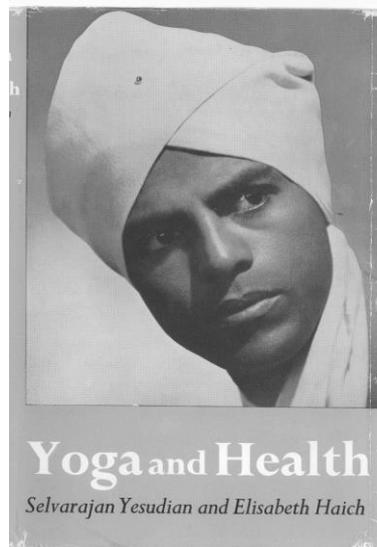


HISTORICAL BACKGROUND ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE PROJECT PARASHAKTI



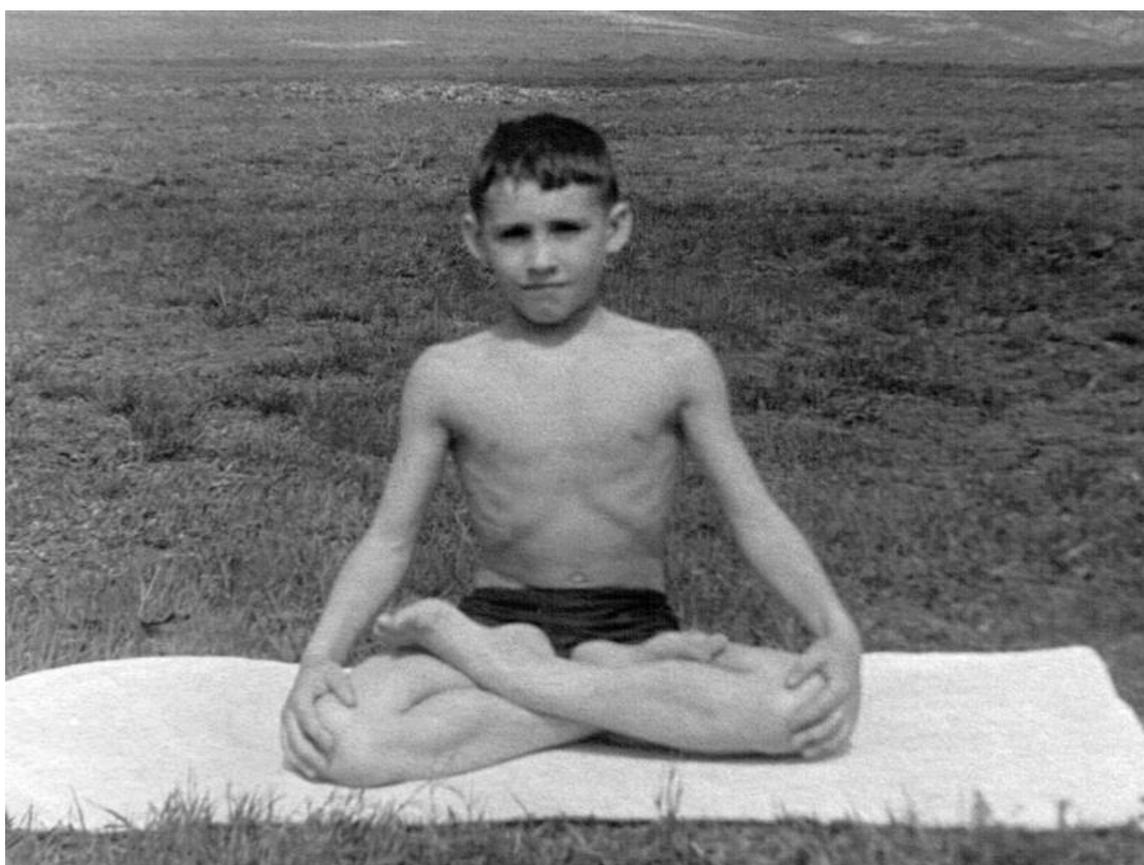
A black-and-white picture of a Hindu in a turban, his dignified face and big clear eyes sending soft magnetic light was a lasting impression from my distant childhood. The image on the dust jacket of a book on yoga, brought by my father from England in 1959, with the author Selvarajan Yesudian's portrait on it, became a point of departure for my spiritual journey in this life. And a few years later, the same book, already a typescript in Russian titled «Yoga and Health», was the first one to pave my way to the vast world of yogic and afterwards spiritual and mystical literature. Little did I know then that the time would come when destiny would vouchsafe me to write a book on yoga! And that maybe a boy of eight or nine years would one day take it in his hands and ask his father, as I once asked mine, “Papa, what does it say? Who about who?”

That seed fell onto the fertile ground of my vivid yet at that time subconscious interest in secret knowledge and, as I grew up, it was cultivated by “rain water” and “sunlight” of the most favorable external conditions. Frequent conversations with my father about enduring values came to be an integral part of my life. Every year, their significance became more and more tangible for me.

A true avalanche of new information on already mentioned enduring values engulfed my young mind in 1963, after my father's trip to India where he worked as an expert UN interpreter and studied yoga in one of the Bombay yoga centers during his free time. And what is more ... he brought more books home with him! Liberalization of Soviet society during the Thaw was

fortunately still in force. From that moment, a new, more conscious and intense period of my yogic adulthood began.

I started practicing asanas and some breathing exercises, which my farther taught me, on a regular basis. After some time, I myself introduced new elements into my program. It all came naturally to me. The body would effortlessly get into every posture and seemed to be meant for practicing them. At least, the thought rested upon my mind for a long time. Stomach suction and breath-holding, already up to three minutes at that time, made me fall into euphoria permanently.



**My first steps in yoga. At a foothills of Mount Mashukh, 1963.
Pyatigorsk (North Caucasus).**

Some time later a *Znanie* (“Knowledge”) society offered my father the chance to give a set of lectures about India in the towns of the Northern Caucasus spa region, to share his impressions of his trip to India and to tell about yoga, within reasonable bounds, of course.

We lived in Pyatigorsk then, and the offer became a great opportunity to spread yogic teaching to wider audiences. Northern Caucasus health resorts were, at that precious time, the sites of pilgrimage for Soviet people to healing springs which nature amply provided in the southern part of Russia.

Needless to say, the lectures excited me very much! I would not miss a single one and used to always be in focus. People's interest in India, its culture and spiritual heritage, turned out to be overwhelmingly huge and genuine. I could literally sense the ardent atmosphere that would inevitably capture the audience. The most breathtaking part of the lectures was when it came time to show specific postures, asanas, which improve health and have a therapeutic effect. I would hang on and suck in every word and feel blessed because there was a person at the venues of overcrowded halls, slim and strong, none other than my own father.

Letters came to our address as if from the Horn of Plenty. They would come from the back of beyond and from all kinds of people! Gradually guests trickled to our home, even people from Siberia, and almost always I would take part in conversations with them at our home. Some people came due to health issues, others would come simply out of curiosity. Still others came for spiritual guidance. There were also visitors interested in hypnosis, mesmerism, astral travel, gaining supernatural powers and even magic. Sometimes I felt like I was embarrassing a guest with my presence. Nevertheless, each time it happened, the father made it clear that I was considered a successor and he would like to conceal nothing from me.

Also I should not keep to myself the role my mother was meant to play in that vital time of my life. I never felt deprived of her tender attention. Her engagement in my upbringing during all those years while I grew older is hardly possible to talk about properly. Once yoga entered my life, she gladly assisted me in exploring it, dedicated her time to translations of "the engaging pages" in the books brought by my father from India. Her English language skills (my father and she both taught English at Pyatigorsk State Pedagogical Institute of Foreign Languages) could not have come at a better time. Also the time we spent making translations together was most cherished. We surely used dictionaries due to the specific subject that was new to us. Perhaps, since then the dictionaries have become a part of my favorite books' list.

By the reported time unique states of ethereal joy would seize me like a tide, for no clear reason. Once it happened to me as I was walking in snow. Unexpectedly, I left the body and found myself watching it from outside: from above, rightward. The states almost always were exaggerated by the starry skies I adored and could admire for a really long time, completely unplugging from the surrounding reality and escaping far into deep spaces.

The truth is that I first became aware of the foreignness of this world in early childhood. I knew intuitively that something different existed elsewhere,

something my soul strived for vigorously. “Why am I here? How did I get here?”; the questions would often come to my mind and worry me and constantly bring sadness. I remember how comforting it was to learn from my father about mayavada: the doctrine of the illusionary character of the universe. “That’s it! My inner sensations are true!” Such contemplation cheered me up and inspired me to look for the other reality – *my* reality. But where was it? The question once it arose has become a guiding feature principle of my spiritual seeking. I was in harmony with the mystic revelations of the great Rumi, who shaped them into everlasting lines:

“I am a bird in God's garden and I do not belong to this dusty world.
For a day or two they have put me here in this cage of my own body.
I did not come here of my own how should I return of my own?
And the one who brought me here will take me back again
to my own country.”

One day as I was walking home, I suddenly stopped in the yard and looked upwards at the brightly shining moon’s disk, it was like something made me do that, and I experienced a moment of death. In a flash, like lightning, the experience pierced my consciousness and I perceived death *as a process* though compressed into a point. Most surprisingly, I had no fear at all. A few minutes later I came home. “What’s wrong with you?!” asked Mom in a worried voice once I was inside. I cast a look at the mirror in the corridor and stood frozen in astonishment – the mirror reflected eyes which did not belong to me anymore, so amazingly lustrous and unnaturally radiant.

I will never forget a dream I had then, a dream of a very believable image that would not leave me for a long time.

It is night. I am standing in the backyard, thinly clad. My house is to the right; other houses are to the left. Deathly stillness embraces me and there isn’t a single soul around. It is as if everything has died! The windows are dark and I know for sure they hide deadly emptiness. The skies scatter incredibly huge snowflakes which land slowly and evenly on the ground covering it like a gentle white blanket. Staring vacantly around, I quietly contemplate the miraculous scenery. It is snowing...but I feel no cold. No one is around...but I feel no loneliness. Keep standing on and on...All of a sudden – as if something called my name – I lift my head up...

That very moment it stops snowing. The last snowflakes cover the ground with a final farewell layer like a blanket and the starry heaven of amazing beauty becomes unraveled before my eyes. Charmed by the beauty, I admire the vast deepness of celestial space, where a myriad of stars are scattered, as huge as the snowflakes and extremely dazzling.

The longer I look into the skies the more clearly I can figure out the outlines of constellations. I am attracted by Cygnus that begins coming to life right before my eyes! First its wings, then it gradually starts moving... Along with it the whole starscape springs to life..! With smooth and rhythmic swings, matching the grandeur of space, it starts throbbing as far as the eye can see.

All at once I notice that the air beneath and around me, as if answering the heavenly call, begins breathing and shows sparks of life.

Moments later, I feel my body makes a move too and it starts swinging with the rhythm of the universal dance. Another throbbing of the revived space captures my body even stronger... Surrendering to its power I am slowly rising off the ground...!

The higher my body rises, the less I am able to feel it and the more I feel the way my soaring soul moves. After turning into an airy spirit, I wake up...

Years passed before I came to realize the meaning of the dream. Snow meant the veil of illusion submerging the other reality, i.e. Heaven. As long as I feasted my eyes on it while looking around, I failed to see the ethereal beauty. But as soon as I lifted my head higher and fixed my eyes on where it came from it ceased to be – the veil of illusion easily fell from the eyes and revealed the space of the Other World, where mortal life originates and where each soul goes after it leaves the body.

These experiences and other similar ones, which I would rather not describe here, were sure to convince me that the source of revelation is enclosed in man himself, whereas the outer factors only act as a stimulus, an additional faculty, and by no means always do so.

However, I first experienced true trance at the sight of the words “Parashakti Ashram”. I was about fourteen or fifteen years old when my father got a book called "Yoga" written by Dr. Ernest Wood from the USA. It caught my eye immediately and I used to open it repeatedly, each time with a bitter feeling because my English was not good enough to read everything. One day I reviewed thoroughly the reference list at the end of the book, reading myself into each author’s name and their works. Number eight in the list was the author Bala Sanyasi and his book called "Raja-yoga with Nava Kalpa". At the very second I read it my heart leaped joyfully; however, the following words prompted even greater excitement: Bangalor (Parashakti Ashram). I stopped reading and repeated "Bangalor, Parashakti Ashram", "Bangalor", "Raja-yoga", "Parashakti Ashram", "Parashakti"..., while trying to... recall... breathlessly listening to the familiar vibrations these words stirred in the

bottom of my soul. There no doubt was something that tied us together, something from my long ago time... A few moments later, I fell into a trance – waves of bliss overwhelmed me, so powerful yet very soft and gentle ... and I melted into them.

In 1988 I found myself in India for the first time. And the first town to fold me in its arms was...Bangalore!

Years later, when my Yoga-Vedanta Teacher, Sri Swami Jyotirmayananda, blessed my setting up my own yoga center in Russia, little did I doubt to name it Parashakti Yoga School.

Vladimir Afanasyev
Krasnodar, Russia
Spring 2011