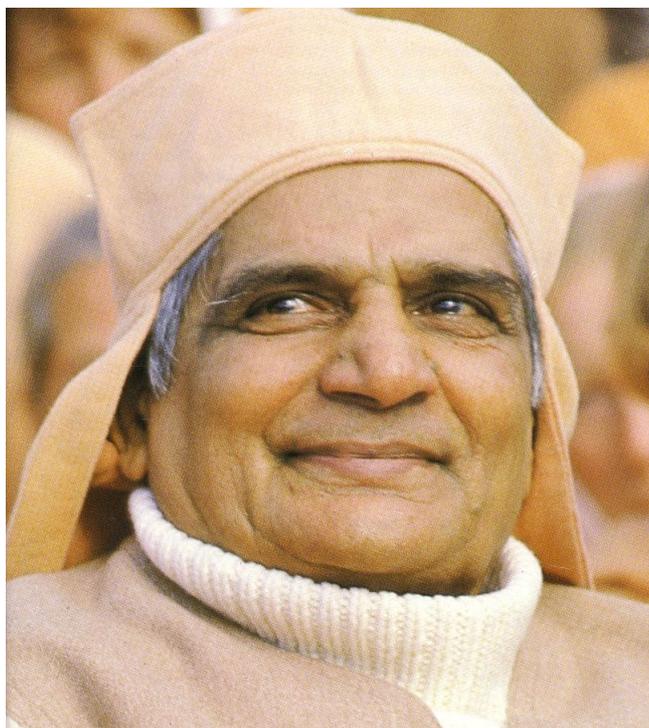


Vladimir and Nelly: Mysterious are the Ways of God

From the book “Swami Narayanananda (Coorg, South India). Vol 2: Stories from India and Russia by His disciples and those who knew Him”
Edited by Omkara 2016 USA (photos are added)



Swami Narayanananda. Photo 1977.

Setting: *Because most stories begin with an interview, I am usually quite familiar with the content. So, when this story, written by Vladimir and Nelly, arrived via e-mail, it was like receiving a present – actually something much more wonderful than a present as the content is filled with their heart-felt and complicated journey with Swamiji.*

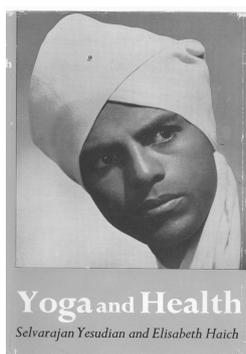
Vladimir – Introduction

“Mysterious are the ways of God”! This truth, ancient as the world itself, involuntarily comes to my mind whenever life suddenly presents us with something special – with a thing that makes us marvel and admire at the same time at unthinkable intricacies by which Providence, manifesting Its heavenly care of us, enlivens our routine earthly existence.

The last time I thought of “the ways of God” was as recently as September 25, of the current year (2015), when suddenly we found in our inbox an email from the United States. Its author turned out to be the United States-based disciple of Swami Narayanananda, a certain lady by the name of Omkara, about whom neither my wife, Nelly, nor I had ever heard before. The content of the email proved to be even more unexpected and involved offering me, a Russian disciple of Swami Narayanananda, the chance to write for a book, that was to be published by Omkara, the story of my path to the Revered Guru. Gratefully, I accepted the offer, on the condition that the author would not only be me, but my wife as well, whom our Guru, having shown marvelous generosity to, also accepted as His female student. And Omkara readily accepted this condition.

The emails plunged into correspondence. In her emails, Omkara repeatedly expressed surprise about how in such a closed-off country like the Soviet Union, with its “Iron Curtain”, there still appeared to be people who found out about Swami Narayanananda and fulfilled their dream to become His disciples. Like others, we have our own story that we will try to unfold on the following pages. However, in order to bring clarity to our story and to make the logic of the things that happened comprehensible to the reader, we will have to start with some background.

My interest in “the sublime” or what some might call “the divine” manifested itself very early. The thing was that I was fortunate enough to have parents profoundly interested in yoga. Already at the age of nine (1959), I had some, although the most common, idea of yogis and yoga. That year, my father, a philologist by education, brought from London, where he traveled with a group of English language experts, a book by Selvarajan Yesudian and Elisabeth Haich called *Yoga and Health*. As chance would have it, because of this book, illustrated with photographs of yoga asanas, my life-long passion for yoga commenced.



Since 2000, I have devoted myself to teaching yoga on a professional basis, conducting yoga classes and retreats within the framework of our “Yoga School of Parashakti”. (The common meaning of the Parashakti is Supreme Power or Primal Energy, but in the context of our Yoga School the term denotes the kundalini shakti in Her highest state of union with Shiva in sahasrara. Whatever spiritual path or kind of yoga, it is a mystic journey of kundalini shakti from muladhara to sahasrara which is the ultimate goal of one’s life.) And a few years later the same book, already a typed copy in Russian, was the first one to pave my way to the ample world of yogic and afterwards spiritual and mystical literature.

That seed fell on the fertile ground of my vivid, but still at that time, subconscious interest in occult knowledge and, as I was growing up, it was cultivated by “rain water” and “sunlight” of the most favorable external conditions. Frequent conversations about enduring values with my father 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 interpreter for the UN and studied yoga in one of the Bombay yoga centers in his off-work time. And what is more ... he brought more books home with him! Liberalization of the Soviet society in “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 on a regular basis which my father taught me. 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 it seemed to be meant for practicing them. At least, the thought rested upon my mind for a long time that abdominal contraction (uddaana) and breath retention would make me fall into euphoria permanently.

Some time later a Znanie (“Knowledge”) society asked my father to give a series of lectures about India in the towns of the Northern Caucasus Spas region to share his impressions of his trip to India and tell about yoga and yogis.

We lived in Pyatigorsk, in South Russia, and the offer became a great opportunity to spread yogic teaching among wider audiences. Northern Caucasus health resorts were at that time a site of

pilgrimage for Soviet people to healing springs which nature amply provided in the southern part of Russia.

Needless to say, how the lectures excited me! I would not miss a single one and would always be very attentive. 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 pull in the audience. The most breathtaking part of the lectures was when it came to showing specific postures, asanas, which improve health and have a therapeutic effect on the body. I would hang on and suck in every word and feel blessed because there was a person in the venues of the overcrowded halls, slim and strong, none other than my father.

Letters came to our home 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. Some people came due to health issues, others came simply out of curiosity, and 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 that happened, my father made it clear that I was to be considered a successor and he would like to conceal nothing from me.

Also, I should not keep to myself the role my dear mother was meant to play in that vital time of my life. I never felt deprived of her tender attention and her engagement in my upbringing during all those years while I grew older is hardly possible to utter properly. Once yoga entered my life, she gladly assisted me in exploring it and 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. And, the time we spent making the translations together was most cherished. We surely used dictionaries due to the specific subject that was new to us. Since then, dictionaries have become a part of my favorite books' list.

By that 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, towards the right. 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 and away into deep spaces.

The truth is that I first became aware of the foreignness of this world in early childhood. I knew by intuition that something different existed elsewhere, something my soul strived for vigorously. “Why am I here? How did I get here?” Such questions would often come to my mind and worry me and constantly bring sadness. I remember how reassuring 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 true reality. But where was it? The question once it arose has become a leading theme of my spiritual seeking.

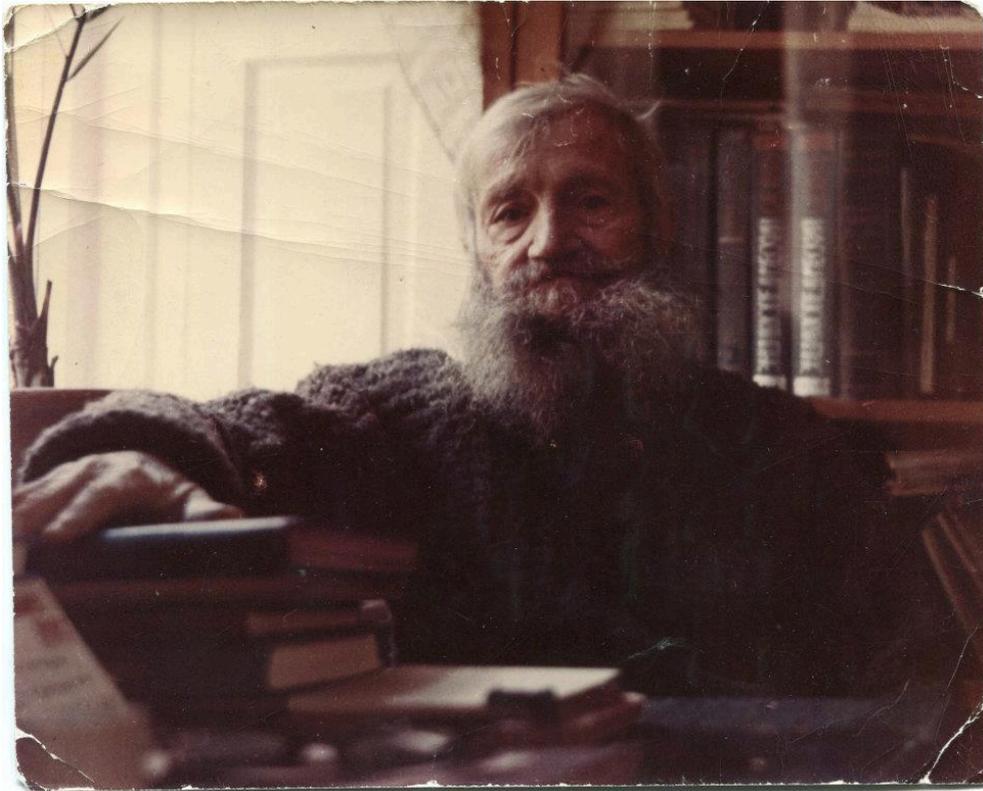
One night as I was walking home, I suddenly stopped in the yard and looked upwards at the brightly shining disk of the Moon – it was like something made me do that – I experienced a moment of death. In a flash, like lightning, the experience pierced my consciousness and I perceived death as a process though compressed into a point. Most surprisingly I had no fear at all.

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 facility, and by no means do they always do so.

By 1971, my parents had divorced and my mother and I moved to Krasnodar and settled there.

By the latter half of the 1970s, which will be referred to below, my wife and I were already familiar with many books on Indian spiritual culture, philosophy and yoga. By the mid-1970s, I managed to collect a fairly large library of yoga and spiritual discourse. We were greatly indebted to an old Russian Theosophist, Arcady I. Malakhov (Korsunovsky), who during the so-called “years of The Thaw” returned from exile to his homeland, the Soviet Union, to Krasnodar, the city where we lived and where his sister also lived. And, he brought with him a large library of pre-revolutionary and emigrant editions of Theosophy, Occultism, Anthroposophy, Agni Yoga (Living Ethics) and Yoga. It was surprising that “the relevant services” did not prevent the importation of his library, although some of the books were withdrawn “for review” at the state border. The library included

books by Swami Vivekananda, Swami Abhedananda, Ramacharaka, Jiddu Krishnamurti, Annie Besant, Madame Blavatsky and other authors, translated into Russian. Arcady I. Malakhov offered to share the books and we would take and photocopy them behind his back although he certainly knew what we were doing as sometimes a book had to be taken apart to be copied and yet he never objected to it.



Arcady Ivanovich Malakhov (Korsunovsky)
(1896–1982)

When I was a student, I often used to sit far into the night studying theosophical and yogic literature thoroughly and covered my notebooks with writing of abstracts, quotations and even complete chapters. You can hardly imagine how much I would indulge in that!

In the 1970s in the Soviet Union, there passed from hand to hand amateur translations of typewritten yogic literature. Among them were works by Swami Kunalayananda, Swami Vishnudevananda, Dharendra Brahmachari, Vasant Rele, Boris Sakharov and others. And, there were the books by Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh (*The Science of Pranayama, Concentration and Meditation* and others). Yet, for us, the book, *Autobiography of a Yogi* by ParamahansaYogananda came as a spiritual bombshell. Its

typewritten Russian translation was mailed to us by a lover of yoga who lived in the Ukraine.

Our library also contained books on Buddhism, Zen Buddhism and Tibetan Mysticism. *The Light of Asia*, a wonderful work by Sir Arnold in a brilliant pre-revolutionary Russian translation, held a special place in our library.

That was the way we lived – typed and retyped books in Russian translations, made by someone, articles, some other texts that interested us, indulged in reading, held home satsangs, corresponded vigorously, sent each other books, visited our yoga friends who were also seekers after Truth in different towns and did a little yoga.

It was a time of unchallenged dominance in the Soviet Union of the atheistic Marxist-Leninist ideology, “the only true doctrine”, as it was proclaimed. Actually, there was no such thing as a ban on yoga, yet it was not approved by the authorities because of its idealistic essence of faith in God, in reincarnation, etc. From time to time, from the pages of some Soviet newspapers and magazines, Indian yogis were criticized for being “exclusively self-absorbed” and therefore they did not care about “social equality” and they would not give a thought to “attending a protest demonstration against the class oppressors”. However, it was admitted that they achieved outstanding success in promoting their health and in developing extraordinary skills in governing their bodies and minds. There was no ban on yoga circles which sometimes appeared under the guise of “health” groups. The authorities saw no threat to the state in them and, therefore, turned a blind eye to them.

But from the beginning of the 1980s, the situation changed. The spread of the Hari Krishna Movement in our country and the incredible activity of its groups forced the authorities to change their attitude to the Soviet citizens who “were into yoga”. Although we had nothing to do with this movement, my wife and I were also within the field of keen view of “the relevant services”. (We see no need of going into the details of the circumstances which accompanied this on the pages of this book).

This tense situation lasted until the latter half of the 1980s and only alongside the Perestroika (“The Restructuring”), proclaimed by Mikhail Gorbachev, did the situation change dramatically. Russia entered a new phase of its evolution – the “democratization of society”. Atheism ceased to be the dominant doctrine of the state

and the spirit of actual freedom of speech, press and religion, swept the vast expanses of Russia and settled its rights on the territory.

Nelly and Vladimir

In May 1975, I met Nelly and already in September we got married. Once, about two months before the day we met, during the meditation that would usually follow after asanas and pranayamas, I experienced a mystic insight – I felt completely mature for family life. That perfectly unexpected sensation was not my brainchild, but disclosed itself as a certain absolute givenness – the truth that would leave no room for doubt. Earlier I had had experiences of this kind, yet due to different matters it is quite easy to tell the game of mind from an insight (if it is truly an insight): the soul simply knows that it is the truth! Alongside this, it only remains for the mind to marvel and take “a resolution from above” for granted. Gracious Lord presented me with a wife as well as a most intimate, most loyal friend who is able to love deeply, understand and empathize.

Nelly

I was seventeen years old when Vladimir came into my life. At that time, I was studying at the academy of music in the Piano Department and was completely absorbed in my studies. I did not have even the slightest idea about what yoga was. About two weeks after we met, I came to Vladimir's home for a visit to meet his mother. From what I saw in his house, the walls of his room made the strongest impression on me – they were all covered with pictures of yogis. I remember very well that I was not surprised and did not even ask who all those people were and why the walls were covered with them. Deep inside I knew that a superficial explanation would not satisfy me and that a moment would come when things would clear up by themselves. And so they did. After some time, Vladimir told me about his devotion. He showed me his stories and books which gradually sparked a keen interest in that unusual subject within me as well. We began to read together, proofread copies of texts from “sources” and corrected mistakes and misprints. Vladimir took me to his yoga friends among whom there were men and women of all ages, from the very young to the very elderly people. It did not take much time before Yoga, Indian mysticism and the high spirituality of Indian culture conquered my heart for life.

In 1977 we were blessed with a daughter. We named her Stella.

Vladimir

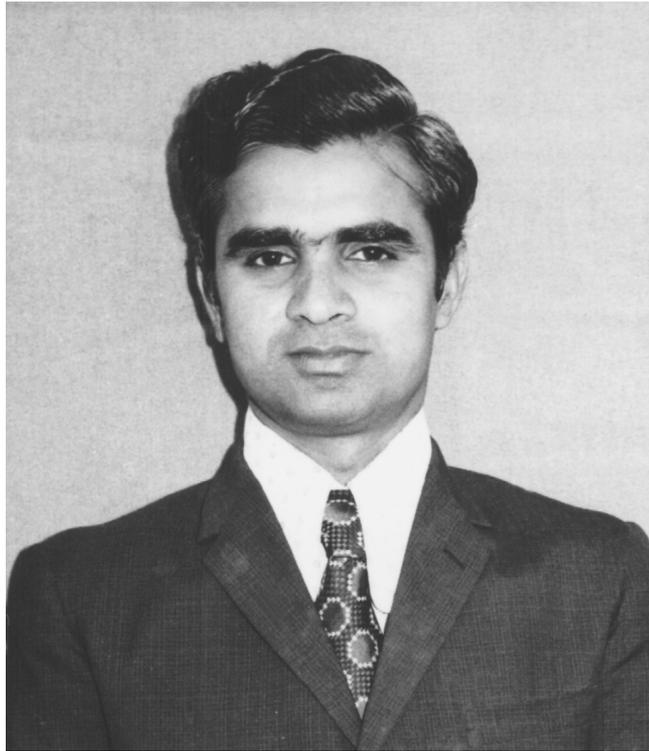
Living in the Soviet Union, we were well aware that never, for objective reasons such as the so-called “Iron Curtain”, would we be able to approach the Guru. Two of my attempts to go to India on a group package tour (no others were to be found in the Soviet Union) failed. Each time, under another absurd pretext, they refused me. The only gurus left for us were the books. They were our spiritual discipline, sadhana of study (svadhyaya), and spiritual association with their authors (satsanga) at the same time. The power and depth of such association are amazing and are even able to define a course of events. At least, that is what my personal experience has proven and such an association turned over a new leaf in Nelly’s and my lives. It has to do with Swami Narayanananda.

It happened in 1978. When I was visiting an old friend, Alexander, who lived in Pyatigorsk, I spotted a photocopy of a book named *Mind, Its Source And Culture*, written by Swami Narayanananda, on his bookshelf. My friend does not remember how he found the book by Swamiji. Perhaps he found it in the Moscow Library of Foreign Languages Catalogue, Section on India, Hinduism and Yoga. By that time, Swamiji sent some of His books to some heads of states. Russia in particular was one such country. So the books could have then been sent on from the head of state to the Library. My friend ordered the negative photograph of this book from the Moscow Library of Foreign Languages. When he got it by post, he made a photocopy by himself using an enlarging machine. I asked my friend if I could take it with me to Krasnodar to read and translate which he agreed to let me do.

The author’s name at the time conveyed nothing to me. However, a Life Sketch of Swami Narayanananda that preceded the text gave rise to some special feeling of close relationship with Him. As soon as I began to read the text itself, He impressed me with His spirituality and profound knowledge of the subject. The fact that I was reading the book by a saint, an enlightened person, became evident from the first lines. Another few pages and gentle love for Him sparked inside my heart and welled over with a deep feeling of gratitude. “I have to translate it into Russian!” – the idea suddenly emerged and captured me completely and I sprang into action. I translated the book very quickly, having devoted every spare moment to it.

A few months later, Providence brought me to an Indian from the South Indian city of Mysore, Shankara by name. In September

1979, he obtained a UNIDO fellowship and represented his organization (Central Food Technological Research Institute) in the Soviet Union, in Krasnodar. At that time, I worked as a musician in the band of the Intourist Hotel's Restaurant which was a hotel where most foreigners, such as Shankara, stayed. When I saw him two or three times in the evenings, I felt that I must speak with him. He attracted me with his beauty, bright eyes and spiritual aura.



Sri Ramamurthy Shankara from Mysore

So one evening I asked a waitress who was serving him to tell him that a musician wanted to ask him some questions. He told her that he would be pleased to do that. So I came to him in the interval of our performance and that was how we got acquainted. He was a devoted follower of Sathya Sai Baba and was well informed on spiritual matters. Owing to common interests, we quickly became friends. At one of our meetings in our house which he used to visit every evening and stay till morning, I asked him if he knew anything about Swami Narayanananda and told him that I had translated His book *Mind, Its Source And Culture*. "Yes, I've heard the name, but not more than that," said Shankara. Then I asked my new friend, after he traveled back home, to find out all he could about that wonderful holy man – for example, whether He was alive.

Not long after, Shankara returned home and I got a letter from him in which he conveyed to me ... blessings from Swami Narayanananda! My friend clarified that in Mysore, Narayanananda's ashram had just opened and he and his family had visited the holy man. Shankara told Him about me and my feelings for Swami Narayanananda. He also spoke about the book which I had translated into Russian. To that, the Revered Sage answered, "I know. Convey to Vladimir my Blessings." Such is the energy of the mind (svadhyaya) and such is the power of the heart (satsanga)!

Nelly

The message about Swami Narayanananda literally lent us wings. Shankara also wrote that Narayanananda's main ashram was located in Denmark and that Swamiji spent most of His time there. In those years, we carried on an active correspondence with our Indian friend Shankara. Several times he sent us books on Indian philosophy and Indian saints but only two parcels succeeded in reaching us and one of them was open and nearly empty.

What I am now going to write was one of the most unpleasant and dramatic episodes of our lives. That is why Vladimir did not want the incident to be mentioned in our story. However, I insisted, considering it vital, and Vladimir had to defer to me. This is the core of what happened.

June 3, 1983, early in the morning, the police came to our house and presented us with a search warrant. In three hours of meticulous work by "the guardians of law", our entire library of over 300 books, texts, and articles was in bags and was carried away. We did not have a single book left that would bear any relation to yoga, esotery or spiritual issues. Also seized were personal notebooks, manuscripts, letters, even the negative images with books on yoga and the Upanishads in English which Vladimir had officially ordered from Moscow libraries. Needless to say, what a shock we experienced! Afterwards, we learned that the same day in our town some of our acquaintances were searched as well. A few days later, an expert arrived from Moscow who had a Ph.D. in Philosophy. He was to conduct an examination of our seized books in order to identify ideologically harmful religious and mystical literature and to define whether Vladimir was involved in the activities of a Hindu sect. During a personal conversation the person (as a matter of ethics I will not mention his name) told to Vladimir to his face, "I'm here to put you in jail." As soon as the

expert examination report was ready, and part of the books were reported to be harmful, “undermining the ideological foundations of the state”, Vladimir was challenged. The philosopher threw his examination report on the table in front of Vladimir with the words “Make a defense!”

And Vladimir accepted the fight. The high standard of knowledge in this area, the culture of speech inherent in Vladimir and his unconventional perseverance allowed him to come out victorious from that struggle which lasted about two years. During that time, while defending his civil rights, Vladimir filled out a ton of papers that he systematically and gradually, step by step, sent to a range of authorities at the prosecution office and the KGB and even to the party authorities (at the time Vladimir was a member of the Communist Party). Several times he had to go to Moscow. In a few pages, Vladimir refuted the conducted examination and the very expertise of the expert. As a result, that examination report was declared “improper”, and the expert – “lacking competence”. The prosecution of the RSFSR (Moscow) decided to conduct another review which was done by a group examination involving experts from the Institute of Oriental Studies (Moscow). The second examination did not identify in the seized books and materials anything seditious and in 1985 the authorities had to give our library back. However, some part of the material was lost.

For the sake of fairness, I would like to highlight the fact that among all the officials with whom Vladimir had to deal, only two people were hostile to him – a Moscow expert in philosophy and an investigator from the Krasnodar regional prosecution office, who handled our case. In general, many officials from the prosecution offices, both in Krasnodar and in Moscow, treated Vladimir entirely friendly and compassionately. Some even helped Vladimir with advice and information.

Vladimir

Needless to say, Nelly described that episode in broad lines leaving out a great many particulars and nuances which could compose an entire book (we still keep all the case documents). I managed to come off victorious owing greatly to Nelly. Her faith in me, her stamina and moral support gave me strength and confidence. Therefore, it is our common victory – hers and mine.

Also, Providence was on our side! Perhaps, as a kind of karmic compensation, it was during those difficult years for us that we made contact with Swamiji. Over the course of years the sequence

of events and some details related to our relationship with Swamiji have been erased from our memory. As for the main, key events we, of course, remember them.

In one of his letters, Shankara sent us the address of the Swamiji's Danish ashram and I obtained the real possibility to approach Him with a request to take me as His disciple. Without thinking twice, I wrote a letter to Swamiji and mailed it. Unfortunately, I cannot find a copy so I cannot provide it here.

After a while, Nelly and I received a letter in which we learned that there were people in the Soviet Union who had managed to make contact with Swamiji, to take diksha (initiation into the mantra) and even to take sannyas. It proved to be a great joy for us. After receiving their address, we wrote them a letter. There was Leonid from Dushanbe, Tajikistan and two other guys, Fyodor and Slava, who took sannyas, Brahmananda and Aadibrahmananda accordingly. We also learned that several other Russian people took diksha and sannyas. Among them was Nirguna (story #25) from St. Petersburg, the only Russian disciple of Swamiji with whom we have been communicating the longest over the years and, so far, maintain a friendly relationship.

And, after some more time, we received a letter from an unknown person from Moscow, Yakov by name who turned out to be a medic. He had also been blessed with diksha from Swamiji. And we learned that he had received a letter from Swamiji for us. I immediately flew to Moscow to get the letter and he gave me the envelope, meant for us. We could not receive the letter by regular mail because it was too precious to us and the mail was unreliable. In the envelope, there was a letter from Swamiji on a thin sheet of paper and two sheets folded in four, fastened with a sticky tape. On one of the sheets, in Swamiji's handwriting, was written: Mantra Vladimir, and on the other was written: Mantra Nelly with every word underlined twice. It is hard to imagine the happiness I experienced.

Back in Krasnodar, we unfolded the sheets of paper which were both dated 18/7/1984 and contained a mantra with instructions: "As you desire, I take you as my disciple. Have full faith in what I say and work. God will Bless you [...]" The sheets ended with the words "With Blessings and Love. Your own Atman. Swami Narayananda".

In addition to the sheets of paper with our mantras was a letter from Swamiji which is written below:

Swami Narayananda
N. U. Yoga Ashrama
DK-8773 Gylling
Denmark (Europe)

18-7-1984.

Blessed Immortal Self,
(Beloved Vladimir &Nelly),

I have your letter dated 20-5-1984. I am sending Mantra to you (and to your wife) both. Follow the instructions. Sannyasa card which was sent last year (1983) by Registered post came back to Us. So also Books, Photos And Magazines sent to them have not reached them at all. -

With Blessings & Love To you all.

Your Own Atman

Swami Narayananda

Since that time Nelly and I, between us, have been calling Swami Narayananda "Gurudev". Inspired by Gurudev's boundless grace, we started the practice that "went like clockwork". The concentration of mind came very easily and we would effortlessly enter the meditative state of deep tranquility and soft inner joy. However, the following years, in all dramatic frankness, exposed how influential the tamasic and rajasic principles are in human nature and how imperfect and sometimes obviously weak, human will is, being powerless to stand against unfavorable karmic conditions and reactions. So, many times Nelly and I experienced the genuineness of Gurudev's words that the path of yoga is truly the path of a hero.

Yes, it is true, that Yoga is able to penetrate deep inside us, shake our stagnant soul space and illuminate our soul's "storerooms" with its light. I, myself, have repeatedly experienced such a great spiritual force that it seemed to me I could achieve anything and everything and nothing could stop it. Surroundings and circumstances, literally everything favored it, and the thing you felt inside was, ah... simply a paradise. Imperfections disappeared somewhere and seemed to never again dare to come back. But suddenly, all at once, everything stops and you start "striking the ground". Alas, the law of action and reaction applies to all people without exception and the point here is not what path you go or what teaching you profess. There is always something of a lower nature inside us that stubbornly resists any progress and does not accept any positive changes.

During reaction, we feel devastation and decline of physical and mental strength. Mind becomes lethargic and restless. Sadhana becomes boring and uninteresting. For no obvious reason, you are suddenly embraced by sadness verging on a feeling of hopelessness. The circumstances seem to turn into an unfavorable light. To make things worse, it all happens against the background of aggravated senses caused by yogic practice. A powerful tide of lust – our most vulnerable issue – might overwhelm you and break its weight on you, trying to drown you, crush you and shatter all your achievements into tiny pieces. And time ... time slackens the pace and harasses the soul through tedious minutes, hours and days.

It is very difficult to cope with such states and if the reaction coincides with life's crises, it is virtually impossible. At such times, circumstances, too, become truly unfavorable. You feel like you are going under quicksand with no strength to get out. You detest yourself unbearably because of being unable to resist. The tissue of life soaks in dark shades, and its meaning ceases to be of any value to you.

But fortunately such periods however long they might be – from a few days to several months or even years – always lapse: a silver lining appears and life shows up to be filled with a new, brighter and warmer light although the shadow of those periods might follow you for a long time!

However our practice would flow, whatever challenges appeared in our life journey and caused setbacks in our practice, "truancy", reactions and issues with discipline – never, during all this time,

did the spirit of doubt haunt us – neither of Guru nor of His teaching nor of Yoga-Vedanta as such!

In the spring of 1985, Leonid invited Nelly and me to Dushanbe, Tajikistan but more precisely, to the mountains, to a meteorological station, at which he was a Senior Meteorological Officer where he spent most of his time. As we came to know, Leonid is the only Russian disciple of Swamiji who met Him personally in India and took diksha on the spot. We gladly accepted the invitation to go to Tajikistan and in early May made our way there. It was a fantastic trip! The time we spent there with Leonid, Brahmananda and Aadibrahmananda was one of the best in our lives. At that time, Brahmananda and Aadibrahmananda also lived in Dushanbe. We were a united spiritual family – laughing a lot and telling each other mystical stories. The very atmosphere of our being there was charged with mysteriousness and the most powerful spiritual vibrations. It was an atmosphere of inner joy and happiness.

We learned that Leonid together with Brahmananda and Aadibrahmananda had translated several books by Gurudev. They were typewritten but needed thorough revision. There were some handwritten translations in notebooks with many corrections, as well. We also learned that these boys were in correspondence with the Sri Ramana Ashrama in Tiruvannamalai from 1983-1984. The boys showed us the letters sent from there and a couple of books on Sri Ramana Maharshi's teachings. They corresponded with V. Ganesan, the managing editor of a quarterly journal, *The Mountain Path*. Among the correspondence, as I remember, there was a letter from The Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre of the U.K. addressed to Slava (the secular name of Aadibrahmananda). The boys were ardently seeking spiritual knowledge, spiritual communion and that is why they were very dear to Nelly and me, because we were treading the same path.

After our trip to Dushanbe, at different times our brother-disciples Leonid, Brahmananda, Aadibrahmananda, Nirguna, in Jan. or Feb. 1989, and another boy, Sasha from Vologda City, came to visit us in Krasnodar. We planned to work intensively on editing the translations that we already had and translating new books by Gurudev into Russian. Leonid even wanted to move to Krasnodar or the Krasnodar Region to be closer to us. We offered our help with picking a dwelling and moving but his passiveness and

indecisiveness did not let him do that. So he stayed in Dushanbe. Nelly and I thought we had acquired a spiritual family, with which we could unite in the future. In any case, the events seemed to favor it.

But later something happened that still remains a riddle to us. In a letter from Leonid, we learned that Brahmananda and Aadibrahmananda, after several unsuccessful attempts to contact Gurudev and due to pressing reactions, accepted Orthodox Christianity and took vows within the walls of the Orthodox Church. In 1989, before Nelly and I went to Gylling, Denmark, I travelled to the Holy Trinity – St. Sergius Lavra (the largest monastery in Russia), where by that time Aadibrahmananda had already been accepted as a monk. I was waiting to meet him and talk with him when a man in a black habit appeared in front of me. “Slava, I’m so glad to see you,” I said to him, using his secular name as I always referred to him. “I am Slava no more,” he said softly and pronounced his new monastic Christian name. Strangely enough, I do not remember anything from our conversation. I do not even remember his new monastic name. He was not talkative and literally exuded humility. It was clear that he had found what he was always looking for. It is left to say that he made a very good impression on me. As far as I know, his spiritual destiny in Christianity has gone favorably along. He was a true friend of ours and we lost him.

Regarding Brahmananda, since 1987-88 our connection has been lost. During the period of our acquaintance and association, I managed to see he was a person of spacious mind and high spiritual culture. He was a true friend of ours and we lost him also.

As for those typewritten translations of Swamiji’s books, their destiny is unknown to us.

Later we learnt that there was another disciple of Swamiji’s, Nirakara from Lithuania. We wrote him a letter and got in touch and maintained a correspondence with him though with long breaks. The mutual desire to meet each other is still unfulfilled. In the beginning of the 1990s when Lithuania separated from Russia, the possibility of meeting in person became even more unlikely.

After our trip to Dushanbe I wrote a letter to Gurudev. Fortunately, a rough copy is left, so I will eagerly present it here.



20.05.85

Beloved Guruji!

Nelly & I got acquainted this month with your chelas: Brahmananda, Aadibrahmananda, Leonid and Sergei [Omkara]. Naturally, we became very close. Thank you, my beloved!

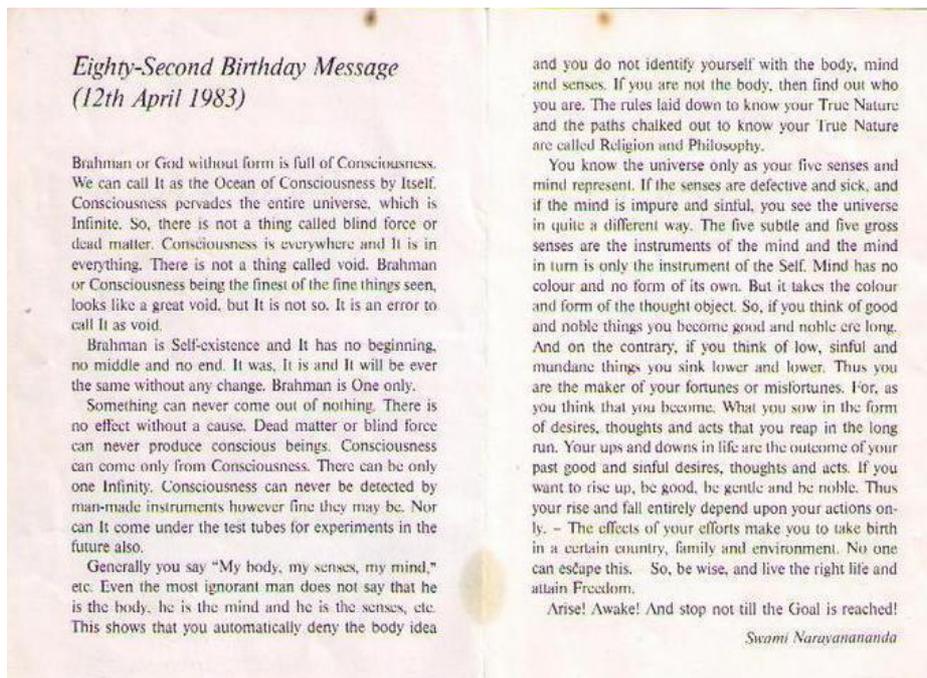
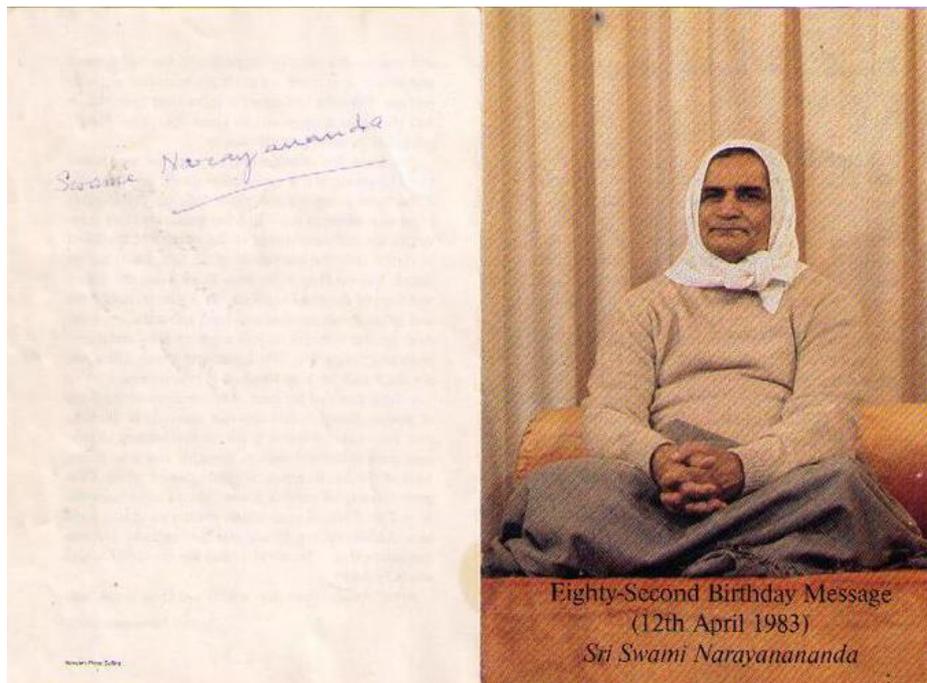
It is a difficult time here with correspondence. Letters and materials (books, photos, magazines) from your Danish ashram do not arrive. But your chelas here need your books, photos, tapes with your voice, letters from you and your disciples there. Because Denmark is a Western country, it is better, we think, to connect Brahmananda with your Mysore ashram. You see, India is a friend of the USSR... May somebody from there write to Brahmananda.

Please Swamiji, bless Nelly and me with a child and give us your psychic and spiritual protection, we need it, really.

Ever yours in Love and Truth,
Vladimir

Nelly

Almost exactly nine months after Vladimir's request to Swamiji for a child, we had a baby boy. Vladislav was born on February 25, 1986. The very next day after Vladislav was born, we found an envelope in our mailbox. We opened the letter and it turned out to be the Eighty-Second Birthday Message dated April 12, 1983 from Sri Swami Narayanananda with Swamiji's own signature – Swami Narayanananda – on the back with the word Narayanananda underlined by His hand. And nothing else! Only the Birthday Message. Too obvious to pin a label on “mere coincidence”, isn't it? Be it as it may, for us it was a Blessing from above. And the day we took Vladislav home from the maternity clinic, for the first time that winter, it started snowing with large snowflakes.



There is an interesting and unusual fact that from the cradle Vladislav would repeatedly cross his legs into sukhasana (easy pose). I could barely straighten them to swaddle him which he strongly resisted and each time tried to cross his legs again. And, as soon as he started school, from the first days, he would sit in "lotus posture" at the desk. It lasted for several years until his teachers taught him to "sit properly". Even in high school, the manner of sitting did not leave him. Once at the parents' meeting, the form master asked me, "Why does your son sit like that?" What could I say? When she asked Vladislav himself why he sat that way, he

replied that it was convenient for him. Even now at age 29, he often sits with his legs crossed on the sofa or at a computer and easily enters into “lotus posture” without using his hands.

In order to make it clear how strongly we wanted connection with Gurudev and everything related to him, I will recall an incident. If I am not mistaken, it happened in 1986. Some one, I don't remember who, told us that in Tallinn, Estonia there was a man, a musician, who had recently toured with an orchestra in Denmark. He traveled to Gylling to see Swamiji and had just gotten back home from the tour. Without hesitation, Vladimir found his address and telephone number, got in touch with him, arranged a meeting, took two-days time off (Vladimir worked as a musician at the time), bought a plane ticket and flew to Tallinn. The distance between Krasnodar and Tallinn is 1862 km which is some distance. Their conversation lasted about four hours. They spoke about Swamiji, yoga and their common interests. For us, any first hand information about Swamiji was a divine possibility to approach Him even indirectly. So just to get this vocal “gift” from an unknown person, Vladimir went to Estonia and came back the same day.

Vladimir

In the spring of 1988, Shankara mailed us an invitation to come for a visit to India. By that time, in the area of democratic reforms prompted by Perestroika, Russia made enough significant steps for the local authorities to decide positively on me going to India, and, moreover, on a private trip! “You are the first person who will go to India on a private visit by invitation. We decided to give you this opportunity. We hope you will live up to our expectations,” said an official to me in a confidential conversation. It was but a grand victory! Unfortunately, Nelly, having two little children, could not come with me. I remember the plane taking off and heading towards India. My feelings failed to stand the tension and the tears flowed from my eyes.

In New Delhi, where the plane landed, I immediately went to the Sri Narayanananda Math in Inderpuri, New Delhi. Luckily, I found there an Indian Swami, Pranavananda, as far as I remember. He welcomed me heartily. We talked and I bought a few books by Guruji from His Complete Works.

I spent two months, October and November 1988 in India. Unfortunately, the same year Gurudev left this world in February;

so there were only eight months from when I could have met Him in Mysore! Karmic intricacies defy rational comprehension. With many things in life, we have to humble ourselves and this definitely holds a special spiritual meaning. If we talk in general, my long-awaited and hard-won trip to my beloved India can best be described by quoting the English poetess Elizabeth Barrett Browning, “God's gifts put man's best dreams to shame”.

The most important event for me was my visit to our Gurudev's Mysore Ashram. During my entire first trip to India, I kept a diary. Here is how I described my first visit to the ashram in it (in English translation).

“23/10/1988

The day began with a conversation with the Shankara's elder brother, Murali, who lives in the second part of the house. Shankara took me to him and left me there for a while. Murali told many interesting things about his grandmother, that she had already in the 1940s become a devotee of Sathya Sai Baba, and about himself [...] Also told how he and Shankara, their grandmother, mother and several relatives visited Swami Narayanananda. Swamiji spoke very little – just a few words or sentences. They came and sat down. First spoke the grandmother, she asked to tell about some aspects of spiritual movement. He was silent for a while, and then he smiled and said, (about Sai Baba), “You have already caught a big man, supreme being. You can follow his teachings. I have no words to tell you. You can follow him. It's enough, good for you.” (These words I recorded word-for-word in English according to Murali). It was the first visit of Shankara's family to Guruji.

Then 3 or 4 times more, Murali went to him alone. At one of the visits he asked Guruji, “Here, I turn my mind onto God, say, at home or at another suitable place, and my thoughts settle down. But then I ‘go back to the world’ and my thoughts begin to rush, the control over them gets lost, and so on. What should I do?” Narayanananda was brief, “You should cultivate repetition of the God's name. Make this practice more intensive.” (These I also recorded word-for-word in English according to Murali).

Another time Murali asked Guruji, “Here, we do puja, focus on God, settle down the thoughts, purify them – all these while being at home, but when we leave the house, we do not feel the effect of this spiritual practice. That is, the spiritual advancement in general is not felt. A thought appears whether everything is done in vain?” Narayanananda replied, “Never think that way. Everything you do with a spiritual purpose lingers and contributes to a spiritual bank. When you put some money in a bank, it brings you a percentage. You

do not see it, but the process goes on. So it is here – no act of the spiritual nature passes in vain.”

At about 4 p.m., Murali, at my request, took me to Narayanananda's ashram in Mysore. My God, how cute it is, lovely! The ashram is located outside the city or on the outskirts. Will not describe the building itself. Next time will take a photo and tell by mouth. I met an elderly Indian sannyasin there, Swami Turiyananda, Kumari Sharada's mother (the wife of Guruji's younger brother) and a Danish disciple, who is the chief builder at the Swami Narayanananda Organization, N. U. Yoga Trust. I will not describe the details of the meeting. Can only say I spoke about myself, about my path to Guruji, about how many Russian disciples there were until recently, and how many left. Why this happened to us, about our problems and the need for constant contact with the ashram. He promised to help in every way possible – books as well as magazines and photos and a lot of other things. The Danish disciple even promised to send an invitation to Denmark for me and my wife, if we wanted. He said that now the Main Centre is in Denmark and all matters related to the activities of the Organization are discussed there.

Sharada, Narayanananda's niece and the closest person to him, is now in Denmark. Next January he is going to come back here to Mysore to establish the Samadhi Kutir. I like seriousness, good organization with which they handle matters. At least, such is the impression created.

Talked to the Dane for quite a long time. He said he would be happy to see me again. Turiya (see note below) then took us to show us the meditation hall with statue and the place of the great yogi's body cremation, my dear Swami Narayanananda. Then presented the first two volumes of His autobiography and two of their Yoga magazines. In parting, said he would be glad to see me again in November. By the way, by that time the pictures I asked for may have come from Denmark. Also he promised to solve the problem with books and magazines. Said goodbye very cordially to Turiya and Sharada's mother, too. That little elderly woman left in my heart an exceptional impression by her pristine simplicity and modesty.”

Note

With Turiya I have a funny story that happened, if I remember correctly, in 1992, during my second trip to India. I came to Swamiji's Mysore ashram to see Sharada and Turiya. The time for lunch came and they invited me to the dining room. Turiya served the food and really strictly warned that I should not wash the dishes after I finish eating but put the dishes there and there. Turiya went away leaving me alone. While I was eating, I had a thought like “will eat and put the dishes where I was asked to”. But suddenly another thought crossed my mind,

“No, it should not be like that. I, of course, will wash my utensils when I am done!” Before I could even comprehend it, I heard the scamper of bare feet on the wooden floor of the veranda. The door opened and a breathless Turiya appealingly said, “But please, do not wash the dishes!” That was wonderful!



From left to right: Sri Kumari Sharada (Gurudeva’s niece),
myself and Swami Turiyananda

Nelly

Needless to say, I was so happy for Vladimir that his golden dream, actually, the dream of his life – to visit India – came true. Yet separation from him even for two months proved to be a challenge for me. The only way to communicate at that time was to write letters. Vladimir described his Indian life in his rare letters so vividly that his experiences unknowingly passed on to me as if I were a living witness of everything that happened to him there. The very fact of the trip was a miracle for us. But the miracles did not come to an end there. Ahead of us there was another incredible miracle.

In 1989, we received an invitation from our Danish friend to come to visit him in Denmark. The invitation was issued not only for Vladimir but also for me. Our Danish brother-disciple fulfilled his promise and for that we will be grateful to him for life. We discussed the issue and understood that there might never be another chance like this again so we decided to travel together. To

the relevant authorities, we submitted an application request for the trip to Denmark by invitation and received permission! Denmark was a dream for many Soviet people. Before Perestroika, traveling to that country was for us equal to flying to the moon. There used to be a joke about a Soviet citizen, who, in order to gain respect, would relish the opportunity to proudly declare, “I know a person who personally knows a person who has been to Denmark!”

Leaving our children in the care of my father, in November of the same year we arrived in Denmark. The description of our stay in the wonderful country of Denmark, and at even more remarkable ashram of our beloved Gurudev would make a long chapter. So here, in this story, I will limit myself to providing the general picture of our visit without going into too much detail.

Our trip to Gylling was not just “wonderful”, “interesting” and “impressive” but also highly fruitful, educational and invaluable in practical terms. We had a chance, though not for long, just for a month, to live with the monks and nuns (boys and girls) of the unique monastic order, N.U. Yoga Trust & Ashrama, established by the great Indian saintly yogi Swami Narayanananda. Upon arrival, we were welcomed with a special program for our stay in the ashram aimed at giving us the fullest insight into the activities of this Yogic Organization and the mode of life of its residents, ashramites. We can recall with much gratitude the cordial welcome and the honor of visiting Swamiji’s Kutir, satsang sessions, hatha-yoga classes in Århus, houses of Swamiji’s disciples, the ashram’s library, farms, printing house, wonderful book stock, etc. and the chance to plunge into the atmosphere of the brilliantly streamlined yogic life. Vladimir was lodged in the boys’ part of the ashram (boys’ ashram), and I was lodged in its girls’ part (girls’ ashram).

The girls’ ashram impressed me with its amazing accomplishment and smoothly running everyday life. Everything there was made for convenience. On the ground floor, there were many common rooms for different purposes. Each of them had a lot of different furnishings for general use and everything was in great variety and of high quality. I was impressed with the bathroom with its huge amount of shampoo, soap, toothpaste, brushes and toiletries. For my inexperienced eye of an ordinary Soviet woman, all these seemed to be fabulous treasures. I was struck by a dressing room with expensive and high-quality clothes and leather shoes. Deep compassion for our Russian women arose inside me because even when we had money, we had no opportunity to buy durable clothes which these Danish nuns could

afford. Impressive was also the common living area equipped with the state-of-the-art technology. I had never seen anything like that before and could not even suppose what it was. The girls patiently explained to me how to use everything but due to agitation and excitement, the explanations used to escape my mind and I kept away from that room completely. The kitchen gained my special preference. It was much easier to get used to. I quickly mastered the stove and oven and a couple of times I was entrusted to cook desserts and pastries for all the girls of the ashram. Some details of maintaining the kitchen I took home and introduced into my household and apply them to this day.

In the beginning of my stay, I definitely felt my inferiority and backwardness and was ashamed of it. I was embarrassed because I did not speak the English language. By the way, this very trip inspired me to start learning English, which I did, and now, already for twenty years, have been teaching it. I was also embarrassed by my humble and monotonous clothes, but not only that, I wanted to “grow up” to the confidence and independence which the girls of the ashram exuded. Following their example was not difficult since I was surrounded by such agreeableness and kindness. Not knowing the language and, therefore, not being able to communicate freely, to better express myself, I felt the warmth of their hearts and aspired after them with all my soul. “Oh, I wish I could stay here!” But just as well one could say, “Oh, I wish I could fly to another planet!” Our return date was rapidly approaching and nothing could be changed because at home the children were waiting for us. We had no connection with them while we were in Denmark.



N.U. Yoga Trust and Ashrama



From left to right: Nelly, Aadibrahmananda, Gita, Tejomaya and Advaita visiting Gita. Photo 1989.



From left to right: Nelly, Prem, Advaita and Bk visiting Prem in Lerdrup. Фото 1989 г.

Vladimir

Indeed, we had no connection with our home, and Nelly, of course, missed the children, although she would not confess it. Alongside all the uncommonness of everything what we faced, what we witnessed, what can be described by the word “external”, “material”, namely, the amazing purity of the environment and groomed facilities, the rationality in arranging everyday life, the highest level of life, and consequently, its regularity and stability, the main thing for us proved to be the psychological factor – that kind, brotherly attitude towards us from virtually everyone with whom we had a chance to communicate in the ashram as well as beyond.

Having lived among those wonderful people in the atmosphere of the intuitively tangible spiritual kinship, we felt at great ease and our souls dwelled in joy and tranquility. And also the feeling of deep satisfaction lingered inside us as when you finally discover what you have been seeking all your life and desires abandon you. I would call that our state of soul nibbanic (heavenly bliss). And I do not think it will be a great exaggeration really.

And more, we had a sensation that the entire space of the land where the ashram was located and the surrounding areas and perhaps the whole of Denmark were blessed with the spirit of freedom, an acute shortage of which we constantly experienced on our native land, Soviet Russia. From what I witnessed in the ashram, perhaps, the most stunning for me were the pursuit and the opportunity of the organization to have everything of the best, highest quality, everything matching the Guru.

We were presented with precious gifts: Gurudev’s hair and the holy ashes from his Mahasamadhi, a video-cassette with Swamiji’s satsangs (we still own the single copy), a small round ball made of the piece of rock crystal that is destined to eternally store Japa-mala and Swamiji’s personal notebook designed for writing mantra, audio-cassettes with Swamiji’s voice and devotional songs composed and performed by Swamiji’s disciples, leather belts for me and Nelly from the belt work-shop where we worked a bit under the fatherly supervision of our dear Prajna and some other presents. And, of course, we are grateful for the books and photographs of Swamiji. We cherish each present and some of the things became an integral part of our home altar.



In front of the ashram's canteen. Photo 1989 г.



Ashram's library where I liked to spend my time.
Photo 1989.



In the ashram's belt workshop. Photo 1989.



“Oh, how I would like to stay here!” Photo 1989.

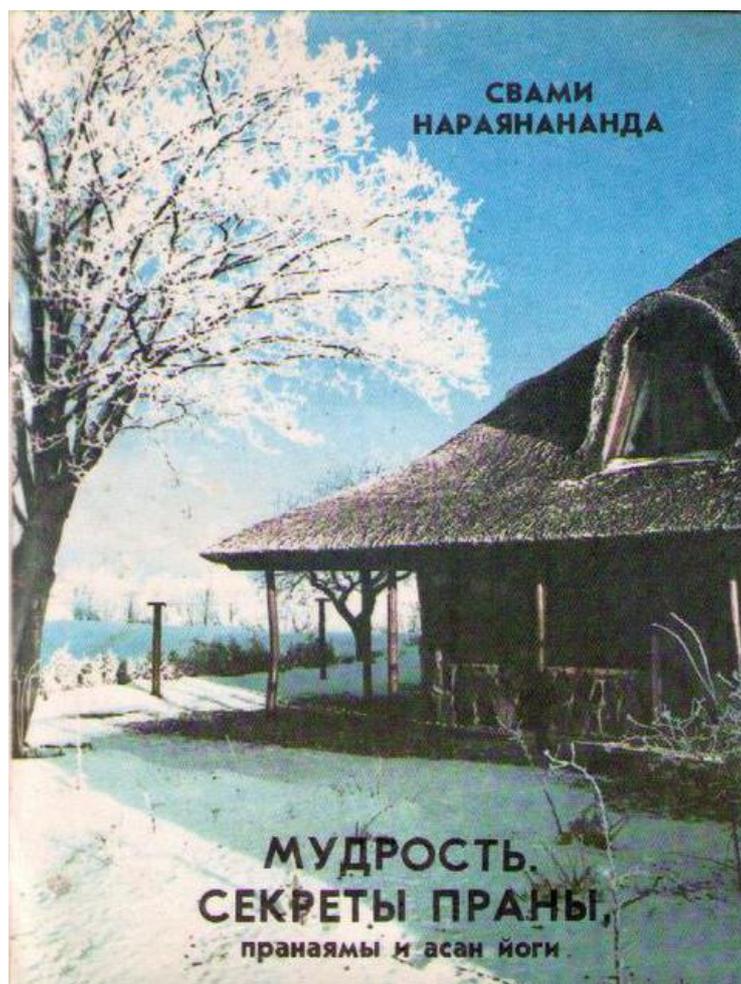
The day of our departure came. When one of the senior Danish disciples said “You will be our Russian center” it was a complete surprise to us and gave us solid hope that there was a clear perspective of applying our creative and spiritual forces for many years ahead. Already at that time, I was planning to devote myself to teaching yoga at home and had discussed, with sister Adwaita, the possibility of obtaining the relevant certificate.

And here we were at home, finally...

With enthusiasm I took on the translation work. Together with Nirguna, another Russian disciple, we translated *Wisdom and The Secrets of Prana, Pranayama and Yoga-Asanas*. In 1990, I managed to publish these two volumes written by Swamiji in one book at a local publishing house. The quality of the publication left much to be desired but a run of 5,000 copies sincerely pleased. In those years in Russia, there came out a magazine of esoteric content called *The Path to Oneself* which quickly gained popularity. I got an idea to write an article about Swami Narayananda and His teachings, *Universal Religion*, for that magazine with Swamiji’s photo. Also I made an advertisement for the book and provided our home address. My article about Swamiji was accepted by the publishers and it was published quickly. At that time, the demand for yogic literature in Russia was colossal because there was hardly anything available. And what do you think? Less than a week passed and to our home address in large amounts, in what seemed like an avalanche, letters showered in from across the country – (the Soviet Union had not collapsed yet and was still a unified state) – from Georgia, the Baltic states, Ukraine, Siberia, the Central Asian republics, and many cities of the Russian Federation, – with a request to send the book. People would order one, two, five and even up to ten copies!

It was a rare day when in our mailbox we would find only two or three letters. Five or six letters was common, sometimes more. Storage beneath the sofa, originally intended for extra blankets and pillows, was where we started to store the letters but it used to get filled regularly and, after a couple of months, we ran out of space there. Every single day I had to go to the main post office and send a load of parcels. Soon I was welcomed as “an inside man” at the main post office. All this went on for quite a long time until all 5,000 copies were mailed. But months later, the letters still came

again and again; however, by that time, the entire edition had been already distributed.



Swami Narayananda's books
“Wisdom” and “The Secrets of Prana, Pranayama and Yoga-Asanas”
translated into Russian and published by us in Russia.

On returning from Denmark, I accepted the offer to head the Yoga Department under the jurisdiction of the Krasnodar Regional Centre for Spiritual Culture of the Soviet Fund of Charity and Health and for a couple of years conducted yoga classes in Krasnodar. Initially I dreamed of getting a yoga-teaching certificate from N.U. Yoga Trust & Ashrama in Gylling, Denmark but, in the beginning of the 1990s, it became clear to me that my dream would never be carried out. As I understood it, for me to be certificated by N.U. Yoga Trust & Ashrama as a yoga teacher my personal presence was necessary. However, I let in the thought that I might have failed to show sufficient persistence in pursuing the goal and, under the circumstances, had abandoned the intention too soon.

Who knows? Eventually, I was able to get yoga teacher certification via other yoga training centers, American ones.

Our country at that time was struggling through enormous hardships. The socio-economic formation of the Communist type, lacking a true religious and spiritual foundation and genuine democratic freedoms, failed to sustain the trial of time and crashed down under the weight of unsolved internal problems and the pressure of external factors. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the change of the political establishment brought about chaos in the country. The economy went bust. Millions of people lost their jobs, people fell widely apart in communication, some woke up billionaires, but others, the vast majority, found themselves below the poverty line in the blink of an eye. The criminal rate was terrifying. My own employment as a musician stopped bringing in needed profit.

Despite Nelly and I being rewarded with the status of “the Russian Center” of Swami Narayanananda, we actually did not feel particular enthusiasm from the side of official Gylling in practical assistance with the development of the center. A few Russian disciples of Swamiji still within the field of our view, by that time, were scattered over the huge country and now, after the Soviet Union collapsed, even found themselves “abroad” (those were Leonid from Dushanbe and Nirakara from Lithuania), whom we lost, as a matter of fact. The only person with whom we would still manage to have more or less regular association was Nirguna from St. Petersburg. Yet we virtually happened to stay alone. Under these conditions, Nelly's and my project of developing or at least maintaining “the Russian center” lost its gist. There proved to be no call for the idea, also financial issues would bring it to the end.

Final Touch

So here we would like to draw down the curtain and save our story from sneaking into the genre of an autobiographical novel. We are very reluctant to get the reader tired of reading. Even though there are still so many things related to Gylling and Swamiji's Mysore ashram and to His disciples we were lucky enough to associate with, left unexpressed, Nelly and I hope that we have fulfilled the task set before us.

Whatever our destiny might have been, wherever we might have found ourselves, whomever we might have met, even great personalities, and experienced their favorable influence on us, in our hearts our beloved Gurudev is irreplaceable and the flame of

love to Him – ever burning. Swami Narayanananda for us is the example of the ultimate spiritual feat, superhuman stamina and determination to pursue the Goal of life (whatever they call it – moksha, mukti, kaivalya, nirvana, nirvikalpa-samadhi, Liberation, Emancipation, etc.), the example of the selfless service to the Truth, God, and His highest manifestation – the man. Revered Swami Narayanananda was and still is the ideal of a Yogi: Holy, Wise and Guru, in the truest sense. Might there be anything else worth adding to this?!

We would like to thank our dear sister Omkara for the chance to contribute humbly to her amazing project. It is a big honor for us.

The work Omkara took on her shoulders – to collect the stories of Swamiji's disciples from different countries and publish them in three volumes – deserves the deepest respect. In actual fact, it is a great seva and a true act of mercy for all disciples and devotees of our dear Guru, Swami Narayanananda.

Nelly&Vladimir,
Krasnodar, Russia
January 7, 2016