though he had not yet received any formal training nor did he practice on his own. I related to him my experiences in meditation at Kopan, with Goenka and my private retreat at Goa. Again, I had to be careful not to egotistically exaggerate too much. This talk aroused his enthusiasm for actively pursuing his own practice.

I explained to Chris that my main purpose in going to Ceylon was to further my own study of Buddhism and that I would be going to a particular meditation center to learn and practice under an English speaking teacher. He became keen on this and asked if he might travel along with me. He thought if he went by himself he might get side-tracked and change his mind before actually getting to the meditation center. This had already happened to him when he was planning to take a Goenka course a few months prior. He had no one with him for moral support while waiting for the course to begin and he lost interest within that time, going off to satisfy his wanderlust. He figured that if he stayed near my stronger influence he would not be so easily detoured. I rather like the gangling fellow with the cockney accent and, if it would help him in this regard, I had no objection, and even encouraged him to accompany me in travelling to Colombo. Chris had already checked into a cheap hotel for his overnight stay and I once again went out to the sand dunes to take advantage of the fantastic view and meditative environment.

In the morning I joined Chris for breakfast at a pre-determined restaurant and then went together to the boat harbor. As I expected, the scene at the customs shed was hectic like the previous pre-departure. Most of the loud, line jumping, impatient people were Indians and Sri Lankans returning with arm loads and great bundles of goods. At this time the socialist Government of Sri Lanka was restricting imports and free world trade so that the natives were starved for anything foreign or not easily obtainable in their country. The most popular items being brought back home were bright colored plastic tubs, buckets and sarees manufactured in India. Besides the majority of South Asians, there were also another ten or fifteen western backpackers making the short sea voyage to the “Resplendent Isle,” as I saw it depicted

on a travel poster. After about three hours we finished all the Exit formalities and boarded the waiting ship.

During the three or four-hour voyage Chris and I met two Sinhalese chaps who were brothers. They were outgoing friendly and spoke good English and they initiated a lengthy conversation with us. When I mentioned my involvement with Buddhism they were delighted and proudly stated that they were “born Buddhists.” I wondered how anyone could be born as a Buddhist, but I guessed it was the same as people in the west who call themselves born Christians. I would only learn the full implications of this terminology later.

The Fernando brothers invited me and Chris to accompany them to Negombo, about twenty miles north of Colombo, where they lived, to stay in their house a few days to get acquainted with Sri Lanka customs. Though it was a generous offer, I did not want to commit myself right off the bat. From talks with others, I was planning to stop first at the ancient capital of Lanka, Anuradhapura. There were extensive Buddhist ruins and an ancient Bodhi-tree there that I wished to have a look at and pay my respects to. I also desired to break into Ceylon casually and travel south leisurely to get a feeling for the countryside and people. I did, however, take their address and if we happened to pass by that way we would try to pay them a visit.

During the trip, I had a friendly chat with another Sri Lankan man who invited me and Chris to come to meet a good Buddhist friend of his who had a house in Colombo. He said the two of us could perhaps stay there free of charge for a few days while in Colombo, and I wrote down the address just in case. So, before we even touched down on the reputed friendly isle, we already had two open invitations to hospitality. That seemed to be a good start.





CHAPTER 14

SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka has an interesting and unique history. According to the historical chronicles the Buddha, before passing away, made a pronouncement about the future of the island: that the Buddha Dhamma



would become fully established in Lanka and Lanka would become the guardian of the pure law. He even asked the Hindu God Vishnu to protect the island in this regard. On the day the Buddha died an Indian prince named Vijaya landed on Lanka with six hundred men with the mission to tame the original natives inhabiting the jungle forests and make it fit for civilization and women were brought to build up the population. After some two hundred years when the country was more or less ready, the great King Asoka of

North India, who was an ardent follower of the Buddha's Teachings, sent his son, the Arahata¹³ Mahinda, to fulfil that prophecy and introduce Buddhism on the island.

Ever since that time Buddhism has remained the principal religion and unifying force of the Sinhalese people, and they take pride in that. Over the centuries many invaders from South India had come and held power from time to time, but always the Sinhalese kings had mustered up the strength to usurp them, at least for a short period. Due to these Tamil invasions Hinduism was also introduced here but it remained secondary in practice

¹³ Highest level of Buddhist Sainthood.

and importance. The Portuguese were the first Europeans to start colonizing the island early in the 16th century, to monopolize the spice trade and other greedy ambitions. The Portuguese called the land, Ceilao, perhaps a corruption of Sri Lanka. The Dutch kicked out the Portuguese in the mid 17th century and changed the name to Ceylan, to suit their pronunciation. The British ousted the Dutch and assumed power in the early 19th century and modified the name further to Ceylon.

During this whole period of European colonial rule Buddhism suffered at the hands of zealous Christian missionaries but, nevertheless, the religion managed to survive. It made a significant comeback early in this century to regain its rightful place as the popular religion of the majority Sinhalese people. There are also minority groups of Hindus (Tamils), Muslims, and Christians who are allowed total freedom of follow their own faith. And for the most part the people of these diverse religious groups get along well and respect each other's beliefs. Any internal communal strife which has arisen from time to time, especially recently, was not based so much on religion but on economic and political factors.

The S. S. Ramanujan docked at the end of Talaimannar pier in the late afternoon, and only a handful of people were around to greet us. The first- and second-class passengers were let off first, followed by the third-class western tourists, leaving for last the majority third-class Indians and Sri Lankans. This pecking order was assigned to allow us a chance to get through customs/immigration before the mad rush of all the "goods runners" and their mountains of baggage.

I suppose because of my appearance with short hair, the Benares holy cloth draped over my shoulders and Tibetan mala around my neck, the immigration officer who stamped my passport inquired if I had come to study Buddhism. When I replied in the affirmative, he was pleased and wished me all the best. He gave me a one-month tourist visa, the standard for all foreign tourists, and told me I could extend it further in Colombo without any problem.

A convenient overnight train service coincided with the arrival of the boat to take passengers to most major points south to Colombo, the largest city and capital. Upon completing the entrance formalities, Chris and I changed our money at the official exchange counter, obtaining Sri Lankan rupees, and bought our tickets on the train as far as Anuradhapura. We had to wait about four hours until the train departed around 10 P.M. In the meantime, we walked over to the row of eating stalls on the opposite side of the tracks to sample our first Sri Lankan food of egg hoppers and string hoppers.



The Bodhi tree at Anuradhapura grew from a sapling of the original Bodhi tree at Bodhgaya and was brought to Lanka in the 2nd century B.C. by the daughter of King Asoka, Sanghamitta, who was also a Buddhist nun and Arahant. She was sent with this sacred gift as part of the great Dhamma King's master plan to spread Lord Buddha's Teachings to all neighboring countries. As mentioned, King Asoka had already sent his son, Arahant Mahinda, to introduce and establish the religion in the native inhabitants. As soon as it became light, we strolled over to the ancient sacred area where we spent the whole day wandering around like good tourists. For me, it was also a spiritual inspiration to try and get a feel for the religious devotion of the past Sinhalese Kings and people who built this first great center of Buddhism. I paid my humble respects to the Sri Maha Bodhi tree by making the customary three prostrations, and then sat in the vicinity to meditate for thirty minutes. Chris in the meantime walked about on his own.

Another inspiring edifice in the sacred park near the Bo tree is the colossal Ruvanveliseya stupa. It was built over two thousand years ago by King Dutugemunu and is reputed to enshrine the relics of the Buddha, as are most Buddhist stupas. Another version says it contains the relics of not less than one hundred Arahants. Whatever the case, it stands over one hundred and fifty feet high and is surrounded by an impressive stone wall

of elephants standing side by side around the huge square compound. During the two thousand years, the stupa suffered much at the hands of the invaders, but over the time has been well restored and glistens in whitewash under the morning sun and is quite awe-inspiring. I made my respectful three circumambulations around the massive dome structure and sat for a while in one corner of the walled-in compound, contemplating the obvious fact of impermanence.



The entire sacred area of this ancient capital is quite large and could easily require two days to inspect it all on foot. Though Sri Lanka is now dominated by the Theravada tradition, in the early days both the Mahayana and Hinayana were practiced by monks of both schools, each with their own monasteries and large followings. The ruins of several of these old monasteries and other stupas are visible in different sections of the grounds. The government and other world cultural heritage organizations are in the process of excavating various sites in order to glean more evidence of the glory of those times; the findings have been impressive. Being the off-tourist season at the end of March, the place was practically deserted. It was so peaceful and relaxing just to leisurely stroll through the giant well-kept park and outdoor museum as it is, with the stands of giant old trees that Chris and I decided to remain another day to absorb it. We spread out our bedrolls on the thick carpet of spongy grass under the canopy of one of the trees to sleep that night, and I introduced Chris to the practice of meditation, starting with the simple anapanasati breath awareness. It seemed the perfect place and time for such a thing. In the course of our park wanderings, we discovered a delightful lotus pond in which we bathed our wearied limbs in the heat of the afternoon. All in all, it was a most pleasant cultural and historical introduction as well as being a spirit-satisfying, uplifting way to spend the first two days in the country that was to become my home away from home for quite a few years.

On consulting the map, Chris and I followed the coast road south to Negombo where we dropped in on the Fernando brothers. The two brothers were glad to see us. They arranged a room, thinking we would stay for a few days, displacing two younger brothers from their room to accommodate us. The house was modest, having several sparsely furnished rooms with an outhouse and bathing well in the back yard. There were also two sisters and the mother who comprised the family, the father having died two years back. It was now the responsibility of the two older brothers to look after the family according to the Asian custom. After settling our belongings in the room, Chris and I took turns refreshing ourselves with a bucket bath at the well. All the neighbors, especially young children, gathered at a cautious distance to watch and giggle at us two “sudiks,” as white-skinned foreigners were locally called. They queried the brothers as to who we were, what was our motherland, etcetera. I could feel a slight annoyance at being stared at while I was trying to bathe, and I had to cover my modesty with the orange waist cloth. The main bother in taking bucket baths in Asia is that most wells are in inhabited places in full view of everyone, so that one must cover oneself while bathing. This makes it slightly awkward to clean oneself thoroughly and leaves a wet cloth to be dried; other than that, however, it is quite delightful, especially in the tropical warm climates. The brothers said that the inquisitive neighbors just liked to look at us because they rarely saw any foreigners. Though I was somewhat annoyed by my privacy being invaded, their faces were so innocent and smiling that it was difficult to get really angry or motion them away.

That night we were treated to a sumptuous meal of rice and several assorted vegetable curries and a fish curry cooked Sinhalese style in coconut milk and laced with tiny bits of red hot chilies. Though it was a bit too hot for my liking, it was nonetheless very delicious and was a marked contrast and welcome change from the standard Indian rice and curry. Later that evening, the brothers informed me that their two sisters, aged nineteen and twenty, were interested in learning some yoga exercises but were too shy to ask me themselves though they knew a little English. The girls were a bit on the chubby side and thought the exercise would help them lose some weight. From the way they acted, I figured the girls were mainly just curious and desired to watch me demonstrate, not so much for their own

intent to actually practice. But I felt this would be the least I could do to repay their hospitality. I told them I would teach them in the morning before eating breakfast, which is when I ordinarily did it.

In the morning, I demonstrated a series of exercises to the sisters and brothers who were curiously looking on; and Chris took this opportunity to learn a little for himself. I did not bother to explain the spiritual aspects of yoga as I figured they would not understand, nor were they seriously interested in that. I made the girls practice each exercise before going on to the next. They were quite shy and giggled while halfheartedly attempting the simple movements. If I would not have insisted on this, the sisters would have just watched and giggled and probably not have made any attempt at all. I figured that after this they would most probably forget about it anyway. To show off a little, I performed a few of the more difficult postures for their entertainment-starved minds. Following this show, Chris and I feasted on the traditional hoppers and string hoppers with chili-laced coconut sambal and coconut milk sauce; it was quite delicious. Chris and I decided not to wear out our welcome and would leave for Colombo that afternoon.

Following another delicious meal of rice and curry for lunch, our hosts insisted we “put a nap.” An after-lunch rest or snooze is common here in the tropics, especially after a heavy meal of rice and hot curries which contributes to body and mental sluggishness. After a one-hour rest, the two brothers escorted us to the bus stand in the center of town and made sure we got on the right bus going into Colombo. Chris and I thanked them for their down-home hospitality, and they urged us to come visit them again whenever we passed through that way.

We were not exactly sure why we were coming to Colombo so quickly. In Anuradhapura, I had given thought to proceed to the former hill capital of Kandy in the center of the country for a look at the Tooth Temple I had heard about. But for some unexplainable reason, I had changed my mind, choosing the coast route. There were a couple of matters I had to attend to in Colombo fairly soon, but they could have waited a little longer. By this time, the five hundred dollars I had received in Athens was nearly depleted;

and I would need more money for my expenses. The Sri Lankan government at this time required each tourist to spend at least sixty U.S. dollars a month, showing bank receipts proving the money was cashed; and I hoped to stay at least six months for starters. Another reason for going to Colombo was that all non-commonwealth nationalities were required to register with the Aliens Registration Bureau at the CID¹⁴ headquarters. This was a way to keep tabs on foreigners and to locate undesirables. After taking care of this mundane business, which I figured to take a day or two, both Chris and I would go out to Kanduboda Vipassana Meditation Center and arrange to stay there for a course of training. I didn't know how long that would last.

Not knowing what exactly to do right off or where to stay in Colombo, I thought we'd drop by the address given to me by the other fellow I'd met on the boat. The man we were going to visit was named Mr. Samararatna or Sam for short, and he lived in a suburb called Bambalapitiya. By asking a few directions and riding in a crowded city bus from downtown, we succeeded in locating the inconspicuous street which branched off the main Galle road. The house we were looking for was at the very end of the narrow lane, which had houses on both sides tightly packed together. It was a small, modest house set back about twenty feet from the potholed street which was not really much more than an alley. A few banana and papaya trees along with other trees and flowering plants graced the otherwise simple earthen front yard. When I knocked on the door, a shy, thin woman answered and looked surprised to see us two foreigners. She immediately went to bring an older lady, who turned out to be her mother. The older lady spoke a few words of English, and I informed her that we had come to meet Mr. Samararatna. That seemed to do the trick, and Chris and I were invited inside to sit down. They must have thought we were known to Sam, as they called him, and set about to prepare us the customary cup of tea. Sam was not yet home from work, but he was expected shortly.

When Sam entered, Chris and I stood up to meet him. He appeared a little surprised to see us in his living room, but he smiled and said "Hello" and

¹⁴ Criminal Investigation Department. (Noted by Dhammavamsa)

asked us to please take our seats again. I immediately introduced the two of us and related the story of meeting his friend, Tissera, on the boat from Rameswaram, from whom we had received his name and address. I explained that we had come to Sri Lanka to study and practice Buddhist meditation and hoped to go out to Kanduboda Meditation Center within a few days. Sam had not yet met his friend Tissera on his return from India, so Sam was not aware of our possible visit. Nevertheless, he was very glad to meet us and was enthused over our interest and intentions to practice meditation. Without our mentioning it or hinting at the possibility, he unhesitatingly offered to help us in any way he could and invited the two of us to stay in his house for as long as we needed while in Colombo. We were both very appreciative; I thanked Sam for his kind, generous offer, saying we did not want to put them to any inconvenience or trouble. He assured us that it would be a boon and honor for them to host us in their humble abode, to render any assistance in our spiritual endeavors. Sam and his son then set about preparing a space in a small cubicle off the front porch which was being used as a storage room. He laid down a large mattress on the floor which both of us could share quite comfortably, and it seemed to be all that we really needed. In my recent experiences, I was becoming more impressed by the way these South Asian people extended such friendliness and hospitality to total strangers in a manner that most westerners reserve only for friends or acquaintances; I chalked it up to the long-standing influence of the Eastern religious traditions.

That evening, we gratefully partook of the rice and curry meal which Sam's wife and her mother prepared and served; as at the Fernando's, Sam requested us to eat first. As if by coincidence, Tissera dropped by and Sam invited him to eat with him after we had finished. Afterwards, we all sat around in the simply furnished living room to have a friendly chat together, joined by another man named Tilak, an old schoolboy chum of Sam's who was boarding in the house, occupying a small room at the back. Tissera was happy to see that Chris and I had found our way to his good friend Sam's, and they all were curious to find out how the two of us became interested in Buddhism. The three men were, as most Sinhalese, 'born Buddhists;' and they liked to discuss Buddhism. Their knowledge of the subject, however, appeared to be limited to textbooks and cultural heritage; they did not

themselves engage in formal meditation practice as such. Their practice of the religion consisted in being friendly, performing acts of merit, trying to live faithfully by the five precepts, visiting the temples from time to time, reciting a few of the traditional Buddhist devotional stanzas and reading the odd book on meditation or Buddhist philosophy. They said practicing Buddhism in that way or at that level would create the good conditions (merit) for them to gradually work out their accumulated worldly attachment and past kamma. They hoped that in a future life they might then be able to become a monk and attain Nibbana. Tilak explained that for most ordinary lay people it was beyond their kammic limitations to attain Nibbana in this lifetime itself. They would have a better chance by being reborn during the presence of the coming Buddha, Maitreyya, prophesied to appear in another two thousand, five hundred years or more. This is the current popular belief among the majority of Sinhalese Buddhists including much of the clergy.

This casual, laid-back attitude to the Dhamma surprised me somewhat. In comparison, I tended to take the Four Noble Truths seriously and was gung-ho in my desire to achieve the end of suffering as soon as possible. This was due no doubt because my main exposure and influence in the Dhamma had been from Lama Zopa and Goenkaji during meditation courses. Thus, perhaps I was under the mistaken impression that all Buddhists, especially the Theravadins, sat for two or three hours of strict meditation each day. I must have pictured them burning a hole in their meditation cushions to reach Nibbana before this lifetime expired.

The next morning, I rode the crowded rush hour bus into the Fort, an area of downtown where all the banks and government offices were located. The first thing I did was to go to the main post office to buy some aerogramme and sat down then and there to pen off a quick letter to mom and dad. I concisely described my travel route and adventures since the last letter, and mentioned in passing that I was now here in Sri Lanka for more intensive training in Buddhist meditation. I requested mom to send by mail transfer another five hundred bucks from my savings account, in which there was still about one thousand dollars left. I gave her the address of the Bank of Ceylon foreign department where she was to send it. I added that I would

most probably be remaining in Sri Lanka for at least six months if I could swing the visa; and, after that, I was not sure. From the Post Office, I went around the corner to the CID building, where I had to report to the fourth floor for the registration of non-commonwealth visitors. This consisted in filling out a form stating all passport particulars and where I would be staying while in Sri Lanka and my intended purpose. As I was intending to soon undergo an intensive retreat at Kanduboda, I wrote that address on the form and stated the purpose as practicing meditation. I was also asked to leave with them a small visa-sized photo if I had one available; as I did have a few extra, I handed one over to satisfy the officer. While downtown, I picked up a “What’s happening in Colombo this month” tourist pamphlet at the Tourist Office, just for something to read that night.

While glancing through the events calendar that evening, my eye fell on a notice about a one-month Yoga course which was being conducted by Dr. Swami Gitananda from Pondicherry, South India. The course had commenced the day before and was being held in a house about a mile from Sam’s. The same reaction came over me as when I had first heard of the Tibetan meditation course; my eyes instantly lit up; it sounded like just the opportunity I’d been waiting for — to study yoga under a qualified teacher. It seemed to be presenting itself on a silver platter, and I immediately showed the notice to Chris who also became enthusiastic. We had not as yet made a definite commitment at Kanduboda apart from my telling the police I would be there, but that did not seem so important. I figured they would not check anyway. The course was being taught by apparently a real Indian Yoga Master and doctor no less. Although it had already begun, I hoped we could still be admitted, being just two days late. Chris and I both decided that we would drop by the address first thing in the morning and inquire about the prospect.

That night I couldn’t help thinking about this lucky coincidence and wondered if it wasn’t the unconscious motivation for coming so quickly to Colombo, as if it was in my stars to attend. When Sam arrived home from work, I excitedly told him of the news and of our desire to participate; he agreed that it would be a good opportunity. He had heard the name of the Swami from a friend who had mentioned it to him. It seems Dr. Swami

Gitananda had written a controversial article about the forsaking of ancient spiritual ideals and practice while giving in to the decadence of modern western civilization. It was published in the Ceylon Daily News English edition.

We arrived at the temporary Ananda Yoga Ashram in Havelock town at 9 A.M. during the morning break. An American woman named Meenakshi, who we soon discovered was the Swami's wife, greeted us. Upon relating our situation, she replied that the course was already full and that the Swamiji didn't like to admit people late; but she asked us to wait while she went to inform the Swami about our predicament anyway. When she returned several minutes later, she told us we could talk with the Swamiji now and personally present our case. I felt a little nervous to meet him face to face and tried to imagine the proper etiquette for presenting oneself before an Indian Guru. I did not have any flowers or fruit to offer as I knew was the accepted tradition, and I wasn't sure if the standard Buddhist-style prostrations would be appropriate. I decided to greet him with the respectful namaste and bow. Upon knocking on the closed door of the back room, a deep voice called out, "Come in." Once inside, I greeted the Swami with the namaste; and he returned it with a big, friendly smile and, "Hi, please be seated," pointing to a mat on the floor. The Swami was quite imposing, seated in a chair looking almost like my projected image of an Indian Yogi — shoulder-length, white, flowing hair with a matching bushy beard and wearing the orange cloth of a sanyassin. His big, bulky body, not short of weight, filled the whole chair; and overall he resembled a joyous Santa Claus in orange. His skin was very fair and smooth-textured, and I noticed a tattoo on one arm. He spoke perfect English and did not appear to be of wholly Indian descent. It struck me as a peculiar combination, but that was my conditioned mind comparing and judging again.

Chris had been following all my motions, and I did most of the talking. Though I believe Meenakshi had already recounted our situation to him, I repeated our desire to join the course. He frankly explained how ordinarily it was not his policy to admit latecomers for fear of upsetting the status quo and that we had already missed some important instructions. But if we were sincere to stay for the rest of the entire course and attend all the classes

punctually starting with the next class in just a few minutes, then he would consent. I replied that of course we could abide by those quite obvious and understandable requests. He inquired further if either of us had any previous yoga experience. I mentioned the little bit I had picked up from the book. He did not seem much impressed and commented that proper yoga necessitated personal imparting and guidance from a qualified teacher — and those were few and far between these days. I readily agreed, saying that was why we had come to him. He then called Meenakshi and asked her to fill us in on the daily schedule and pertinent details and to collect the course fee.

The fee for the course was the equivalent of thirty dollars. As neither Chris nor I had that much money on us at that time, we told Meenakshi we'd have to bring it in the afternoon. Actually, both of us would have to make a quick trip to the bank during the lunch break that very day to cash another traveler's check to cover the amount and have some left over on which to live. Meenakshi explained that the fee was exclusive of any meals or lodging as this was not a residential retreat. We would have to live on the outside and arrange to come on time to the periodic classes during the day from early morning till evening. The first mandatory class of hatha yoga and pranayama was from 6 till 7:45 A.M., followed by a morning breakfast break. The next class was at 10 when the Swami gave a talk on some aspect of yogic health followed by a practical session learning various yoga relaxation techniques. This class ran up until noon, with a lunch break until 3:30 when we would meet for a class on therapeutic postures and breathing techniques. 5 P.M. was reserved for the half-hour mantra-chanting period, following which was a dinner break until 7 when we would reassemble for the evening satsangha. Satsangha literally means 'community of Truth seekers,' and in this case it consisted of a question-and-answer period with Swamiji and/or a special discourse on an appropriate spiritual topic. Meenakshi explained that we were allowed to come as early as 5 A.M. for meditation on our own, sitting in the hall; and we could remain at the ashram during the morning, afternoon and evening breaks if we were not going out to eat at those times or had no other place to go. On Mondays, there were no classes, it being a one-day break each week for taking care of personal affairs or just a plain holiday for going to the beach, etcetera.

About fifteen minutes before the 10 o'clock class, the other students began trickling in, returning from their breakfast break. Several Americans and a few Europeans were among them, while the rest were local Sri Lankans. When everyone was seated on their mats in the hall, the hefty Swamiji came out of the back room and took his seat on a mattress laid on the floor. He started out by giving a talk on the nature of relaxation for the body and mind, describing how the two are interrelated and must be treated as a whole if effective relaxation was to take place. This was followed by a session with all of us lying stretched out on our backs on the floor while the Swami guided us through a systematic conscious relaxation technique. It involved the use of awareness to feel the areas of tension in the body and issuing mental commands to help relax those tense areas. Meenakshi came around to each person and lifted one arm to let it drop back to the floor. By observing the way it fell, she could tell if the person was deeply relaxed or not and would give further advice if needed. The whole explanation and practice seemed quite scientific and logical, and I was able to become quite relaxed; my practice of vipassana helped out greatly in this procedure.

The topic of the talk that afternoon was on integrated, holistic health from the yogic standpoint. The Swamiji explained how most humans, especially modern westerners, abuse their bodies through faulty diet and breathing in conjunction with polluted air, bad postures, and so forth. This is the reason behind poor health and chronic physical ailments of so many kinds — largely self-created by our individual and collective lifestyles. He explained how the physical body is a marvelous, complex organism capable of extended excellent health for an indefinite period if maintained properly from the yoga standpoint based on reality; he cited some examples of Indian yogis reputed to be hundreds of years old. In the ancient days, the life span of humans was thousands of years, which accords with the Buddhist canonical texts on the subject as well. It was interesting how implicitly and authoritatively he spelled it all out, talking nearly the whole two hours. The Swami did not teach blind yoga, but laid out all the whys and wherefores of everything connected with a certain subject, making it sound scientific and up to date. He had even been a surgeon in the British Navy during the Second World War and studied medicine in England. So

this deep knowledge of western science and medicine combined with his profound, somehow limitless knowledge of yoga science made his teachings sound very real, sensible and convincing.

In the 5 o'clock mantra-chanting session, he explained the meaning of OM or AUM and how to chant OM into the seven chakras¹⁵ from the base of the spine up to the top of the head. AUM in the ancient Vedic texts is the sound vibration of the un-manifested, universal creative force — in popular yoga terminology, Cosmic Consciousness; in the Christian mystic tradition it is referred to as the Godhead. Perhaps an equivalent in Buddhism would be the higher formless jhanas or the state of Nibbana, implying freedom from the conditionings and limitations of ego consciousness, tantamount to total purity of mind. Chanting OM in a specific way into each of the chakras was supposed to help purify these psychic energy centers. It took me quite a few repetitions to locate or imagine the chakras and coordinate the chanting into them, but the chanting alone was quite stimulating. After ten or fifteen minutes, I was left in a very concentrated, blissful state with a strong, magnetized sensation between the brows and a faint glow of light inside the head. When the chanting stopped, I continued to sit in the lotus posture, trying to keep the feeling as long as possible and reverting to vipassana awareness. In the meantime, most everyone else got up and dispersed in various directions for their dinner break. I had already decided that I would not eat anything in the evenings but use this time before Satsangha for my evening meditation period, to keep up my former practice.

For Satsangha, we all sat on the floor in a semi-circle around Swamiji who sat in a chair. His long, white, fluffy, freshly washed hair hung over his broad shoulders and his beard puffed out all over his enormous chest. He wore a freshly ironed set of orange swami clothes (lungi and Indian-style, long-sleeved shirt) and sat quietly in what appeared to be a state of deep meditation for several minutes. After singing a few Bhajans (devotional songs) in Tamil by those who knew them, Swamiji fielded questions regarding the things we had been learning or more general

¹⁵ Centers of energy in the etheric body.

questions on Yoga or spirituality. A Sri Lankan woman dressed neatly in a saree asked a question concerning the pranayama breathing technique which he had taught that morning (Chris and I missed it.) The Swami didn't answer just short and sweet as she probably expected, but went into a long detailed and philosophical oration on the nature and scope of prana (life force.) He covered seemingly every aspect of the subject, and in the process the lady's original question was answered in different ways. This long answer held domain for most of the hour. This was Swamiji's style on many occasions. He did not usually give prearranged or memorized lectures but spoke spontaneously, drawing on what seemed to be an inexhaustible storehouse of facts, figures and profound yogic wisdom while weaving it all together in a comprehensive way.

By the end of this first day, I felt sure I had met the right Yoga teacher and that it wasn't by sheer blind chance. Chris was also enthusiastic about the Swami with his apparent deep knowledge and distinct, dynamic style of teaching. We arrived back at the house about 9:30 P.M.; Sam was waiting up for us, anxious to find out how it went. Chris and I alternated relating all the events of the day, and I inquired of Sam if it would be possible for the two of us to stay at his house for the entire month until the course was finished. We did not want it to be a burden for him and his family members and offered to pay as kind of boarders. Without second thought, Sam responded affirmatively and assured us that we would be most certainly and happily welcomed; he could accept no remuneration. He said it was their duty as Buddhists to offer whatever hospitality was within their humble means to help us, because they knew we were earnestly seeking to learn and practice the Dhamma, whether it was Yoga or Buddhist meditation. Sam wanted us to feel free to come and go as we needed to fit the schedule, and consider it our own home. So for the four weeks, we did just that.

Chris and I mutually decided that we would get up about 5 A.M. and meditate sitting on our mattress in the room before walking over to the ashram at dawn to arrive by 6. During the two-hour morning break, we went to one of the nearby restaurants with some of the other westerners to eat breakfast, which usually consisted, at least for myself, of a mixture of bananas, papaya and curd eaten with hoppers or string hoppers. Afterwards,

we sometimes took a stroll down one of the lanes off Galle Road, crossing the railroad tracks to sit on the big boulders which form a breakwater along the seacoast, to while away the time before the next class at 10. For lunch we walked back to Sam's, stopping along the way to buy fresh fruit and vegetables and a pot of curd and prepared our own yogic diet. We stayed in the vicinity of the ashram during the evening break, myself usually meditating and Chris going with the others for a light dinner. We both returned together to Sam's after the Satsangha for sleeping. This arrangement worked out quite well, but it did not allow us to see much of Sam except a few minutes or longer at night when we got back around 9:30 or 10 P.M. Sam was in the Sri Lanka Air Force and worked as a clerk in the SLAF Headquarters located downtown. He had a 8 to 5 schedule; he was usually still asleep by the time we departed at 5:40 A.M. and retired by 10 P.M.

In the first week, we learned a lot of yogic cleansing techniques, including a salt water purge of the entire gastrointestinal tract. This was a kind of 'Spring cleaning' for the body and was normally followed by a period of fasting. Swamiji explained how periodic systematic body cleansing and fasting were beneficial or important for anyone really wanting to purify his or her body; it was the foundation on which yoga practices must be done if any authentic state of stable health be attained; which was in turn the springboard for higher states of meditation to easily flow forth. Half the diseases or disorders people have, especially westerners on their junk food diets, occur in the gastrointestinal tract. He said that no one could hope to achieve high or genuine meditative states or Cosmic Consciousness if one's bowels were fouled and plugged up with "crud," as was the case with the majority of persons. The tone in which he said it struck me funny; but in the context of his overall explanation, it sounded all very scientific and reasonable. I knew my guts were in bad shape, albeit getting slowly better; and I was curious to try this routine. In the first few days, all of us were expected as part of the course curriculum to undergo the complex procedure under the guidance of Meenakshi and a couple other of Swamiji's experienced Western assistants.

When I tried this, I could see the foul-looking and smelling crud which came out of my insides and it was a real eye opener; it made me feel inwardly cleaner and even lighter. I hoped this might be the permanent end to the chronic stomach disorders I had been having off and on for the past year; it made me want to never consume things like meat, processed food and junk foods again; this, however, was wishful thinking and didn't necessarily come to pass as strictly as I would have liked. Nonetheless, I gained a new perspective on the whole matter of body/mind relationships. We were to follow this cleansing by a period of total fasting, drinking only water. This was to give the digestive organs a needed rest and allow the body cells to eat up the accumulated foreign matter and excess fatty tissues.

Fasting is a proven way to help the body rid itself of unnatural, harmful inner growths and organisms and restore health if undertaken wisely. The length of our fast depended on our individual body needs, according to what the Swami called one's individual biorhythm cycles. In my case, it was four; so I was required to fast for four days. I had never voluntarily fasted before (I had skipped eating for a day when seriously ill once or twice,) and the prospect of going without any food whatsoever for four whole days was intriguing. I knew I had felt better, more light and airy, while eating only one meal of fruit and vegetable salad at Goa, and I wondered if total abstention would be even more exhilarating — a reverse of the phrase, "the more the merrier." The whole situation presented itself so surprisingly on the spur of the moment, with only one day's notice, that I did not have much time to think about it pro or con or become scared by the prospect of forsaking food for four days. Before I knew it, I had completed the bizarre routine and was fasting.

The first day was the worst in terms of the mind thinking about food and feeling hunger pangs, but by the second day those physical and mental habit patterns largely faded away. I did feel a little weaker than normal; during the noon breaks at Sam's, I laid down for a one or two hour nap, but felt fine otherwise. When it came time to break the fast on the fourth morning, I did not even feel particularly hungry nor have a real desire to eat. I felt I could have continued much longer without food. Chris had also fasted, but for only three days according to his own personal cycle. We were instructed

to break the fast gradually, starting on the first day drinking only diluted fruit juice or eating soft fruits, depending on how long the fast was.

The second day, I began eating my normal diet of curd, fruit and vegetable salad, which was relatively light and yogic anyway. Once I started eating, I could notice the old desires trying to reassert themselves; and I had to resist the temptation for indulging in sweets, other snacks and eating at night. The mind made up clever excuses why I should eat more — to replenish the body. As it was, I did give in and sometimes ate a piece of fruit or two during the evening interlude after rising from my post mantra-chanting meditation.

Swamiji taught us other yogic cleansing techniques for the nose and sinus passages. One involved sniffing up salt water or a herbal solution through the nostrils and spitting it out the mouth; another technique had us taking a deep breath and then expelling the air in short quick blasts out each nostril in a certain prescribed manner. The Swami was a perfectionist and a stickler for details and described each new technique and practice very thoroughly, and he expected the students to listen carefully and perform it exactly that way. He emphasized that Yoga was an exact science and conscious evolution. He criticized Western yoga buffs who cut corners and modified yoga to suit themselves saying, “We need a Western yoga.” He dubbed slipshod or haphazard practice as “bhoga yoga” or “armchair yoga”!

In the morning hatha yoga and pranayama session, we covered a lot of material very quickly, learning new postures and breathing patterns every day. Swamiji described scientifically how all the practices in the Science of Yoga are based upon the universal reality of prana. He explained that prana is the invisible, all-pervasive life force which sustains all forms of life — human, animal, plant and even mineral. He referred to it as “cosmic plasma” or a kind of rarified electrical energy that binds all of the elements of creation together and gives them life. We receive most of the prana the body needs through breathing, but small amounts are taken in and absorbed from the food we eat, especially raw food, and the water we drink. Prana circulates through the body via an extensive network of invisible etheric

channels called nadis. Under normal circumstances, prana flows in the nadis in set patterns to perform various vital functions, but, unlike the circulation of blood, it can be re-routed and directed by mind control. A high concentration of prana in a particular painful or diseased area can be an effective healing power. Pranayama is then the conscious, controlled movement of prana in various prescribed patterns and rhythms to insure optimum health and well being of the entire body/mind organism.

Pranayama is not merely deep breathing exercises, though it comes in with the air, it includes visualization or awareness of the energy as it is directed through the nadis. Swamiji's description of all this was fascinating for me.

According to Dr. Swami Gitananda, the *sine qua non*¹⁶ of Yoga is based upon mastering three-part lobular breathing. This means breathing into the three major lobes of the lungs, viz.¹⁷ low, mid, and high, in a rhythmic fashion. He explained the physiology of this in connection with the flow of prana and blood through the intricate circulatory and respiratory system. Each of the three lung sections govern prana and blood circulation to a corresponding area of the body. If we fail to breathe in one or more of the lobes, then the respective body parts will not get the required amount of blood, oxygen and prana to maintain itself properly. He pointed out that the major cause for most chronic disorders and organ malfunction could be traced back to inadequate prana intake and blood/oxygen distribution due to faulty breathing. These disorders could be corrected and revitalized by suitable pranayama breathing practices in conjunction with certain yoga postures and diet.

In the first few days while I was fasting, we went over this lobular breathing many times and were taught different postures designed to help stimulate or force the air to go into the three lung sections. Hell, I had never even known what real deep breathing was nor that I had these different lung lobes, etcetera. For all intents and purposes, the lungs were just an elastic bag that we breathed in and out of. This was a new revelation for me, and I could feel the difference once I practiced a little and got the hang of it.

¹⁶ An essential element or condition; something absolutely indispensable or essential. (Noted by Dhammvamsa)

¹⁷ That is; namely. (Noted by Dhammvamsa)

Swami Gitananda also stressed the importance of rhythmic breathing done in conjunction with postural movements, and he taught us a whole series of exercises in that fashion. Some of this was similar to what I'd been doing from the book, but this new material went way beyond and eclipsed the former. In the beginning, we learned simple movements such as single and double leg lifting while lying stretched out on the back, then on each side and from the stomach-prone position. We eventually performed all the classical postures — the boat, cobra, bow, plough, bridge, the tree and many others, learning two or three new ones each day to add to our growing repertoire. Swamiji also taught us a whole bunch of other pranayama breathing routines, along with things called mudras, bandhas, and kriyas. But these were more complex, and we only briefly experimented with them, not spending enough time repeating over and over to effectively learn or experience the individual benefits of each.

The late afternoon mantra-chanting session was my favorite period of the day. The Swami taught us various mantras and styles of chanting, as there was an appropriate mantra for each day associated with different devotional deities in the Hindu pantheon. My favorite was OM NAMA SHIVAYA. Swamiji explained that Shiva, though commonly regarded and worshipped as a God, means “Goodness” coming from purity of mind or that state of pure mind itself; in chanting OM NAMA SHIVAYA we were paying homage to and arousing that quality of Enlightenment that is within us. Seeing Shiva in this way made it appear similar to the Buddha Nature of Zen or Nibbana, and this is how I reconciled them. I got quite high from these chanting sessions and could sit for an extra long time in the lotus posture afterwards meditating, trying to let the mind merge into the inner light and feeling of infinity or simply abiding in a very expanded state of tranquil awareness.

In the course of his talks, the learned Swami would mention bits and pieces about the six or eight various branches of the holistic Science of Yoga. The way he seemed to confidently and expertly expound and integrate the various aspects of body and mind purification/training made it appear to be truly the grand daddy of all sciences. Through this, I began to

see more clearly, on a deeper level, the fundamental relationship between the body and the mind; they are like two sides of a coin and it is necessary to treat them so in the process of spiritual growth and eventual Enlightenment. I was trying to understand the similarities and differences in how Yoga and Buddhism approached and treated the matter of Spiritual Awakening and liberation from Samsara. Buddhism did not concern itself with purifying the body first or directly as in Yoga. Buddhism appeared to be chiefly concerned with eradicating the unwholesome elements in the mind firstly and directly by meditation to achieve the end of suffering and the ultimate happiness of Nibbana. There was no need of mentioning anything about a God or a Supreme Self or Soul (Atman) to realize. Yoga, on the other hand, did have as a principal concept of Reality the Supreme Self, and often used the various words for God (Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, etcetera) as synonyms. On the surface, there seemed to be a contradiction in terms between the No Self or Emptiness doctrines of Buddhism and the Self-Realization of Yoga and Hinduism in general, but they both claimed emancipation from the flesh and the attainment of everlasting peace and happiness. I wondered if there was really any fundamental difference. How could there be two separate Truths or Ultimate Realities? At the time, my knowledge on this subtle matter was limited. I was not in a position to make any intelligent or critical judgments one way or the other, nor did I feel the need to. I felt in either case the ultimate goal for me was still a long ways off. Whether there was a crucial, irreconcilable difference or not would all eventually come out in the wash, as the saying goes, as it became clearer in my continued studies, practice and personal experience of each. For the time being, I was content with practicing the yoga to purify and strengthen the body/nervous system and the Buddhist meditation to eliminate mental defilements, decrease attachments and cultivate Wisdom.

By the last week of the course, I was quite turned on to the potentiality of many of these yogic practices and was sorry it was almost over. The time was so short and there was so much to learn and try to absorb that it was almost overwhelming; there was no way I could have possibly remembered the details of all the techniques and the massive volume of facts and information which was so hurriedly dished out. The Swami even said that this was primarily intended to be a whirlwind introduction to the variety,

scope, and practical application of the various aspects of Yoga. All the material presented in this one-month course had been condensed from a standard, full six-month teacher training course that he taught at his ashram in Pondicherry each year. The same material plus much more was presented and gone over in a slower, more detailed manner, with sufficient time allotted to practice and repeat the various techniques and postures. Swamiji said that six months was usually sufficient to get a good foundation in these teachings and become competent enough to instruct others if one so desired and made a sincere effort. He even offered a Yoga teacher certificate to those who successfully completed the six months of training. He encouraged any of us who were really interested to come to Pondicherry and take this six-month course which commenced on October 1st of each year.

By the end of the course, I had all but made up my mind on going to Pondicherry by October 1st to stay for the full six-month program. I talked to the Swami about it, and he heartily welcomed me to do so. Chris was also impressed with the Swamiji's teachings and likewise had the wish to attend. Two of the other westerners new to Swami Gitananda and his teachings were also thinking to follow suit. There was five months until then during which I would remain in Sri Lanka and practice the vipassana meditation I was still keen on, while keeping up with the yoga so that I would be in good shape to start the six-month course. This was my projected plan for almost the next full year. It was an assuring thought and nice feeling to know that there was enough to keep me spiritually occupied here in the East for that long.

The last night was reserved for Guru Dakshina or 'gift for the Guru.' This is a custom in the Yoga tradition of teacher-disciple relationship where each student is expected to present himself or herself individually in front of the guru to express one's gratitude for the teachings received and bringing a gift of some sort to offer. Swamiji liked flowers and fruit, but it was obvious that he couldn't use thirty or forty simultaneous offerings of only that. Meenakshi suggested that a modest gift of cash would be more useful, as their expenses to go and come from India and other necessities had to be met. She explained that the fee for the course was just barely enough to

cover the running costs such as renting the house, their food, utilities, etcetera. The Swami also needed some extra money for his own personal expenses.

This, of course, sounded very practical and reasonable, but, as my money from home had not yet arrived, I had only about ten dollars left. I felt greatly indebted to him for his invaluable teachings and inspiration and knew I should unhesitatingly offer the ten dollars; I could borrow some money from Chris to tide me over. Somehow, however, that deep-rooted, self-cherishing stinginess struggled to rear its ugly head, trying to use my low cash level as an excuse not to give much. I found myself having to mentally debate the issue of how much if any to give, or should I simply buy a flower garland and a few pieces of fruit to offer. I was horrified at this pettiness going on in the mind, but I was almost helpless to stop it. Finally, I succeeded in asserting my better judgment and offered the remaining ten dollars and felt very relieved and light by it. Coincidentally, the money arrived at the bank the following day.

That night it was interesting to watch as each person went before the Swami to pay their respects and make an offering. I noticed myself trying to judge each person's sincerity in their presentation. Some, especially the Tamils, appeared genuinely devoted and made obeisance by garlanding him and prostrating to touch the Guru's feet. Others were more reserved, perhaps held back by their ego or self-consciousness and merely feigned a bow with joined palms and placed an envelope on the plate beside him. A few did not make any attempt at bowing — clearly ego restrained. Because I was used to and appreciated the value of humbling oneself in front of the Guru, I performed the Theravada Buddhists' modified version of prostration¹⁸ and touched the Swamiji's bare feet. But even as sincere or egoless as I thought I was, I could still detect a slight trace of showmanship in the act. These were more insights to reveal the depth of defilements which lurk in the dark recesses of the un-liberated mind.

¹⁸ *This is done from a kneeling position; with joined palms one simply bends over to touch the hands and head to the floor and then raising back up, repeating it three times.*



CHAPTER 15

KANDUBODA VIPASSANA CENTER

Now that the course was over, Chris and I set our sights once again on picking up where we had left off — going to Kanduboda. I had already written to Venerable Sivali, the English-speaking monk/teacher, informing him of our impending visit and desire to undergo a period of vipassana training under his guidance. First of all, however, the two of us had to go down to the immigration office to get our visas extended. With a little smooth talking, we managed to obtain a three-month extension, for which we had to go to the bank and cash one hundred and eighty dollars each and bring the bank receipts to show them. Fortunately, my money arrived at this time so I could do this without any problem. I also went to a cloth shop and bought two white sarongs and a couple of sleeveless white banyan shirts. I had heard that at the meditation center it was customary to wear white attire, preferably the national dress of an ankle-length sarong and a long-sleeve white shirt. White is a symbol of purity in the East. When undergoing meditation retreats or even going to the temple to worship, white dress for lay people is deemed appropriate; women wear a white saree. Because it was so hot and humid, I did not relish wearing a long-sleeved shirt; so I chose the white undershirts which were an acceptable substitute.

At some point along the line, since my interest in vipassana, I had been given the names of two good books on the subject. One was *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation* by Venerable. Nyanaponika Thera, a German monk living in Sri Lanka; the other was *Practical Insight Meditation* by Mahasi Sayadaw, a Burmese monk/meditation master. On one of the free Mondays, I had gone to one of the large bookstores downtown and was lucky enough to find both of them, which I bought. I knew that reading books while on intensive retreat at Kanduboda was not officially permitted, so I had begun reading the first mentioned; I found it extremely straightforward and clear, and it inspired me to begin practicing. It talked about the need for mindfulness in our daily lives and the power of mindfulness to uncover the

hidden dark recesses of the mind and root out the various hindrances to realize inner peace and eventual Enlightenment. The method of vipassana expounded in both these books was different from Goenka's sweeping; it was the style I heard described by Joseph back in Bodhgaya and which was also taught at Kanduboda. Having thoroughly read *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*, I decided to take along *Practical Insight Meditation* which described the actual systematic practice in more detail, hoping to sneak in some time to read it. Because it described the actual technique I would be practicing, not something else which might distract my attention, I figured it wouldn't hurt."

The Kanduboda Vipassana Bhavana Center is situated in lush green countryside about fifteen miles into the interior from Colombo. But because



of the narrow, potholed road and the frequent bus stops, the journey took nearly an hour. On arrival, Chris and I reported to the reception office just inside the entrance gate and inquired from the clerk about our stay, informing him that I had written earlier. He requested us to go and meet the teacher to discuss the matter with him. One of the temple boys

directed us down a sandy pathway past some low-roofed, white-washed buildings; the whole place was kept very clean with the sandy courtyards and paths neatly swept; many palm trees of varying heights along with profuse flowering trees and exotic plants added to exude a tranquil, sanctified air. Venerable Sivali was sitting quietly alone on the floor in his small cottage and asked us to enter. We slipped off our thongs and stepped inside, whereupon he politely requested us to sit down on a straw-woven mat which was laid out in front of him. I paid my respects with three modified prostrations and then sat down cross-legged with Chris following suit.

Venerable Sivali was middle-aged but was youngish looking and unassuming, appearing very calm and centered. Once he got a good look at my face, he came alive a little as if he recognized me, and he inquired, “Is your name Joseph?” When I replied in the affirmative, he related the following story. Two weeks earlier, a man from the CID headquarters had come in search of me; they wanted me for some reason and came here because I had listed Kanduboda as the place where I would be residing. The man had brought along the picture I had left when registering and showed it to Venerable Sivali, inquiring if he had seen me. He informed the CID man that I had not come as yet, though he remembered the letter I had sent. The officer seemed a bit upset not to find me and instructed Venerable Sivali that when I arrived to send me back immediately to the CID headquarters. Now the calm monk looked a little worried and asked me what might be wrong, why the police wanted me. I was just as perplexed as he and told him truthfully that I did not know. I described to him how I had intended coming to Kanduboda last month, but then postponed it because of the unexpected yoga course without registering the change. He told me that before I could stay there for meditation, I would have to return to Colombo to straighten out the matter. It was already late in the afternoon, but he suggested that I go now and stay in Colombo that night; he appeared cautious, and I suppose he had the right, though I figured it was merely a routine checkup. Because Chris was British, he had not been required to register and Venerable Sivali allowed him to remain to begin his practice. I told him I hoped to clear this up quickly and be back in a day or two. The teacher requested me to obtain a written clearance from the CID, and then he would permit me to stay. So with a slight feeling of anxiety, not knowing what to expect, I walked back to the bus stand at Delgoda junction and got on the next bus. I proceeded directly to Sam’s house and planned to go downtown first thing in the morning.

Sam was already home from work when I arrived, and he was surprised to see me back so soon. I related the whole episode, and he agreed that it was most likely just a routine check though for some reason I retained a little uneasiness and expectation. I presented myself at the fourth floor office the next morning at 9 A.M. and was instructed to sit on the bench along the wall to wait. After fifteen minutes, I was called into an office and again told

to sit, only to wait another ten minutes. Finally, an officer came with a folder of papers and my picture. He inquired, "Have you ever been busted for trying to smuggle hashish out of Afghanistan?" This abrupt, unexpected question startled me, and it took a few seconds to formulate a reply. I figured that somehow they must have been informed about it, otherwise, how could they have known; and this was why they wanted to see me. In a calm manner I asked him why he asked that question. He replied that they had received a list of names from Interpol of suspected or potential drug traffickers; and my name, along with the offense I had committed, was on the list. I then explained, "Yes, last year I tried that foolish stunt and got caught and was punished for it; I learned my lesson the hard way." I added that all of that had happened in the past when I was an ignorant fool, but now I had turned over a new leaf, converted to Buddhism and was practicing meditation. I assured him that I had quit using drugs and that I was clean as a whistle in that regard. Thinking he was probably a Buddhist, I felt he would understand the implications of the statement and not hold the past against me.

The officer seemed pleased with my answer and asked where I was practicing meditation. I told him I was just now preparing to undergo a retreat at Kanduboda under the guidance of Venerable Sivali. He immediately responded, "Oh yes, that is a favorite place for westerners." He said his mother-in-law was a dyaka (supporter) of Kanduboda, and she had sometimes also practiced meditation there. He did not even mention the fact of my not being there when the CID man had come looking for me. He then started gathering up his papers and preparing to go, and I questioned him if that was all. He casually replied, "Yes, the matter is over as far as we are concerned; I don't think we have to worry about you; you are free to go." At the last moment, I remembered about obtaining a written clearance for Venerable Sivali to set his mind at ease. I requested this from the officer, but he said it was not necessary. It took a detailed explanation and a repeated emphasis of Venerable Sivali's worry to convince him. He finally cooperated by quickly scribbling out a quick message to the effect on a scrap of paper which he signed and stamped with an official seal. His seeming lack of concern about the whole matter was uncanny. I chalked it up to being part of the Asian easygoing attitude towards life. I was grateful

but felt that with real offenders this attitude would not be very skillful. On the way back to Sam's for lunch, I reflected on the law of kamma and how my actions of nearly one and a half years followed me all this way.

I arrived back at Kanduboda that afternoon clutching the letter of clearance. After carefully reading it, Venerable Sivali told me I could stay for a period of three weeks. Being one of only two regular meditation centers for westerners and the most popular, it was often full to capacity; and therefore a time limit of three weeks was imposed to allow for others. In special circumstances, or in the off-tourist season, the period of stay could often be extended with the teacher's approval. I sat down on the mat while Venerable Sivali explained the rules to be followed: we were expected to observe the ten precepts, the same ones as at Kopan; we were not allowed to go near the women's section which was housed in a separate area of the center; we were not to engage in conversation with the other student meditators nor should we write any letters or read books; again, practicing yoga was discouraged. All these occupations, he said, would only distract from the task at hand, which was to cultivate a steady, uninterrupted mindfulness in a specific way which he would explain. He would be available for personal interviews and progress report each day during an allotted time in the afternoon. Besides being a meditation center for lay people, Kanduboda is also a monastery with a number of monks studying and practicing. The lay male meditators eat their breakfast and lunch with the monks in their dining hall or *danasala*, as it is termed in Buddhist monasteries here. Following the rule for monks, we also would not be eating any solid food after the noon meal; however, a cup of black tea would be served in the afternoon and evening.

The teacher then described the actual meditation technique. He explained how I should concentrate on the rising and falling movements of the abdomen during the process of normal breathing. A mental note of 'rising, rising' should be made while breathing in and 'falling, falling' while breathing out. This was to be the primary object of focus while sitting. During the pause between breaths or if the breathing became too faint and unnoticeable, then he said to feel where the knees or buttocks touched the floor and make a mental note of 'touching, touching.' If the mind got

caught up in thinking, whereupon awareness of sitting and breathing was obscured or lost, it should be recognized as soon as possible by making a note of 'thinking, thinking,' and then simply return awareness to 'rising, rising,' and 'falling, falling.' If I was disturbed by a loud sound, a mental note of 'hearing, hearing' should be made until the sound went away and then return again to 'rising... falling...' The same mental noticing applied to the other sensory stimulations of seeing objects, feeling gross body sensations, smelling and tasting, if and when they occurred. In this practice, only the bare observation of the process itself was important. We were not to try to analyze or make judgments concerning them beyond the initial noting. All together, this was the basic rhythm of contemplation while sitting for one-hour periods several times a day. In between sittings, we were to practice walking meditation which he went on to describe. This was continuation of the sitting awareness, substituting the movement of the feet for the rising and falling of the abdomen. While lifting one foot, make a note of 'lifting, lifting;' when swinging the foot forward 'swinging, swinging;' and when lowering the foot to the ground 'lowering, lowering.' This attention was applied to each step in succession without break, while walking very slowly. The rest was the same concerning the mind's errant thinking and the sensory activities of hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting and touching — giving only bare attention to the initial raw sensory phenomenon.

These basic instructions coincided with what I had read in *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation* and which were described in even more detail in *Practical Insight Meditation*. He instructed me to try and sit for an hour at a stretch interspersed by thirty minutes or so of walking meditation, alternating these periods of awareness as much as possible from early morning till night. He advised me to begin slowing down all my other general movements while attending to the routine activities of the day such as eating, bathing, using the toilet and so on; he would describe this in more detail later. I asked him about the anapanasati technique, feeling the breath at the nose tip as I had learned from Goenka. He replied that this rising and falling of the abdomen awareness was itself a form of anapanasati, and it was more conducive for the cultivation of alert insight awareness. He said there was no need to do anything else, just start slowly, relax into it, and let

it all unfold naturally. This sounded reasonable and satisfied my curiosity. The mild-mannered monk then led me over to the men's quarters and assigned me one of the tiny individual cells, pointing out the latrines and bathing well, and then departed, leaving me on my own.

I spent the next hour settling into my new environment. There were about twenty individual cubicles on both sides of a rectangular building with a wide corridor going all the way around. This encircling hallway was used for the walking meditation where I saw Chris and another Western 'yogi,' as the meditators were called, pacing very slowly with their eyes downcast in front of their feet. They looked something like walking zombies in that exaggerated slow motion. The individual cells were approximately five by seven feet with a raised cement bench along one side for sleeping; a coconut fiber mattress, a sheet and pillow were provided. A small, low, wooden chair was in one corner, upon which I set up a personal altar. Over the wooden surface I laid my neatly folded Benares holy scarf and set upon it a Tibetan-style picture of Shakyamuni Buddha and a small, framed picture of Lama Zopa that I had brought from Kopan. I improvised an incense holder out of a cup that I found in the corner and filled it full of sand; I had brought along a packet of incense. A few candles and a box of matches were already in the room as there was no electric light in any of the cells. I spread out my thin blanket and jalaba over the mattress and put my straw yoga mat that I had thoughtfully brought on the floor. I set out my toothbrush, toothpaste, soap and towel neatly at the foot of the bed and placed the book, *Practical Insight Meditation*, out of sight under the mattress. All of this arranging seemed to brighten up the otherwise drab, stark cell, giving it a touch of cozy warmth.

I was now all set to begin. However, just as I was about to sit down upon the bed, Chris silently glided by and paused at the screened door, and I motioned him to come in for a quick whispered chat. I briefed him on what had transpired at the CID office, and he filled me in on a few particulars concerning the daily schedule. There were three one-hour group meditation periods each day when all the yogis sat in the corridor across from the door of their own room. Venerable Sivali also came and sat with the group at these times which were held after breakfast from 8 to 9, immediately after

lunch from 12 to 1, and in the evening from 6 to 7. The wake-up bell sounded at 3 A.M. when we were supposed to mindfully get up, do a face wash if desired and then start the sitting and walking awareness practice. At about 5 A.M. a monastery attendant boy came around to the rooms with a pitcher of rice gruel and poured everyone a cupful. A cup and plate would be provided which I was to keep in the room and carry to the dining hall at mealtimes. Coconut water was brought at 10 A.M., and tea was served in the mid-afternoon and evening to help keep us awake. Chris added that the food was very good! Now one of the monastery boys was bringing my cup and plate, and Chris discreetly resumed his mindful pacing. It was almost time for the evening tea followed by the group meditation, so I put off sitting until then.

In that first group sitting I began the abdomen awareness, trying to adjust my mind to the newness of it. Because I had been practicing the deep yoga breathing which exercises the diaphragm, I was able to feel the rising and falling movements of the abdomen fairly easily. My attention, however, was sporadic, being interrupted often by thoughts of the day, which I attempted to control by noting 'thinking, thinking;' and it did help a little. After the bell rang signifying the end, I was then on my own until the official sleeping time at 11 P.M. Going to sleep at 11 P.M. and getting up at 3 A.M. meant only four hours' sleep which caused me slight apprehension. I wasn't sure if I could endure those austere hours, at least just yet. I had read in one of the vipassana books that one who diligently sustains this kind of keen awareness loses the need for sleep. The Buddha was said to have slept for only two hours each night which was reassuring. Anyway, Chris informed me that no one checked up on us to enforce the strict hours, so one could cut an hour or two on either end if needed.

I was now anxious to start the walking meditation. I stood up slowly in the hallway and kept close to one side so as not to be in the direct line of the five or six other yogis. I began carefully, slowly lifting the right foot a few inches off the floor, saying to myself 'lifting, lifting' following through with 'swinging, swinging' and 'lowering, lowering,' and repeating the

process with the left foot as the body slowly inched forward.¹⁹ It felt a bit awkward at first, and I had to struggle to maintain balance moving so slowly. As I pressed on, it gradually became easier; and I was able to absorb the mind into it, forgetting about time almost. It took quite awhile to circle the cellblock in this manner; and after two complete trips, the feet and legs were quite tired. So I went into the room to sit on the bed to continue with the abdomen awareness, but I had more difficulty with the ‘monkey mind;’ and then sleepiness overcame me. It was only the first day; and, as I had been running around Colombo in the morning, I excused myself. I stretched out with the idea to continue the awareness of rising and falling, but soon fell fast asleep. It was 9 o’clock.

The faint reverberation of the morning wake-up bell penetrated through the eardrums, arousing consciousness from its dreamy slumber. This was immediately followed by three chimes from the big wall clock hanging in the center of the hallway. I observed the drowsy mind formulating its comprehension of 3 A.M. with the implications, followed by the conditioned, obstinate reaction to getting up so early. I thought I would just lay awake observing ‘rising and falling’ for awhile before actually arising. But the inevitable happened again — I dozed off into dreamland. I was reawakened by the chimes sounding 4 o’clock and sat up with a start, feeling guilty about oversleeping. After my morning ablutions, I did a few yoga stretching exercises with deep breathing to wake up more fully, and then, arranging the pillow as a cushion, I sat and began the basic practice. At about 5, I heard the sounds of the boy bringing the rice gruel. I mentally followed the boy going from room to room serving each person and was caught up in desire-based expectation and imagination. Only after a few minutes did I realize that I had totally lost the basic awareness and was lost in thought, whereupon I immediately noted, ‘wandering, wandering’ and reverted to ‘rising, rising,’ ‘falling, falling,’ ‘hearing, hearing,’ etcetera. I had left the cup for the gruel near the door as Chris had advised; this was so that the boy could open the screen door and pour the gruel himself without my having to get up out of meditation. As he poured it, I said to myself,

¹⁹ From here on, I will often refer to the parts of my body and the activities of my mind with the objective ‘the’ instead of subjective ‘my’ — the eardrums, the feet, the mind, etcetera. This is to emphasize the conditioned, no-self, owner-less, automatic programmed nature of such body-mind activity as seen through the eye of vipassana.

‘hearing, hearing;’ though my eyes were shut, the mind was picturing the whole scene and I was slow to note ‘imagining, imagining.’

Canda, as it is called in Sinhala, is a traditional drink made from rice, coconut milk, herbs and sweetener. It is often served in the early morning prior to breakfast in meditation monasteries where monks and lay meditators start the day so early. As I had never drunk the stuff before, I was anxious to try it. Upon savoring it sip by sip, I knew I had just developed a new attachment — it was quite delicious. The green concoction was fairly thick; and by the time I finished, I was quite satisfied; it was like an adequate breakfast in itself. I even toyed with the idea of skipping the regular breakfast and just eating lunch. But when the bell rang, I gave in to the temptation and collected my plate and cup.

All the lay yogis lined up in single file behind two western monks who were also undergoing the training here. With eyes downcast on the heels of the person in front, we slowly and mindfully paced along the concrete path into the *danasala*^{III}. The Sinhalese monks who resided in a different section of the monastery had already entered and were sitting alongside one wall with Venerable Sivali at their head. The two western monks in our group took their places at the end of the monk’s row while the lay yogis sat on a bench on the opposite side separated by the tables in the center where the food was placed. While waiting to be served, everyone sat silently looking downwards or with closed eyes. Eating was also incorporated into the overall meditation practice, though I had not yet been instructed in the exact particulars, except to eat slowly. I sat trying to be aware of the abdomen rising and falling while fighting off the temptation to see what kind of food was on the table.

The lay people who bring the food to Kanduboda personally serve by coming around carrying a pot or plate of each dish. They put a spoonful or piece of each item on each yogi’s plate or, in the case of monks, their alms bowl, which one was normally supposed to accept without qualms or preference. When one feels he has enough, a hand is put over the plate or bowl to indicate so, whereupon the donors pass on by. Being new to this procedure, I wound up with a mountain of food on my plate which I could

not have possibly eaten. I was scarcely even hungry because of the large helping of canda I had drunk barely an hour earlier. But not wanting to appear wasteful and out of curiosity to sample the many new kinds of Sinhalese breakfast foods, I ate a little of each. Following this main course, bananas, slices of papaya, pineapple and mango were brought around. My eyes almost bulged out of my head when I saw all of this, as I was already stuffed. Despite the fact, I couldn't resist eating a banana and slice of papaya to top it all off. Afterwards, a bowl of water was given to each person to wash the soiled right hand²⁰ and a spittoon or bucket was brought around to dump the dirty water into. When everyone was finished, Venerable Sivali led the monks out followed by the laymen.

During the 8 A.M. group sitting, I listened to the gurgling of my stomach as the food was being digested and experienced considerable drowsiness which I attributed to having overeaten. I regarded these as shakedown experiences to find out the correct proportions with respect to food, sleep and meditation. After the group sitting, we were on our own until 11 A.M. when we assembled for lunch. We could bathe or wash clothes or just continue the sitting and walking routine. Venerable Sivali had given me only the basic instruction so far, and I was anxious to learn the whole detailed procedure; so I utilized this time to sneak in some reading in *Practical Insight Meditation*, with the door shut so no one could see me with the book.

The book elaborated much more on the actual technique, including some theory behind it. The observation of rising and falling of the abdomen tunes awareness to the flow of impermanence; the arising and passing away of the in-breathing and out-breathing is symbolic of the arising and vanishing of every other body and mental activity. As you hone awareness on this basic movement of life, you also automatically begin noticing other phenomena more clearly. The noting functions to keep the mind on the activity while it is occurring in the present moment and aids in establishing an objective detachment. This 'bare attention' is very effective in establishing some mental space which breaks the spontaneous, habitual

²⁰ In Sri Lanka, as in all South Asian countries, eating is usually done with specifically the right hand. The left hand is used for washing the anus after defecating and is considered unclean — even if you wash the hand with soap.

reactions, both physical and emotional, and the subsequent suffering that would normally ensue; it is a kind of self-psychotherapy in that sense.

The book's instructions on noting covered almost every conceivable body activity that arises in a normal day. While turning the head — 'turning, turning;' if you blink — 'blinking, blinking;' while lifting, lowering, stretching or bending an arm or leg — 'lifting..., lowering..., stretching..., bending..., ' so on and so forth. Any distinct movement should be done with this alert mindfulness; it almost forces you to slow down and move much slower. When the movements are slow enough and the awareness sharply in focus, the beginning and end — the duration or life-span of each body movement can be discerned; and each deliberate movement is necessarily preceded by an intention or command from the mind. You understand that the material body can do nothing on its own without the mind to power it. It also described how to practice this awareness while eating. When looking at the food — 'looking, looking;' while arranging it with the fingers — 'arranging, arranging;' while bringing the hand to the mouth, opening the mouth, putting the food inside, chewing, tasting and swallowing — you note all these separate activities in the same manner. If there is recognizing flavors, if there is any liking or disliking, desire or expectation for something else, then be sure to note all of these mental occurrences as well.

The book went on to list the various states of mind that can arise during meditation which should also be observed and noted. Some of the common mental activities are imagining, restlessness, worry, desire, aversion, anger, boredom, tiredness, dullness, curiosity, comparing, judging, pride, conceit, envy, jealousy, fear, doubt, dejection, confusion, frustration, contentment, joy, tranquility, compassion, love, etcetera. If and when these states arise, they should be objectively identified with bare attention, using the noting until it goes away. All of this serves to cultivate a deeper insight into the true nature of how the body and mind operate and the different elements or factors involved to gain a clearer understanding of the characteristics of impermanence, conditionality and no-owner. While absorbed in this insightful reading, the boy came around with the mid-morning coconut water; and I quickly hid the book from his view and feigned meditating. When he left, I mindfully noted the desire to drink the sweet delicious

liquid and executed the whole process of reaching for the cup, bringing it to the mouth, pouring it in, relishing the taste, swallowing, lowering the cup to my lap — repeating the sequence several times until it was finished.

Armed with this additional detail, I was eager to get in a period of sitting before lunch. I stood up and stretched the legs to get the circulation moving again and then sat down in the lotus posture and started by taking a few deep yoga breaths. Returning to natural, uncontrolled respiration, I began paying particular attention to the beginning, brief duration and end phases of each expanding and contracting movement of the abdomen. I noticed that being aware in this way helped to keep the mind more alert, and I could notice other body sensations arising and zipping away more easily as well as different sounds from outside. When the mind started wandering or daydreaming, I was fairly successful in making the appropriate notes to keep from getting lost into it. When pain grew in my knees, ankles and hips due to the lotus posture, I tried to create a mental space for it by keeping an objectified distance and noting ‘pain, pain’ as the book suggested.

It did work in most cases for a short while. After thirty minutes in the lotus posture, however, I was forced to bail out and lower the top foot down to the half lotus position. I tried to perform this adjustment slowly and distinctly, noting each separate movement according to the instructions in the book. As I was still new to this novel way of moving and in a hurry to alleviate the pain, I missed many details. I was already absorbed in expecting lunch when the bell rang and was slow to note ‘hearing, hearing.’ Better late than never, I mentally grabbed for ‘imagining, imagining,’ ‘expecting, expecting,’ and ‘hearing, hearing.’ I knew I had a lot of work to do; but, nonetheless, I was enthusiastic and hopeful about the potential of this technique and the whole practice.

The lineup and slow walk to the *danasala* for lunch was the same as for breakfast. While filing in past the center tables, I couldn’t help but notice the densely packed pots, pans, and plates of food. There were two or three varieties of rice, all kinds of different vegetable and fish dishes, plus heaps of bananas and slices of other fruits, pots of curd and platefuls of sweets. I detected anticipation in the mind but tried my best to ignore it. I was not

very hungry as I was still feeling the effects from breakfast, and I wanted to avoid the mistake of the morning. But in trying to practice slow, mindful movements, I was not quick enough to fend off the continuous parade of devotees depositing their spoonfuls on the ever-growing mound. I tried not to watch what was coming next, as this encouraged expectation and more discriminating thoughts; but I could feel the urge to peek out of the corner of my eye. I made a conscious effort to practice the eating meditation as the book described and found it quite a unique experience. Because of the greater time required to eat each mouthful, it was a good way to automatically or consciously force myself to eat a smaller amount of food. Though I knew better, I still found myself selecting the bits and pieces I liked best or which looked new and interesting and deliberately left room for the fruit, curd and sweets while half-heartedly noting 'desire, desire.' The leftovers were dumped into a large bucket which was carried around and later fed to the animals outside.

Within fifteen minutes of returning to our quarters, in which I had to quickly brush my teeth, it was time for the group sitting along the wall in the corridor. I knew I had eaten too much as the body felt heavy and stiff, and I had to fight off drowsiness which enveloped the mind like a thick dark cloud. In minutes, my head began its downward descent, yielding to the push of gravity; before I knew it, the chin was touching the chest and I was slumped over as well — hardly the picture of a meditating yogi. It took a couple of minutes to recognize this sloth and torpor and to muster up the strength to straighten up, only to slump over almost immediately. This process repeated itself over and over again during the sitting period, and no other progress was made. It was easy to understand why this was called a hindrance for meditation.

Out of curiosity, I discreetly looked around to see how the others were faring. To my consolation I discovered most of the others also bobbing up and down like yo-yos — even to my surprise, Venerable Sivali, who was sitting down the hall within view. I wondered what the purpose was in subjecting ourselves to this after eating and was glad when the clock chimed 1 o'clock to signify the end. I mindfully stretched my stiff legs and then performed the movement by movement process of bringing the body

up to a standing position and proceeded with walking which helped in banishing the tiredness from both the body and mind.



That afternoon between 3 and 5, Venerable Sivali sat on his usual seat in the center hallway to hold the daily interviews. I waited until the others had met with him before taking my turn. I paid respects with the customary prostrations and sat on the mat in front of him. He questioned me as to what I had been experiencing. I replied that I was slowly adjusting to the new routine and

mentioned my monkey-mindedness and the difficulty with sleepiness after meals. The monk smiled and explained how mental restlessness and its opposite, mental sluggishness were two of the five hindrances which were very common for beginners. He described how being more attentive to the breathing would aid in calming the erratic wandering mind; he said a good way to overcome sleepiness after meals was by forcing oneself to sit through it. If the yogi musters up enough mindfulness and determination, he can break through to a state of clarity, lightness and serenity. He said overeating was a major cause of the heavy drowsy feeling and apparently left it up to me as to what to do about it.

The teacher now explained the more detailed practice of slowing down and noting all body and mental occurrences, understanding them in their impermanent, conditioned nature, as I had already read. He reiterated that I should cultivate this mindfulness from the moment I open the eyes in the morning to the moment I fall asleep at night, in all four postures of sitting, standing, walking and lying down. He added that the occasions of using the latrine, washing at the tap, brushing the teeth, and even taking a bucket bath at the well were all very good times to develop insight. He advised me to relax into the practice, starting slowly and letting it gradually unfold and not to become tense or anxious about results. He then inquired if I had any further questions, which I did not. Having now a fairly good theoretical understanding, it was just a matter of time and persistent but patient

cultivation. I took the compassionate teacher's leave, bowing again and commenced mindfully walking.

INTENSIFYING INSIGHT

During the next week, I settled into the daily routine and concentration/awareness gradually improved. I was beginning to understand on a deeper level the real meaning of impermanence. As I sustained keen attention on the rising and falling of the abdomen, it appeared that each expanding or contracting movement was actually comprised of many separate movements, each with its own beginning, brief duration, and cessation. With this perception, the whole, or what appeared to be continuous, was broken up and discerned in its parts. This sharpened awareness helped to detect the other sensory stimulations as they arose and vanished, especially moments of hearing and feeling other body sensations, which at times came fast and furious. At these peak times, I could not even keep up with the noting because it all whizzed by so rapidly. Sometimes I would become frustrated and purposely slowed it down by reverting to the simple rising and falling of the abdomen and then let the momentum of other stimuli gradually build back up again.

In all this I perceived and understood how it is the nature of the conditioned mind to grab at, identify and react to certain stimuli which it is most familiar with or attached to, and leave the rest to simply disappear. When the mind selects a particular sense impression, that stimulus becomes the center of attention and assumes individual object status. As this insight penetrated deeper, I began to understand how everything in the physical world, in ultimate reality, is merely sensory or energy vibrations — color, sound, odor, flavor, and tactile — upon which the conditioned mind works its imagination to create what is perceived as the concrete world.²¹ Bound up in this mental process is also the nature of like and dislike, pleasure and pain, good and bad, in regard to the feelings and objects identified. Through our upbringing, since childhood, we have come to associate and react to

²¹ This accords with Einstein's Theory of Relativity in which matter is seen as merely compact energy vibrations in relationship to the observer.

particular individuals, groups of persons and objects of everyday experience in these set patterns. Our life literally revolves around these programmed mental feelings, trying to acquire and keep what we like or regard as pleasant, desirable or good while trying to avoid or get rid of what is disliked, what is regarded as unpleasant, painful or bad. As I watched the whole process, I realized that these concepts we have are essentially the work of the imagination, that individual objects in themselves have no such inherent value or realness. From this, I could get an inkling of the Yoga and Buddhist phrases, “The world is illusion; it is mind made”, and terms like Emptiness and Voidness.

These insights also revealed the no-self or egoless (anatta) characteristic of the process. I was not willing anything to happen; sense impressions and resulting mental activity were arising and passing away on their own accord, leaving their respective trails — all without my permission and even against my wishes. All I wanted to do was peacefully watch the breath go in and out; but, in spite of this, the movie projector of the mind cranked out melodrama after melodrama, much to my consternation. A few incidences during the day provided an excellent opportunity to experience this unwanted mental activity and brought home the truth of no-self. The most frequent and annoying automatic mind movies were the ones of the boy bringing the early morning canda, the mid-morning coconut water and afternoon tea. By the sound alone, the mind would know when he was approaching, what he was bringing, when he was opening the door, pouring and leaving. Sometimes this existed only as a train of associated thoughts and other times in visualized technicolor. Often it would stimulate expectation, desire, impatience or indecision; and I would debate whether to leave it alone to combat desire or break the meditation to drink it before it got cold.

The chiming of the wall clock also triggered off programmed activity. I would almost always think about what time it was and count along with the chimes or try and guess if I didn't know for sure. If it was 3 A.M., I would try and convince myself to catch an extra forty winks or practice breath awareness while still lying on the bed with the good intention to get up at 3:30. This often resulted in dozing off again and reawaking only at 4,

whereupon I would become angry with myself and vow not to do it again. With the 5 A.M. chimes, the expectation of canda would creep in and at 5:30, I sometimes debated whether or not to go for breakfast, to just be satisfied with the gruel. On several occasions, I did forego breakfast in order not to break an extra good meditation. But most of the time, I would rationalize that I was too thin and needed to put more meat on my bones — mom would like that! And sometimes I considered going without lunch and fasting a day or two, wanting to appear like a strenuous yogi to the others. But it was again mostly in vain—I wound up going to lunch anyway. And, contrary to cultivating detachment, I found myself still selecting the vegetables I liked best (raw, half boiled, with least chilies,) shunning meat and saving room for fruit and curd. I allowed myself this choosiness because I was trying to be yogically diet consciousness and knew it would help reduce sloth and torpor for the after-lunch sitting. Included was the subtle desire to outshine the others, even our teacher, by sitting up erect and alert for that period — and it did help in that respect.

Another great opportunity for watching conditioned responses was when flies and mosquitoes, of which there were many, buzzed around or landed on me. Just the approaching sound would trigger the alarm system; and the melodrama would begin — “What is it? I hope it won’t land on me.” If it was a fly, I would worry about possible germs; if a mosquito — the fear of stinging pain and the chance of contracting malaria. If they did land on me, I would debate whether to shoo them off or let them suck my blood, enduring the irritation until they buzzed off by themselves. Because I had taken the first precept, I refrained from wanting to kill them though occasionally it was tempting. Sometimes, especially with flies on my lips or in the corners of the eyes and multiple mosquitoes drinking blood, I might gently nudge them off. All theses activities because of mere sounds and tactile sensations!

I tried to watch all these scenarios with as much detachment as possible and utilized the noting when I felt it appropriate — which did help immensely. Sometimes it got really crazy, and I couldn’t help but laugh at myself for my nonsense, fears and reactions; at other times, I would get angry or disgusted with myself for being so petty and foolish in my inner

dialogues and deliberations. This kind of penetrating awareness revealed so many aspects of the psyche that hitherto I had never consciously encountered nor felt the need to deal with. I normally took these reactions for granted, not thinking anything of it. But I now was beginning to understand how most of these habit patterns were motivated and sustained by unwholesome mental factors which gave rise to much unnecessary worry, fear, frustration and so on.

The biggest disturbing factor for me to recognize was the ever-defiant, “self-cherishing-I” with its crafty maneuvers, always out to assert itself. Seeing all this within myself increasingly brought home the pervasive nature of the Buddha’s first two Noble Truths — suffering and its cause. Everything that we experience and identify with in the material and mental world is by nature constantly changing beyond our exact control; pursuing it with selfish and ignorant desire brings eventual frustration, sorrow and pain; craving can never be satisfied. When we think we’ve acquired something, it alters or disappears, or the fickle mind changes and we lose the desire for a certain person or object, leaving us wanting something else to fill the vacuum. Because of our strong habit patterns, largely motivated by greed, ignorance and hatred, we commit unskillful, unwholesome actions which often bring suffering down upon our heads with a heavy crash. This is the real manifestation of suffering (Dukkha) that the Buddha was indicating. It was indeed insightful and even fascinating to discover and observe, but sometimes difficult and even appalling to accept that it is all within.

Now, more deeply than before, I saw what I was up against. I wondered if there was any limit to what one could know. I also realized the difference between the two popular vipassana techniques. The sweeping method taught by Goenka seemed to be only an introduction to the Buddha’s great wisdom in comparison with what I was getting into now. While the former focused primarily on impermanence, this practice of full-blown, six-sense door awareness in all four postures ruthlessly attacked and exposed all the three characteristics, especially conditionality and no-self. My faith and confidence in the Buddha-Dhamma was growing stronger. I became

inspired to resume with a new spark and emotion the Tibetan prayers I had largely been neglecting since leaving Goa.

There was a small shrine room at one end of the corridor with a Buddha statue on the altar; and an oil lamp, candles, incense, and matches were kept there for the use of anyone. On passing it in the course of walking meditation, I occasionally noticed one of the other westerners sitting meditating inside or making a personal puja. And now with my newly resurrected devotion, I began stopping there on my way around in the evening to perform my own little puja or worship. If the room was unoccupied I went inside; if the candle, lamp or incense was low or out I would replace and relight them. While lighting the candle or lamp, I recited to myself, "May all beings light the lamp of wisdom in their mind which dispels the darkness of ignorance, just as I am lighting this flame." While lighting the incense, I recited, "As this fragrance drives the foul smell out of the room, so too may I and all beings drive out the three mental poisons and cultivate the virtues of a Buddha." I then executed a number of full-length prostrations, the number of which varied according to how emotionally stirred I was at the time, or if I had harbored any especially negative thoughts during the day, or if my ego was exceptionally strong. This exercise was a symbolic offering up of that ego along with the burden of identities and attachments for the sake of Enlightenment and to benefit others. I then sat on my knees with the forehead touching the ground and palms together in devotional posture and recited the Three Refuges and five precepts. I then sat cross-legged and recited the whole repertoire of Tibetan prayers that I could remember and reflected on the perfect human rebirth. All of this brought back the memories of Kopan with strong emotion and motivation, and I even came to the point of tears on a few occasions. I finished with a short Metta meditation radiating extra long vibrations to mom and dad back home, and to my teachers Lama Zopa, Goenkaji, and Swami Gitananda; I dedicated all the merits acquired from my efforts in the Dhamma to the Great Enlightenment (of all sentient beings.) Before departing, I bowed again and then resumed the slow motion walking.

Each night after that one hour or so of steady concentration in the shrine room, I was filled with a serene energy and alert sensitivity and could

continue the walking and sitting practice with strong mindfulness. Upon retiring to the cell somewhere between 10 and 11, I would stretch out on my right side in the Buddha's reclining 'lion posture,' exercising vigilance until losing consciousness. When awaking with the 3 A.M. chimes, the mind was fresh and clear; and I was able to resume awareness immediately with 'hearing, hearing' and opening the eyes 'opening, opening.' I could perform the whole process of sitting up, stretching the arms and eventually standing up with movement by movement clarity. In this way, I was usually able to get the edge over any sleepiness trying to creep back in and could remain mindfully alert for the rest of the early morning.

I used the sitting periods as an opportunity to gradually increase the length of time in the lotus posture. My goal was to be able to sit comfortably in that leg-locked position for a full hour before the end of the three weeks. Each period, I increased the time a minute or so, enduring the burning pain. The most painful spot was at the point where the two shin bones crossed and pressed hard against each other. The sensations here became hot and excruciating after about thirty minutes; it was a matter of wearing a groove into the bones so that they form fit. Another vulnerable spot was where the top of the left foot pressed down onto the fleshy part of the right thigh. This was a good chance to experiment with the different methods of dealing with pain. If I could detach the mind from this agony I figured I could overcome anything, even the attack of mosquitoes. I would just fasten my mental seatbelt so to speak and grit the teeth to extend little by little, the pain threshold. At the end of the second week, I reached my personal goal of one full hour. And within a few more days, I was comfortably managing all three group sittings which I used as 'resolve' periods, extending the time in the lotus even longer. With noticeable pride, I mentally patted myself on the back. This was proof to myself that anything, within limits, was attainable, if it meant enough and the determined effort was applied and sustained.

In my continued reading of *Practical Insight Meditation*, I was intrigued by the step-by-step procedure on how to actually realize Nibbana. It described a series of nine insight knowledges which are purposely cultivated and passed through in succession, one stage leading to the next.

The ninth and final knowledge is the experience of ‘cessation’ or Nibbana itself. The nine are: the knowledge of rise and fall, the knowledge of dissolution, the knowledges of terror, danger, dispassion, desire for deliverance, reflection, equanimity of formations, and the consummation which is called knowledge in conformity with Truth.^{IV} In theory, it sounded like such a straightforward, exact, clear-cut path — something along the lines of a recipe or a marked route on a map, culminating in Enlightenment. It was so matter of fact, I wondered why I hadn’t heard of it before in some of the Buddhist books I’d read. When I had read over this material a couple of times, I was anxious to get started training the mind step by step in the prescribed manner. I had already more or less experienced some of the stages at different times without knowing them as such, so I didn’t think it would be too difficult.

In that first sitting, I tuned into the rising and falling of the abdomen and gradually expanded awareness to include the other noticeable sense stimuli, paying particular attention to the precise moment of sensory impingement. I was curious to see if I could actually detect a moment of consciousness arise as a separate distinct phenomenon then instantly vanish together, making way for the next moment of sense consciousness (as the book seemed to suggest.) Only one conscious moment can exist at a time, and the successive sequence of them is likened to the individual frames of a film strip. Of course, this happens extremely fast; but the book said that with keen penetrative attention one could actually experience this mind/matter or name/form moment of consciousness arise and vanish. At this early stage, I did not perceive this clear-cut phenomenon but I did experience a rapid barrage of sensory impressions arising and passing one after another; I tried to imagine it happening in that fashion. When it became too difficult to keep up with, I switched to the second insight knowledge, focusing in on only the disappearing. The quick fire succession of instantaneously vanishing moments brought back memories of my army training when shooting tracer bullets at night with an M-60 machine gun — all I could see was the red trails disappearing into the void of darkness. Now, too, all I was perceiving was a steady stream of sensory bombardment melting into the void of the mind. I couldn’t even discriminate between tactile, sound and other stimulations; they were zipping away or disintegrating so fast that

there was no time to formulate such mental distinctions. Random thoughts did slip in but they too immediately vanished.

While passively witnessing like this, I comprehended the formations in their three characteristics as being impermanent, unsatisfactory and without self-nature; I then deliberately reflected on the whole process as being nothing but sorrow, terrifying and a potential danger (if one gets attached and possessively clings) as the book suggested. It did not take long for the mind to come to the stage of dispassion. I could feel the mind withdrawing from identification with and inclination for any of the body sensations or mind phenomena and felt a growing sense of relief, lightness, and subtle joy. Again, as the book suggested, I reflected on Nibbana as being the only state of real peace and fulfilling happiness where the mind is totally cut off from any identification or hankering after anything in this or other conditioned worlds. This also had a further soothing and joyful effect on me. The idea of Nibbana was very appealing, even if just thinking about it, especially while in this state of dispassion. Having gone this far, with these five stages of insight knowledge, I was quite satisfied. I had already been sitting for over an hour; and though I was not really tired, I decided to stop for awhile. The boy had already brought the afternoon tea which was getting cold.

When I had the interview with Venerable Sivali that afternoon, I felt like asking him about these insight knowledges. Although he had never mentioned them by name, he must have known about this specific method of mind training. If I inquired about it directly, he might have wanted to know where I learned of them; and I did not want to give away the fact that I was reading the book. He did ask me what I was experiencing so I related the insights I was having. I explained how I experienced the body as just a heap of changing elements and the mind as a stream of fragmented feelings, perceptions, memories, emotions, habit patterns of ego-based thoughts, etcetera. I told him I realized that the ego was the source and instigator of all desire, aversion, worry, fear, frustration, and so forth. Basically, I told him what I thought he would want to hear, or what might cause him to think I was on the right track, though these were genuine insights. When I finished, he nodded in his calm manner and advised me to keep on

practicing in the same manner and not to expect any results; expectation was a hindrance.

In the next several sitting periods, I was able to quickly pass through the first five insight knowledges up to dispassion and then went on to cultivate the desire for deliverance. As the book suggested, I reflected on everything in the conditioned world as a mass of inflamed suffering, to be feared like a bed of red hot embers, and generated the wish to be free from it. This helped to estrange and isolate awareness further from the ongoing barrage of sense impressions from within and without. I was losing the feeling of having anything to do with them and awareness was turning away, becoming alienated from it all. The sense of 'I' faded into the background, weakening the subject/object orientation to the body and normal perception process. The ego became very tenuous while a definite clear awareness itself was still present. There was no noticeable attraction or repulsion or bending of the mind to any stimuli. I speculated that this must be the state of equanimity or very close to it. This restful and tranquil state did not last long, however, as my mind was still weak at this level; it required many more sittings to become thoroughly familiar with the subtleties of this delicate mental balance.

In this state, the ego or sense of separate individuality is on a reverse course of involution, as it were; it starts to fade away. When this happens, the whole familiar world of subject/object orientation gets turned upside down or seems to pull apart like taffy, figuratively speaking. At this point, the ego panics because the very ground on which it is standing is disintegrating; the thread holding it to itself and to the only world it knows is about to be cut — and this is threatening. The ego is afraid of the unknown and therefore jerks itself back to more firm familiar ground. This is what it felt like in my own experience and how I interpreted it. I got to the point where I could routinely come to the state of refined equanimity within ten or fifteen minutes and maintain it off and on for the rest of the hour or longer.

According to the book, the next step was the realization of Nibbana itself. I guessed this to be the actual cutting of that fine thread holding the “self-

cherishing-I” to the secure world, the quantum leap into the unknown. The first experience of this state of non-duality is called “entering the stream.” This alludes to the fact that this experience is so evolutionary and tastes of freedom, that the yogi or Sotapanna²² will never regress, but be steadily drawn as if floating on the current of a river, to the final goal of permanent Nibbana within a relatively short period of time. ^v

Though Venerable Sivali had warned me against having expectations, I held a trace of anticipation for that experience; but my ego had its own subtle reservations. Every time consciousness approached that mental jumping-off point, the complete transcendence, unconscious hesitation, or fear as I deduced it, prevented it. Sometimes it felt as though the ‘I’ was delicately balanced on the pivotal point, but I couldn’t quite let it dissolve. Maybe I was trying too hard or had too much expectation. At any rate, I was convinced that this was the correct method of development and that I just had to work on it, to undermine any subtle latent doubts, fears, and attachments which were no doubt holding the ego back. And I was willing to accept that this could take a long time. I reflected on Samsara, the fact that this deluded, clinging mind had been wandering through the six realms since beginningless time accumulating so many layers of defilement. To expect that I could purify or wash the mind clean in this short time (six months) was certainly wishful thinking. But I knew that for me, now, there was no other alternative or useful thing to do in life except see this thing through to the end, no matter if it required the rest of this life, or longer.

I pondered again the perfect human rebirth, considering myself as being one whose kammic time for the Dhamma was ripening — it seemed as if there was no way out; I was somehow being sucked into it. These were some of the fanciful ruminations that took up the slack between long periods of exertive mindfulness. Sometimes thoughts about old friends, going back home to lead a normal life, or more traveling would try and creep in. But, fortunately by now my awareness was quick enough to see these as just old broken records of memory and habit and they vanished before giving them serious consideration.

²² *One who has entered the stream.*

The walking meditation and other slow motion movement activities throughout the day afforded a different experience in terms of insight. The deliberate, exaggerated, slow movements require more attentiveness and they tend to 'catch' or attract awareness. While lifting, swinging forward and lowering the foot, turning the head, stretching an arm and so forth, I could clearly distinguish the beginning, brief duration and ceasing of each minute movement. I was able to get a good feel how the movement and the awareness of it coincided and I spent long, uninterrupted periods honing attention on this process. On at least one occasion, I did actually experience consciousness leap out, so to speak, simultaneously with the movement. It was a lucid, momentary flash arising and vanishing in the void of the mind. This helped me see how ordinary consciousness works in a similar manner as a motion picture, being comprised of a continuous series of separate still frames which mean little or nothing by themselves.

This penetrating insight exposed the illusory compactness or solid appearance of physical objects and revealed their essentially empty nature. I recalled my previous experience with computers and amused myself comparing the workings of the body and mind to a computer console with its input/output devices and seemingly infinite memory bank. The physical body (hardware) can only function by the intricate network of nerve circuits which relay vibrations (data) from the sense organs (input devices) to the mind/brain memory bank. It is then all translated (conceptualized), sorted out, decided upon (software) and the body is instructed to walk, sit, eat, speak, etcetera (output devices).

After about ten days, the slow motion moving really got deep and seemed to take off under its own momentum, becoming practically continuous and effortless. Starting the moment I opened the eyes in the morning to the time of closing them at night for sleep, I remained keenly aware of almost every separate movement and without having to make so many mental notes. One of my favorite activities of the day was taking a bucket bath at the large sunken well. Looking at the bucket, reaching for it, picking it up, dipping it into the water, raising it over the head, pouring it out, feeling the cool wetness — repeating the process several times to get thoroughly wet — was

performed in extra slow motion. Then I would rub the soap over the body, rinse it off with several more buckets of water, reach for the towel, dry off, put on a fresh sarong and wash the other if necessary — all in the same zombie like manner. Unlike a zombie, however, awareness was very lucid and everything had a bright, almost alive, texture — the bucket, water, walls of the enclosure with plants growing in the cracks, the soap on my skin and the skin.

I was captivated by the whole thing. It was almost like watching someone else in a movie and at times it assumed the qualities of a vivid dream, except that I was quite fully aware. It was similar to the quality of perception I had sometimes experienced on psychedelics. I also attended the calls of nature, brushed the teeth, tidied up the cell and so forth in a like manner. Practicing in this way was very valuable for learning how to bring meditation into activity and the mundane chores of daily life. It helped clear up a certain misunderstanding and appreciate that meditation is not so much something you do while sitting alone quietly but rather a state of clear awareness and comprehension in whatever you do.

In spite of the contrary regulations, most mornings, I was doing at least a few yoga exercises. I usually began with five or ten minutes of deep three part breathing to oxygenate the blood, followed by forward and backward bending to flex the spine, a couple leg stretching postures and one or two one-leg standing poses to aid balance and concentration. I performed these in the same mindful way so that it did not interrupt my meditative awareness and I felt there was no harm in it. On the contrary, I found the short routine very helpful in keeping good blood circulation and boosting energy. I even repeated some of this or different postures in the late afternoon just before the last group sitting. Of course, I carried this out clandestinely in my room at times when the boy was not coming around.

From time to time, not being able to resist a convenient opportunity, I had held brief, low pitched conversations with Chris and also with the two Western monks. I was interested to find out how Chris was faring in his first meditation retreat, inquiring if he was having any insights or strange experiences. He replied that he was patiently plodding along with the basic

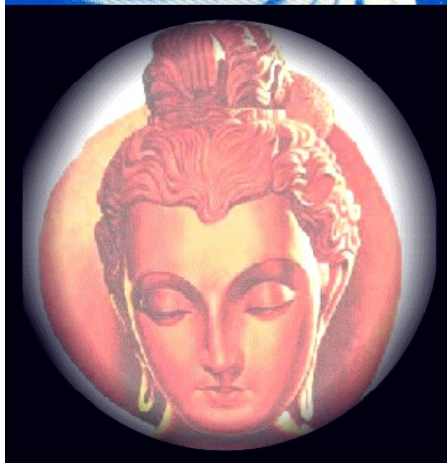
practice, wrestling with his monkey mind and frequent tiredness; but nevertheless, he was enjoying the peaceful surroundings, the silence, solitude, good food, and discovering a lot about himself. Of the two Western monks, one was an Englishman and one was a Canadian. In talking with them I learned that it was fairly easy to get ordained in Sri Lanka. The government and people understood the position of Westerners and wholeheartedly supported any foreigners who wished to become monks. A one year temporary residence permit was obtainable for those who were serious about pursuing a long time course of scriptural study in the Buddhaddhamma and/or practicing intensive meditation. This was encouraging and it sparked off fantasies of my own possible future ordination and ascetic monk life.

A few days before the three weeks were over I began to plan what I might do next. I was getting a bit antsy and would be ready for a change of environment by then. I felt I had experienced and realized enough for now and was satisfied that I knew the complete technique and subtleties of the practice. I had in mind to continue this practice along with more yoga on my own, perhaps at one of Ceylon's beautiful deserted beaches. A second possibility was going to Kataragama in the south-east of the island where there was reported to be a yoga ashram run by a Hindu Swami. It was situated near the bank of a large river and the Swami had a few rooms and cottages to accommodate Westerners.

First of all, however, Chris and I would return to Colombo to stay with Sam for the upcoming days during Vesak. I wished to see first hand how the Sinhalese Buddhists celebrate their most important religious holiday. I had heard from Sam that giant colorful pandals were erected on the streets of Colombo and people hung Vesak lanterns in their homes which he recommended us to see. He had urged us to come back and stay with him those few days and he would take us around to view the festivities.

When it came time to leave, I packed up my meager belongings, paid my last respects in the shrine room, took a nostalgic glance around and departed without much ado. Chris was leaving with me and we stopped by Venerable Sivali's kuti to thank him for his kind, wise, patient and valuable

guidance. I told him that I found it to be the most insight yielding, satisfying and practical of all the Buddhist meditation techniques I had so far encountered. In his characteristic calm, humble manner, he wished both of us the best of luck in our respective Dhamma endeavors; after paying obeisance we quietly left him in his solitude. By acquired habit we proceeded out under the arch of the entrance gate, slowly and mindfully walking the quarter mile down the country road to the bus halt at Delgoda junction — we were now back in the real world.



CHAPTER 16

UNAWATUNA BAY

We had not informed Sam we were coming on this day but he was more or less expecting us at any time. He was happy to see the two of us and was anxious to hear about our meditation experiences. But as he had not practiced intensive meditation himself, I found it difficult to try and describe my deeper experience to him. It was like trying to describe atomic physics in detail in a few sentences to someone with little mathematical background, so I kept my descriptions fairly basic. In the early evening some friends of Sam's paid a customary holiday visit and we had more discussions from which I gleaned more about Vesak and Sinhalese customs.

Vesak is the Theravada Buddhist equivalent to the Christian Christmas. It is the joyous recollection of the three auspicious events in the Buddha's life — his birth, Enlightenment, and passing away or attainment of Parinibbana. According to the Theravada tradition all these earth shaking events occurred on a full moon day in the month of May of their respective years.²³ So the May full moon day, called Vesak, is honored as the thrice blessed day and is a national holiday in Sri Lanka stretched over three days.

On the full moon day itself most devout Buddhists devote extra time in reflection, worship and/or meditation. The more popular practice is to go to a local temple, forest monastery or other specific location to spend the whole day observing 'sil'. For this the participants come dressed in the traditional white clothes referred to as a 'sil kit'. The program begins at 6 A.M. when a monk administers the Three Refuges and the five, eight or ten precepts. The rest of the day is passed listening to Dhamma preaching (Dhamma sermons) by the resident or guest monks and/or laymen, performing pujas, chanting gathas (Buddhist verses) and meditating. At recognized meditation centers like Kanduboda and more remote forest hermitages, some of the more sincere practitioners come the day before and spend two or three days

²³ The Mahayana Buddhists in China, Japan, Korea and Vietnam have a different version, celebrating Buddha's Enlightenment in December and his birth in April.

in a similar manner but usually with more emphasis on meditation. A large number of others visit the local temple for an hour or two to make an offering of flowers, recite a few gathas, chat with the temple monks or listen to a bana. Others merely stay at home and perform their own private puja or meditate in front of their home altar. Sam explained that these practices are observed not only on Vesak but on the full moon day of every month which are also designated as Poya (observance) days in Sri Lanka.

After dinner Sam, along with Tilak and two other friends, escorted us on a leisurely stroll down Galle Face road to view a few large pandals. Pandals are colorfully painted wooden constructions which depict the Buddha and various scenes of his life or his previous lives (Jataka stories). They are trimmed with hundreds of blinking colored lights and vary in height from fifteen to thirty feet. Some kind of music usually blares out from loudspeakers to attract public attention. Viewing them is a time for people to get out of the house and enjoy themselves while walking up and down the streets, meeting and chatting with friends. On our walk as I observed people, I doubted whether anyone was actually giving any serious thought or contemplating the Four Noble Truths while they were gazing and held spellbound by all the gaudy glamour on the pandals. Personally I felt that the money spent on erecting and electrifying these would be better spent feeding the poor or some other such humanitarian gestures. I amused myself by wondering what the Buddha would think if he could see how the people were remembering him and his eternal message. Because of all the inward focusing and contemplating on impermanence and so on, I could not now suddenly shift my attention outwardly and be attracted to all this. It was, however, a pleasant casual outing and a chance to become more familiar with the people and culture.

The next day Chris and I went to a large temple to visit a revered, erudite monk who Sam had told us about. The name of the temple was Vajirarama and the monk we wanted to meet was Venerable Narada. He had written many books on Buddhism and had traveled extensively in South-east Asia where he had started something of a revival in Theravada Buddhism. He was a much sought after teacher, preacher, and spiritual friend for many here in his native Sri Lanka as well. When we arrived through the gate of

the temple we found him sitting in his customary chair on the porch of the temple library. A man and woman were already conversing with him so we waited at a distance. When our turn came Chris and I paid our respects and he bade us to sit down on a mat at his feet. The old monk had a warm friendly smile and immediately asked us in very good English where we were from and how long we had been in Sri Lanka, and if we were practicing meditation.

After this polite ice-breaking talk, I described my introduction to Mahayana Buddhism in Nepal and my subsequent experience in vipassana with Goenka and then mentioned our just completed retreat at Kanduboda. The calm, learned, old monk listened with an apparent interest and a friendly grin saying, “continue, continue.” So I went on to describe how the perception of impermanence led me to realize the unsatisfactory, empty nature of the five aggregates and how I had now lost the desire to return to normal worldly pursuits, that I might possibly become a monk in the future. When I finished he commented with a gleam in his eye, “good, good.” He also gave me a copy of a pocket size Dhammapada which he had translated from Pali into English. This was the first time I had seen this delightful collection of the Buddha’s concise but pithy words of wisdom and I thanked him sincerely for it.

Venerable Narada then informed us that one of my fellow American compatriots was a Buddhist monk and was currently staying at the Vajirarama Temple for a few days. His name was Samitta and he had also practiced meditation at Kanduboda and was leading a zealous ascetic monk’s life. I was interested in meeting and talking with him to possibly find out a little more about the western monks scene here, as I did not have much opportunity to freely discuss this at length with the two at Kanduboda. Venerable Narada said we could meet him and sent word by an attendant to Samitta’s room to have him come if it was convenient for him at the time. While waiting the friendly monk said we could have a look in the library if we liked, which we did.

Now Samitta was approaching. He appeared to be very serene and mindful as he slowly paced across the courtyard and sat down on a small

chair. Venerable Narada introduced us to him and then left us to talk between ourselves for a while. He himself got up out of his chair and took his customary late afternoon stroll around the freshly whitewashed stupa in the middle of the entrance compound, where other devotees were now gathering. Samitta informed us that he did not like to talk too long or about mundane matters because it dissipated his power of concentration and that the real Dhamma was in practice, not worldly conversation. I could relate to and appreciate this; after the three weeks at Kanduboda, I was also now finding it disruptive and exhausting to speak for long stretches with Sam and his friends. Samitta had been ordained at Kanduboda about six months prior but was now on his own going to different secluded spots to practice alone. He said he especially preferred places where there were wild animals and snakes, as this helped him to develop strong concentration and overcome fear. When I inquired how many other Western monks were currently in Ceylon, he said he wasn't sure — they tended to come and go. But he approximated twenty or twenty-five, saying they were scattered here and there around the island living in small kutis or in forest monasteries. He mentioned a famous monastery called Island Hermitage where most of the Western monks had resided at one time or another and was the only place where more than two or three ever stayed at the same time during the recent years. It was situated on a small island in the middle of a large lagoon near Galle on the extreme south coast.

Because of my evident interest, Samitta continued freely talking about a few of the more recent generation of foreign bhikkhus²⁴. One, in particular, was an Englishman, Nyanavira, who had died several years back but was reputed by some to have been a Sotapanna (the first stage of Sainthood). He had lived a long time alone in a small cottage in the forest near the south coast village of Bundala. Though he was supposed to be partially Enlightened he ironically committed suicide there in his kuti by suffocating himself with a plastic bag. It seems that he had been long suffering from a terribly painful stomach ailment and couldn't bear the pain. This act, however, caused some to speculate about his alleged attainment, saying that a person of such high attainment would not purposefully take his own life

²⁴ Pali word for monk; means literally scrap gatherer or one who subsists by begging alms.

— it would be breaking the first precept.^{VI} Samitta also mentioned an American monk who had lived in Nyanavira's kuti just two years ago. The story has it that he was walking about in the forest around the kuti one night apparently without a flashlight and he stepped on a very aggressive poisonous snake, which of course bit him. He died in the vicinity a few hours later. Currently, a French monk was dwelling in the same kuti who Samitta had visited on a few occasions. He lived a strict austere bhikkhu life and favored remote solitary places which challenge the mind and bring out deep rooted fear, the ego and other hang-ups. Hearing about all these western monks, their dedication to the Dhamma and rigorous practice with only the goal in mind gave me encouragement and inspiration. As he had already talked enough for one day, Samitta was ready to go back to his room for his evening meditation. I thanked him for his time and generous information and asked if we might meet again; he replied, "It may be possible," and I bid him a goodnight.

The next day was the actual full moon and Vesak day proper and Chris and I spent it quietly in our small room meditating and reading. In the late afternoon we accompanied Sam and his family to the nearby temple where they offered flowers at the Bo-tree and Buddha Shrine while reciting the appropriate devotional verses. The large holy tree had a wide sandy path around the base where I sat down to meditate and reflect on Siddhartha's pre-enlightenment struggle with Mara²⁵ under the Bodhi tree. While thus seated white clad devotees, mostly ladies and children, walked very close past me circumambulating the tree chanting Sadhu, Sadhu, Sadhu and other verses. A few old ladies also sat down in different spots to recite stanzas or quietly meditate.

I noticed in myself a subtle "holier than thou"²⁶ conceit as I sat there trying to maintain a perfect lotus posture. The thought that I was more advanced or a better Buddhist because I practiced yoga and meditation became a nuisance but I could not seem to drive it out of the mind. After twenty minutes of this monkey mindedness I began to wonder who was

²⁵ Pali word meaning, *The Tempter; the subconscious tendencies and ignorance which try and delude and pull one away from meditation practice.*

²⁶ *Holier-than-thou (adj): Exhibiting an attitude of superior virtue; self-righteously pious. (Noted by Dhammavamsa)*

actually doing the purer practice. Was it I who was sitting saintly but plagued by spiritual pride or was it the little old ladies in white repeating Sadhu, Sadhu, Sadhu as they went around the Bo tree with simple but perhaps pure devotion. This was a situation I would face many times and a difficult question to honestly answer.

All in all, it was a simple quiet day and it gave me a glimpse of what was called Sinhalese Buddhism about which I would have much more direct expert experience in time to come. Before falling asleep, I fantasized myself being an ascetic bhikkhu, ardently dwelling alone in the forest leading what I pictured to be the ideal monk's life, leaving the world behind. Little did I consciously know that on Vesak day exactly one year hence, I would be ordained as a novice monk (samanera).

Since leaving the serene, conducive environs of Kanduboda that degree of sensitive moment to moment awareness/comprehension naturally faded and I was gradually returning to normal perception. But even so, there remained a residual feeling of the insights which I could easily reflect on to bring the mind back to a greater detachment to whatever I might be thinking about or doing. This ability, I felt, was important to keep up and if this medium level of awareness could be maintained even while traveling, socializing or living more normally, it would be an effective achievement.

In those two days Chris and I discussed our immediate plans. At Kanduboda Chris had befriended an English 'Yogi' named Gordon who left a week before us. Gordon lived with his girlfriend in a rented house at Unawatuna Bay, a large, curved, nearly deserted beach a few miles south of Galle. He had invited Chris and me to come visit them if we ever passed that way. His description of the place sounded like it could be a suitable environment for another self retreat like at Arambol Lake. Chris was keen on it also. We decided to leave as soon as possible because Sam's house was a bit too congested and was not so conducive for our practice. We also did not want to wear out our welcome or inconvenience them any longer than necessary. Whenever we were there it usually meant someone else — a friend, relative or house helper had to sleep on a mat in the living room and I didn't feel comfortable knowing that, though Sam insisted it was OK.

I tried to place myself in their position of having to play host and knew there were limits.

Before leaving, I went downtown to the big Lake House bookstore and browsed around for a few new books to take with me. I figured I would have a lot of leisure time to read and I wished to expand my academic knowledge in Buddhism and related subjects. I especially wanted to pick out some more of the Wheel pamphlets which focused on different, specific Theravada doctrines. After careful scrutiny and minutes of indecision, I selected the individual subjects of Karma and Rebirth, Dependent Origination, The Satipatthana Sutta, Seven Factors of Enlightenment, and the Noble Eightfold Path. In addition to these thin pamphlets I bought a book on Zen by D. T. Suzuki, entitled *Living by Zen*. While in the downtown area, I went to the Pettah and bought another sarong to take along. I was now quite used to and enjoyed this comfortable attire and didn't care if I ever wore long pants again. Instead of a normal one, I had my eye on buying the style of sarong that was worn by the Buddhist monks under their outer robe. These under-robos, as they are called, are sewn together in a patchwork design with large squares and come in my favorite colors of yellow and orange. I did not pause to consider if wearing it would be objectionable as I obviously was not a monk, still having my big bushy beard. When I went into the store and asked the clerk for one it was sold to me readily without question.

Chris and I thanked Sam, his wife, and mother-in-law for their compassionate generosity and sincere hospitality in allowing us to freely use their home as we needed. He reassured us that we were always welcome whenever we came to Colombo and we were very grateful for this. It was a nice feeling to know that there was a convenient and pleasant place to call home, to use as a base or contact point. I was now having my mail sent to this address rather than the Poste Restante, which saved an unnecessary trip downtown to the GPO²⁷ and any of our accumulated belongings such as my growing book collection could be left there without worry. But the best thing was simply staying with a local middle class

²⁷ GPO: General Post Office. (*Noted by Dhammavamsa*)

family and getting to know first hand their head and hearts, and to share our greater worldwide experiences with them.

A few miles past Hikkaduwa the bus passed through the village of Dodanduwa where not far away was the large lagoon in the middle of which sat Island Hermitage. Further past Dodanduwa the lagoon with the tiny tree-covered island became visible in the far distance. I could just barely make out the red tile roof of what I later learned was the hermitage's library building. The setting for a monastery looked very idyllic indeed and I felt that sometime I would visit there. I imagined saffron clad bhikkhu/yogis sitting at the roots of trees in deep absorption or contemplating impermanence and death as they mindfully paced up and down the sandy pathways.

In Galle, we changed buses to carry us the three miles further south to Unawatuna. Gordon had drawn Chris a little map of how to get to his house, which was situated about half a mile off the main road. The walk through the palm tree studded village was quite pleasant with many children playing and staring at us two 'sudiks' as we passed by toting our rucksacks. Coming out next to the bay my gaze was attracted over the placid turquoise water to a rocky and palm tree covered hill on the other side about a quarter mile distant. Sitting at the base of the hill at the end of the curved palm-fringed beach was a walled enclosure containing a few small yellow buildings. The isolated little compound exuded an air of peaceful tranquility sitting there all by itself. Not a soul could be seen on the whole crescent shaped white sandy beach. I was stunned by the picturesque storybook setting and had something like a deja vu experience. It felt as though a strong connection was made in my heart or mind. I could only just stand there with my eyes thoughtlessly fixed upon that dreamlike scene. It felt as though I was getting off on psychedelics.

Chris had not been so affected and was patiently waiting for me to come with him to the house which was now close by. I told him to go on to the house and I'd catch up in a few minutes. I had the urge to immediately walk around the cove to get a closer look. But then I came back to reality and decided to first meet Gordon and Mona. They were living in a big white

house with a large front yard set back from the village road. The couple was happy to see us and invited us in for tea and we exchanged our friendly greetings. After some initial chit chat I inquired if they knew anything about the enclosed compound I had seen. Mona said it was a Hindu/Buddhist temple of sorts. From the little she knew it was called a *kovil* or *devale*, a place where Hindu gods were worshipped, but one of the buildings contained a large Buddha statue. Nobody lived there permanently and the buildings were generally kept locked up. Mona did not know any more than that but said if I was interested I could probably find out more by questioning some of the local villagers, a few of whom spoke adequate English. I mentioned my strong experience upon setting eyes on the enchanting spot and had a hunch that it might be a suitable place for a delightful sojourn.

I was still feeling the initial euphoria and was anxious to go check it out; after a few more minutes I took off. Chris preferred to remain behind to get in some additional visiting with our two new friends. Upon setting foot on the beach, I was again captivated by the natural beauty of the whole bay. I had the entire beach to myself. There were, however, a couple of fishermen standing out on a coral reef in knee deep water and a few native catamarans lined the curved beach. A gentle breeze blew through the palm branches creating what was like music to my ears as I walked in the sand towards my destination. The temple compound was situated right on the sand at the base of the rocky scrub-covered and palm-studded hill. The gate was unlocked so I went inside and had a look around, inspecting the outside of the three locked buildings. The place was deserted of people, and fallen leaves from the few trees were scattered about the sandy ground with other signs of neglect. Peeping through the keyhole on the door of the largest building, I discovered the large seated Buddha statue which filled up the small, windowless inner shrine room.

From the back wall of the compound I watched the large swells of the Indian Ocean rolling past the point. The main coastal road was about half a mile away behind parts of the village and seaside palms. The noise of the infrequent vehicles was barely audible, being drowned out by the sound of the surf crashing against the rocky cliffs. I remained in the compound

absorbing the exotic natural beauty and tranquility of what seemed to be a little 'separate reality'; it brought on imaginations of Robinson Crusoe on a deserted tropical isle and I could sense a subtle special energy permeating the place. The sun was now setting on the opposite side of the hill out of view and the pastel hues of the wispy clouds floating by enhanced the dreamlike scene. I was 'blissed out'.

By now I decided that I would try to reside here, in or around the compound, for a spell and perhaps get into some deep meditation. Just outside the gate at the water's edge was a small sandy and grassy area that looked ideal for doing my morning yoga practices. I fancied that I could sleep right there on the beach as well, or if it rained, under the eaves of the Buddha shrine on the concrete hallway running around it; perhaps I could obtain permission and the key to open the door of the shrine to make pujas and meditate inside; the sandy ground inside the enclosed area was perfect for walking meditation. But first things first; I was not familiar with the customs or superstitions regarding these religious shrines and whether or not I would even be allowed to stay in or near the premises. I did not want to just barge in and start dwelling here without permission from the proper authority. I thought that whoever had the keys to the doors would be the one to ask. I thought Chris might also be interested to stay there practicing intensively with me and we could give each other moral support. As it was almost dark, I would accept Gordon and Mona's offer to sleep at their house this night and in the morning make the necessary inquiries.

To make a long story short, we got permission to use the *devale* from the monk at the local village Buddhist temple. He gave us the key to the Buddha shrine to use for meditation. Gordon and Mona invited us to come take our meals with them each day. But Chris and I decided to fast for the first couple of days, setting the right mood of austerity.

As we walked through the village on the road which led to the back part of the bay, villagers came to their doors and curiously watched the two of us pass by, not having seen many western tourists here. We found the beach and the *devale* deserted as I had the previous evening and after setting our gear down, I opened the door to the Buddha room to inspect it more fully.

The statue was sculpted out of brick and cement in the seated cross legged posture with the robe portion painted an orange color in the typical Sri Lankan style. It filled almost the whole room with only a few feet between the door and the base upon which it sat. An offering table for candles, oil lamps, flowers and incense occupied almost the entire space between the door and the Buddha, and a donation box stood in the corner. Chris and I inaugurated our retreat with a ritual puja, lighting a candle, a stick of incense and making three prostrations. We took refuge in the Triple Gem



by reciting the traditional Pali formula and I recited some Tibetan prayers to instill motivation and share the potential merit of our endeavors with all sentient beings.

With all these formalities

completed, Chris and I spread our bedrolls out under the eave on the backside of the Buddha Shrine, where we'd be somewhat out of view if anyone should happen to enter the premises. I donned for the first time the new yellow monk's sarong and stripped off my shirt to feel more at home and comfortable in the warm humid climate.

The two of us then spent some time in the mid afternoon reconnoitering the area and climbed the hillock behind to get a magnificent 360 degree view. We were standing at the tail end of a long rocky ridge and mountain that extended about two miles back towards Galle. It acted as a huge natural sea wall separating the surging Indian Ocean from the bay and village area. On the hilltop we were virtually surrounded by water on three sides with only an approximate fifty foot width of land connecting the hillock with the rest. A reef jutted far into the bay from in front of the kovil, nullifying the

incoming breakers which continually roll past the point, creating a small protected cove of shallow turquoise clear water. Everywhere could be seen only sparkling water, swaying palms and a long curved sandy beach stretching far to the south. The old town of Galle with its 17th century Dutch fortress and modern lighthouse could be seen about a mile away in the distance. All in all it was an incredibly beautiful display of natural and even man-made beauty which would keep me spellbound for weeks to come.

Being here was like a dream come true and I couldn't help but ponder over the kamma that brought me to this secluded paradise. I was sitting on a deserted beach in the midst of probably the most beautiful seacoast landscape I had ever laid eyes on, blissed out of my skull — and without drugs. Was it merely for social reasons that I decided to stop here to meet Gordon and Mona or was that only a front or stepping stone for something deeper? In the manner that I was first captivated, I figured that this place had been unconsciously attracting me like the pull of a strong magnet. And now that I was here — how long would I remain? That, too, was most probably beyond my conscious control and I would leave it up to nature. When I got or learned enough of whatever it had to offer, I would move on with the winds of my past and present kamma. I went on ruminating in this way, considering how the major incidents and events in my life, especially those of post high school days, helped create the mental conditions which eventually led me to the East. I felt that the experiences I had in the army and with drugs influenced my subconscious mind to begin questioning the validity of so-called normal society and the pursuit of happiness. And this in turn somehow attracted me to try Transcendental Meditation and subsequently come to India with all the situations I had gotten myself into (relations with Gail, dealing drugs, events in Afghanistan, etcetera) as being more 'grist for the mill²⁸'. Since that turning point at Kopan, the inner search or quest for Truth had become more or less a conscious endeavor, being sustained and prodded along by the unconscious yearning for deeper experience. This sequence of reflections I would mull over time and time

²⁸ *Grist for the mill (idiom): Something that can be used to advantage. (Noted by Dhammavamsa)*

again in the future months; it helped cement the reality of the Perfect Human Rebirth.

Chris and I awoke before sunrise, lit a candle and stick of incense and sat just inside the door of the shrine for about an hour. By then the light of dawn was penetrating the doorway and the unmistakable sounds of crows were rousing us from our contemplation, or perhaps daydreaming. It was now time for a yoga session out on the beach which we were both looking forward to. Putting on our shorts, we brought the straw mats and laid them on the grassy area at the edge of the sand. The high tide was washing up within a few feet. After intoning the AA-OO-MM into the respective lung lobes as we had learned it, we went ahead and performed most of the polarity movement exercises in the order that we could remember, carrying on for about an hour. As we were intending to fast this day there was no hurry to finish. The warm early morning sunshine rose from across the bay, gently bathing our bodies, and I could feel the invigorating but relaxing energy absorbing into me.

About 9:30 I sought relief from the hot sun, returning to the shady eaves behind the Buddha shrine, where I found Chris already reading. I thumbed through some of the Wheel pamphlets in my pack, trying to decide which one to read first. After some initial indecision, I chose the Satipatthana Sutta. This particular discourse by the Buddha was his original teachings on the practice and development of insight/wisdom in the form of the four foundations of mindfulness. It was from the all-encompassing instructions given in this series of precise contemplations that the more specific and popular vipassana techniques were derived. So I was anxious to become familiar with the original text and with this I joined Chris leaning up against the wall and commenced reading.

After an hour of stimulating reading we both began sitting for an hour's meditation. Before the hour was up, I heard some noises outside the *devala* and recognized it was people coming inside. I tried to put it out of the mind with 'hearing, hearing' but that did not work so well. They came right into the hallway and stopped a few feet away from us, whispering among themselves and placing things on a table which was in the corner. I was

curious to find out what was going on so I slowly raised one of my eyelids to take an inconspicuous peek and found them looking right into my eye. I quickly shut the eye again to think about it. There were two old women, one man and two children with a few baskets on the table. It was quite obvious that they wanted our attention and I knew it would do no good to try and ignore them, pretending to be in oblivious samadhi. They now knew I was conscious of their presence. The hour was almost up anyway, so I opened both eyes and shot a glance at Chris who seemed to be waiting for me to make the first move. The people were busying themselves taking plates, bowls and containers of food out of the baskets, and I soon realized that they wanted to offer us a meal. None of them spoke English and in my few broken words of Sinhalese along with sign language I tried to make it known that the two of us did not desire to eat, that we were fasting. I thought maybe they had a mistaken impression that we were monks, so I pointed to our hair and my bushy beard, saying, “No monks, no monks.” It was a hopeless case. These simple villagers could not understand my futile explanation, or else they did not believe it or they simply did not care. To them we had to eat, being monks or not it did not matter, and the plates were becoming piled high with rice and curries. It was too late. Chris and I looked at each other with puzzled expressions and I told him that to be polite we might as well break our fast and eat some of it so as not to hurt their feelings. They appeared to be sincere and devoted Buddhists, whoever they were, and the two old ladies were fussing over getting everything ready. They prepared a small plate of food which was offered to the Buddha, as is the custom before serving monks, and they knelt down in front of the altar chanting the appropriate stanzas for this act of merit.

When everything was ready we were offered glasses of water which they had also brought along for washing our hands and drinking, and then they handed us the heaping plates. The ladies stepped back and held their hands in the respectful namaskar as if waiting for us to say something in response. I did not know the proper kind of merit transference and blessings that the monks traditionally recite so I said, “Bohoma stuti” (thank you very much). They seemed to get a kick out of my few words of Sinhalese and they smiled and watched on, waiting for us to begin eating. I closed my eyes and radiated Metta to our humble, generous well wishers for half a minute and

then reflected on the purpose of eating (in order to keep the body strong enough for practicing Dhamma) for a few moments and began mindfully eating. Heaped around the plate were several different vegetable curries with the inevitable chilies. I was aware that all of this would really blow the hell out of the light airy feeling I was having from not eating breakfast and it would probably cause me drowsiness in the afternoon.

I deliberately did not eat too much rice and selected what I thought was the least hot of the chili laced curries. I stole a few quick glances at Chris, who seemed to be relishing all of it. While so engaged I spied on the table a pot of curd and plateful of bananas which I expected were for dessert, and saved some room for it. The sweet old ladies were so caring and concerned that it really touched my heart; I wanted to eat enough to make it worth their effort coming all the way out here carrying the heavy baskets. They stood at a respectful distance observing our plates, ready to rush over with another spoonful of this or that when something got low. After I indicated that I had had enough, the man who had been standing idly around brought us a bowl of water to wash our soiled fingers. Next, the ladies brought us each a cupful of curd and poured treacle²⁹ over it, and after that, bananas. Now, as if all this was not enough, the man pulled out a thermos bottle along with cups and saucers. I thought to myself, “My God, tea or coffee too?” Yep, they served us each a cup of sweetened black coffee, I suppose to aid digestion. The full course “beggars banquet” was now complete and they began packing all of the leftovers and dirty dishes back into the baskets.

At this point I did not know quite what to do. The monks usually chanted some blessings for the dana they received. So I played it by ear, waiting to see if they were expecting a blessing of some sort. But the women did not appear to want anything from us. Because we were foreigners they probably figured we didn't know the customs and so forth and were simply content that they could offer us poor starving yogis our main meal for the day. The merit from their compassion and generosity would accrue to them, in their minds, without any need for special blessings from others. Before

²⁹ A kind of liquid brown sugar tapped from the Kitul tree. Curd with treacle had been served as dessert nearly every day at Kanduboda and I developed a liking to it.

they departed, I gestured the two old ladies with namaskar and a big Bohoma stuti. They reverently returned the namaskar with the familiar Sadhu, Sadhu, Sadhu!

When the small group had left, Chris and I discussed the incident, trying to figure it out. The only explanation we could come up with was that the word must have leaked out that two foreign yogis were dwelling in the *devale* practicing yoga and meditation. And thinking we had nothing to eat, these dear souls took it upon themselves to feed us. Even though we both would have preferred to continue fasting for at least one more day, we were grateful for their thoughtful consideration. We wondered if it would happen again but did not want to expect it.

As I figured, the lunch caused drowsiness, and not caring to fight it off by sitting like at Kanduboda, I laid down for a little nap. Upon awakening, I read some more of the Foundations of Mindfulness. It described how to contemplate the body as being just a composite of thirty-two parts starting with the hair, nails, teeth, skin, and bones. One is not to conceive of the body as a man or woman, beautiful or ugly, but perceive it merely as a collection of parts which are subject to breakage, decay and death. One then further analyzes it as essentially only the four primary elements of Earth, Fire, Water and Air. By this the yogi overcomes the idea of body parts, which could still cause attachment and identification as one's self.

While these ideas were still fresh in my mind I decided to stop reading and try out this novel contemplation. I could readily see the practical psychology behind all these contrived contemplations. As long as the body, or any physical object, for that matter, is regarded as being real, individual, beautiful, desirable or even undesirable, the potential for personal identification, attachment, craving or aversion will remain. The 'self-cherishing-I' will sustain itself through infatuation with his or her own body and lusting after other bodies and attractive objects.

I was eager to experiment with these techniques while doing walking meditation, so after sitting I went to the rear of the compound out of view. I imagined my own body as merely an empty skeleton as I slowly paced up

and down, and found it very effective, especially with my eyes closed. All of these mental x-rays helped me to appreciate even more the supremely wise Buddha with all his clever, skillful means for rousing people out of their normal waking dreamlike state.

In the late afternoon we were paid a visit by a village man named Eustace, who spoke relatively good English. He had heard about us via the village gossip network and he brought with him a thermos full of hot tea, which he offered and we gratefully accepted. Eustace explained that very few people in the area spoke English and he just wanted to be friendly and to keep up his English speaking ability. I seized this opportunity to ask our new friend why those people had brought us lunch. Eustace explained that they heard two foreigners had just arrived to live in the lonely kovil to practice austere meditation, and this pleased them. Most were simple people and devoted Buddhists but knew little about real meditation except that it was the way to attain Nibbana, whatever that meant to them.

The villagers were caught up in their mundane daily life and felt they could not meditate and reach Nibbana in this life. They knew, however, that it was their duty as Buddhists to support anyone who earnestly tried to achieve the goal. If a person did attain Enlightenment supported by their dana, it would be great merit for them. When I asked Eustace if the people knew we were not monks, he replied that it did not matter to them. It was our apparent sincere effort to practice meditation that inspired their hearts. He said that nowadays their own native priests had for the most part abandoned the more traditional, austere, meditative bhikkhu life to engage in scholastic study, social works and even politics, so there was not much inspiration.

The villagers were particularly tickled that we as Westerners had come halfway around the world and in their eyes sacrificed so much to take up, in such primitive conditions, the Buddha's way. He said a lot of the local families would probably be anxious to offer us dana and inquired if we were vegetarians. Speaking more for myself, I informed Eustace that we were trying to be and that we preferred the red country rice and half boiled

vegetables and fruits; that we did not care for chilies. He said he would try and spread the word around.

That evening we again climbed the hillock to watch the sunset and practice three part deep breathing. It was very exhilarating with the strong breeze blowing the fine mist from the crashing waves into the face, while ominous gray clouds drifted in from the southwest blotting out the sun — a breathtaking display of nature. Before dark we descended and resumed sitting quietly on the grass in front of the kovil. The tranquil surface of the cove and the branches of the palms fluttering in the wind provided many minutes of serene gazing and listening until we were completely swallowed up in the dark of night. As the moon rose and lit up the compound, I again took to³⁰ pacing to and fro reflecting on this thirty-two part, four element prattling illusion called ‘myself’. I found it extremely powerful and effective. It was as though the body was walking by itself and the mind, like the open sky, was filled with an incredible clarity and waves of soothing bliss, adding ever more new dimensions to my accumulating understanding.

Before sleeping, I sat at the feet of the compassionate Buddha image. I pictured the faces of mom, dad, and my gurus, sending them waves of golden warm Metta, systematically extending it to encompass all samsaric beings throughout the infinite universes until all gross distinctions of self and others melted into the cosmic light. I tried to hold this partial absorption as long as possible. This was the way I would close each day, and I found it complementary to vipassana for approaching the threshold of Non-duality.

I had not cut my hair since that fateful day at Kopan and now after six months it was two or three inches long. In this hot, humid climate even that relatively short length was a noticeable burden on top of my head. I remembered the relief and lightness I had experienced upon cutting my hair back then, and after some deliberation I decided to cut it again. It would help keep my latent vanity down and give me more of a monkish image, considering the way I was living here. I did not, however, feel like shaving

³⁰ Take to (idiom): To apply or devote oneself to (as a practice, habit, or occupation): take to begging. (Noted by Dhammavamsa)

off the bushy beard, though I knew I had residual attachment to it. I reasoned that once I started shaving I would have to keep it up, which would become an extra mundane chore to perform every few days. Chris, who had been experiencing an itchy scalp recently, was thinking along the same lines, so after lunch that day we took the bus into Galle to find a barbershop. This was the first time we had left the immediate vicinity of our little oasis and we stopped in to say “hi” to Gordon and Mona, who were naturally glad to see us. They had been meaning to come to the *devale* to see how we were faring but, on second thought, figured it might be too early, that we might be enjoying our solitude. They filled us in on the village gossip; everyone thought we were ‘good yogis’, always meditating and doing yoga, and they were all eager to support us in our noble endeavors to attain Nibbana. After a cup of tea and fifteen minutes of amiable chit chat, Chris and I continued our way back out through the long, strung-out village to the Galle/Matara road. Several villagers came out to look at us and appeared to know who we were, whispering in Sinhala, “the white yogis at the *devale*.”

We had some difficulty in recognizing a barber shop but finally stumbled upon a wooden shack on a side street, having a single chair on a dirty floor and a large mirror hanging on the wall. A fairly young man in a white sarong and undershirt was standing idly outside and I inquired if he was a barber. I did this by pointing to my hair and making a scissors movement with my fingers. He smiled and shook his head in agreement and ushered us inside the low-ceiling hut. There was only one chair and Chris beat me to the punch in saying that he would wait outside while I went first. The man was equipped with only a pair of scissors, a comb and a ‘cut throat’ straight razor, which I did not fancy him scraping my head with. I did not particularly wish to come out too monkish looking, as I was already wearing the yellow patchwork monk’s under-robe and an orange shirt. A freshly shaven head along with that semi-monk garb and my bushy reddish beard might really throw the village folks into a quandary. So I instructed him to cut the hair down as close as he could with only the scissors.

Chris, on the other hand, hoping to rid himself of dandruff, opted for a clean-shaven dome. He was wearing a plain white sarong and white banyan

so he would not be taken for an ordained monk either. But as the two of us walked through Galle afterwards to have a look at the old Dutch Fort and to do some shopping, we received some mighty long stares and puzzled looks. While walking back through the village to the beach all the residents noticed our changed appearances, evidenced by the giggles and finger pointing, especially by the jubilant children. Again we stopped at Gordon and Mona's and the couple thought our new look was fitting. We took this opportunity to have a bucket bath at their well and I filled up the water container. I was now in a hurry to get back to the seclusion of our new dwelling.

Over the next six weeks the routine continued with pre-dawn puja, meditation and sunrise yoga. Different groups of villagers faithfully brought us lunch each day. And many mornings someone would bring us breakfast as well. It was very touching to see how much these poor people cared about us total strangers. All of this devout generosity by these materially poor, rural folks made me stop, recheck, and strengthen my motivation. Was I worthy to receive this overflowing attention? I had access to more money or material possessions than they could ever hope to have, yet I was accepting their alms, taking from their own mouth. They were making a spiritual investment in us, counting on us as it were to attain Nibbana. I had to live up to that image to the best of my ability and not be hypocritical or eat their alms in vain. It was a difficult position to suddenly find myself in but it helped me remain on my toes — being aware of tendencies to back-slide and reflecting on the perfect human rebirth. Even so I still felt a little uneasy. Eustace said it would break their hearts if we refused their generosity.

Each day we sat to meditate for an hour before lunch and again at three P.M. At five P.M. we did some more yoga and went up on the hilltop for sunset deep breathing and meditation. Then we sat on the sand in front of the *devale* until becoming too sleepy to continue. There was even a sweet old lady living nearby who brought us a thermos of sweet tea during this night meditation. On some days this flexible schedule was modified to accommodate unexpected visitors or other special circumstances. Gordon and Mona came on a few occasions to watch the sunset or meditate with us.

Chris and I alternated going to their house to bathe and bring back drinking water. Since it was a public shrine, people would come to worship and make pujas from time to time, sometimes arriving in big tour parties. They usually showed up while the two of us were meditating, which aroused their curiosity greatly, with them whispering and shuffling around to get closer for a better peek. We became somewhat of a novelty in these parts.

Word of our presence spread to Galle and even Matara twenty miles to the south. Several persons came with the sole intention of meeting and speaking with the 'foreign yogis'. If we were not meditating, they would try and engage us in conversation. The ones who presented themselves politely and who appeared well educated we would generally happily converse with, as long as the subject was about the Dhamma or related topics. And we did meet a few well-versed, spiritually minded, interesting persons with whom we held lively and lengthy conversations. But most of the inquisitive visitors used this as an opportunity to practice their English, which was largely limited to the standard mundane questions: What is your country? Do you have brothers or sisters? Are you married? Why are you staying in this lonely place? Being posed the same questions over and over became rather annoying and even ludicrous, but it taught us more patience and compassion.

Once in a while we would be awakened in the middle of the night by people coming to make a puja to the gods and exorcize evil spirits. In Sri Lanka, being possessed or influenced by evil spirits is a common belief and persons thinking themselves so possessed come to *devales* to rid themselves of the menace. This particular kovil happened to be such a place where they came to be dispossessed and, for some reason, it usually occurred in the dead of night. Accompanying the person was a man called a 'devil dancer' who performed the ritual puja and acted as the medium or exorcist, calling forth the aid of the gods.

Out of curiosity Chris and I got up on a couple of these occasions to watch the proceedings. The possessed person brought along a basket of things necessary for the puja including flowers, incense, coconut oil, lamp wicks, a husked coconut and other fruits. They usually came to the Buddha

shrine first to routinely offer a few flowers and incense, perhaps thinking to appease the Buddha (if that is possible) before appealing to the gods for more worldly help. Following this they returned to the shrine of the principal god where they prepared everything. Small oil lamps were lit and placed in different locations around the compound, especially under the giant boulder near the back which was supposed to be the 'power spot.' During the preliminaries the coconut was smashed on a rock letting all the water run out onto the ground. The possessed then went inside the inner sanctum with the devil dancer or *devale* priest who performed the ritual. Wearing a costume and a mask he shook a rattle, rang bells, and jumped around while chanting incantations, sometimes even shouting and harmlessly hitting the person. When I say this I thought it was superstition and hocus pocus. But with talking to some of the possessed people afterwards, they said it did have some effect; they felt freer and better as a result. Maybe it was all in the mind?^{VII}

As I continued reading through the Wheel pamphlets I was most interested in the doctrine of Dependent Origination. I had heard of these twelve inter-dependent links which turn the wheel of life at Kopan and read and heard it mentioned elsewhere but had never studied it closely. This theory of conditioned reality expounded by the Buddha is unique in the field of religion and stands at the core of the Buddha's profound Wisdom. It illustrates how the whole world of creation with the rounds and birth and death (samsara) is perpetuated for each individual through ignorance and craving.

On the surface this describes the process of birth and death as it relates to the successive existences in samsara. But at the deepest level it pertains to the birth and death of consciousness with each successive mind moment in which all twelve of these interdependent factors play their role. I read through this several times in order to memorize it and then spent several periods of meditation going over this as a kind of intellectual discursive contemplation, while at the same time trying to observe the process going on in the mind. It added yet another interesting dimension of wisdom to investigate. As I observed the arising and passing away of sensory stimulation I tried to detect and reflect on the various levels of ignorance

and how it produces the mental activities. I observed how sensory contact spontaneously triggers pleasant or unpleasant feelings along with the attending attachment, aversion, desire, craving, grasping and fresh actions — moving a sore leg to relieve the pain or shooing away a mosquito.

I recalled in my own life how this deluded ego energized mind lured by desire and lust had gone on forging strong habits by which I had performed many unwholesome actions and reaped subsequent physical and mental pain and caused others to suffer. I imagined that if this powerful thirsty mind was not tamed, if the exuberant energy was not re-channeled in a more refined spiritual direction, then this ego-consciousness would go on wandering through samsara aimlessly and endlessly. I understood that the more or less frequently we repeat our thoughts and actions based on ignorance or wisdom, the stronger or weaker those habits become; and according to the strength of our ignorance or wisdom it would perpetuate (with ignorance) or eventually terminate (with wisdom) the cycle of samsara. It all made terrific logical sense to me and the more I observed these things in myself and in others I became quite sold on the Buddha's formula for rebirth and liberation.

In some of our talks with Eustace and a few others the subject of Chris and I becoming real or official monks came up. Many people in the area would have liked to see us two foreigners in robes. This idea, of course, was not new to me; it had been in the back of my mind ever since the experience at Kopan. It had been brought back to a more conscious level recently by the conversations with Samitta and the two Western monks at Kanduboda. But since arriving at Unawatuna I had all but forgotten about it and was content living as we were, which was almost a monk's life anyway. However, now that the subject was brought up again and presented to both of us as a kind of proposal, we began to seriously consider the possibility. As time was passing on I realized more and more that I had no incentive left to revert to ordinary life or to just keep bumming around the world seeking different experiences. And now with this renewed discussion on the topic, and all the physical requirements for such a move near at hand, I spent some time 'soul searching.' It didn't take long to realize that I was probably as ready as I would ever be in terms of mental resolve and

sincere motivation, which made it seem like the next natural step. Chris, on the other hand, was not so sure of his deep inner commitment to a Buddhist monk's life, but the idea of becoming monk appealed to his romantic, adventurous fancies in a manner of "let's try and see."

It would mean a lot to the villagers who were supporting us; it would be a very auspicious event and a source of great merit for them to have a hand in getting us ordained. Eustace enthusiastically described how there would be a big procession with us riding on elephants through the village and along the Galle/Matara road complete with the whole traditional ceremony. So I figured that if I was to ordain at all I should first give these kind hearted people the opportunity to share actively in it. Eustace informed us of a big temple a few miles away where he knew the High Priest; Valle Devale was actually under his jurisdiction as was the Yaddehimulla village temple. Eustace thought we might be able to receive our ordination there and he offered to take Chris and I to meet the Venerable High Priest and present the matter to him.

A few days later Eustace came early in the morning and we walked the three or four miles into the interior and across rice paddies to the big temple. Besides being a temple it acted as a school or training center for about twenty young novice monks who were studying for the higher priesthood. Eustace introduced Chris and I to the Chief Incumbent who spoke no English and we paid our obeisance with three carefully executed prostrations. He bade us sit down. Eustace explained to him how we had been living at the *devale*, which he already was aware of, and now the two of us desired to don the saffron robe. This took the somber elder priest by surprise and he seemed a bit puzzled. He finally replied that he was happy to hear we wanted to follow in the footsteps of Lord Buddha but because we were foreigners he was not sure of the procedure. He would need some time to think it over.

When we went back to the temple a few days later for his answer the Chief Priest regrettably informed us that he could not grant us ordination. He was not sure of the government's policy towards admitting foreigners to the Sangha. He felt it would be better if we went to Island Hermitage or the

Vajirarama in Colombo. He also did not have the proper facilities for training us as none of the other monks spoke English and communication would be difficult. He explained that new monks were supposed to stay with their preceptor/teacher generally for a least five years to receive training in the proper monks' etiquette (code of discipline) memorizing scriptural passages, learning Pali and studying the ancient texts. Chris and I, of course, were not so much interested in that. We mainly just wanted to continue our own meditative lifestyle at the *devale*. I guess we figured it would be easy as pie to just get ourselves ordained, wear the robe, and be free to do as we liked, as Samitta seemed to be doing. We hadn't even given thought to the fact that we might have to live in a monastery for a certain period of time and undergo formal training. Even though I had built up an expectation in those few days of waiting, this news did not let me down too much. We were, however, somewhat sorry for the villagers who had become quite excited over the prospect (Eustace had spread the rumor) and now they might be a little disappointed. The two of us merely carried on like before as though those few days had been only a dream.

It was now about two weeks before our visas expired and we would have to return to Colombo to obtain another two months extension. The novelty of dwelling here at the *devale* was wearing off and I had finished reading all of the books I'd brought. It was also beginning to rain quite heavily, being the southwest monsoon season, and it was not so pleasant living exposed to the elements as we were. During long rainstorms which sometimes lasted all day Chris and I would sit inside the Buddha shrine and at night slept just inside the door where we could keep relatively dry and warm. I was still quite enamoured with the charming place. But I guess deeper down the latent restlessness or need for a change began to stir, and it seemed like a natural time to move on. I decided to journey to Kataragama as I was already nearly halfway there. I would return to Colombo directly from Kataragama two or three days prior to the expiration date of my visa. Chris, however, opted to stay in Unawatuna for a few days longer staying with Gordon and Mona at their house and then perhaps go his own way. We planned to meet again in Colombo at Sam's house two or three days before the visas expired and go together for the extension. We informed Eustace and the other villagers that we would be leaving soon to move on with the

winds of our kamma, which they were able to understand. I told Eustace that this particular spot was very special to me and that I had a strong feeling I would return someday. Jokingly I said, "Maybe the next time I come I'll be wearing the robe." And how true that would turn out to be.

When I arrived back in Colombo a few days later Chris was already at Sam's. Sam had been on weekend duty at the Air Force headquarters and returned this evening to find us both back, after nearly two months. Chris and I related all of our mutual and individual tales to his eagerly listening ears which he translated to his wife, son and mother-in-law. They were especially happy to hear of our nearly joining the monkhood and Sam inquired if we still had that desire. I replied that we would be putting off any such move until returning from India. He seemed to agree with that logical reasoning.

Chris and I now had to decide what we would each do for the next two months, taking it for granted we would receive a two months extension the following day. Sam's mother and father along with two of his brothers and their families lived on the family's ancestral property situated on a hillside just outside of the Kandy city limits. Sam encouraged us to go up and spend some time in the beautiful old hill capital. His ageing parents lived alone in one of the three houses and there was a big extra room where we would be welcome to stay as long as we wanted. Sam's spry old father spoke good English and was a learned pious Buddhist who also practiced meditation and was keen on discussing the finer points of Dhamma. We decided to do just that. Kandy was also the place where the famous German monk, Venerable Nyanaponika lived in a hermitage in the forest. He was the author of, *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation* mentioned earlier. I was keen on visiting him.

The next morning Chris and I went downtown to the immigration department and without too much difficulty obtained an additional two months visa. We were told however that this would be our last extension and that we would have to leave the Island. While downtown I penned an aerogramme to Mom and Dad. I told them about my continued interest in meditation and Yoga and my going to India for six months. As a long term

projection I told them that I would probably return to Sri Lanka after completing the Yoga course.

That afternoon the two of us went over to the Vajirarama Temple thinking to pay our respects to Venerable Narada and see if perhaps Samitta might be around. Just outside the temple gate we bumped into the tall brown robed American monk as he was coming out of the premises. Samitta informed us that the Venerable Narada was currently in Indonesia on one of his periodic Far Eastern Dhamma teaching missions and wouldn't be back until the end of the three months rainy season period. He himself was spending the three month 'Vas' at a secluded aranya about thirty miles outside Colombo but had come to the big city to attend to some needed dental work. He was now on his way to a dental appointment.

While standing there chatting an old man who was on his way into the temple stopped in front of us and with some difficulty got down on his knees to pay respect to Samitta. Samitta, of course, was wrapped up neatly in his dark colored forest-monk robe and he said a few Sinhala words to bless the pious old man. But then the feeble fellow turned to make the same obeisance to me. I was surprised and a little embarrassed at this and I took a couple of steps backward while Samitta tried to tell the man that I was not a monk. The devout old man evidently did not hear or didn't care and finished his three bows in my direction and then turned to Chris and did the same. Our hair was still quite short and I was wearing the yellow sarong and an orange shirt, so he might have mistaken us for swamis or something. When the man had gone inside the temple Samitta rebuked me for wearing the distinguishable monk's under robe saying it could fool people into thinking I was a monk as it may of had with the man. He said I was not an ordained monk and it was not proper. He frankly added that he did not want to be seen in public with me nor should I bother to visit him again if I persisted in wearing it. He also suggested not to wear my orange shirt. All of this hit me unexpectedly as a mild shock and I could only manage to respond by saying in a calm tone, "Okay." The monk then said rather curtly, "I have to be going" and he took off walking down the street, leaving me and Chris looking at each other with question marks. In all the time that I had been wearing that yellow sarong in public places, even in

front of Sinhalese monks in temples, no one had ever commented on it — at least not to me directly. But after considering it, and out of deference to Samitta and the Sangha, I stopped wearing it in public.

CHAPTER 17

GOTHAMA TAPOVANAYA

The old capital Kandy, situated in a cooler climate was a welcome change from the hot humid coastal region. Sam's family were very gracious hosts and gave us a big room to stay in. However on the second day Chris was admitted to the hospital. For the past week he had had increased swelling in his feet and he went to the Kandy hospital to have them examined. The doctor could not say immediately what the exact problem was but he recommended that Chris be warded for further tests and x-rays. Having heard so much about strange tropical diseases, Chris did not want to take any chances on letting it go unchecked, so he reluctantly consented to being warded.

The ward he was housed in was a simple barracks style building with open sides and no screens to keep out flies and mosquitoes. The beds were lined up on both sides of the long dormitory room with no individual privacy. The linen was changed or washed only once a week and the meals were very basic. But it was free; what else could be expected from a poor country. For the next ten days until Chris was released I went each day to see how the tests were coming and to keep him company for an hour or two, bringing along some fruits and other nutritious foodstuffs to supplement the hospital fare. This was an opportunity to exercise selfless compassion to make up for my weakness in this respect from the experience with Ronald in Nepal. I also went to the Buddhist Publications Society and bought some of the Wheel pamphlets for him to read.

During this time I paid a visit to Venerable Nyanaponika Thera. He lived in a big house set deep within a lush forest just outside of the city and the walk to get there was delightful. Bands of monkeys freely roamed through the stands of straight tall vine covered trees and a large pond bordered by giant bamboos and over hanging trees with vines hanging down made it look like something out of a Tarzan movie. When I arrived at the Forest Hermitage the venerable old scholar monk was busily engaged in his

writing and editing, but he was kind enough to welcome me inside to sit and converse with him for awhile. I told him I had read his book and that I was practicing that method of vipassana awareness using the abdomen as a primary object from which I was deriving much practical benefit. The learned Thera explained that training the awareness on the rise and fall of the abdomen was more conducive for cultivating the momentary concentration that was employed in vipassana meditation. This technique was found to be more suitable and helpful for the temperaments of many people and was quite sufficient for developing insight leading to the stages of realization. The orthodox version of anapanasati, concentrating at the tip



of the nostrils or upper lip was utilized more for gaining a deep one-pointed concentration leading to the states of absorption (*jhana*); the two were different processes. I described my own experimentation with both forms of breath awareness and said I tended to agree with him.

Before taking his leave I inquired if he knew of any other meditation center in Sri Lanka besides Kanduboda where the Mahasi Sayadaw technique of vipassana was taught. He gave me the name of Gothama Thapovanaya and said the teacher, Venerable Vangisa Maha Thera, had studied personally with the Burmese monks who had come to the island in

1956. His English was not so good but he gave instructions through a translator. Thapovanaya was the only other meditation center that catered to Westerners and it was conveniently located just six miles outside of Colombo in a rubber forest. There was still six weeks before I would leave for India and I thought I might as well spend the time meditating; I had no real desire to do anything else. So I planned on paying a visit to this place called Thapovanaya, 'ascetic forest,' as soon as Chris was released from the hospital.

The doctors finally diagnosed Chris's infection as being a mild case of filaria or elephantitis. This disease is also carried by the mosquito and cases were not uncommon along the coast. Chris had most likely picked it up during our sojourn at Unawatuna. Why I hadn't acquired it surprised me — I kept my fingers crossed. He was given a course of antibiotic injections and the swelling in his feet gradually disappeared and he was shortly thereafter declared cured and discharged. I stayed in Kandy a couple of more days and then proceeded back to Colombo to check out Gothama Thapovanaya as a place to get in a last month of intensive vipassana practice. Chris elected to hang out in the cool agreeable climate of the upcountry. We would meet again in Colombo for our proposed departure date on September 28th to take the ship back to Rameswaram and reach Pondicherry on or before October 1st.

When I got back to Colombo I stayed one night with Sam just to inform him of the latest happenings and plans of Chris and I and then headed out to Gothama Thapovanaya. Venerable Vangisa Maha Thera had his private cottage in the middle of the large rubber forest monastery which was crisscrossed with several wide, freshly swept pathways. The short, plump, middle aged monk greeted me with a smile and invited me into the front room of his comfortable quarters where I paid my respects and sat on the floor as usual. I expressed my desire to practice meditation under him and he seemed willing to have me stay. I did not mention my previous experience at Kanduboda, wishing to be thought of as a complete beginner. He had a young attending monk lead me to the yogis quarters to assign me a cubicle and provide a pillow and bed sheet. The teacher told me to settle into the room and he would call for me later for the first instructional interview when the translator arrived.

When I met an hour later with the teacher and the elderly woman translator I was instructed in the same identical vipassana method that I had learned at Kanduboda and which I had been more or less continuing all along. He instructed me to begin the practice slowly and alternate the periods of sitting and walking as much as possible from morning till night. He would be available in the afternoons for interviews only every two or

three days when the translator came; if I had any urgent problems or strange experiences I could come to his kuti and he would try and help me through his limited knowledge of English. A couple of his older student monks who also spoke a bit of English could be of some help. So with this I returned to my cell and got started. I also sneaked in pranayana and yoga exercises, though the latter was not expressly forbidden here.

The set up here was slightly different than at Kanduboda. The male yogis section was a single rectangular building with a row of ten cells on each side opening onto an inner hallway running down the middle. The center hallway was marked off into three lanes which were used for walking meditation. At one end of the building were the toilet stalls and at the opposite end was a small separate area with a Buddha altar and open space for sitting. A dirt pathway went around the outside of the building which could also be utilized for walking meditation. The surrounding area was dense with rubber trees and well shaded, keeping it nice and cool. Just across the wide entrance pathway was the spacious, newly constructed Dhamma preaching hall where the full moon poya day 'sil campaigns' were held.

At this time there was only one other western yogi and he occupied a cell at the opposite end of the hall from me. It was inevitable that we would meet and we held occasional, low pitched conversations, though neither of us were into talking too much. Allen was also an American and he had been here meditating for the past two months but he too was leaving for India shortly. He said it was a nice quiet place except for the crowds that came on the full moon days and the young boys from the monastery sponsored orphanage nearby who often ran around playing.

The daily schedule was similar to the one at Kanduboda but without any group sittings. The wake up gong was at a more reasonable 4 A.M. and there was no set time for sleeping at night; there was no clock in the building. Each yogi was left on his own to sit and walk throughout the day as each saw fit. A well for bathing and washing clothes was a short distance away. There were about twelve young samaneras (novice monks) ranging in age from eight to twenty and four or five older bhikkhus, all of whom

were direct disciples of the Venerable Vangisa. The young ones were learning the Buddhist scriptures and some were going out to the *pirivenas* (special schools for monks). Some were attempting to learn English and they would try and get us western yogis to teach them a few words and speak with them. But Venerable Vangisa did not approve of them disturbing the meditating yogis. None of the other monks were practicing meditation as such, confining themselves to doing pujas and chanting long recitations.

During the meals, lay yogis sat on mats on the floor in the *danasala* at the end of the row of samaneras who sat on a raised bench along one wall. Across from us several feet away sat the fully ordained bhikkhus with Venerable Vangisa at the head. All of the monks ate out of their black tin alms bowls. Like at Kanduboda, the lay yogis ate off plates. Unlike Kanduboda, however, though the food was brought in by lay devotees, it was served by the novices who unmindfully came by and dumped a spoonful of each item onto the plate and into the bowls. The novices ate their meals very fast and were usually finished within ten minutes and then they waited for the senior monks to finish. When Venerable Vangisa gave the signal they all quickly washed their soiled hand in the water bowl and stood up in unison to go outside where they fed the scraps to the animals and washed their bowls at the tap.

There was a definite hierarchy among the junior and senior monks and a definite order for doing things; it was tightly regimented and maintained by Venerable Vangisa. In contrast to the un-mindful hurriedness of the young monks, I was practicing very slow eating movements and would only have eaten five or six mouthfuls when the others were already preparing to leave. The teacher, who also took his sweet time, told me I could remain as long as I needed to mindfully eat and I was usually the last one left in the large dining hall.

There was one American monk who had been ordained here by Venerable Vangisa. His name was Sudhamma and he was staying separately in the rear of the large aranya where there were a number of individual kutis, reserved for higher ordained bhikkhus and foreign novices. He came to the

danasala before the food was served to collect it in his bowl and then returned to his kuti to eat in privacy. Lay yogis were not allowed to go back into that section of the monastery where he dwelled but I managed to meet him near the *danasala* before lunch a few times to sneak in short conversations. I wished to inquire from him about the monk life there and what he had to go through to get ordained. He had been ordained for six months and was Venerable Vangisa's first and only Western disciple. He described how the young samaneras liked to talk and horse around and he felt alone and frustrated trying to practice his meditation. He was not so happy and was becoming discouraged and somewhat homesick for Ohio where he was from. Sudhamma confided to me that he was itching to leave and he would probably do so within a week but he asked me not to repeat it to anyone else. Sure enough, a few mornings later it was discovered that Sudhamma had 'jumped the fence', left, bag and baggage, without informing anyone, not even Venerable Vangisa. He did not even leave a conciliatory note.

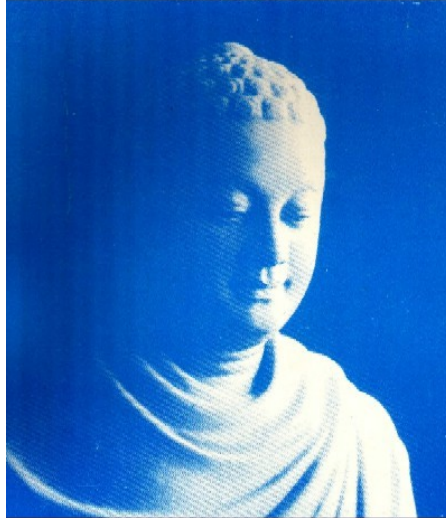
Sudhamma's unannounced leave was not appreciated by the other monks or the teacher. They asked me why Sudhamma would run off just like that without informing them after all they had done for him for the last six months. I couldn't very satisfactorily answer that question myself. He didn't tell me he was going to disappear in such an abrupt and secretive manner, but I was not too surprised. His mind was bent on splitting and he was probably afraid the others would try and talk him out of it, or he was just too embarrassed and wished to take the quick, easy way out.

One night I had a unique experience. I had been concentrating intently on the moment to moment movements of the body all day and late into the night until falling asleep. When I woke up about 2 A.M. to go to the toilet it was, as if watching a film in slow motion: I could quite distinctly perceive each 'frame' of movement arise and vanish in quick succession. This began automatically upon opening the eyes and while sitting and standing up, walking to the toilet, performing the function of urinating, returning to the cell, laying back down right up to the moment of closing my eyes. It was similar to the experience at Kanduboda with the one isolated flash of consciousness but this was occurring over and over continuously for about

five minutes without any effort. It was quite intriguing but I was able to observe the whole process with equanimity. When I awoke in the morning the awareness was back to normal and I returned to deliberately imagining it happening that way. On a few other isolated instances, when I least expected it, awareness sprang up vividly, noticing some insignificant thing such as the slight movement of a toe, finger, blink, the chirping of a bird, or touch of wind on the head. These were all more direct insights into the various and wonderful aspects of perception which normally are hidden under layers of fast movements, ego-expectation and grasping.

By the time the month was over, I had more or less made up my mind to join the monkhood upon returning from India. I was getting along quite satisfactorily with Venerable Vangisa and the younger monks and I was content with the atmosphere at Gothama Thapovanaya. I conveyed this desire to the teacher and inquired if it might be possible to be ordained by him upon my return some six or seven months hence. I explained to him how I had been planning this trip to India to take the yoga course for a long time and how the yoga exercise helped to keep me healthy, promoting good blood circulation and toning the nervous system which aided the meditation practice. He somewhat agreed with what I said and replied that I was welcome to come back to Thapovanaya and remain as a layman for some time while he considered the matter of ordination. He might still have had memories of Sudhamma and decided to exercise more caution with foreigners. I respected the teacher for that and thanked him.





CHAPTER 18

ANANDA ASHRAM

Much of downtown Pondicherry is owned and influenced by the large Aurobindo Ashram which occupies several square blocks of prime property near the seaside. At this time the Ananda Ashram of Dr. Swami Gitananda



was not so well known and all the taxis and rickshaw-wallahs thought that every tourist came to stay at Aurobindo Ashram or its affiliate, Auroville. So it was with great difficulty and confusion that we finally arrived at Ananda Ashram situated out in the middle of a barren open area outside of town in a suburb called

Lawspet. Though the surroundings were dry and treeless, the inside premises was a veritable lush garden oasis with bright clean buildings and freshly swept sandy, shady pathways. Chris and I were greeted by Meenakshi who was busy making arrangements for the influx of students arriving in these few days. She recognized the two of us as being from the Colombo course.

By the next night, the 30th, most of the expected students had arrived and settled in and Swamiji came out for the opening night satsangha to get acquainted and orientate us to the rules and course schedule. Another, fancier name for the ashram was The Yoga Vedanta University of South India and indeed the various subjects we would cover in the six months sounded like a formidable college syllabus. There was to be six or eight classes a day which everyone was expected to attend starting with the 4 A.M. Brahma Mahurta (God's hour) meditation and ending with the usual

evening satsangha. Other class subjects besides the 6 to 7.30 hatha yoga/pranayama class would be: yoga relaxation and concentration techniques, health, diet, hygiene, yoga physical therapy, philosophy, Sanskrit and Tamil language lessons, devotional or bhajan singing, mantra chanting and more. Swamiji explained that all the standard rules of morality (equal to the five precepts) and punctuality to all classes and functions was of primary importance. Again, Mondays would be a day off when we could go downtown to take care of needed shopping, banking and visa matters, other errands or just lazing around on one of the beaches or simply remaining quietly in the ashram. Most of the classes would be held in the main garden classroom in the back under the spreading cashew trees on the sandy ground. All throughout the two or three acre, fence-enclosed ashram complex were papaya, banana, palm, cashew and other varieties of trees as well as vegetable plots, flowers, medicinal herbs, and other exotic potted plants, all of which were laid out and arranged very neatly. Swami Gitananda had selected this former desert-like area to build his self-contained “Garden of Eden” somehow knowing of a perennial underground water source; the ashram was blessed with unlimited, fresh, iron enriched water.

During that first week everyone performed the radical salt water purge followed by fasting according to each one’s biorhythm cycle. I accomplished my four day fast feeling very light, clean and energetic. The only time exclusively reserved for quiet meditation was in the early morning between 4 and 6. Due to the heavy class schedule there was not much spare time during the day to do our own personal extra practice. Though the course was six months long, there still didn’t seem to be quite enough time to master everything we were learning. I began using the evening dinner break period after mantra chanting and before satsangha for getting in extra meditation, practicing advanced pranayama techniques, the headstand and other more difficult exercises.

My favorite activity was going out to the beach north of Pondicherry on Tuesday and Friday mornings for the pranayama exercise class. We had to leave the ashram early enough to ensure arriving on the beach before the sun rose above the horizon. We greeted the rising sun with the AA-OO-

MM chanting followed with the complex Suriya Namaskar (Sun Salutation) exercise or other specific exercises and eye drills which utilize the first minutes of the rising sun. Sometimes we all lined up at the water's edge sitting in the full or half lotus posture and performed special pranayama breathing routines while letting the tide lap up around our legs. Swamiji, wearing an orange dhoti with his bare barrel chest, long white hair and bushy beard stood in front leading the group. He reminded me of a drill sergeant correcting our wrong movements and occasionally barking instructions. All of this unusual early morning activity attracted the curious attention of some of the local fishermen and toddy tappers³¹ who came to the beach for their morning ablutions and/or work. The one and a half hour session closed with a refreshing swim or body surfing in the blue waters of the Coromandel Sea. We then headed back in our own way to the ashram for a late breakfast before the 9 o'clock class commenced.

On the full moon of each month all the ashramites went out to another stretch of beach a few miles further north where it was not so inhabited and spent the late afternoon and whole night. For this most of us rented bicycles for the long ride. A light meal was carried out by Meenakshi and Swamiji who usually came out in a three-wheeled auto taxi; it was served after the mantra chanting. Swamiji had us dig and fashion out of sand a huge mandala in the shape of a star, a heart or other auspicious symbol near the tide line. When the full moon rose above the horizon we welcomed the sun's complimentary energy by specific full moon mantras and bhajan singing. When the tide rose shortly after, we watched it consume all of our hard labor of love. It was another teaching on the natural cycle of birth and death, the dance of creation and destruction which, alas, we are all part of.

Afterwards we would all gather around Swamiji for satsangha when he would usually deliver an especially long and stimulating talk and field questions from us which he would answer in his expert manner. By around 10:30 or 11 P.M. most everyone had fallen asleep. I, however, would try and stay up the whole night or at least the better part of it to take advantage of the full moon energy which I imagined to have special power. I spent the

³¹ Men who climb coconut palms to tap toddy, the wine-like beverage I experienced in Kerala.

time meditating, energizing the body with pranayama, performing more difficult postures (asanas) utilizing the soft sand which made some of them easier and taking long meditative strolls along the shoreline. I could detect a trace of pride in being awake while the others slept.

On one of these nights an interesting experience occurred. At sunset a group of people from the nearest village a mile away came walking in a funeral procession carrying a body on a stretcher with the attendant drumming and trumpet blowing and stopped a few hundred feet away from our group. They built a pyre out of logs they had brought in a bullock cart and set the corpse upon it, performed the customary Hindu rites and then set it ablaze. Shortly afterwards the people started leaving while the fire and embers continued late into the night. When everyone in our group had fallen asleep I strolled over to the deserted cremation site and sat down to gaze into the pit of glowing coals. I could see a few pieces of spinal vertebrae all charred and oozing with fluid which were the only mortal remains. So I took it upon myself as a good Samaritan and as a kind of death meditation to stir the bone fragments with a stick until they completely burned into ashes. I then covered the site with sand and ritually piled up a few rocks and circumspectly walked back imagining my own body having the same fate.

Getting back to Ananda Ashram, the religious atmosphere was definitely Hindu dominated. Pictures and statues of the various deities such as the elephant-headed Ganesha, the flute playing Krishna and the dancing Shiva were conspicuous in many niches. Every morning a Brahmin priest who lived nearby came to the ashram, washed down all the main statues with water, applied fresh red paste on the forehead of each and deposited a few flowers at each, all the while chanting the appropriate Sanskrit mantras. Every Sunday morning at 9 was the regular ashram puja which we all attended freshly bathed and wearing clean clothes. It was what you might say a Hindu version of a church service. Swamiji and Meenakshi lead us in chanting mantras for Lord Shiva and we sang Tamil bhajans while the Brahmin priest performed the extra elaborate cleansing rites on the beautiful bronze dancing Shiva and the lingam/yoni in the central shrine area. Afterwards a special sweet substance called prasad (blessed food) was

passed out to everyone and the priest came around with the sacred flame (burning camphor) to pass our hands through and red paste to apply to our foreheads — if we so desired. There were periodically other special pujas to commemorate the birth or death of a great saint, a Hindu holy day and for Swami Gitananda's own Guru. On these festive days the public was invited to attend to celebrate the occasion and enjoy the free meal that was offered to everyone, served in the traditional way — sitting on the floor eating off a banana leaf.

The talks that Swamiji gave on the various aspects of the comprehensive science of Yoga and related topics was an unending fountain of facts, information and insight. Some of the things he would say and comment on seemed to be a little exaggerated and some of the students even took offense to Swamiji's free interpretation and ridicule of Western medicine, science, culture, and certain personalities. Though some of his facts might have been slightly off and his opinions biased, the point he was trying to make was clear enough. He was stressing the need to abandon the artificial devices, modern chemicals and drugs which actually create more unhealthy dependence and medical complications, which started in the West but was now rapidly spreading in the East. Modern man's pollution and rape of the planet along with his and her body and mind is the thing that will bring the end to the human race. And as individuals living in and being subject to the environment, only our adherence to a yogic way of life would keep us healthy, sane and happy in, for the most part, a sick, insane, unhappy world. It was this emphasis and the Swami's apparent sincerity and no compromise attitude in matters of morality, health, habits etcetera that inspired me the most.

In the course of time we learned yoga techniques for cleansing, stimulating, and rejuvenating every conceivable part of the body and mind in numerous assorted and complimentary ways. I learned about and experienced to a certain extent body functions and glands and how they affected the mind in ways that I never even knew existed. ^{VIII} The dynamics and flexibility of the lungs and respiratory process with the different ratios of breathing and movements of prana was perhaps the greatest revelation as far as the physical body was concerned. In the afternoon therapy class we

learned things like spine walking, spinal stretching, hip, shoulder, and neck joint settings, acupressure foot massage and other forms of massage. Every class day we picked partners and after Swamiji demonstrated a particular technique we would practice on each other laying on the soft sand under Swamiji's roving watchful eye. This was very instructional and practical first hand training which we could use in our life to help those around us. I thought I could help my mother in this respect who suffered from mild arthritis and periodic back seizures for which she spent money visiting chiropractors. We also were taught therapeutic postures to aid or cure functional disorders such as asthma, diabetes, high blood pressure, constipation and other chronic disturbances along with eye drills to improve eyesight. It was all very useful and insightful.



From Christmas day until January 1st there was a break during which Swamiji took a bus load of students on a tour to various ashrams, temples and other holy pilgrimage sites around South India. I did not particularly care to join the group tour and instead I planned to go to an ancient rock fortress called

Gingee, located about fifty miles from Pondicherry. Meenakshi told me about this place which she had been to a couple times. It rose out of the flat arid landscape and was literally a mountain of rock with a stairway leading to the flat top on which there were some remarkably well preserved stone temples. A pool of water in a kind of sunken grotto under huge rocks could be made suitable for drinking with the addition of a water purification tablet or iodine. The rock fortress of Gingee was a tourist attraction in South India and ordinarily people were not allowed to remain inside the small enclosed area overnight. But if I acted inconspicuously, the gate attendants or watchman would probably not notice me and I could likely get away with it. Though tourists came in the daytime, it still was quiet and isolated and made an ideal place for a few days retreat. It sounded pretty neat so I

figured to do a mini retreat there during the five day Christmas break, existing on a meager fruit diet or simply fasting and catch up on some longer hours of vipassana meditation which I had been missing. As an added bonus, this was to be the period just after the full moon, so the waning moonlight would enhance the nighttime mood.

I left just after the special Christmas morning puja and banana leaf lunch, thinking it to be my last substantial meal for awhile. I packed my rucksack with jalaba, poncho, straw mat, and water bottle and rode the bus into the interior countryside. In the nearby village of Gingee I bought some assorted fruits and a bag of peanuts to last a couple of days, thinking to fast on water when the rations were finished. At the entrance gate I bought the fifty paise ticket and, acting like any other daytime tourist, I casually hiked up the long winding flight of stone laid steps to the top. It was indeed a grand view of the surrounding area, especially lit up under the moonlight in the late night. I was able to find a secluded spot in one of the rock temples to stash the pack and use as a refuge from the daytime sun. At night I brought my bedroll (mat, jalaba, and poncho) outside to sleep under the moon and stars. I did lots of pranayama in the clean invigorating South Indian winter air as well as practicing the mudras and other stimulating routines and a few hours of sitting meditation each day. I also spent a lot of time just gazing out over the countryside to the horizon absorbed in thoughts. By this time I had developed a habit of seeing how everything that happened to me and the world fit into the Buddhist and Yoga world view. I had read the English newspaper once in a while and heard bits and pieces of current world events as Swamiji would comment on them from time to time (he read the paper every day) and these Dhamma Truths sunk deeper in. I thought indeed the majority of the human race is mad, blindly driven by the fires of ego-ignorance, greed, jealousy, and hatred; even the President of the United States, the supposed leader of the free world, is not exempt from the corrupt mind — My God!³² I pondered over my own past — how I had gotten here and speculating where it might all lead. It felt good to be out here all alone again after three months and I thoroughly enjoyed the outing.

³² Referring to Richard Nixon and the Watergate scandal.

By the end of March there were only ten of us who had made it through the whole six months. In the last few weeks Swamiji initiated our elite group into the advanced practices of the hundred syllable mantra laya and *Laya Yoga kriyas*. These complicated routines were designed to raise the *Kundalini* spiritual force up the hollow center of the spinal column (*sushumna nadi*) passing through the seven chakras to the Thousand Petalled Lotus at the crown of the head. When Cosmic Awareness becomes fully established at this crown chakra, this is the yogi's Enlightenment and liberation from Samsara, termed Brahma Nibbana. These *Laya Yoga kriyas* were supposed to be the highest and consummate tantric practices for achieving this. All the other things we were doing such as the pranayamas, chakra awareness etcetera were only to purify the chakra/nervous system, to prepare the groundwork for the 'final blow.'

The experience of 'awaking the *kundalini*' has been described in some popular books as being like a lightening bolt shooting up the spine, or at least a slower, hot, and sometimes painful ascendance. These *kriyas* required a great deal of concentration and breath (prana) control and though I practiced them assiduously for a few weeks, I never had any such radical experience. However, after thirty minutes or an hour of this strong concentrating I was left in a very effortless and blissful meditative state and out of the body feeling, which I could reach all the same by an hour of strong vipassana awareness.

I had always considered Buddhist meditation as my path for developing Wisdom and attaining Enlightenment while yoga was primarily a complementary support, purifying the 'body temple.' Compared to vipassana, all these pranayama breathing routines, concentration and meditation techniques, *kriyas*, talk about chakras and raising the *kundalini* seemed too complicated and perhaps unnecessary. I went along with it all and tried my level best to get any possible experience and benefit from them — I was open to anything. I knew there must be something to it as it was such a highly evolved, technical, exact system; I didn't think it had only an imagined result. But it obviously wasn't the only path and maybe not mine, at least in all its aspects and fine details.

In terms of the whole course, I felt I had really benefited and accomplished something. I gained an incredible amount of theoretical as well as practical knowledge and insight into the nature and scope of Yoga and life itself in so many aspects. Some of the things learned would not be so useful for me in my envisioned future monk's life and those I could drop. But there was plenty which would prove useful and complementary. I still had not lost the desire to return to Sri Lanka and become a forest dwelling monk; rather I was now more prepared and anxious.

Chris had endured the six months also but had since change his mind about being ordained. Instead, he was planning to go up to Nepal for some Spring trekking. From Nepal his plans were to make his way to Australia or New Zealand to see about the possibility of his permanently living there. That had been his original intention for leaving England in the first place before becoming sidetracked with me. After a pleasant, educational and insightful one year delay, he was ready to get on with that initial objective.

On the last night during satsangha Swamiji held an informal ceremony for two long time Western male disciples, initiating them into sannyas, accepting Swamiji as their official Guru. Each of them received the traditional *mala* of 108 *Rudraksha* beads, the orange garb, and the prefix title of Yogiraj to accompany the Sanskrit name they already had. In a way I felt kind of envious but at the same time realized that my path was still that of the more meditative Buddhist monk which I hoped to soon actualize. Swamiji gave the rest of us the opportunity to make a less formal commitment and receive a Sanskrit name and even a special mantra which could serve as an indirect connection. I did feel a great affection and gratitude to Swami Gitananda and I would always consider him one of my Gurus as I did Lama Zopa, Lama Yeshe and to a lesser extent Goenkaji and Venerable Sivali. I decided to go ahead and receive a name as a token remembrance of unofficial discipleship. The Swami suggested the name 'Rahul'. Rahula (Pali version) was the name of the Buddha's son who became fully Enlightened at a fairly young age. I did, indeed, quite fancy that name. I had not been using the Tibetan name that I received from Lama Yeshe because it seemed awkward outside of its Tibetan context. I figured I would not actually have much chance to use this new name either, because,

upon becoming a Buddhist monk, I would most probably be given a new Pali name from my preceptor. But for the time being I connected with 'Rahul' and was satisfied.

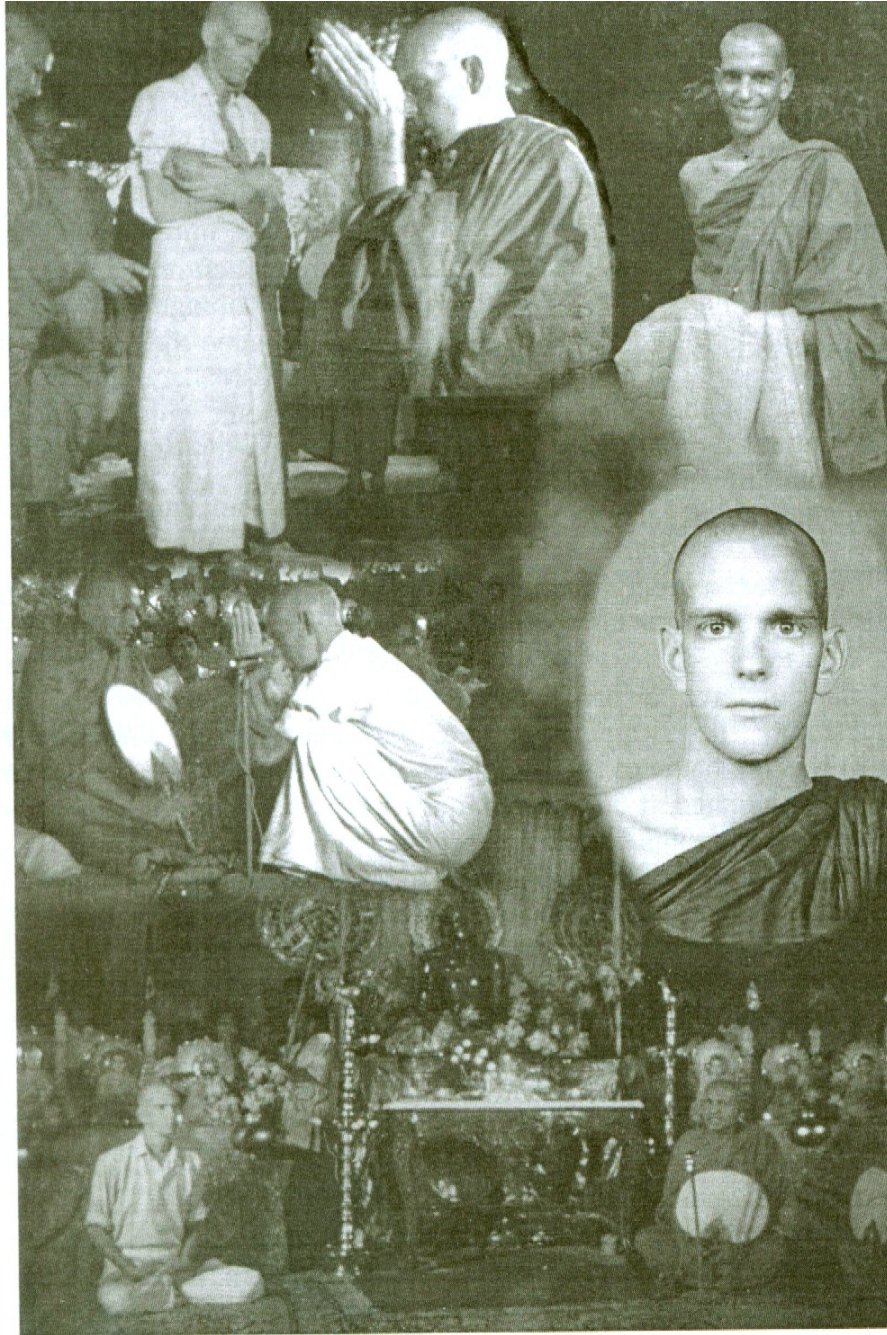


CHAPTER 19

GOING FORTH

Upon returning via ship and train to Colombo in the first week of April I stayed with Sam of couple of days before going out to Gothama Thapovanaya. Sam was sorry that Chris did not return with me and that he had given up any ambition to become a monk. Sam added that he felt Chris had not seemed as serious or committed to the ideal as I, so he was not too surprised at Chris's change of heart.

When I met Venerable Vangisa I reasserted my desire to join the Sangha. He was pleased to see me back and that I had not been led astray by Hinduism. We laughed about that and I told him how the Hindu/Yoga experience helped me appreciate the direct, naked approach of Theravada, specifically vipassana meditation. I tried to explain how in yoga there were useful techniques for strengthening concentration, achieving good blood circulation, purifying the nervous system and gaining stable body health which aided the practice of meditation. The plump Thera half-heartedly agreed with the health aspect and even suggested I might try teaching some yoga exercises to the young monks. Venerable Vangisa himself was suffering from diabetes and I told him there were specific exercises to improve and cure the condition. But he was not so enthusiastic about the prospect of his own participation and he quickly changed the subject. About my ordination as a monk, I would have to remain there under his supervision and continue my vipassana practice until such time as he felt I was ready, and also for an auspicious time; he advised me not to be in a hurry. Before leaving India I had made a quick trip to the Sri Lanka High Commission and obtained a three month visa, so there was no immediate hurry in that regard. Venerable Vangisa had a number of Buddhist books in English including the Vinaya (code of discipline and training rules for monks) which he advised me to look through to orientate myself to that aspect of monk life.



I was assigned the same room as I had previously in the lay yogi's quarters and settled back into an intensive meditation routine while keeping up with certain deep breathing ratios and postures. I was the only westerner remaining on a long time basis while two or three guys came for a week or ten days and then moved on. One of these guys left with me the third book in the Carlos Castenada series of Don Juan's teachings entitled *Journey to Ixtlan*. I had read the first two books before I had started on the active

meditation path. Now with the accumulated experience in vipassana I could see the direct similarity in the knowledge of Reality taught by the Mexican Seer, Don Juan. The passages describing the “Path of a warrior” and the warrior’s ability to perform “not doing” in order to “stop the world” and “see”, thus becoming a “man of knowledge” seemed to hit the nail right on the head. In vipassana, the yogi accomplishes ‘not doing’ by cultivating bare attention and ‘stops the world’ by applying clear comprehension, cultivating equanimity and experiencing ‘cessation’. He thus becomes a ‘man of knowledge’ or in Buddhist terms, an Enlightened One. A true spiritual seeker with his or her passive weapon of awareness/clear comprehension/wisdom takes up the non-violent fight against the defilements remaining in the mind; it takes the patience of a warrior to accomplish this.

The ‘*Journey to Ixtlan*’ is a metaphor to describe the predicament facing a warrior, meditator, or spiritual seeker. Ixtlan represents the conditioned illusory world — our cherished ideals, identity, self-image, family, home, country, etcetera. Everyone is on that journey hoping to reach, to arrive, to hold onto and protect one’s idea of happiness and security in this changing, unstable world. When a meditator gains the knowledge of No-Self/Emptiness everything that was considered real and familiar is seen in a whole new perspective; the futility of self-centered striving and craving is understood and abandoned. Such a one can never go back to the old habit patterns in the same blind way. Old feelings and memories may persist a little but these are seen as only ‘ghosts of the past’; no matter how tempting the world may seem at times the meditator knows he can never return to the ways of ignorance.

It was a beautiful ending to the book and I saw myself in the same position. I knew I would never again be really happy or fulfilled trying to live an ordinary life, becoming a cog in the wheel, part of mainstream U.S.A. Becoming a monk would officially consecrate the recognition of being a man without a country, home, or past identity to cling to. To me it meant taking up in a full time way the “path of a warrior.” As a monk there would be no other duty or obligation except to do this precious work, to “perfect the spirit.” Some people in the West accused monks of escaping or

copping out from the so-called real world and not facing up to life and I gave this plenty of thought. But I came to the conclusion that this kind of accusation or attitude was just empty talk. People who spoke thusly were probably unconsciously jealous that they were not in a position to disentangle themselves from the world, which deep down many people wish they could do.

According to Eastern thought, the case is just the opposite. It is considered more difficult and challenging to renounce the world and take to the solitary meditative path, to consciously purify the mind of greed hatred and ignorance. In my own experience it took more courage, will power, honesty and intelligence to sit through a whole hour or more meditating, having to face up to, accept and try to skillfully deal with the force of the ego, attachment, aversion, and fear as they arose. There was no place to physically go, no television or radio to turn on, no refrigerator to open up, beer to drink, dope to smoke, no friend to call up and cry to; there was no escape from the reality of the present moment of mind. Resorting to sensory indulgence, entertainment, ego gratification, burying one's problems in self-pity, alcohol, drugs and so many other distractions is the real escape and the easier way out. Even the normal life of getting married, raising a family, doing a job, social interaction and taking vacations is primarily a selfish affair.

People everywhere live mainly for themselves or their own family, small circle of friends, or particular group; they do just enough to get by, to feel good about themselves or to impress others. Though on the surface people may appear to be living a useful life, helping others, contributing to society, being happy and content, under the superficial appearances there is a lot of suffering; for many, deep inner joy and fulfillment is missing and they die empty-handed and confused. To the Awakened Sages this is the unreal or meaningless world and most people are as if merely sleep-walking.

After two weeks Venerable Vangisa informed me that he would schedule my ordination ceremony for that coming Vesak full moon day. He said that it was an auspicious day and he felt I would be emotionally and intellectually ready by that time. I hadn't even thought of it before, but it

did sound like just the perfect time. My future preceptor added that I would be receiving only the lower samanera or novice initiation at this time. This acts as a training/adjustment period to prepare one psychologically for the higher bhikkhu ordination and more austere committed life. A samanera is required to observe only the ten standard precepts plus seventy-five training rules which deal with matters such as how to wear the robes properly, conduct one-self in the monastery and in public, respecting the elder monks and so on. A fully ordained bhikkhu, however, is required to observe two hundred and twenty seven rules, which govern just about every aspect of his life. This rigid code of discipline, called the Vinaya was to help keep the aspirant for Nibbana mindful and alert to every activity of the body, speech, and mind, so as to hopefully avoid accumulating unwholesome, spiritually obstructing thoughts and habits. This, of course, was what I was interested in and I would consider myself as unofficially taking the higher ordination nonetheless, trying my best to observe all of the important rules.

By now I had read enough about the ideal life of a semi-ascetic meditative bhikkhu and that was how I envisaged my new mendicant lifestyle. I had daydreams of dwelling in this or that remote forest cave and even back at the Unawatuna *devale* going on my daily almsround striving to attain the goal. But from my conversations and observations, the majority of monks in the city and village temples, even here at Thapovanaya (the meditation was mostly for the Westerners), did not obviously share the same immediate ambitions or aspirations; we didn't seem to have much in common or be on the same wave length. Maybe this was why the previous western monk, Sudhamma, jumped the fence after six months. Sensing this, I was preparing to accept the ironic situation and commit myself to Venerable Vangisa and Gothama Thapovanaya at least for the time being. I realized that I would have to sacrifice some of my private opinions and projected ideals and tolerate the surrounding reality, understanding that it was all in the mind anyway. I could use this as an opportunity to look at my deeper latent ego/attachments and hang-ups as they may be stirred up. Most of the younger monks were happy that I was to become their Sangha brother and several were hoping I would teach them English. I also welcomed this as a chance to be of some useful service in that way and to learn Sinhala at the same time, with which they were eager to help. I

reckoned I would be in Sri Lanka for at least a couple years and I wanted to improve my knowledge of the language in order to communicate more freely with the local people if the need arose.



There was now a lot to do in that remaining month. Venerable Vangisa had one of the samaneras provide me with a list of Pali verses that I would need to memorize and recite during the ceremony and I was helped with the pronunciation. Another important thing I had to do right away was write a few letters. I wanted to find a tactful way of breaking the news to my parents, family and old friends. I hoped that I could convey in words a feeling for what I was about to do, so that perhaps they also could share in the joy of it. I did not want them to think I had really flipped out this time or that I was copping out on life. There was even a rule that a prospective monk should have his parents' permission to join the Order. This was to prevent the parents from too much unexpected shock or despair and grief over what they might consider as losing their only son. If they approved of the idea fine, but if it would cause too great a hardship in the family by not having anyone to help out or carry on the family name, then they should have that right. ^{IX} I knew that Mom and Dad could not, and would not, outrightly deny my decision to become a Buddhist monk. But out of my new respect for them, I did not wish that it cause them mental turmoil nor for them to harbor resentment or disown me. By my few letters they knew that I was serious about the yoga and meditation practice but I had never hinted at any such drastic move. I figured the news would freak them out a bit but they would get over it, as they had with my escapades in Afghanistan.

I knew the news would really blow the minds of Barry, Larry, Fred and the whole Riverside gang, though they might get a kick out of it — their old pal, Scott, the Buddhist monk. I also wanted to write Eustace to inform the villagers in Yaddhemulla and invite them up to Thapovanaya for the big event if they could manage it. And I wrote to the two Fernando brothers in Negombo to let them know and invite them. People like Sam and the other local friends I could inform in person on the one or two day trips into Colombo that I would make. And when I did meet Sam the following week

he and Tilak requested the honor of providing me with my first set of saffron robes and begging bowl, which I naturally couldn't refuse. It was considered to be the greatest merit to furnish a new monk with his robes and this was usually offered by the parents or relatives.

Normally a big crowd of devotees came to Gothama Thapovanaya for the monthly full moon poya program and this Vesak, I reckoned there would be a huge gathering. On top of this, my Preceptor was inviting the American Ambassador to attend. When he first told me of this I kind of shuddered and then laughed. I wondered why my teacher would want the Ambassador to witness such a thing that would perhaps not interest him. I learned later that it was a kind of standard protocol in the case of Westerners ordaining into the Sangha here and the publicity it would bring to the monastery wouldn't hurt either. Venerable Vangisa also suggested that I prepare and deliver a speech to the distinguished English speaking guests and others in the assembly explaining my motivations and feelings about this major change in life. I balked at the thought but while mulling it over in the next few days I got behind the idea. I thought I could perhaps give his excellency, the American Ambassador or any other English speaking people present a good shot of Dhamma.

A week before Vesak as I was mindfully walking back to my cell after lunch I passed by a Sinhalese layman sitting under a tree eating out of an alms-bowl. He wore a fresh white sarong and a long sleeved white shirt on which I noticed a Buddhist flag patch sewn on one sleeve. He sported a full black beard and long hair which was tied up in a bun on top of his head; he looked quite dignified sitting cross-legged on a mat mindfully eating. About thirty minutes later he arrived at the door of my cell and asked if he might speak with me. I replied, "Please come in." It turned out that he was a retired postmaster from Anuradhapura and now, after completing his service to society and satisfying his family duties, he had taken up the life of a lay Buddhist mendicant or anagarika (homeless one). He was observing the ten precepts and did not eat after noon and as he was on a walking tour and passing this well known forest monastery, he stopped to receive some alms in his bowl and partake of the daily meal. On seeing me walk by he desired to meet me to have some discussion. His knowledge of

English was excellent and he appeared to be well versed in the Dhamma and also with Western culture and the accompanying psychological problems. When I informed him of my ordination he beamed with delight and said he would try to attend. He said he understood why Westerners were becoming disenchanted with their society and value structure and were now turning to the Buddhadhamma and other Eastern traditions; there was a problem though because there were not many qualified Easterners able to communicate the subtleties of Dhamma to them in their own language. He felt that foreigners who came here to learn and practice for a sufficient amount of time would be in a better position to teach their own people upon returning to their respective countries. I tended to agree with him.

In the course of our lengthy conversation the amiable fellow asked if I might like to accompany him on a ritual pilgrimage up to the top of Adam's Peak. He said it would be very auspicious prior to 'Going Forth.' The idea struck a favorable note in me; not to worship the footprint so much, but just to make the climb in the traditional atmosphere. The weather was now dry and it was the pilgrimage season so there would be scores of devotees undertaking the early morning ascent chanting "Sadhu! Sadhu! Sadhu!" and watching the sunrise. It would also be my last chance to get out and mingle with the crowd as a layman. I was kind of attracted to this articulate anagarika; I had never met anyone quite like him among the Sinhalese and thought it would be nice to make this last memorial pilgrimage with him. He knew Venerable Vangisa and together we approached my teacher to request his permission to go on the sacred journey. He readily approved and gave his blessings.



Adam's Peak (Sinhala Sri Pada, Tamil Sivanolipatha Malai, Arabic Al-Rohun) is a 2,243 meter (7,360 foot) tall conical mountain in modern-day Sri Lanka, revered as a holy site by Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims and Christians.

Hindu pilgrims walk up the mountain, following a variety of routes up thousands of steps. The journey takes several hours at least. The peak pilgrimage season is in April, and the goal is to be on top of the mountain at sunrise, when the distinctive shape of the mountain casts a triangular shadow on the surrounding plain and can be seen to move quickly downward as the sun rises.

On top of the mountain is a rough impression in the rock like that of an enormous — nearly two meter footprint. Muslim legend states that it is the footprint of Adam, who was placed in Sri Lanka as the next best thing to the Garden of Eden; from this comes the name Adam's Peak. Other candidates in other legends for making the print are Buddha, the Hindu god Shiva, and Saint Thomas.

The Buddhist legend says that the (logically existing) other footprint is in a city about 150 kilometers distant, or possibly at Phra Sat in Thailand. A shrine to Saman, a Buddhist deity charged with protecting the mountain top, can be found near the footprint. Pilgrims who complete the climb sometimes ring a small bell near the temple — once for each climb completed.

(From <http://explanation-guide.info/meaning/Adam's-Peak.html> — Inserted by Dhammavamsa)

Not having anything preventing our departure, the two of us left that evening, taking the bus up through Hatton and Maskeliya to the base of the holy mountain, arriving at one o'clock in the night. My experienced friend and guide had suggested this timing so that we could reach the top just before the sun rose over the horizon. On the slow climb along with the throngs of other pilgrims the anagarika taught me his personal method of walking/climbing meditation by chanting the Buddha's qualities in the traditional Pali stanzas. He slowly recited two or three words at a time beginning with "*Iti-pi-so, Bhagava, Arahan, Sam-ma Sam-Buddho...*", and I would repeat them over and over until I had it down. By the time we approached the summit at dawn following a few rest breaks, I had memorized it and was reciting the whole verse. It was an effective way to keep the mind concentrated which made the time and fatigue of climbing goes almost unnoticed. Knowing the meaning of the Pali words, which I was generally aware of, turned it into a reflective devotional meditation in itself.

As we neared the almost vertical last few hundred feet, the cement steps became clogged with humanity and upward progress came to an eventual standstill. We had to be content with staying put and turning around to wait

for the climactic moment. Fortunately this was a clear morning and when the orange orb inched its rim over the distant horizon a thunderous roar of “Sadhu! Sadhu! Sadhu!” went up with everyone joining their two palms in the *namaskar* salute. My informative friend explained that since ancient times, people in Asia have been sun worshippers in one way or another. Sri Lankans believed watching the sunrise from the peak of Sri Pada was a great blessing; some Buddhists even imagined that the sun itself, as it rose each morning, was paying homage to the footprint of Lord Buddha. I didn't necessarily believe in these superstitions but I knew the sun was the sustainer of life and therefore was due some respect; I gestured my own pranams. This morning we were lucky enough to have the right conditions to see the shadow of the peak reflected on the surrounding mist. All in all, it was indeed a glorious sight.

Shortly after, people who had been at the top began descending and little by little we edged our way upwards to the summit. The ritual goal is to pay one's respects to the twin giant footprints cast in cement which are enclosed in a small shrine at the very highest point. Devotees were bowing down to touch their head on the slab and throwing coins and flowers onto the prints. Frankly, I was not so moved or impressed and I watched the fervent activity knowing that it was all in the mind of the beholder. The anagarika seemed to know the right people and he managed to get us invited inside the small kitchen where we were served a simple but hearty breakfast of rice and dhal before heading down. Somewhere on the way back to Colombo the anagarika took my leave to visit his sister who lived nearby and was then taking off on his wanderings; if he was in the area for Vesak he would make an effort to come to my ordination. I saluted him with namaskar as he got off the bus and I was back at Thapovanaya that evening.

The next day I shaved off my long cherished beard that I had been leaving till the last minute. I knew it would have to go sooner or later and I was now mentally prepared to let go of the last vestige of my former hippy image. I wanted to shave it off a few days in advance in order to get used to the new feeling and get some sunshine on the skin which would be a lighter shade than the rest of my face. It felt somewhat strange and for a few days afterwards I continued to reach up out of habit to stroke the beard, before

realizing it wasn't there; I gave the chin a rub anyway. The young monks commented that I looked much younger and, oddly enough without even looking in a mirror I felt younger. I was also going to shave my hair off which was now back to a length of almost three inches but Venerable Vangisa told me to hold off. Part of the preordination ritual was for the preceptor to cut off a small lock of hair from the crown of the candidate's head just prior to tonsuring the rest of the hair. In my case this would be done on the morning of the ordination itself which was to commence at 9 o'clock.

I was now enthusiastically caught up in preparing myself, memorizing the Pali verses I would have to utter during the ceremony and asking questions from my teacher and the other monks about various aspects of the procedure. I also spent a lot of time trying to come up with something meaningful to say in my address. I wrote down notes as ideas came up so as not to forget it in all the excitement. I brought up the question of a monk name for myself with the teacher, who up until now had not given it any thought. I was kind of hoping to be able to retain the name Rahul but was afraid he would want to give me a name specially selected by him. Without telling him where I had gotten the idea I mentioned the name Rahula. To my pleasant surprise he immediately exclaimed, "Rahula, Rahula, Lord Buddha's son, yes that will be a very good name." Then he added that I must have an identifying prefix. In Sri Lanka every Buddhist monk uses the name of his native town or village in order to distinguish himself from other monks having the same proper Pali name. There were many monks with such common names as Ananda and Rahula. My preceptor wanted to call me American or California Rahula, but I was instantly turned off by that explicit identification; I couldn't envisage Riverside Rahula either. I explained to him that I wished to cut off all such associations as far as possible and he said he understood. Then he suggested the prefix "yogavacara". *Yogavacara* was an epithet used by the Buddha for the forest dwelling bhikkhus who were devoted to meditation striving to attain the goal. The full name Yogavacara Rahula had a nice ring and I could relate to it. Having the word yoga included seemed to fit my particular 50/50 blend of vipassana meditation and yoga practice that I was doing. It was just

another new image to substitute for the defunct hippie image, but one that I felt would have a positive influence and deeper meaning.

During these last few days the young monks and other laymen had been busy preparing the monastery for the Vesak program. The Buddha Hall and pathways were festooned with Buddhist flags, colored lights and other decorations and now everything was ready. On the afternoon before the full moon day white clad upasakas and upasikas (male and female lay devotees) began trickling in to get the best positions on the floor in the giant preaching hall. The nearly deserted yogi's quarters was filling up with laymen coming to practice meditation for the two or three days. Another Westerner who had just arrived a few days prior was befuddled by all the decorations and bustling activity in what he thought was supposed to be a peaceful, unassuming meditation center. He was intrigued that I was becoming a monk here. I found out from one of the arrivals that the fact of my ordination with the presence of dignitaries had been in the newspapers; about a thousand people were expected for the actual Vesak day with my ordination being a big drawing card, taking center stage.

In order to make the event more meaningful to myself I planned to fast that day. At 8 A.M. Venerable Vangisa summoned me to his cottage where he performed the ritual tonsuring by snipping off the first lock of hair. At the same time I was instructed to reflect on the impermanence of hair and the rest of the body by chanting the Pali words for hair, teeth, skin, and nails. One of the other monks then shaved my head down to the bare scalp with a sharp straight razor. This was the first time I could ever recall having had my head shaved like this and it felt pleasantly cool and comfortable — a feeling that would become second nature. I then took a refreshing bucket bath at the well and donned the traditional white clothing. For this I wore my freshly washed white sarong, but as I lacked a nice white dress shirt, one of the samaneras had to borrow one from a layman for me to wear. I was now getting butterflies in my stomach in nervous anticipation and I waited in my cell trying to remember the verses I was to recite and getting my speech together.

Just before 9 A.M., Sam arrived with his family, Tilak and a few others. They brought the set of new brown colored robes, alms bowl and other requisite items which they would present to me at the appropriate time during the ceremony. ^x Tilak informed me that he had just seen a shiny black car from the American Embassy pull in with a couple of people in the back; another group of foreigners were busy setting up big portable camera lights inside the hall apparently intending to film the whole thing. Just before leaving me alone to take their places in the hall, Sam handed me a telegram that he had received the day before. It read: “We’ll be with you — tuning in on channel LSD at Joshua Tree on Full moon — Love, Barry, Larry, Fred and other friends.” Tears welled up in my eyes.

At the appointed time, I followed the line of seven bhikkhus headed by Venerable Vangisa into the hall and we took our pre-arranged seats on cushions on the floor in front of the specially set up, elaborate altar. The Preceptor sat in the middle while the witnessing monks sat on his left side. I, seated in the lotus posture, was at the right underneath the glare of bright lights. I tried not to look up at the audience but I couldn’t help noticing that the hall was packed full with a lone row of chairs in front on which sat several Western VIPs. A couple of men were moving big lights around and one was shouldering a large movie camera trying to find the best position.

The actual ordination procedure began by my offering a tray of flowers, incense, and lighting an oil lamp at the feet of the large Buddha statue on the altar where I executed three kneeling bows. I then moved back, paid similar obeisance to Venerable Vangisa and the other presiding Sangha members and then remained kneeling before my preceptor. With joined palms I recited the Pali formula requesting the teacher to grant me out of compassion the Going Forth (*Pabbaja*) novice ordination. This translated to the effect that I was a suffering soul and wished to liberate myself from the thralls of ignorance, greed, and hatred by being admitted to the Holy Order. I repeated this request three times following the instructions and promptings I had been given. The preceptor answered by saying he would have compassion on me and grant the request. Sam and Tilak who had been sitting in the front off to one side were now summoned and after bowing to the assembled Sangha members, they handed over the set of robes to

Venerable Vangisa; he in turn placed the bundle of folded robes onto my outstretched forearms and ceremoniously tied it around my neck with a strip of orange cloth. All the while camera lights were blaring and the film was rolling; many individual flashbulbs clicked off. At this point I stood up clutching the robes to my bosom and slowly, with head downcast, walked out of the hall to a nearby building where with the help of a few of the young monks I donned the saffron robes for the first time.

I was literally helpless in the art of wearing the large outer robe which had to be wrapped around the body and draped over the left shoulder while leaving the right shoulder bare. I had difficulty in keeping the robe up over the shoulder; it kept wanting to slide off. When I thought I had it all together, I mindfully headed back to the hall hoping for God's sake that the robe would not fall down in front of everyone. As soon as I re-entered the hall, a thunderous chorus of "Sadhu! Sadhu! Sahdu!" went up and the bright camera lights beamed squarely onto me. I was noticeably (to myself) nervous and with downcast eyes, remaining highly conscious of the robe, I returned to center stage while the lights, camera flashes and exclamations of Sadhus followed. I tried to concentrate on each step so as not to be distracted by all the sensational attention. When I reached in front of the preceptor I again knelt down and with joined palms requested the Three Refuges and Ten Precepts. This was the traditional formula for consecrating the Going Forth. Having repeated the vows after my teacher and paying obeisance again to all the robed Sangha members I sat back down on my cushion facing the glaring lights and the capacity crowd.

Venerable Vangisa then delivered a talk in Sinhala explaining the meaning of ordination and how I came to Gothama Thapovanaya to practice vipassana bhavana under him and subsequently desired to renounce the world. He told the audience that it was a difficult thing for a Westerner to renounce the world and become a Buddhist monk, because it was alien to Western belief. We would most likely be branded as heretics, escapists or freaks in our own country, even by family and friends; it would also be very difficult to find support for a bhikkhu living in the West. He said it was the duty of Buddhists in Sri Lanka to offer refuge and moral support for the foreigners, now growing in numbers, who came seeking to learn Buddhism

and practice meditation. He pointed out that we were sacrificing a great deal leaving our motherland, luxury life, family, etcetera, subjecting ourselves to volunteer poverty to live the austere, solitary life of a bhikkhu in a far away country such as Sri Lanka. He added, in his characteristic, somewhat animated, preaching tone, that Sri Lankans, in their haste to Westernize, could learn something from us, who, having been raised in the ego-driven, fast, materialistic culture, were realizing the futility of that way of life. The whole time the Thera was speaking the audience sat in rapt attention, while I was trying to suppress tears of emotion, center myself and struggle to remember the details of my own speech. I was next.

Clearing my throat, I started speaking, “Members of the esteemed Sangha, Buddhist devotees, and special guests. I was asked by my venerable teacher to share with you some of my feelings as to why I have chosen to become a Buddhist monk. For you Buddhists the reasons may be obvious. For the non Buddhists, however, you might be perplexed as to why an American, raised in a Judaeo Christian background, would become converted in the Eastern way of thought, which on the surface seems so alien. The Western culture and scientific thought is for the most part entirely externally and materialistically oriented. The world of mind and matter is considered the center of existence, something real and substantial; happiness is based primarily on the objective world, what we can obtain, and we live our life accordingly; material possessions, ego-satisfaction, intellectual or artistic pursuits are the yardsticks of success and happiness. The whole of Western society and culture has been steadily evolving around these ideals and principles. The Buddhist or Eastern way of thinking, on the other hand, realizes that this objective world of mind and matter is not the entire story. The conditioned world is merely a complex, constantly changing phenomena in which no lasting security or happiness can be found. Trying to seek satisfactory refuge in what is by nature impermanent only leads to frustration, sorrow and despair. The only real stable contentment and inner fulfillment lies in a mind devoid of selfish attachment and wanting. Having grown up in Southern California, I was conditioned to that self-centered, outward focused lifestyle and more or less accepted it without question and I suppose I quite enjoyed it. However, as I grew older and experienced more of life including three years in the army

and using drugs, something inside of me began becoming disenchanted at an unconscious level. My experimentation with various psychedelic drugs exposed new mental possibilities and apparently helped to trigger a growing search for the Truth. I thought there must be more to life than the run of the mill living and dog-eat-dog, material, ego-striving that most people in the West, including myself, seemed to be inextricably trapped in, each in one's own way.

This eventually led me to leave my home in California on a tour around the world to experience a wider variety of cultures, people and religions. I wished to see how people in different parts of the globe were faring in this process of life: and I saw that basically the same circle or web of striving to survive was found everywhere, only in varying degrees according to the physical environment, society's conditionings and ancient beliefs of a particular country and region. My unconscious spiritual yearning finally led me to Nepal where I was destined to meet two Tibetan Lamas who opened my heart and mind to the Dhamma. Fortunately my mind was ripe to understand, with some serious reflection, the gross meaning and implications of the Four Noble Truths. This was the crucial turning point in my life; it was what you might call a spiritual rebirth. And since then this mind has more or less been one-pointed in delving into and trying to penetrate the subtler aspects of those Truths. It is as if I am helpless in resisting the quest for greater understanding and mental transformation in line with Dhamma and for the ultimate realizations it will bring.

According to Eastern metaphysics, there is no absolute, eternal, individual owner or controller (soul) of this conditioned life in the body/mind organism. It is merely a complex, mysterious process determined by the varying degrees of ignorance, greed and hatred or their opposites, wisdom, non-attachment and love, which have been accumulated in the mental continuity of each Samsara-bound being; the Awakened One called it Anatta. The feeling of our being a separate, substantial entity, the experiencer and owner/controller is merely a magical, clever, deeply ingrained illusion projected from the murky depths of the ignorant mind. In my own experiences of meditation, I have perceived to a certain extent that this is true. Now for the good part — despite there being no absolute ego-

self there is the Unborn, Unconditioned, call it what you will, realm of Ultimate Reality; we all have the inherent potential to wake up from this continuous dream called individual life with its attended limitations and suffering; it is possible to realize the blissful Oneness and Unity of existence, the state of Ultimate Liberation. It is this potential within each being which will sooner or later lead each person to the spiritual path. I increasingly experience it as a sort of homing signal which is continuously, mostly on an unconscious level, trying to guide the (my) mind back inside, back home to its original source as it were. Using another metaphor, ego-consciousness is like a guided missile which is being lured, drawn, guided to its target, in this case Non-Duality or Nibbana, which is ever there emitting vibrations of Reality.

The course that my life has taken and is taking is dependent and conditioned by the accumulated experiences, actions (kamma) of body, speech and mind from past lives and this current life up to date. Hence, as for the reasons of becoming a monk, there are no real definite reasons as such. It is just part of the conditioned process, a phase life is taking to find the most direct, perhaps most conducive way, like rain water coursing down a mountainside, to reach the final resting place, Nibbana. In the ultimate sense there is no 'one' behind the process making step-by-step rational decisions.

According to the Buddha's Supreme Wisdom it is a rare occurrence to obtain the "Perfect Human Rebirth", the opportunity for meeting wise spiritual teachers and, even more, listening with an open mind, understanding, practicing, transforming the mind and realizing the profound Dhamma. As such, turning down or ignoring this long sought ideal opportunity which I believe I have, would be like spitting at Heaven, plunging right back into the field of suffering. I cannot see any reason for voluntarily keeping myself limited, confused and fettered by the normal Western lifestyle with marriage, kids, eight to five job, conforming social life and so forth. At this point in my life I feel that the most beneficial way to carry on is by becoming a monk. Going forth from home to

homelessness³³, living in accordance with the disciplinary rules, persevering in meditation; in short, following the Noble Eightfold Path, will keep the mind on a one-pointed straight course. I would like to remain in Sri Lanka and allow this process of Awakening to continue and deepen until I am convinced I have reached a point of no regression. When I feel I am mentally strong enough and confident, with something worthwhile to share, then I might like to go back to the West. I would like to share any fruits thus actualized, be it practical wisdom, compassion, inner joy, contentment, equanimity, firstly with my dear parents and close family members. Then in the spirit of the Bodhisattva I would try and help other fellow samsaric beings, perhaps bringing some joy and light of the Dhamma into their lives in whatever way possible.

I am very fortunate and grateful to be able to receive the *Pabbaja*, Going Forth, here at Gothama Thapovanaya under the compassionate guidance of the Venerable Vangisa Maha Thera. Thapovanaya is doing a great service to the Truth seekers of the world by providing a simple but pleasant abode in sylvan surroundings to contemplate the realities of life. To the Thapovanaya Society, the monastery staff, and all the faithful supporters, I offer my humble and sincere thanks and appreciation. May you all share in the merits which are acquired and may you all attain the everlasting bliss of Nibbana.

There was a great chorus of Sadhu! Sadhu! Sadhu!

³³ In the highest sense, from home to homelessness means letting go of every holding in the mind.

CHAPTER 20

POSTSCRIPT

I wound up staying in Sri Lanka for two years after my ordination. I spent the time between a few different places continuing my study of the Buddhist scriptures and meditating. One of the places I went a number of times was a cave located at the base of Dolukhanda mountain in a remote area about six hours bus journey from Columbo. There were poisonous snakes around and monkeys abounded. I needed to walk about one or two miles round trip to collect almsfood in my alms bowl. This was my most intensive meditation and ascetic practice place where I worked on overcoming fear of various kinds, especially the fear of death. Observing the greedy monkeys always trying to steal something from my almsbowl or the cave afforded good insights into the greedy mind which is easily seen in us humans.

After two months or so at Dolukanda I would return to Tapovanaya and report my progress in meditation to Venerable Vangisa and stay two weeks or so studying the Pali Buddhist texts (in English translation). Another place I alternated between was Unawatuna. The villagers there were very happy to see me officially in robes now. I would again reside in the *Devale* and meditate and go on almsround in various parts of the large area. Venerable Vangisa was quite satisfied with my progress in meditation and my continued determination to develop my knowledge of the Buddhist scriptures.

My parents had reluctantly accepted my new lifestyle but were understandably concerned, especially when I wrote to them telling them how I was living in a remote cave with poisonous snakes in the immediate vicinity and monkeys trying to steal my scanty begged food. In 1977 my mother decided to come to Sri Lanka to visit me and see first hand that I hadn't gone absolutely mad. It was a nice visit. She stayed the first week or so at Tapovanaya where I taught her meditation and she got a first hand glimpse at the monastic lifestyle. Then we went on a tour around the Island

visiting some the ancient historic sites as well as the cave at Dolukanda and Unawatuna. She came away with a reasonably favorable acceptance that what I was undertaking was a legitimate religious/spiritual life. She was also impressed with the friendliness and openness of the Sri Lankan people



she met and how these people respected and supported me in my spiritual pursuits. She was able to take these impressions back home to reassure my father, brother, sister and other relatives and friends that I had not in fact gone over the edge.

The following year in 1977 I decided to return to the States to visit my other family members and to see how Buddhism was developing in the West. To make a long story short I stayed most of the time at the International Buddhist Meditation Center on New Hampshire Avenue in Los Angeles. This was only fifty miles from my parents home in Riverside so I could visit with them for a few days or week at a time once a month or so. The head of the

IBMC was a very respected Vietnamese Zen Master named, Venerable Thich Thien-An. He was also a professor of Buddhist Philosophy and taught classes at the Los Angeles City College. The IBMC was predominantly a center focusing on the Mahayana schools of Buddhism. But Venerable Thich Thien-An, or Dr. Thien-An, as most Americans addressed him was keen on having monks and nuns from all the different

Buddhist traditions living there together and sharing their traditions with each other.

Just before I had visited the place for the first time the Theravada monk who had been living there passed away. Dr. Thien-An was happy to see me and encouraged me to stay there and help represent the Theravada tradition. By and by I began to give Dhamma talks on occasion at the Sunday meditation service and teach a yoga and meditation class once a week. Buddhist meditation was beginning to become quite popular in America then and increasingly large numbers of people attended these and other programs sponsored by the IBMC and the co-existing College of Buddhist Studies. So this was my first real introduction and training in teaching the Dhamma and meditation to others. It was also a chance to expand my understanding of the different Mahayana teachings and traditions. Many Buddhist ceremonies and festivals were celebrated here and teachers from Tibetan , Zen, Theravada and other sects would drop by for scheduled and unscheduled teaching programs. It was quite an active place, quite different from my monk's life in Sri Lanka but I was enjoying the change at least for some time.

And on Vesak day in 1979 I had my higher ordination (upasampada) which was held at the big Wat Thai Buddhist temple in North Hollywood. This was my final step in fully embracing the monk's life. This ordination was organized by the group of Sri Lankan monks who were residing in Los Angeles at the time. My parents and other family members were able to come to witness this auspicious event. My parents were good natured enough to even participate in the big procession around the temple three times carrying my alms bowl and set of new robes, to the beat of drums and chanting.

After about two years at the IBMC I began yearning for more silence and the forest monk's life, so I began to make plans to return to Sri Lanka. The busyness and less strict observance of the monastic rules and close proximity to lay persons of the opposite sex were threatening to undermine my monastic life and peace of mind. I yearned for my cave at Dolukhanda with its snakes and wild monkeys and the idyllic beachside dwelling at

Unawatuna. So in the early summer of 1980 I returned to the Indian Subcontinent, flying to Calcutta and making my way to Bodhgaya. I regularly meditated in the ambience under the sacred Bodhi Tree and stayed in some of the various monasteries there which offered their free hospitality. In mid-September I left Bodhgaya to make a pilgrimage on foot to the other Holy places connected to the Buddha's life-Rajgir/Nalanda, Vaishali, Kusinara, Sravasti, and ending at Lumbini in Nepal. I was able to go for almsround and get sufficient food in the villages I passed, sleeping in ashrams, Buddhist temples and just outside under trees off the main roads. By the first of November I had arrived at Lumbini, the Birthplace of the Buddha, which I had bypassed on my first journey to Nepal seven years before. Being so close to the Himalayas now I decided to continue on to Pokhara and make a trek into the Great mountains.



There was a Theravada monastery in Pokhara where I resided for several days before setting out on a one month trek which took me up to the pilgrimage spot of Muktinath and also to the Annapurna Sanctuary. I developed a strong affection for trekking in the Himalaya and used it as an aspect of developing my monk/spiritual life. By mid December, I was back at Bodhgaya to soak up the religious fervor of all the Tibetan people who

flock there in the thousands during December, and by the middle of January I was back in Sri Lanka.

To make a long story short, I stayed in Sri Lanka for the next six years. A new meditation center was just opening high in the cool mountains above a tea estate above Kandy. The name of this center was Nilambe. It was started by laypeople from the Kandy area and the main teacher there was a highly regarded layman named, Godwin Samaratne. It was primarily intended for use by lay people, but they welcomed monks to stay for periods of time. And I was asked by Godwin if I would lead a ten day retreat sometime. Godwin traveled quite a lot teaching in different places so while he was away he wanted teaching activities to continue.

So it turned out that I began teaching ten day meditation courses there at Nilambe about two or three times a year over the next five years. It was primarily Western tourists who attended these courses but by and by several Sri Lankans would also attend. In between the courses I would go down to stay at Unawatuna. During my three year absence Unawatuna Bay had been discovered by tourists and a number of low key hotels and restaurants had been established along the shoreline and among the village houses. So this disturbed the isolated tranquil setting I had enjoyed before on the beach itself. However, I discovered an ideal little spot underneath a thick canopy of trees and bushes on top of the hill where, with the help of the villagers I had a wooden kuti built.

People seldom came up to the top of the hill except to watch the sunset and then they were usually quiet. The kuti could not be seen from the outside so people didn't even know I was there. I had a gap cut in the bushes at the back of the hut which opened out onto the large rocks of the bluff where the waves of the Indian Ocean crashed just twenty feet below. There was a flat rock which I could comfortably sit for meditation facing the sunset unseen by others. It turned out to be a nice little dwelling and I went on my daily almsround in the different parts of the large sprawling area which made up Unawatuna, extending inland from the shoreline. It was here that I spent most of my time between the two or three yearly visits to Nilambe. It was also here where the idea to write this book evolved.

I did not go back to Thapovanaya. While I was away, Venerable Vangisa had passed away and the monastery had grown into a large training school for young monks. So it was no longer the quiet meditation center I was used to. In April 1985 I returned to India to spend about six months hiking in the Indian Himalaya. I started at Rishikesh, the famous place where the Beatles practiced meditation with Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. I set out from Rishikesh on the traditional padayatra (foot pilgrimage) visiting the major Hindu Holy sites of Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri, Yamunotri, and Amaranath Cave in Kashmir, as well as several other holy shrines.

By the time the monsoon rains broke out I had crossed the Zojila pass and entered the remote and less wet region of Ladakh and eventually arrived in Leh. I spent two months walking through the Indus Valley staying for a few days or so at each the different Tibetan style monasteries scattered all throughout this high desert like plateau. By the end of October I had retraced my steps back to Srinagar and then down the great length of India via Aurangabad and Ajanta Caves to Rameswaram with the help of a few long train and bus rides. And from Rameswaram I took the old ferry boat, SS Ramanujam, one last time back to Sri Lanka. Shortly after this the growing Tamil rebel insurgency in Sri Lanka forced the convenient ferry service between the two countries to quit.

Shortly after the return from my long pilgrimage trek in India I was browsing through an International Buddhist magazine at the Buddhist Publication Society in Kandy when I read something that struck my interest. It was an article announcing the starting of a Theravada forest monastery in West Virginia. I knew that there were Zen and Tibetan monasteries in America and Theravada temples located mostly in cities. But this was the first time that I had heard about a forest monastery and meditation center in the Theravada tradition opening up.

For a long time in the back of my mind I felt that I would like to live in West and help spread the Buddha's Dhamma teachings and meditation. My first exposure of that at the IBMC was the beginning. But I was still too young then in my monk's life to feel real secure. Now with the additional

six years of living in Asia and solid grounding in teaching at Nilambe I felt the time was near. So when I read this article it rekindled an active interest. And the forest monastery to be, which was being named, the Bhavana Society, was founded by a Sri Lankan monk, Venerable Henepola Gunaratana. They had bought thirteen acres of virgin forest land in the eastern panhandle of West Virginia about a two hour drive from Washington D.C., and construction was under way. They were looking for interested persons to join them in this budding endeavor. Without much hesitation I penned a letter to Venerable H. Gunaratana who was then the President of the Washington Buddhist Vihara in the nation's capital. After briefly introducing myself I told him I was indeed interested in helping in the worthwhile project. Within a short while I received a kind reply from him inviting me to come join him.

So to make another long story short, in the spring of 1987 I arrived at the Washington Buddhist Vihara where Bhante Gunaratana was still living. The first building erected on the grounds was still not habitable and groups of devotees were going out on weekends to help the construction process. When I got to the property I quickly fell in love with the physical surroundings and saw the potential the property for being developed into a Sri Lankan style aranya (forest monastery). I began staying on the property full time alone to continue the work, make friends with the sparse neighbors and meditate, of course.

By the fall of 1988 the main building with its small meditation room along with all basic infrastructure and three wooden kutis off in the forest were complete. Ten more acres of adjoining land were also purchased. And so the official opening ceremony of the Bhavana Society Forest Monastery and Meditation Center took place in October 1988. It has continued to grow over the ensuing years and it has been a place where my own spiritual growth has and is continuing to grow. While in Sri Lanka I had met many Europeans and had kept in contact with some. This paved the way to going to Europe every summer for two months since 1988, leading a series of meditation retreats mostly in Germany, but also in Denmark, Sweden, Italy and France from time to time.

Thus do I record it.



APPENDIX I

NUMBERED NOTES

I. A Sannyassin is a Hindu renunciate (monk) who takes vows of volunteer poverty and celibacy as part of his or her spiritual discipline. Since the ancient days they traditionally wore the orange, yellow or saffron color cloth as a symbol of renunciation, and this is their identifying mark even today in India. Sannyassins are highly respected and revered by pious Hindus. But Rajneesh's "neo-sannyassins" were quite a different kettle of fish and they created a big stir in Poona when they went around town in their conspicuous orange/red garb with their malas dangling around their necks. Males and females, mostly foreigners, were sometimes seen in public embracing or kissing which is a definite taboo even for lay people in Hindu society. The neo-sannyassins were seen in restaurants and bars spending money lavishly, eating, drinking and dancing. Needless to say, this un-seeming outlandish conduct (for a so called renunciate) enraged many of the local Hindus. But because these orange clad Westerners were spending huge sums of money in the local economy, they got away with it for along time. In 1980, a local infuriated Poona resident, made an attempt on Rajneesh's life by throwing a knife in his direction during one of the morning discourses. This was a clear indication that Bhagwan and his "orange people" were not welcome any longer. And I guess, feeling that negativity Bhagwan decided to pack it up lock, stock and barrel and get out of town, out of India in fact. He and his merry tribe are now living in America, "the land of the free," having settled in Northeast Oregon. They are in the midst of building a new city which they have appropriately named Rajneeshpuram and have begun a new religion, Rajneeshism.

II. The Kanduboda Vipassana Bhavana Center was started around 1956 when some Burmese monks came to Sri Lanka to teach meditation. These bhikkhus (Pali word for monks) were disciples of Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw, the author of Practical Insight Meditation, a reputed Arahant and originator of this particular technique using the rise and fall of the abdomen. They came upon invitation to reintroduce the practice of meditation which had all but died out with the heavy Christian missionary activity of the last several hundred years. The year 1956 was significant as it was the 2,500 years celebration of the Buddha's Parinibbana called Buddha Jayanthi. Before passing away the Buddha predicted that his Dharma teachings would last on Earth for five thousand years at which time the world would be plunged onto spiritual darkness until the next Buddha, Maitreyya, will be born a long time hence. Therefore 1956 marked the halfway point for Buddhism and a worldwide celebration was held, and a resurgence of interest in meditation began. It was just before this that Mahasi Sayadaw and Goenka's

teacher U Ba Khin set up their respective meditation centers in Rangoon. When the Burmese Bhikkhus came to Sri Lanka at that time they spent the Vassana (the yearly three months rainy season retreat required for all bhikkhus) teaching this particular meditation technique. Many Sinhalese laypeople and monks took advantage of this rare opportunity. Later several meditation centers were established to facilitate the large numbers of eager practitioners. Kanduboda was one of these and was founded by a Sinhalese bhikkhu who even much earlier had learnt the technique in Burma, and on his return subsequently became a teacher himself. His name was Venerable Sumathipalo and was the teacher of Venerable Sivali. Both of these teachers of Kanduboda as well as Mahasi Sayadaw passed away in 1982.

III. Dana or giving is an important essential aspect of Dhamma practice. Basically it means any form of giving which helps to reduce one's greed and ego-attachment while at the same time benefiting others in need. Popularly in Buddhist countries dana refers primarily to giving or offering monks their four basic requisites of food, robes, shelters and medicine. The *danasala* is where monks receive and eat their one or two-daily meals which are generally brought to the monastery/temple and offered by the donor/devotees. By supporting monks in their quest for Nibbana it is believed that the giver begets much merit for his or her own spiritual growth or even just for future worldly happiness; the "Holier" the receiver, the better quality merit so to speak. So recognized meditation centers like Kanduboda are prime recipients for dana. An added attraction for the donors (dayakas) at Kanduboda was the presence of Western yogis. They feel that a Westerner, to give up the comforts of the glorified West to come to the East and practice meditation in these comparatively austere conditions, was sacrificing a lot and therefore they like to contribute to their support. This also gives them the opportunity to take a peek at foreign Dhamma-strivers.

IV. For simplicity, these eight stages can be grouped into three phases according to their general function. The first function is to reveal the impermanent, empty nature of the five aggregates-form, feeling, perception, determinations and I-consciousness. This is accomplished by the insights into arising and vanishing and then just vanishing or ceasing alone. The second phase requires pondering over and being convinced that the whole process of body and mind and the entire created world, for that matter, is unsatisfactory and the source of suffering (if we cling) so that we no longer identify with or desire anything in the world. Merely seeing the arising and vanishing is sometimes not enough to let go. Unless it is given special attention and is recognized as suffering, the unsatisfactory nature of the conditioned world remains concealed by our delusion and attachment/craving. Though we may know it as unsatisfactory we still usually keep identifying with and strive to gain. This alarm and urgency for detachment is accomplished by the deliberate cultivation of the knowledges of terror

and danger. But this terror and danger is not a kind of paranoid or pessimistic fear. It is rooted in calm detachment and is simply the honest recognition that everything is continuously melting away and that there is no shelter (or only for one night) nor refuge, security or peace in any kind of attachment. The third phase is the actual turning away, the total non-identification or hankering after any of the six senses and their objects, turning away from being the 'me' experiencer also. This is the phase where the fruit of the effort is experienced by equanimity, tranquility, Wisdom and in the end, the highest sublime happiness-Nibbana. This is accomplished by deliberately cultivating dispassion, desire for deliverance, reflection and equanimity to all the formations. This is followed by Conformity, change of lineage, emergence and fruition-the actual transcendence from the mundane subject/object awareness to the Supra-mundane, non-dual awareness of Nibbana. This system of insight knowledges and the corresponding stages of Enlightenment are only part of a much more elaborate exposition on the entire scheme of mental purification as found in the Theravada Texts. This complete material can be found in the Path of Purification or Visuddhimagga, a sort of condensed version of the whole Pali Canon, expounded by Buddhagosa in the 5th century. The content of the huge book deals with and describes in detail the development and perfection of Virtue (Sila), Concentration (Samadhi) and Wisdom (Panna). The relevant material on Insight is contained in the third part dealing with Wisdom or Right Understanding. The English translation by Bhikkhu Nanamoli Thera is published and available from the Buddhist Publications Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka. It is also put out in two volumes by Shambala Publications, California.

V. The Buddhist Texts describe ten fetters or obstacles to Enlightenment which must be eradicated through the practice of Vipassana (by Wisdom). The gradual elimination or, as it is put, destruction of these fetters coincides with the attainment of four graduated stages of Enlightenment or Sainthood of which Stream-Entry (Sotapatti) is the first and Arahatsip is the culmination. These are also elaborated upon in the section on Insight Knowledges in the Path of Purification.

VI. A Sotapanna, one who has attained the first stage of Stream-Entry, is destined by the weakness of his residual kamma accumulations, to be reborn at the most seven more times before realizing Arahatsip. Because of the purity of the mind at this first stage of sainthood, a Sotapanna cannot be reborn in any of the lower realms of suffering (animals, hungry ghosts, and hell). Therefore, considering himself to have reached that state, Venerable Nyanavira reasoned that it would not be a great setback to his final attainment (a mere seven more lifetimes at the most and none in the lower realms); so he decided to terminate his life to end his present intense suffering, thus speeding up his evolution by one more lifetime — or something to that effect. Nyanavira's feelings on this delicate subject were later revealed in letters he had

written to a close friend before his suicide. During his last years he also jotted down a lot of his personal insights on various aspects of the mind which were later gathered together and put into a book form entitled '*Notes on Dhamma*'. Samitta had never met Nyanavira as it was well before his time, but he had seen the letters and acquired a copy of the 'Notes' which he had read over several times. He was convinced that the late Nyanavira must have indeed had a direct personal glimpse of Nibbana if not more. Samitta was now an avid fan of the deceased and the posthumous 'Notes' and you might say Nyanavira was his hero. All of this information I picked up in bits and pieces in subsequent meetings with Samitta and a couple of other knowledgeable persons. I even studied the 'Notes' myself sometime later and did find them original thinking and intellectually stimulating. But because of my limited experience, I stopped short of passing judgment on Nyanavira's attainment or the morality of his suicide.

VII. In Sri Lanka, though most Buddhists will be quick to deny belief in Hinduism, they do pray to gods. The gods are sought for mundane material assistance and the Buddha or the Dhamma is sought for spiritual guidance or salvation. When people pray for material favors they very often make a vow to undertake a religious pilgrimage to a holy spot if the wish is fulfilled. One young man I met said he had prayed to the gods for help in passing his university entrance exams, vowing to climb Sri Pada if he passed. He did pass and he was now returning from fulfilling his vow, stopping again to thank the gods. Another lady was praying for the successful operation on her son's eye and vowed to make the long pilgrimage with her son all the way to Bodhgaya in North India to worship the Bodhi Tree. The operation was successful and they did make the trip to faithfully fulfill the vow (I knew the family). I thought that all this reliance on gods (for Buddhists) was a little antithetical to Buddhism but I did leave room for some truth to it, as I did for spirit possession, Astrology, Palmistry and occult practices.

VIII. In the Science of Yoga the endocrine or ductless, hormone producing glands are associated with the system of seven chakras or energy centers. The three lowest glands/chakras (viz. testes or ovaries, adrenals and pancreas) deal with the gross physical functions of sex, reproduction, digestion, metabolism and the heavy emotions of lust, greed, anger and so on. The fourth center or heart chakra with the thymus gland, marks the transition to higher consciousness with the altruistic sensitivity of compassion, love (metta) and sympathetic joy (rejoicing with others in their good fortune). The three highest centers with the thyroid, pituitary and pineal glands respectively are associated with concentration, awareness/wisdom and transcendental experience. People obsessed with sexual preoccupation, craving for food and other earthly material indulgences are said to live mostly influenced by the lower chakras.

Artists, poets, philosophers and religious minded people are correspondingly influenced by the middle and higher centers/glands while the saints and Enlightened Ones are fully established in the highest crown chakra. The branch of yoga called Kundalini Yoga is concerned with certain body postures coupled with complex pranayama/breath control and even visualization to raise the conscious life force or Kundalini from the lowest root chakra up to the crown chakra or Thousand Petalled Lotus. If the glands associated with the energy centers are defective or not functioning, which one or more are with most people, then this upward movement may be impeded or totally blocked. This is why there is so much emphasis in yoga for purifying, stimulating and rejuvenating all the interrelated major body systems — viz. nervous, respiratory, circulatory and glandular systems, to help facilitate this ascending spiritual awareness. Dr. Swami Gitananda stressed that both the body and the mind had to be worked on at the same time to help each other out. Trying to attain Enlightenment through body purification alone without consciously developing the mind was futile and barren. And trying to raise consciousness or develop awareness/wisdom through meditation, while having a fouled or defective vital body system, was only beating one's head against the wall, or at least making it twice as difficult. In Yoga, the body and mind process is seen as being like two sides of a coin. Getting consciousness refined enough to successfully meditate was not something forcibly accomplished, accidentally stumbled upon (in a few rare cases perhaps) or haphazardly grabbed out of the air; it is a very precise process involving the relaxation and purification of both the body and mind in a wholesomely integrated procedure, or “conscious evolution”.

IX. There is an interesting story behind this rule. Shortly after the Buddha's Enlightenment he returned home to the palace where his wife and son were still living. Because the Buddha had renounced everything in the highest mental sense (the state of Nibbana) the young Prince Rahula was now next in line for the throne. When the Buddha, the King of Dharma arrived, Princess Yasodhara (his wife) sent the seven year old Rahula out to meet his father and to ask for his inheritance (officially transferring the future throne to him). But the Blessed One, out of compassion for the lad, instead, handed him over to Sariputra, the Buddha's senior Arahant disciple, to have him ordained as the first samanera. This caused a great stir and consternation among the family because now, who would inherit the throne? On account of this predicament, the Buddha was beseeched not to recruit young boys into the Sangha without the parents' prior consent. As already mentioned Rahula attained Arahantship while fairly young. As an interesting sidelight, the Buddha's stepmother who raised him, nursing baby Siddhartha on her own breast milk (Buddha's mother Queen Maya died seven days after giving birth) became the first Buddhist nun (Bikkhuni); Yasodhara also became a nun and both ladies attained Arahantship before they passed away; and his father King Suddhodana, though never becoming a monk, attained Arahantship while still dressed in his regal finery — so it is said.

X. A Theravada Bhikkhu is officially allowed only eight requisite items for his private daily use. These are: three robes (two outer and one under-robe), an alms bowl, a needle and thread, a water strainer, a razor, and a belt (to hold up the under-robe). The extra outer robe and other things can be easily packed inside the alms bowl which has a carrying bag: In this way, the mendicant bhikkhu can wander about with all his worldly possessions in one convenient compact bundle.



APPENDIX II

GLOSSARY OF BUDDHIST AND HINDU/YOGA TERMS

Terms	Explanation
Anatta	Not-self, egolessness, impersonality; one of the three characteristic marks of conditioned existence.
Anicca	Impermanence; another mark of conditioned existence, that all phenomena, the five aggregates (form, feelings, perceptions, volitions and consciousness) are in a continuous state of change, flux, transformation, continuously arising and passing away beyond our control.
Arahat	A Perfected One; the last stage of Buddhist sainthood. The Arahat has destroyed (by meditation) all the ten fetters (mental defilements) which bind one to the wheel of birth and death. He has attained or realized full Nirvana or Deathlessness, never to be reborn into the worlds of Impermanence and Suffering.
Avijja	Ignorance, delusion, the state of not knowing; the state of the unenlightened mind. It is grasping things as Self veiling man's eyes and preventing him from seeing the true nature of things (the body, mind and world about). This Ignorance is so profound that it obscures the truth, turning everything upside down; it makes us believe what is impermanent is permanent, what is unsatisfactory or painful as satisfactory and pleasurable, what is without substance or self-nature as having substance and self-nature. It makes us think what is wrong (unwholesome, unskillful) is right (wholesome, skilful) and what is right is wrong. It is not understanding the Buddha's Four Noble Truths.
Bhavana	Mental development or meditation. Buddhist meditation is of two kinds- samadhi bhavana (concentration and tranquility) and vipassana bhavana (insight meditation).
Bhikkhu	Literally 'scrap gatherer', one who lives on alms; the Pali word commonly refers to a Buddhist monk.
Bodhi	Supreme or super-mundane Wisdom; Awakening, Enlightenment. The Bodhi tree in Boghgaya is the tree under which Siddhartha Gotama sat when he attained his supreme Awakening.
Bodhicitta	The mind highly motivated to achieve Enlightenment in order to have the power to save all sentient beings from suffering and Samsara. The Mahayana Bodhisattva cultivates the "precious gem of the Bodhicitta" in order to avoid falling back to the selfish path of spiritual practice for oneself alone as they accuse the Hinayana or Theravada followers (the Arahat ideal).

ONE NIGHT'S SHELTER (FROM HOME TO HOMELESSNESS)**Appendix 2: Glossary of Buddhist and Hindu Terms**

Terms	Explanation
Bodhisattva	‘Enlightenment Being’; one who has made a vow to become a Buddha, offering one’s life and wisdom for helping others to overcome their suffering and to attain Enlightenment. The Bodhisattva is the ideal of Mahayana Buddhism (in contrast to the Arahant ideal of Theravada Buddhists); The Bodhisattva vows not to enter his (or her) final Nirvana until the very last sentient being (even a blade of grass) has attained Nirvana before him.
Buddha	One who is awake with Supreme Enlightenment (Bodhi).
Buddhi	The faculty of the intellect; a function of the higher mind which enables one to realize or awaken Bodhi and become an Arahant or Buddha. This faculty of Buddhi in the mind of the most ordinary worldly people does not function; it remains dormant and undeveloped due to the strength of their Avijja. It can be awakened and developed through hearing Dhamma and by meditation.
Chakra	In Yoga, chakras are centers or ‘wheels’ of energy, where the prana life force performs or controls specific functions of the body and mind. There are six principal chakras in the physical body located at points along the spine starting at the base of the spine. These chakras are associated with major nerve plexi and the endocrine glands situated in the same area. These chakras and associated glands and plexi are responsible for specific emotions, mental states and personality traits from the gross and negative to the refined, subtle and positive. The three lower chakras deal with the gross worldly needs and pursuits while the three higher ones at the heart, throat and brows are responsible for the higher altruistic emotions of love, compassion and concentration meditation and transcendental awareness. The seventh chakra, the Thousand Petalled Lotus or Crown Chakra is situated just at the very top of the skull and is the center for full Enlightened awareness. Most worldly (non-spiritual inclined) people live primarily dominated by the gross emotions and passions regulated by the lower chakras, while their higher chakras remain shut down- not activating the higher traits (selfless love, compassion, meditation etcetera). The purpose of many yoga practices is to activate the higher chakras so that spiritual awareness and associated traits will develop.
Deva	In Buddhist cosmology, a god or goddess that abides in one of the various deva-lokas or heavenly realms of existence as a result of having led a good or virtuous, charitable life as a human being.

Terms	Explanation
Dharma (Sanskrit), Dhamma (Pali)	This word has many meanings. The common meaning and the one used most in this book refers to the religious teachings which lead to the realization of Absolute Truth, Nirvana Or Enlightenment. In Yoga and Hinduism, Dharma also refers to one's personal path of spiritual development (unique for each person) which is more or less determined at the time of birth. In the metaphysical sense (in the Pali Abhidhamma) a dhamma is anything which exists in the universe. There are two types of Dhammas, conditioned and unconditioned. The conditioned Dhammas are the five aggregates, the elements of mind and matter which make up the world which bears the marks of Impermanence (Anicca), Un-satisfactoriness or source of suffering (Dukkha) and Not-Self or Egolessness (Anatta). The one unconditioned Dhamma is Nirvana (Sanskrit) or Nibbana (Pali). The Dhamma teachings teach about the conditioned Dhammas which when understood leads one to realize the unconditioned Dhamma, Nibbana, the end of all suffering.
Dukkha	Suffering, ill, un-satisfactoriness; More precisely it refers to the impermanent, unstable (anicca) and not self (anatta) nature of conditioned existence (mind and matter). Because beings grasp and cling to their body, mind and external world under the influence of ignorance (avijja) developing attachments and craving, sorrow, confusion, pain, grief and despair inevitably arise sooner or later. This is the very foundation of the Buddha's Dhamma teachings and the fact of Dukkha is the first of the Four Noble Truths.
Hatha Yoga	One of the basic aspects in the vast subject of Yoga science; it deals with purifying the body, toning up the nervous system, balancing vital energy, etcetera, so that effective higher meditation can effortlessly unfold. The word is comprised of the two syllables 'Ha' (positive charged sun's energy) and 'tha' (negative charged moon's energy); balancing this flow of energy (prana) in the body by various postures and breathing exercises (pranayama) is Hatha Yoga.
Hinayana	The Lesser Vehicle; this is a somewhat derogative term coined by Mahayana (the Great Vehicle) Buddhists referring to the Arahant ideal of the Theravada Buddhists. The Mahayana Bodhisattva vows to save all sentient beings while the Hinayana followers are supposed to be selfishly concerned with their own Enlightenment and salvation only: this is their contention.

Terms	Explanation
Karma (Sanskrit), Kamma (Pali)	This word means action or conscious volition. Karma begins in the mind and is expressed through the body and speech. Conscious actions leave a residual impression in the nervous system and subconscious mind which will be capable of producing or bringing effects of the same likeness back to us. The nature of karmic action can be wholesome or unwholesome and they bring pleasant or unpleasant results respectively. Unwholesome actions are those performed under the influence of ignorance, greed and hatred while wholesome actions stem out of wisdom, non-attachment and friendliness/love. These actions with their potential for future manifestation represent the energy which will shape the destiny for each person and will be the fuel for generating rebirth.
Kundalini	In the science of Yoga, the spiritual consciousness-force which is said to lie dormant at the base of the spine until awakened through spiritual (yoga) practices. It has been dubbed, the 'Serpent Power' and likened to a sleeping cobra coiled up at the base of the spine in the muladhara chakra. In Kundalini Yoga the idea is to prepare the nervous system for the time when one finally succeeds in arousing the dormant force which then rises up through the hollow center of the spinal cord (sushuma nadi) passing through the six chakras to the Thousand Petalled Lotus or Crown Chakra at the very top of the head. When consciousness is established at the Crown Chakra this is said to constitute Enlightenment and Moksha for the yogi.
Mantra	Literally, 'to hold the mind'; mantras are special words or short holy runes usually from the Sanskrit language which are used extensively in Yoga/Hinduism and in Buddhism to cultivate concentration and other mental qualities or power. Some sects use mantras as their sole means of meditation; one practice in the Tibetan Vajrayana system of Tantra is called Mantrayana (the vehicle of mantra).
Moksha (Sanskrit)	Freedom, liberation, ultimate release from the rounds of birth and death (Samsara); Moksha is the Hindu/Yoga equivalent to the attainment of full Nirvana for the Buddhist; a synonym is Brahma Nirvana.
Mahayana	The Great Vehicle; the major branch of Buddhism found predominant in Japan, Korea, Taiwan, China and among Tibetans.
Namaskar Mudra	A hand gesture formed by placing both palms/fingers together and held at chest level giving a slight forward bend. It implies the recognition (to another person) of the God or potential for Enlightenment within. It is the common form of greeting among the Hindus and Mahayana Buddhists. Namaste means, I salute the God within you.

Terms	Explanation
Nirvana (Sanskrit), Nibbana (Pali)	Literally, going out of all the passions; the extinction of Ignorance, Attachment/Greed and Aversion/Hatred. Some common names for it are: The Unborn, Unconditioned, Non-Duality, the Cool, the End of Suffering, Liberation, and Supreme Happiness. There are two aspects of Nirvana; liberation (of the mind) while still living in the body as with the Arahats/Buddhas, and the ultimate release when the last body has been shed.
Paticca-samuppada	Dependent Origination; The Buddha's doctrine of twelve interdependent factors, which fuel the arising and passing away of all material and mental phenomena, the five aggregates (forms, feelings, perceptions, volitions and ego consciousness). The doctrine or formula is used to explain in words how rebirth takes place, linking one life to the next. It also holds true for the moment to moment arising and passing away of consciousness throughout the lifetime.
Pranayama	Prana, in the Yoga science, is the invisible electric-like energy or life-force which pervades the entire universe and is responsible for the manifestation and upkeep of all manifested (material and mental) life. Prana circulates through the body in invisible etheric channels (nadis) to sustain the body and mind. Prana is taken into the body mainly through breathing but small amounts are received in the food we eat and water drunk. Pranayama is a major aspect or practice in the Hatha Yoga discipline involving deep breathing exercises (to intake more prana). Pranayana implies controlling the circulation of prana in specific patterns usually up and down the sides of the spine in order to purify and strengthen the nervous system in preparation for the arousal of the Kundalini and highest experiences of meditation.
Sadhu	A popular term for Hindu and Buddhist monks. Somehow it has also come to be an exclamation of joy or auspiciousness when walking on a holy pilgrimage, beholding monks or holy Buddhist monuments (Buddha statues, Stupas, Bodhi trees, etcetera) and it is said even sometimes after sitting for a period of meditation (recognizing the power or auspicious nature of meditation) and the wisdom it releases.
Samadhi	Concentration or mental composure; in meditation to fix the mind on one particular point or object such as while chanting a mantra or passively observing the process of breathing (anapanasati) in order to bring the mind to an unwavering, calm, subjectively tranquilized state.
Samsara	Perpetual wandering through the rounds of birth and death in the various realms of possible existence. It also refers to the rise and fall or coming and going of the moment-to-moment sense experiences in the mind with attachment and grasping.

ONE NIGHT'S SHELTER (FROM HOME TO HOMELESSNESS)**Appendix 2: Glossary of Buddhist and Hindu Terms**

Terms	Explanation
Satipatthana	The foundation of mindfulness. The four foundations of mindfulness are the primary teachings of the Buddha on meditation leading to the development of insight wisdom, seeing reality as it is. These teachings are laid out and detailed in the famous discourse of the Satipatthana sutta found in the Pali scriptures. The popular techniques of vipassana meditation are based on these teachings.
Sotapanna	Stream-Enterer; one who has entered the stream of Dhamma by having his first real glimpse or experience of Nibbana. With this he cannot commit any unwholesome kamma which could cause him to retrogress spiritually; he is assured of achieving full Nirvana (Arahatship) within seven more lifetimes.
Tantra	A school of esoteric spiritual disciplines found in both Hinduism and Buddhism. In contrast to the more passive tranquilizing meditations and sensory restraint found in Samadhi and Vipassana meditation, tantra utilizes the senses fully in various practices in order to eventually transcend them. Tibetan Tantra uses much creative visualization and mantra chanting; in yoga, the advanced practices to arouse the Kundalini are tantric exercises; but probably the most well known of tantric practices belong to the left hand school which engage in actual sexual union between man and woman. In this practice the idea is to utilize the unique quality of the sensations aroused approaching climax to completely abandon and transcend the feeling of two partners and lose ego consciousness, to experience non-duality. This is a technique which Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh espouses for his sanyassins.
Theravada	Literally, the words of the Elders; it refers to the Pali tradition of Buddhist teachings which are considered to be the earliest and therefore the most pure of all the Buddha's teachings. Theravada Buddhism is the majority religion found in the countries of Sri Lanka, Thailand and Burma.
Vajrayana	The Diamond Vehicle; this is the name which the Tibetan Buddhists give to their unique brand of Dharma teachings which include tantric practices of creative visualizations and cultivation of the Bodhicitta.
Vipassana	Literally, 'seeing separately', seeing the nature of reality as it really is; it is applied to the system of meditation which is based on the Satipatthana Sutta, the four foundations of mindfulness as found in the Theravada teachings. In this the mind is directed to tuning into and perceiving the impermanent, unsubstantial or soulness and therefore unsatisfactory nature of the five aggregates of clinging (the body, mind and external world) in order to cultivate detachment, destroy the ten fetters and realize Nibbana.

Terms	Explanation
Yoga	Literally, to yoke or join or merge together; yoga is the specific spiritual disciplines within the broad category of Hinduism which leads to Self-Realization and Moksha. Yoga implies different aspects of merging together: bringing into harmony and merging the activities of the body and mind in thoughts, speech and actions on the mundane plane as the beginning; and then to eventually merge the individual ego consciousness into the ocean of God Consciousness or non-dual Cosmic Consciousness to achieve Moksha.
Zen	Zen is a Japanese word which means meditation, but in a total way. Zen is the school of active meditation which strives to penetrate directly through the veil of the ego's deluding dualistic thoughts without relying too much on scriptural study, intellectualism or rites and rituals. Zen Buddhism originated in China and was introduced into Japan in about the twelfth century where it developed and flourished with its unique flavor. In the formal training in the monastery the ego of the student is driven into a corner as it were. The idea is to drop the ego entirely along with all thinking in order to experience Egolessness. The ego keeps one trapped in dualistic perceptions. The Zen Masters are notorious for skillfully using various techniques to accomplish this, including often strange even contradictory behavior such as shouting and hitting the students. Zen belongs to the Mahayana fold and was the first Buddhist meditation discipline to arrive in the West and take hold. Zen is slowly adapting to the Western way of life, shedding its strict Japanese flavor to acquire what is called Westernized Zen.



**MAY ALL BEINGS BE WELL,
MAY ALL BEINGS BE WISE,
MAY ALL BEINGS BE LIBERATED.**



APPENDIX 3

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Appendix 3: Photographs/Maps



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Yogavacara Rahula was born as Scott Joseph DuPrez in Southern California in 1948. He grew up during the hippie revolution and entered the U.S. Army for three years in 1967, spending ten months in Vietnam. In 1972 he began a long odyssey starting in Scandinavia which took him half way around the world to India and Nepal characterized by staying 'stoned' on hashish much of the time with numerous trips on LSD. In Nepal he encountered his first spiritual teachers, Tibetan Lamas, at a month long meditation course, by the end of which he was converted more or less to being a Buddhist or at least an earnest seeker after Truth. His search brought him south to Sri Lanka where he got ordained as a Buddhist monk in 1975. He remained in Sri Lanka until 1977 when he returned to the U.S.A. to visit his parents and to help spread the Dhamma there. In 1980 he returned to Sri Lanka where he lived until 1986. In 1981 he began conducting periodic 10 day yoga and meditation retreat/courses at the SMS Meditation Center situated high in the mountains near Galaha and residing at Seaside Kuti, Unawatuna. Since 1987 he has resided at the Bhavana Society forest Monastery in West Virginia, USA. Two other books by the author are, *The Way to Peace and Happiness*, a comprehensive study of the Buddhist Teaching, and *Traversing the Great Himalaya*, a photo documentary of a spiritual pilgrimage in the Himalaya.



END