



**AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A YOGI**  
Paramhansa Yogananda



# DISCOVERY PUBLISHER

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# Preface

By W. Y. Evans-Wentz, M.A., D.Litt., D.Sc.  
Jesus College, Oxford; Author of  
*The Tibetan Book of the Dead,*  
*Tibet's Great Yogi Milarepa,*  
*Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines,* etc.

THE VALUE OF Yogananda's *Autobiography* is greatly enhanced by the fact that it is one of the few books in English about the wise men of India which has been written, not by a journalist or foreigner, but by one of their own race and training—in short, a book *about yogis by a yogi*. As an eyewitness recountal of the extraordinary lives and powers of modern Hindu saints, the book has importance both timely and timeless. To its illustrious author, whom I have had the pleasure of knowing both in India and America, may every reader render due appreciation and gratitude. His unusual life-document is certainly one of the most revealing of the depths of the Hindu mind and heart, and of the spiritual wealth of India, ever to be published in the West.

It has been my privilege to have met one of the sages whose life-history is herein narrated—Sri Yukteswar Giri. A likeness of the venerable saint appeared as part of the frontispiece of my *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines*.<sup>1</sup> It was at Puri, in Orissa, on the Bay of Bengal, that I encountered Sri Yukteswar. He was then the head of a quiet *āshrama* near the seashore there, and was chiefly occupied in the spiritual training of a group of youthful disciples. He expressed keen interest in the welfare of the people of the United States and of all the Americas, and of England, too, and questioned me concerning the distant activities, particularly those in California, of his chief disciple, Paramhansa Yogananda, whom he dearly loved, and whom he had sent, in 1920, as his emissary to the West.

Sri Yukteswar was of gentle mien and voice, of pleasing presence, and worthy of the veneration which his followers spontaneously accorded to him. Every person who knew him, whether of his own community or not, held him in the highest esteem. I vividly recall his tall, straight, ascetic figure, garbed in the saffron-colored garb of one who has renounced worldly quests, as he stood at the entrance of the

hermitage to give me welcome. His hair was long and somewhat curly, and his face bearded. His body was muscularly firm, but slender and well-formed, and his step energetic. He had chosen as his place of earthly abode the holy city of Puri, whither multitudes of pious Hindus, representative of every province of India, come daily on pilgrimage to the famed Temple of Jagannath, "Lord of the World." It was at Puri that Sri Yukteswar closed his mortal eyes, in 1936, to the scenes of this transitory state of being and passed on, knowing that his incarnation had been carried to a triumphant completion. I am glad, indeed, to be able to record this testimony to the high character and holiness of Sri Yukteswar. Content to remain afar from the multitude, he gave himself unreservedly and in tranquillity to that ideal life which Paramhansa Yogananda, his disciple, has now described for the ages.

W. Y. EVANS-WENTZ

1. Oxford University Press, 1935.



## *Author's Acknowledgments*

I AM DEEPLY INDEBTED to Miss L. V. Pratt for her long editorial labors over the manuscript of this book. My thanks are due also to Miss Ruth Zahn for preparation of the index, to Mr. C. Richard Wright for permission to use extracts from his Indian travel diary, and to Dr. W. Y. Evans-Wentz for suggestions and encouragement.

PARAMHANSA YOGANANDA

*October 28, 1945*  
*Encinitas, California*





# Chapter 1

## *My Parents and Early Life*

THE CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES of Indian culture have long been a search for ultimate verities and the concomitant disciple-guru<sup>1</sup> relationship. My own path led me to a Christlike sage whose beautiful life was chiseled for the ages. He was one of the great masters who are India's sole remaining wealth. Emerging in every generation, they have bulwarked their land against the fate of Babylon and Egypt.

I find my earliest memories covering the anachronistic features of a previous incarnation. Clear recollections came to me of a distant life, a yogi<sup>2</sup> amidst the Himalayan snows. These glimpses of the past, by some dimensionless link, also afforded me a glimpse of the future.

The helpless humiliations of infancy are not banished from my mind. I was resentfully conscious of not being able to walk or express myself freely. Prayerful surges arose within me as I realized my bodily impotence. My strong emotional life took silent form as words in many languages. Among the inward confusion of tongues, my ear gradually accustomed itself to the circumambient Bengali syllables of my people. The beguiling scope of an infant's mind! adultly considered limited to toys and toes.

Psychological ferment and my unresponsive body brought me to many obstinate crying-spells. I recall the general family bewilderment at my distress. Happier memories, too, crowd in on me: my mother's caresses, and my first attempts at lisping phrase and toddling step. These early triumphs, usually forgotten quickly, are yet a natural basis of self-confidence.

My far-reaching memories are not unique. Many yogis are known to have retained their self-consciousness without interruption by the dramatic transition to and from "life" and "death." If man be solely a body, its loss indeed places the final period to identity. But if prophets down the millenniums spake with truth, man is essentially of incorporeal nature. The persistent core of human egoity is only temporarily allied with sense perception.

Although odd, clear memories of infancy are not extremely rare. During travels in numerous lands, I have listened to early recollections from the lips of veracious



men and women.

I was born in the last decade of the nineteenth century, and passed my first eight years at Gorakhpur. This was my birthplace in the United Provinces of northeastern India. We were eight children: four boys and four girls. I, Mukunda Lal Ghosh,<sup>3</sup> was the second son and the fourth child.

Father and Mother were Bengalis, of the *Kshatriya* caste.<sup>4</sup> Both were blessed with saintly nature. Their mutual love, tranquil and dignified, never expressed itself frivolously. A perfect parental harmony was the calm center for the revolving tumult of eight young lives.

Father, Bhagabati Charan Ghosh, was kind, grave, at times stern. Loving him dearly, we children yet observed a certain reverential distance. An outstanding mathematician and logician, he was guided principally by his intellect. But Mother was a queen of hearts, and taught us only through love. After her death, Father displayed more of his inner tenderness. I noticed then that his gaze often metamorphosed into my mother's.

In Mother's presence we tasted our earliest bitter-sweet acquaintance with the scriptures. Tales from the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*<sup>5</sup> were resourcefully summoned to meet the exigencies of discipline. Instruction and chastisement went hand in hand.

A daily gesture of respect to Father was given by Mother's dressing us carefully in the afternoons to welcome him home from the office. His position was similar to that of a vice-president, in the Bengal-Nagpur Railway, one of India's large companies. His work involved traveling, and our family lived in several cities during my childhood.

Mother held an open hand toward the needy. Father was also kindly disposed, but his respect for law and order extended to the budget. One fortnight Mother spent, in feeding the poor, more than Father's monthly income.

"All I ask, please, is to keep your charities within a reasonable limit." Even a gentle rebuke from her husband was grievous to Mother. She ordered a hackney carriage, not hinting to the children at any disagreement.

"Good-by; I am going away to my mother's home." Ancient ultimatum!

We broke into astounded lamentations. Our maternal uncle arrived opportunely; he whispered to Father some sage counsel, garnered no doubt from the ages. After Father had made a few conciliatory remarks, Mother happily dismissed the cab. Thus ended the only trouble I ever noticed between my parents. But I recall a characteristic discussion.

"Please give me ten rupees for a hapless woman who has just arrived at the house." Mother's smile had its own persuasion.



MY FATHER  
Bhagabati Charan Ghosh  
*A Disciple of Labiri Mahasaya*

“Why ten rupees? One is enough.” Father added a justification: “When my father and grandparents died suddenly, I had my first taste of poverty. My only breakfast, before walking miles to my school, was a small banana. Later, at the university, I was in such need that I applied to a wealthy judge for aid of one rupee per month. He declined, remarking that even a rupee is important.”

“How bitterly you recall the denial of that rupee!” Mother’s heart had an instant logic. “Do you want this woman also to remember painfully your refusal of ten rupees which she needs urgently?”

“You win!” With the immemorial gesture of vanquished husbands, he opened his wallet. “Here is a ten-rupee note. Give it to her with my good will.”

Father tended to first say “No” to any new proposal. His attitude toward the strange woman who so readily enlisted Mother’s sympathy was an example of his customary caution. Aversion to instant acceptance—typical of the French mind in the West—is really only honoring the principle of “due reflection.” I always found Father reasonable and evenly balanced in his judgments. If I could bolster up my numerous requests with one or two good arguments, he invariably put the coveted goal within my reach, whether it were a vacation trip or a new motorcycle.

Father was a strict disciplinarian to his children in their early years, but his attitude toward himself was truly Spartan. He never visited the theater, for instance, but sought his recreation in various spiritual practices and in reading the Bhagavad Gita.<sup>6</sup> Shunning all luxuries, he would cling to one old pair of shoes until they were useless. His sons bought automobiles after they came into popular use, but Father was always content with the trolley car for his daily ride to the office. The accumulation of money for the sake of power was alien to his nature. Once, after organizing the Calcutta Urban Bank, he refused to benefit himself by holding any of its shares. He had simply wished to perform a civic duty in his spare time.

Several years after Father had retired on a pension, an English accountant arrived to examine the books of the Bengal-Nagpur Railway Company. The amazed investigator discovered that Father had never applied for overdue bonuses.

“He did the work of three men!” the accountant told the company. “He has rupees 125,000 (about \$41,250.) owing to him as back compensation.” The officials presented Father with a check for this amount. He thought so little about it that he overlooked any mention to the family. Much later he was questioned by my youngest brother Bishnu, who noticed the large deposit on a bank statement.

“Why be elated by material profit?” Father replied. “The one who pursues a goal of evenmindedness is neither jubilant with gain nor depressed by loss. He knows that man arrives penniless in this world, and departs without a single rupee.”

Early in their married life, my parents became disciples of a great master, Lahiri

Mahasaya of Benares. This contact strengthened Father's naturally ascetical temperament. Mother made a remarkable admission to my eldest sister Roma: "Your father and myself live together as man and wife only once a year, for the purpose of having children."

Father first met Lahiri Mahasaya through Abinash Babu,<sup>7</sup> an employee in the Gorakhpur office of the Bengal-Nagpur Railway. Abinash instructed my young ears with engrossing tales of many Indian saints. He invariably concluded with a tribute to the superior glories of his own guru.

"Did you ever hear of the extraordinary circumstances under which your father became a disciple of Lahiri Mahasaya?"

It was on a lazy summer afternoon, as Abinash and I sat together in the compound of my home, that he put this intriguing question. I shook my head with a smile of anticipation.

"Years ago, before you were born, I asked my superior officer—your father—to give me a week's leave from my Gorakhpur duties in order to visit my guru in Benares. Your father ridiculed my plan.

"Are you going to become a religious fanatic?" he inquired. 'Concentrate on your office work if you want to forge ahead.'

"Sadly walking home along a woodland path that day, I met your father in a palanquin. He dismissed his servants and conveyance, and fell into step beside me. Seeking to console me, he pointed out the advantages of striving for worldly success. But I heard him listlessly. My heart was repeating: 'Lahiri Mahasaya! I cannot live without seeing you!'

"Our path took us to the edge of a tranquil field, where the rays of the late afternoon sun were still crowning the tall ripple of the wild grass. We paused in admiration. There in the field, only a few yards from us, the form of my great guru suddenly appeared!<sup>8</sup>

"Bhagabati, you are too hard on your employee!' His voice was resonant in our astounded ears. He vanished as mysteriously as he had come. On my knees I was exclaiming, 'Lahiri Mahasaya! Lahiri Mahasaya!' Your father was motionless with stupefaction for a few moments.

"Abinash, not only do I give *you* leave, but I give *myself* leave to start for Benares tomorrow. I must know this great Lahiri Mahasaya, who is able to materialize himself at will in order to intercede for you! I will take my wife and ask this master to initiate us in his spiritual path. Will you guide us to him?"

"Of course.' Joy filled me at the miraculous answer to my prayer, and the quick, favorable turn of events.

"The next evening your parents and I entrained for Benares. We took a horse cart

the following day, and then had to walk through narrow lanes to my guru's secluded home. Entering his little parlor, we bowed before the master, enlocked in his habitual lotus posture. He blinked his piercing eyes and leveled them on your father.

“Bhagabati, you are too hard on your employee!” His words were the same as those he had used two days before in the Gorakhpur field. He added, ‘I am glad that you have allowed Abinash to visit me, and that you and your wife have accompanied him.’

“To their joy, he initiated your parents in the spiritual practice of *Kriya Yoga*.<sup>9</sup> Your father and I, as brother disciples, have been close friends since the memorable day of the vision. Lahiri Mahasaya took a definite interest in your own birth. Your life shall surely be linked with his own: the master's blessing never fails.”

Lahiri Mahasaya left this world shortly after I had entered it. His picture, in an ornate frame, always graced our family altar in the various cities to which Father was transferred by his office. Many a morning and evening found Mother and me meditating before an improvised shrine, offering flowers dipped in fragrant sandalwood paste. With frankincense and myrrh as well as our united devotions, we honored the divinity which had found full expression in Lahiri Mahasaya.

His picture had a surpassing influence over my life. As I grew, the thought of the master grew with me. In meditation I would often see his photographic image emerge from its small frame and, taking a living form, sit before me. When I attempted to touch the feet of his luminous body, it would change and again become the picture. As childhood slipped into boyhood, I found Lahiri Mahasaya transformed in my mind from a little image, cribbed in a frame, to a living, enlightening presence. I frequently prayed to him in moments of trial or confusion, finding within me his solacing direction. At first I grieved because he was no longer physically living. As I began to discover his secret omnipresence, I lamented no more. He had often written to those of his disciples who were over-anxious to see him: “Why come to view my bones and flesh, when I am ever within range of your *kut-astha* (spiritual sight)?”

I was blessed about the age of eight with a wonderful healing through the photograph of Lahiri Mahasaya. This experience gave intensification to my love. While at our family estate in Ichapur, Bengal, I was stricken with Asiatic cholera. My life was despaired of; the doctors could do nothing. At my bedside, Mother frantically motioned me to look at Lahiri Mahasaya's picture on the wall above my head.

“Bow to him mentally!” She knew I was too feeble even to lift my hands in salutation. “If you really show your devotion and inwardly kneel before him, your life will be spared!”

I gazed at his photograph and saw there a blinding light, enveloping my body and

the entire room. My nausea and other uncontrollable symptoms disappeared; I was well. At once I felt strong enough to bend over and touch Mother's feet in appreciation of her immeasurable faith in her guru. Mother pressed her head repeatedly against the little picture.

"O Omnipresent Master, I thank thee that thy light hath healed my son!"

I realized that she too had witnessed the luminous blaze through which I had instantly recovered from a usually fatal disease.

One of my most precious possessions is that same photograph. Given to Father by Lahiri Mahasaya himself, it carries a holy vibration. The picture had a miraculous origin. I heard the story from Father's brother disciple, Kali Kumar Roy.

It appears that the master had an aversion to being photographed. Over his protest, a group picture was once taken of him and a cluster of devotees, including Kali Kumar Roy. It was an amazed photographer who discovered that the plate which had clear images of all the disciples, revealed nothing more than a blank space in the center where he had reasonably expected to find the outlines of Lahiri Mahasaya. The phenomenon was widely discussed.

A certain student and expert photographer, Ganga Dhar Babu, boasted that the fugitive figure would not escape him. The next morning, as the guru sat in lotus posture on a wooden bench with a screen behind him, Ganga Dhar Babu arrived with his equipment. Taking every precaution for success, he greedily exposed twelve plates. On each one he soon found the imprint of the wooden bench and screen, but once again the master's form was missing.

With tears and shattered pride, Ganga Dhar Babu sought out his guru. It was many hours before Lahiri Mahasaya broke his silence with a pregnant comment:

"I am Spirit. Can your camera reflect the omnipresent Invisible?"

"I see it cannot! But, Holy Sir, I lovingly desire a picture of the bodily temple where alone, to my narrow vision, that Spirit appears fully to dwell."

"Come, then, tomorrow morning. I will pose for you."

Again the photographer focused his camera. This time the sacred figure, not cloaked with mysterious imperceptibility, was sharp on the plate. The master never posed for another picture; at least, I have seen none.

The photograph is reproduced in this book. Lahiri Mahasaya's fair features, of a universal cast, hardly suggest to what race he belonged. His intense joy of God-communion is slightly revealed in a somewhat enigmatic smile. His eyes, half open to denote a nominal direction on the outer world, are half closed also. Completely oblivious to the poor lures of the earth, he was fully awake at all times to the spiritual problems of seekers who approached for his bounty.

Shortly after my healing through the potency of the guru's picture, I had an

influential spiritual vision. Sitting on my bed one morning, I fell into a deep reverie.

“What is behind the darkness of closed eyes?” This probing thought came powerfully into my mind. An immense flash of light at once manifested to my inward gaze. Divine shapes of saints, sitting in meditation posture in mountain caves, formed like miniature cinema pictures on the large screen of radiance within my forehead.

“Who are you?” I spoke aloud.

“We are the Himalayan yogis.” The celestial response is difficult to describe; my heart was thrilled.

“Ah, I long to go to the Himalayas and become like you!” The vision vanished, but the silvery beams expanded in ever-widening circles to infinity.

“What is this wondrous glow?”

“I am Iswara.<sup>10</sup> I am Light.” The voice was as murmuring clouds.

“I want to be one with Thee!”

Out of the slow dwindling of my divine ecstasy, I salvaged a permanent legacy of inspiration to seek God. “He is eternal, ever-new Joy!” This memory persisted long after the day of rapture.

Another early recollection is outstanding; and literally so, for I bear the scar to this day. My elder sister Uma and I were seated in the early morning under a *neem* tree in our Gorakhpur compound. She was helping me with a Bengali primer, what time I could spare my gaze from the near-by parrots eating ripe margosa fruit. Uma complained of a boil on her leg, and fetched a jar of ointment. I smeared a bit of the salve on my forearm.

“Why do you use medicine on a healthy arm?”

“Well, Sis, I feel I am going to have a boil tomorrow. I am testing your ointment on the spot where the boil will appear.”

“You little liar!”

“Sis, don’t call me a liar until you see what happens in the morning.” Indignation filled me.

Uma was unimpressed, and thrice repeated her taunt. An adamant resolution sounded in my voice as I made slow reply.

“By the power of will in me, I say that tomorrow I shall have a fairly large boil in this exact place on my arm; and *your* boil shall swell to twice its present size!”

Morning found me with a stalwart boil on the indicated spot; the dimensions of Uma’s boil had doubled. With a shriek, my sister rushed to Mother. “Mukunda has become a necromancer!” Gravely, Mother instructed me never to use the power of words for doing harm. I have always remembered her counsel, and followed it.

My boil was surgically treated. A noticeable scar, left by the doctor’s incision, is present today. On my right forearm is a constant reminder of the power in man’s



sheer word.

Those simple and apparently harmless phrases to Uma, spoken with deep concentration, had possessed sufficient hidden force to explode like bombs and produce definite, though injurious, effects. I understood, later, that the explosive vibratory power in speech could be wisely directed to free one's life from difficulties, and thus operate without scar or rebuke.<sup>11</sup>

Our family moved to Lahore in the Punjab. There I acquired a picture of the Divine Mother in the form of the Goddess Kali.<sup>12</sup> It sanctified a small informal shrine on the balcony of our home. An unequivocal conviction came over me that fulfillment would crown any of my prayers uttered in that sacred spot. Standing there with Uma one day, I watched two kites flying over the roofs of the buildings on the opposite side of the very narrow lane.

"Why are you so quiet?" Uma pushed me playfully.

"I am just thinking how wonderful it is that Divine Mother gives me whatever I ask."

"I suppose She would give you those two kites!" My sister laughed derisively.

"Why not?" I began silent prayers for their possession.

Matches are played in India with kites whose strings are covered with glue and ground glass. Each player attempts to sever the string of his opponent. A freed kite sails over the roofs; there is great fun in catching it. Inasmuch as Uma and I were on the balcony, it seemed impossible that any loosed kite could come into our hands; its string would naturally dangle over the roofs.

The players across the lane began their match. One string was cut; immediately the kite floated in my direction. It was stationary for a moment, through sudden abatement of breeze, which sufficed to firmly entangle the string with a cactus plant on top of the opposite house. A perfect loop was formed for my seizure. I handed the prize to Uma.

"It was just an extraordinary accident, and not an answer to your prayer. If the other kite comes to you, then I shall believe." Sister's dark eyes conveyed more amazement than her words.

I continued my prayers with a crescendo intensity. A forcible tug by the other player resulted in the abrupt loss of his kite. It headed toward me, dancing in the wind. My helpful assistant, the cactus plant, again secured the kite string in the necessary loop by which I could grasp it. I presented my second trophy to Uma.

"Indeed, Divine Mother listens to you! This is all too uncanny for me!" Sister bolted away like a frightened fawn.

1. Spiritual teacher; from Sanskrit root gur, to raise, to uplift.



2. A practitioner of yoga, “union,” ancient Indian science of meditation on God.
3. My name was changed to Yogananda when I entered the ancient monastic Swami Order in 1914. My guru bestowed the religious title of *Paramhansa* on me in 1935 (see chapters<sup>24</sup> and <sup>42</sup>).
4. Traditionally, the second caste of warriors and rulers.
5. These ancient epics are the hoard of India’s history, mythology, and philosophy. An “Everyman’s Library” volume, *Ramayana and Mahabharata*, is a condensation in English verse by Romesh Dutt (New York: E. P. Dutton).
6. This noble Sanskrit poem, which occurs as part of the *Mahabharata* epic, is the Hindu Bible. The most poetical English translation is Edwin Arnold’s *The Song Celestial* (Philadelphia: David McKay, 75¢). One of the best translations with detailed commentary is Sri Aurobindo’s *Message of the Gita* (Jupiter Press, 16 Semudoss St., Madras, India, \$3.50).
7. *Babu* (Mister) is placed in Bengali names at the end.
8. The phenomenal powers possessed by great masters are explained in chapter 30, “The Law of Miracles.”
9. A yogic technique whereby the sensory tumult is stilled, permitting man to achieve an ever-increasing identity with cosmic consciousness. (See chapter 26.)
10. A Sanskrit name for God as Ruler of the universe; from the root *Is*, to rule. There are 108 names for God in the Hindu scriptures, each one carrying a different shade of philosophical meaning.
11. The infinite potencies of sound derive from the Creative Word, Aum, the cosmic vibratory power behind all atomic energies. Any word spoken with clear realization and deep concentration has a materializing value. Loud or silent repetition of inspiring words has been found effective in Coueism and similar systems of psychotherapy; the secret lies in the stepping-up of the mind’s vibratory rate. The poet Tennyson has left us, in his *Memoirs*, an account of his repetitious device for passing beyond the conscious mind into superconsciousness: “A kind of waking trance—this for lack of a better word—I have frequently had, quite up from boyhood, when I have been all alone,” Tennyson wrote. “This has come upon me through *repeating* my own name to myself silently, till all at once, as it were out of the intensity of the consciousness of individuality, individuality itself seemed to dissolve and fade away into boundless being, and this not a confused state but the clearest, the surest of the surest, utterly beyond words—where death was an almost laughable impossibility—the loss of personality (if so it were) seeming no extinction, but the only true life.” He wrote further: “It is no nebulous ecstasy, but a state of transcendent wonder, associated with absolute clearness of mind.”
12. Kali is a symbol of God in the aspect of eternal Mother Nature.



# Chapter 2

## *My Mother's Death and the Mystic Amulet*

MY MOTHER'S GREATEST desire was the marriage of my elder brother. "Ah, when I behold the face of Ananta's wife, I shall find heaven on this earth!" I frequently heard Mother express in these words her strong Indian sentiment for family continuity.

I was about eleven years old at the time of Ananta's betrothal. Mother was in Calcutta, joyously supervising the wedding preparations. Father and I alone remained at our home in Bareilly in northern India, whence Father had been transferred after two years at Lahore.

I had previously witnessed the splendor of nuptial rites for my two elder sisters, Roma and Uma; but for Ananta, as the eldest son, plans were truly elaborate. Mother was welcoming numerous relatives, daily arriving in Calcutta from distant homes. She lodged them comfortably in a large, newly acquired house at 50 Amherst Street. Everything was in readiness—the banquet delicacies, the gay throne on which Brother was to be carried to the home of the bride-to-be, the rows of colorful lights, the mammoth cardboard elephants and camels, the English, Scottish and Indian orchestras, the professional entertainers, the priests for the ancient rituals.

Father and I, in gala spirits, were planning to join the family in time for the ceremony. Shortly before the great day, however, I had an ominous vision.

It was in Bareilly on a midnight. As I slept beside Father on the piazza of our bungalow, I was awakened by a peculiar flutter of the mosquito netting over the bed. The flimsy curtains parted and I saw the beloved form of my mother.

"Awaken your father!" Her voice was only a whisper. "Take the first available train, at four o'clock this morning. Rush to Calcutta if you would see me!" The wraithlike figure vanished.

"Father, Father! Mother is dying!" The terror in my tone aroused him instantly. I sobbed out the fatal tidings.

"Never mind that hallucination of yours." Father gave his characteristic negation to a new situation. "Your mother is in excellent health. If we get any bad news, we shall leave tomorrow."

“You shall never forgive yourself for not starting now!” Anguish caused me to add bitterly, “Nor shall I ever forgive you!”

The melancholy morning came with explicit words: “Mother dangerously ill; marriage postponed; come at once.”

Father and I left distractedly. One of my uncles met us en route at a transfer point. A train thundered toward us, looming with telescopic increase. From my inner tumult, an abrupt determination arose to hurl myself on the railroad tracks. Already bereft, I felt, of my mother, I could not endure a world suddenly barren to the bone. I loved Mother as my dearest friend on earth. Her solacing black eyes had been my surest refuge in the trifling tragedies of childhood.

“Does she yet live?” I stopped for one last question to my uncle.

“Of course she is alive!” He was not slow to interpret the desperation in my face. But I scarcely believed him.

When we reached our Calcutta home, it was only to confront the stunning mystery of death. I collapsed into an almost lifeless state. Years passed before any reconciliation entered my heart. Storming the very gates of heaven, my cries at last summoned the Divine Mother. Her words brought final healing to my suppurating wounds:

“It is I who have watched over thee, life after life, in the tenderness of many mothers! See in My gaze the two black eyes, the lost beautiful eyes, thou seekest!”

Father and I returned to Bareilly soon after the crematory rites for the well-beloved. Early every morning I made a pathetic memorial-pilgrimage to a large *sheoli* tree which shaded the smooth, green-gold lawn before our bungalow. In poetical moments, I thought that the white *sheoli* flowers were strewing themselves with a willing devotion over the grassy altar. Mingling tears with the dew, I often observed a strange other-worldly light emerging from the dawn. Intense pangs of longing for God assailed me. I felt powerfully drawn to the Himalayas.

One of my cousins, fresh from a period of travel in the holy hills, visited us in Bareilly. I listened eagerly to his tales about the high mountain abode of yogis and swamis.<sup>1</sup>

“Let us run away to the Himalayas.” My suggestion one day to Dwarka Prasad, the young son of our landlord in Bareilly, fell on unsympathetic ears. He revealed my plan to my elder brother, who had just arrived to see Father. Instead of laughing lightly over this impractical scheme of a small boy, Ananta made it a definite point to ridicule me.

“Where is your orange robe? You can’t be a swami without that!”

But I was inexplicably thrilled by his words. They brought a clear picture of myself roaming about India as a monk. Perhaps they awakened memories of a past life; in any case, I began to see with what natural ease I would wear the garb of that



MY MOTHER  
*A Disciple of Labiri Mahasaya*

anciently-founded monastic order.

Chatting one morning with Dwarka, I felt a love for God descending with avanchic force. My companion was only partly attentive to the ensuing eloquence, but I was wholeheartedly listening to myself.

I fled that afternoon toward Naini Tal in the Himalayan foothills. Ananta gave determined chase; I was forced to return sadly to Bareilly. The only pilgrimage permitted me was the customary one at dawn to the *sheoli* tree. My heart wept for the lost Mothers, human and divine.

The rent left in the family fabric by Mother's death was irreparable. Father never remarried during his nearly forty remaining years. Assuming the difficult role of Father-Mother to his little flock, he grew noticeably more tender, more approachable. With calmness and insight, he solved the various family problems. After office hours he retired like a hermit to the cell of his room, practicing *Kriya Yoga* in a sweet serenity. Long after Mother's death, I attempted to engage an English nurse to attend to details that would make my parent's life more comfortable. But Father shook his head.

"Service to me ended with your mother." His eyes were remote with a lifelong devotion. "I will not accept ministrations from any other woman."

Fourteen months after Mother's passing, I learned that she had left me a momentous message. Ananta was present at her deathbed and had recorded her words. Although she had asked that the disclosure be made to me in one year, my brother delayed. He was soon to leave Bareilly for Calcutta, to marry the girl Mother had chosen for him.<sup>2</sup> One evening he summoned me to his side.

"Mukunda, I have been reluctant to give you strange tidings." Ananta's tone held a note of resignation. "My fear was to inflame your desire to leave home. But in any case you are bristling with divine ardor. When I captured you recently on your way to the Himalayas, I came to a definite resolve. I must not further postpone the fulfillment of my solemn promise." My brother handed me a small box, and delivered Mother's message.

"Let these words be my final blessing, my beloved son Mukunda!" Mother had said. "The hour is here when I must relate a number of phenomenal events following your birth. I first knew your destined path when you were but a babe in my arms. I carried you then to the home of my guru in Benares. Almost hidden behind a throng of disciples, I could barely see Lahiri Mahasaya as he sat in deep meditation.

"While I patted you, I was praying that the great guru take notice and bestow a blessing. As my silent devotional demand grew in intensity, he opened his eyes and beckoned me to approach. The others made a way for me; I bowed at the sacred feet. My master seated you on his lap, placing his hand on your forehead by way of

spiritually baptizing you.

“Little mother, thy son will be a yogi. As a spiritual engine, he will carry many souls to God’s kingdom.’

“My heart leaped with joy to find my secret prayer granted by the omniscient guru. Shortly before your birth, he had told me you would follow his path.

“Later, my son, your vision of the Great Light was known to me and your sister Roma, as from the next room we observed you motionless on the bed. Your little face was illuminated; your voice rang with iron resolve as you spoke of going to the Himalayas in quest of the Divine.

“In these ways, dear son, I came to know that your road lies far from worldly ambitions. The most singular event in my life brought further confirmation—an event which now impels my deathbed message.

“It was an interview with a sage in the Punjab. While our family was living in Lahore, one morning the servant came precipitantly into my room.

“Mistress, a strange *sadhu*<sup>3</sup> is here. He insists that he “see the mother of Mukunda.”

“These simple words struck a profound chord within me; I went at once to greet the visitor. Bowing at his feet, I sensed that before me was a true man of God.

“Mother,’ he said, ‘the great masters wish you to know that your stay on earth will not be long. Your next illness shall prove to be your last.’<sup>4</sup> There was a silence, during which I felt no alarm but only a vibration of great peace. Finally he addressed me again:

“You are to be the custodian of a certain silver amulet. I will not give it to you today; to demonstrate the truth in my words, the talisman shall materialize in your hands tomorrow as you meditate. On your deathbed, you must instruct your eldest son Ananta to keep the amulet for one year and then to hand it over to your second son. Mukunda will understand the meaning of the talisman from the great ones. He should receive it about the time he is ready to renounce all worldly hopes and start his vital search for God. When he has retained the amulet for some years, and when it has served its purpose, it shall vanish. Even if kept in the most secret spot, it shall return whence it came.’

“I proffered alms<sup>5</sup> to the saint, and bowed before him in great reverence. Not taking the offering, he departed with a blessing. The next evening, as I sat with folded hands in meditation, a silver amulet materialized between my palms, even as the *sadhu* had promised. It made itself known by a cold, smooth touch. I have jealously guarded it for more than two years, and now leave it in Ananta’s keeping. Do not grieve for me, as I shall have been ushered by my great guru into the arms of the Infinite. Farewell, my child; the Cosmic Mother will protect you.”

A blaze of illumination came over me with possession of the amulet; many dormant

memories awakened. The talisman, round and anciently quaint, was covered with Sanskrit characters. I understood that it came from teachers of past lives, who were invisibly guiding my steps. A further significance there was, indeed; but one does not reveal fully the heart of an amulet.

How the talisman finally vanished amidst deeply unhappy circumstances of my life; and how its loss was a herald of my gain of a guru, cannot be told in this chapter.

But the small boy, thwarted in his attempts to reach the Himalayas, daily traveled far on the wings of his amulet.

1. Sanskrit root meaning of *swami* is “he who is one with his Self (*Swa*).” Applied to a member of the Indian order of monks, the title has the formal respect of “the reverend.”
2. The Indian custom, whereby parents choose the life-partner for their child, has resisted the blunt assaults of time. The percentage is high of happy Indian marriages.
3. An anchorite; one who pursues a *sadhana* or path of spiritual discipline.
4. When I discovered by these words that Mother had possessed secret knowledge of a short life, I understood for the first time why she had been insistent on hastening the plans for Ananta’s marriage. Though she died before the wedding, her natural maternal wish had been to witness the rites.
5. A customary gesture of respect to *sadhus*.





# Chapter 3

## *The Saint With Two Bodies*

“FATHER, IF I promise to return home without coercion, may I take a sight-seeing trip to Benares?”

My keen love of travel was seldom hindered by Father. He permitted me, even as a mere boy, to visit many cities and pilgrimage spots. Usually one or more of my friends accompanied me; we would travel comfortably on first-class passes provided by Father. His position as a railroad official was fully satisfactory to the nomads in the family.

Father promised to give my request due consideration. The next day he summoned me and held out a round-trip pass from Bareilly to Benares, a number of rupee notes, and two letters.

“I have a business matter to propose to a Benares friend, Kedar Nath Babu. Unfortunately I have lost his address. But I believe you will be able to get this letter to him through our common friend, Swami Pranabananda. The swami, my brother disciple, has attained an exalted spiritual stature. You will benefit by his company; this second note will serve as your introduction.”

Father’s eyes twinkled as he added, “Mind, no more flights from home!”

I set forth with the zest of my twelve years (though time has never dimmed my delight in new scenes and strange faces). Reaching Benares, I proceeded immediately to the swami’s residence. The front door was open; I made my way to a long, hall-like room on the second floor. A rather stout man, wearing only a loincloth, was seated in lotus posture on a slightly raised platform. His head and unwrinkled face were clean-shaven; a beatific smile played about his lips. To dispel my thought that I had intruded, he greeted me as an old friend.

“*Baba anand* (bliss to my dear one).” His welcome was given heartily in a childlike voice. I knelt and touched his feet.

“Are you Swami Pranabananda?”

He nodded. “Are you Bhagabati’s son?” His words were out before I had had time to get Father’s letter from my pocket. In astonishment, I handed him the note of introduction, which now seemed superfluous.

“Of course I will locate Kedar Nath Babu for you.” The saint again surprised me by his clairvoyance. He glanced at the letter, and made a few affectionate references to my parent.

“You know, I am enjoying two pensions. One is by the recommendation of your father, for whom I once worked in the railroad office. The other is by the recommendation of my Heavenly Father, for whom I have conscientiously finished my earthly duties in life.”

I found this remark very obscure. “What kind of pension, sir, do you receive from the Heavenly Father? Does He drop money in your lap?”

He laughed. “I mean a pension of fathomless peace—a reward for many years of deep meditation. I never crave money now. My few material needs are amply provided for. Later you will understand the significance of a second pension.”

Abruptly terminating our conversation, the saint became gravely motionless. A sphinxlike air enveloped him. At first his eyes sparkled, as if observing something of interest, then grew dull. I felt abashed at his pauciloquy; he had not yet told me how I could meet Father’s friend. A trifle restlessly, I looked about me in the bare room, empty except for us two. My idle gaze took in his wooden sandals, lying under the platform seat.

“Little sir,<sup>1</sup> don’t get worried. The man you wish to see will be with you in half an hour.” The yogi was reading my mind—a feat not too difficult at the moment!

Again he fell into inscrutable silence. My watch informed me that thirty minutes had elapsed.

The swami aroused himself. “I think Kedar Nath Babu is nearing the door.”

I heard somebody coming up the stairs. An amazed incomprehension arose suddenly; my thoughts raced in confusion: “How is it possible that Father’s friend has been summoned to this place without the help of a messenger? The swami has spoken to no one but myself since my arrival!”

Abruptly I quitted the room and descended the steps. Halfway down I met a thin, fair-skinned man of medium height. He appeared to be in a hurry.

“Are you Kedar Nath Babu?” Excitement colored my voice.

“Yes. Are you not Bhagabati’s son who has been waiting here to meet me?” He smiled in friendly fashion.

“Sir, how do you happen to come here?” I felt baffled resentment over his inexplicable presence.

“Everything is mysterious today! Less than an hour ago I had just finished my bath in the Ganges when Swami Pranabananda approached me. I have no idea how he knew I was there at that time.

“Bhagabati’s son is waiting for you in my apartment,” he said. “Will you come



SWAMI PRANABANANDA  
*“The Saint With Two Bodies”*  
An Exalted Disciple of Lahiri Mahasaya

with me?’ I gladly agreed. As we proceeded hand in hand, the swami in his wooden sandals was strangely able to outpace me, though I wore these stout walking shoes.

“How long will it take you to reach my place?’ Pranabanandaji suddenly halted to ask me this question.

“About half an hour.’

“I have something else to do at present.’ He gave me an enigmatical glance. ‘I must leave you behind. You can join me in my house, where Bhagabati’s son and I will be awaiting you.’

“Before I could remonstrate, he dashed swiftly past me and disappeared in the crowd. I walked here as fast as possible.”

This explanation only increased my bewilderment. I inquired how long he had known the swami.

“We met a few times last year, but not recently. I was very glad to see him again today at the bathing *ghat*.”

“I cannot believe my ears! Am I losing my mind? Did you meet him in a vision, or did you actually see him, touch his hand, and hear the sound of his feet?”

“I don’t know what you’re driving at!” He flushed angrily. “I am not lying to you. Can’t you understand that only through the swami could I have known you were waiting at this place for me?”

“Why, that man, Swami Pranabananda, has not left my sight a moment since I first came about an hour ago.” I blurted out the whole story.

His eyes opened widely. “Are we living in this material age, or are we dreaming? I never expected to witness such a miracle in my life! I thought this swami was just an ordinary man, and now I find he can materialize an extra body and work through it!” Together we entered the saint’s room.

“Look, those are the very sandals he was wearing at the *ghat*,” Kedar Nath Babu whispered. “He was clad only in a loincloth, just as I see him now.”

As the visitor bowed before him, the saint turned to me with a quizzical smile.

“Why are you stupefied at all this? The subtle unity of the phenomenal world is not hidden from true yogis. I instantly see and converse with my disciples in distant Calcutta. They can similarly transcend at will every obstacle of gross matter.”

It was probably in an effort to stir spiritual ardor in my young breast that the swami had condescended to tell me of his powers of astral radio and television.<sup>2</sup> But instead of enthusiasm, I experienced only an awe-stricken fear. Inasmuch as I was destined to undertake my divine search through one particular guru—Sri Yukteswar, whom I had not yet met—I felt no inclination to accept Pranabananda as my teacher. I glanced at him doubtfully, wondering if it were he or his counterpart before me.

The master sought to banish my disquietude by bestowing a soul-awakening gaze,

and by some inspiring words about his guru.

“Lahiri Mahasaya was the greatest yogi I ever knew. He was Divinity Itself in the form of flesh.”

If a disciple, I reflected, could materialize an extra fleshly form at will, what miracles indeed could be barred to his master?

“I will tell you how priceless is a guru’s help. I used to meditate with another disciple for eight hours every night. We had to work at the railroad office during the day. Finding difficulty in carrying on my clerical duties, I desired to devote my whole time to God. For eight years I persevered, meditating half the night. I had wonderful results; tremendous spiritual perceptions illumined my mind. But a little veil always remained between me and the Infinite. Even with super-human earnestness, I found the final irrevocable union to be denied me. One evening I paid a visit to Lahiri Mahasaya and pleaded for his divine intercession. My importunities continued during the entire night.

“Angelic Guru, my spiritual anguish is such that I can no longer bear my life without meeting the Great Beloved face to face!”

“What can I do? You must meditate more profoundly.”

“I am appealing to Thee, O God my Master! I see Thee materialized before me in a physical body; bless me that I may perceive Thee in Thine infinite form!”

“Lahiri Mahasaya extended his hand in a benign gesture. ‘You may go now and meditate. I have interceded for you with Brahma.’<sup>3</sup>

“Immeasurably uplifted, I returned to my home. In meditation that night, the burning Goal of my life was achieved. Now I ceaselessly enjoy the spiritual pension. Never from that day has the Blissful Creator remained hidden from my eyes behind any screen of delusion.”

Pranabananda’s face was suffused with divine light. The peace of another world entered my heart; all fear had fled. The saint made a further confidence.

“Some months later I returned to Lahiri Mahasaya and tried to thank him for his bestowal of the infinite gift. Then I mentioned another matter.

“Divine Guru, I can no longer work in the office. Please release me. Brahma keeps me continuously intoxicated.”

“Apply for a pension from your company.”

“What reason shall I give, so early in my service?”

“Say what you feel.”

“The next day I made my application. The doctor inquired the grounds for my premature request.

“At work, I find an overpowering sensation rising in my spine.<sup>4</sup> It permeates my whole body, unfitting me for the performance of my duties.”

“Without further questioning the physician recommended me highly for a pension, which I soon received. I know the divine will of Lahiri Mahasaya worked through the doctor and the railroad officials, including your father. Automatically they obeyed the great guru’s spiritual direction, and freed me for a life of unbroken communion with the Beloved.”<sup>5</sup>

After this extraordinary revelation, Swami Pranabananda retired into one of his long silences. As I was taking leave, touching his feet reverently, he gave me his blessing:

“Your life belongs to the path of renunciation and yoga. I shall see you again, with your father, later on.” The years brought fulfillment to both these predictions.<sup>6</sup>

Kedar Nath Babu walked by my side in the gathering darkness. I delivered Father’s letter, which my companion read under a street lamp.

“Your father suggests that I take a position in the Calcutta office of his railroad company. How pleasant to look forward to at least one of the pensions that Swami Pranabananda enjoys! But it is impossible; I cannot leave Benares. Alas, two bodies are not yet for me!”

1. *Choto Mahasaya* is the term by which a number of Indian saints addressed me. It translates “little sir.”
2. In its own way, physical science is affirming the validity of laws discovered by yogis through mental science. For example, a demonstration that man has televisual powers was given on Nov. 26, 1934 at the Royal University of Rome. “Dr. Giuseppe Calligaris, professor of neuro-psychology, pressed certain points of a subject’s body and the subject responded with minute descriptions of other persons and objects on the opposite side of a wall. Dr. Calligaris told the other professors that if certain areas on the skin are agitated, the subject is given super-sensorial impressions enabling him to see objects that he could not otherwise perceive. To enable his subject to discern things on the other side of a wall, Professor Calligaris pressed on a spot to the right of the thorax for fifteen minutes. Dr. Calligaris said that if other spots of the body were agitated, the subjects could see objects at any distance, regardless of whether they had ever before seen those objects.”
3. God in His aspect of Creator; from Sanskrit root *brih*, to expand. When Emerson’s poem *Brahma* appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1857, most the readers were bewildered. Emerson chuckled. “Tell them,” he said, “to say ‘Jehovah’ instead of ‘Brahma’ and they will not feel any perplexity.”
4. In deep meditation, the first experience of Spirit is on the altar of the spine, and then in the brain. The torrential bliss is overwhelming, but the yogi learns to control its outward manifestations.
5. After his retirement, Pranabananda wrote one of the most profound commentaries on the Bhagavad Gita, available in Bengali and Hindi.
6. See chapter 27.





# Chapter 4

## *My Interrupted Flight Toward the Himalayas*

“LEAVE YOUR CLASSROOM on some trifling pretext, and engage a hackney carriage. Stop in the lane where no one in my house can see you.”

These were my final instructions to Amar Mitter, a high school friend who planned to accompany me to the Himalayas. We had chosen the following day for our flight. Precautions were necessary, as Ananta exercised a vigilant eye. He was determined to foil the plans of escape which he suspected were uppermost in my mind. The amulet, like a spiritual yeast, was silently at work within me. Amidst the Himalayan snows, I hoped to find the master whose face often appeared to me in visions.

The family was living now in Calcutta, where Father had been permanently transferred. Following the patriarchal Indian custom, Ananta had brought his bride to live in our home, now at 4 Gurpar Road. There in a small attic room I engaged in daily meditations and prepared my mind for the divine search.

The memorable morning arrived with inauspicious rain. Hearing the wheels of Amar's carriage in the road, I hastily tied together a blanket, a pair of sandals, Lahiri Mahasaya's picture, a copy of the Bhagavad Gita, a string of prayer beads, and two loincloths. This bundle I threw from my third-story window. I ran down the steps and passed my uncle, buying fish at the door.

“What is the excitement?” His gaze roved suspiciously over my person.

I gave him a noncommittal smile and walked to the lane. Retrieving my bundle, I joined Amar with conspiratorial caution. We drove to Chadni Chowk, a merchandise center. For months we had been saving our tiffin money to buy English clothes. Knowing that my clever brother could easily play the part of a detective, we thought to outwit him by European garb.

On the way to the station, we stopped for my cousin, Jotin Ghosh, whom I called Jatinda. He was a new convert, longing for a guru in the Himalayas. He donned the new suit we had in readiness. Well-camouflaged, we hoped! A deep elation possessed our hearts.

“All we need now are canvas shoes.” I led my companions to a shop displaying rubber-soled footwear. “Articles of leather, gotten only through the slaughter of

animals, must be absent on this holy trip.” I halted on the street to remove the leather cover from my Bhagavad Gita, and the leather straps from my English-made *sola topee* (helmet).

At the station we bought tickets to Burdwan, where we planned to transfer for Hardwar in the Himalayan foothills. As soon as the train, like ourselves, was in flight, I gave utterance to a few of my glorious anticipations.

“Just imagine!” I ejaculated. “We shall be initiated by the masters and experience the trance of cosmic consciousness. Our flesh will be charged with such magnetism that wild animals of the Himalayas will come tamely near us. Tigers will be no more than meek house cats awaiting our caresses!”

This remark—picturing a prospect I considered entrancing, both metaphorically and literally—brought an enthusiastic smile from Amar. But Jatinda averted his gaze, directing it through the window at the scampering landscape.

“Let the money be divided in three portions.” Jatinda broke a long silence with this suggestion. “Each of us should buy his own ticket at Burdwan. Thus no one at the station will surmise that we are running away together.”

I unsuspectingly agreed. At dusk our train stopped at Burdwan. Jatinda entered the ticket office; Amar and I sat on the platform. We waited fifteen minutes, then made unavailing inquiries. Searching in all directions, we shouted Jatinda’s name with the urgency of fright. But he had faded into the dark unknown surrounding the little station.

I was completely unnerved, shocked to a peculiar numbness. That God would countenance this depressing episode! The romantic occasion of my first carefully-planned flight after Him was cruelly marred.

“Amar, we must return home.” I was weeping like a child. “Jatinda’s callous departure is an ill omen. This trip is doomed to failure.”

“Is this your love for the Lord? Can’t you stand the little test of a treacherous companion?”

Through Amar’s suggestion of a divine test, my heart steadied itself. We refreshed ourselves with famous Burdwan sweetmeats, *sitabhog* (food for the goddess) and *motichur* (nuggets of sweet pearl). In a few hours, we entrained for Hardwar, via Bareilly. Changing trains at Moghul Serai, we discussed a vital matter as we waited on the platform.

“Amar, we may soon be closely questioned by railroad officials. I am not underrating my brother’s ingenuity! No matter what the outcome, I will not speak untruth.”

“All I ask of you, Mukunda, is to keep still. Don’t laugh or grin while I am talking.”

At this moment, a European station agent accosted me. He waved a telegram whose import I immediately grasped.

“Are you running away from home in anger?”

“No!” I was glad his choice of words permitted me to make emphatic reply. Not anger but “divinest melancholy” was responsible, I knew, for my unconventional behavior.

The official then turned to Amar. The duel of wits that followed hardly permitted me to maintain the counseled stoic gravity.

“Where is the third boy?” The man injected a full ring of authority into his voice. “Come on; speak the truth!”

“Sir, I notice you are wearing eyeglasses. Can’t you see that we are only two?” Amar smiled impudently. “I am not a magician; I can’t conjure up a third companion.”

The official, noticeably disconcerted by this impertinence, sought a new field of attack.

“What is your name?”

“I am called Thomas. I am the son of an English mother and a converted Christian Indian father.”

“What is your friend’s name?”

“I call him Thompson.”

By this time my inward mirth had reached a zenith; I unceremoniously made for the train, whistling for departure. Amar followed with the official, who was credulous and obliging enough to put us into a European compartment. It evidently pained him to think of two half-English boys traveling in the section allotted to natives. After his polite exit, I lay back on the seat and laughed uncontrollably. My friend wore an expression of blithe satisfaction at having outwitted a veteran European official.

On the platform I had contrived to read the telegram. From my brother, it went thus: “Three Bengali boys in English clothes running away from home toward Hardwar via Moghul Serai. Please detain them until my arrival. Ample reward for your services.”

“Amar, I told you not to leave marked timetables in your home.” My glance was reproachful. “Brother must have found one there.”

My friend sheepishly acknowledged the thrust. We halted briefly in Bareilly, where Dwarka Prasad awaited us with a telegram from Ananta. My old friend tried valiantly to detain us; I convinced him that our flight had not been undertaken lightly. As on a previous occasion, Dwarka refused my invitation to set forth to the Himalayas.

While our train stood in a station that night, and I was half asleep, Amar was awakened by another questioning official. He, too, fell a victim to the hybrid charms of “Thomas” and “Thompson.” The train bore us triumphantly into a dawn arrival

at Hardwar. The majestic mountains loomed invitingly in the distance. We dashed through the station and entered the freedom of city crowds. Our first act was to change into native costume, as Ananta had somehow penetrated our European disguise. A premonition of capture weighed on my mind.

Deeming it advisable to leave Hardwar at once, we bought tickets to proceed north to Rishikesh, a soil long hallowed by feet of many masters. I had already boarded the train, while Amar lagged on the platform. He was brought to an abrupt halt by a shout from a policeman. Our unwelcome guardian escorted us to a station bungalow and took charge of our money. He explained courteously that it was his duty to hold us until my elder brother arrived.

Learning that the truants' destination had been the Himalayas, the officer related a strange story.

"I see you are crazy about saints! You will never meet a greater man of God than the one I saw only yesterday. My brother officer and I first encountered him five days ago. We were patrolling by the Ganges, on a sharp lookout for a certain murderer. Our instructions were to capture him, alive or dead. He was known to be masquerading as a *sadhu* in order to rob pilgrims. A short way before us, we spied a figure which resembled the description of the criminal. He ignored our command to stop; we ran to overpower him. Approaching his back, I wielded my ax with tremendous force; the man's right arm was severed almost completely from his body.

"Without outcry or any glance at the ghastly wound, the stranger astonishingly continued his swift pace. As we jumped in front of him, he spoke quietly.

"I am not the murderer you are seeking.'

"I was deeply mortified to see I had injured the person of a divine-looking sage. Prostrating myself at his feet, I implored his pardon, and offered my turban-cloth to staunch the heavy spurts of blood.

"Son, that was just an understandable mistake on your part.' The saint regarded me kindly. 'Run along, and don't reproach yourself. The Beloved Mother is taking care of me.' He pushed his dangling arm into its stump and lo! it adhered; the blood inexplicably ceased to flow.

"Come to me under yonder tree in three days and you will find me fully healed. Thus you will feel no remorse.'

"Yesterday my brother officer and I went eagerly to the designated spot. The *sadhu* was there and allowed us to examine his arm. It bore no scar or trace of hurt!

"I am going via Rishikesh to the Himalayan solitudes.' He blessed us as he departed quickly. I feel that my life has been uplifted through his sanctity."

The officer concluded with a pious ejaculation; his experience had obviously moved him beyond his usual depths. With an impressive gesture, he handed me a printed

clipping about the miracle. In the usual garbled manner of the sensational type of newspaper (not missing, alas! even in India), the reporter's version was slightly exaggerated: it indicated that the *sadhu* had been almost decapitated!

Amar and I lamented that we had missed the great yogi who could forgive his persecutor in such a Christlike way. India, materially poor for the last two centuries, yet has an inexhaustible fund of divine wealth; spiritual "skyscrapers" may occasionally be encountered by the wayside, even by worldly men like this policeman.

We thanked the officer for relieving our tedium with his marvelous story. He was probably intimating that he was more fortunate than we: he had met an illumined saint without effort; our earnest search had ended, not at the feet of a master, but in a coarse police station!

So near the Himalayas and yet, in our captivity, so far, I told Amar I felt doubly impelled to seek freedom.

"Let us slip away when opportunity offers. We can go on foot to holy Rishikesh." I smiled encouragingly.

But my companion had turned pessimist as soon as the stalwart prop of our money had been taken from us.

"If we started a trek over such dangerous jungle land, we should finish, not in the city of saints, but in the stomachs of tigers!"

Ananta and Amar's brother arrived after three days. Amar greeted his relative with affectionate relief. I was unreconciled; Ananta got no more from me than a severe upbraiding.

"I understand how you feel." My brother spoke soothingly. "All I ask of you is to accompany me to Benares to meet a certain saint, and go on to Calcutta to visit your grieving father for a few days. Then you can resume your search here for a master."

Amar entered the conversation at this point to disclaim any intention of returning to Hardwar with me. He was enjoying the familial warmth. But I knew I would never abandon the quest for my guru.

Our party entrained for Benares. There I had a singular and instant response to my prayers.

A clever scheme had been prearranged by Ananta. Before seeing me at Hardwar, he had stopped in Benares to ask a certain scriptural authority to interview me later. Both the pundit and his son had promised to undertake my dissuasion from the path of a sannyasi.<sup>1</sup>

Ananta took me to their home. The son, a young man of ebullient manner, greeted me in the courtyard. He engaged me in a lengthy philosophic discourse. Professing to have a clairvoyant knowledge of my future, he discountenanced my idea of being a monk.

“You will meet continual misfortune, and be unable to find God, if you insist on deserting your ordinary responsibilities! You cannot work out your past karma<sup>2</sup> without worldly experiences.”

Krishna’s immortal words rose to my lips in reply: “Even he with the worst of karma who ceaselessly meditates on Me quickly loses the effects of his past bad actions. Becoming a high-souled being, he soon attains perennial peace. Arjuna, know this for certain: the devotee who puts his trust in Me never perishes!”<sup>3</sup>

But the forceful prognostications of the young man had slightly shaken my confidence. With all the fervor of my heart I prayed silently to God:

“Please solve my bewilderment and answer me, right here and now, if Thou dost desire me to lead the life of a renunciate or a worldly man!”

I noticed a *sadhu* of noble countenance standing just outside the compound of the pundit’s house. Evidently he had overheard the spirited conversation between the self-styled clairvoyant and myself, for the stranger called me to his side. I felt a tremendous power flowing from his calm eyes.

“Son, don’t listen to that ignoramus. In response to your prayer, the Lord tells me to assure you that your sole path in this life is that of the renunciate.”

With astonishment as well as gratitude, I smiled happily at this decisive message.

“Come away from that man!” The “ignoramus” was calling me from the courtyard. My saintly guide raised his hand in blessing and slowly departed.

“That *sadhu* is just as crazy as you are.” It was the hoary-headed pundit who made this charming observation. He and his son were gazing at me lugubriously. “I heard that he too has left his home in a vague search for God.”

I turned away. To Ananta I remarked that I would not engage in further discussion with our hosts. My brother agreed to an immediate departure; we soon entrained for Calcutta.

“Mr. Detective, how did you discover I had fled with two companions?” I vented my lively curiosity to Ananta during our homeward journey. He smiled mischievously.

“At your school, I found that Amar had left his classroom and had not returned. I went to his home the next morning and unearthed a marked timetable. Amar’s father was just leaving by carriage and was talking to the coachman.

“My son will not ride with me to his school this morning. He has disappeared!” the father moaned.

“I heard from a brother coachman that your son and two others, dressed in European suits, boarded the train at Howrah Station,’ the man stated. ‘They made a present of their leather shoes to the cab driver.’

“Thus I had three clues—the timetable, the trio of boys, and the English clothing.”

I was listening to Ananta’s disclosures with mingled mirth and vexation. Our





(left) I stand behind my elder brother, Ananta (right). Last Solstice Festival celebrated by Sri Yukteswar, December, 1935, My Guru is seated in the center; I am at his right, in the large courtyard of his hermitage in Serampore.

generosity to the coachman had been slightly misplaced!

“Of course I rushed to send telegrams to station officials in all the cities which Amar had underlined in the timetable. He had checked Bareilly, so I wired your friend Dwarka there. After inquiries in our Calcutta neighborhood, I learned that cousin Jatinda had been absent one night but had arrived home the following morning in European garb. I sought him out and invited him to dinner. He accepted, quite disarmed by my friendly manner. On the way I led him unsuspectingly to a police station. He was surrounded by several officers whom I had previously selected for their ferocious appearance. Under their formidable gaze, Jatinda agreed to account for his mysterious conduct.

“I started for the Himalayas in a buoyant spiritual mood,’ he explained. ‘Inspiration filled me at the prospect of meeting the masters. But as soon as Mukunda said, “During our ecstasies in the Himalayan caves, tigers will be spellbound and sit around us like tame pussies,” my spirits froze; beads of perspiration formed on my brow. “What then?” I thought. “If the vicious nature of the tigers be not changed through the power of our spiritual trance, shall they treat us with the kindness of house cats?” In my mind’s eye, I already saw myself the compulsory inmate of some tiger’s stomach—entering there not at once with the whole body, but by installments of its several parts!”

My anger at Jatinda’s vanishment was evaporated in laughter. The hilarious sequel

on the train was worth all the anguish he had caused me. I must confess to a slight feeling of satisfaction: Jatinda too had not escaped an encounter with the police!

“Ananta,<sup>4</sup> you are a born sleuthhound!” My glance of amusement was not without some exasperation. “And I shall tell Jatinda I am glad he was prompted by no mood of treachery, as it appeared, but only by the prudent instinct of self-preservation!”

At home in Calcutta, Father touchingly requested me to curb my roving feet until, at least, the completion of my high school studies. In my absence, he had lovingly hatched a plot by arranging for a saintly pundit, Swami Kebalananda,<sup>5</sup> to come regularly to the house.

“The sage will be your Sanskrit tutor,” my parent announced confidently.

Father hoped to satisfy my religious yearnings by instructions from a learned philosopher. But the tables were subtly turned: my new teacher, far from offering intellectual aridities, fanned the embers of my God-aspiration. Unknown to Father, Swami Kebalananda was an exalted disciple of Lahiri Mahasaya. The peerless guru had possessed thousands of disciples, silently drawn to him by the irresistibility of his divine magnetism. I learned later that Lahiri Mahasaya had often characterized Kebalananda as *rishi* or illumined sage.

Luxuriant curls framed my tutor’s handsome face. His dark eyes were guileless, with the transparency of a child’s. All the movements of his slight body were marked by a restful deliberation. Ever gentle and loving, he was firmly established in the infinite consciousness. Many of our happy hours together were spent in deep *Kriya* meditation.

Kebalananda was a noted authority on the ancient *shastras* or sacred books: his erudition had earned him the title of “Shastri Mahasaya,” by which he was usually addressed. But my progress in Sanskrit scholarship was unnoteworthy. I sought every opportunity to forsake prosaic grammar and to talk of yoga and Lahiri Mahasaya. My tutor obliged me one day by telling me something of his own life with the master.

“Rarely fortunate, I was able to remain near Lahiri Mahasaya for ten years. His Benares home was my nightly goal of pilgrimage. The guru was always present in a small front parlor on the first floor. As he sat in lotus posture on a backless wooden seat, his disciples garlanded him in a semicircle. His eyes sparkled and danced with the joy of the Divine. They were ever half closed, peering through the inner telescopic orb into a sphere of eternal bliss. He seldom spoke at length. Occasionally his gaze would focus on a student in need of help; healing words poured then like an avalanche of light.

“An indescribable peace blossomed within me at the master’s glance. I was permeated with his fragrance, as though from a lotus of infinity. To be with him, even



without exchanging a word for days, was experience which changed my entire being. If any invisible barrier rose in the path of my concentration, I would meditate at the guru's feet. There the most tenuous states came easily within my grasp. Such perceptions eluded me in the presence of lesser teachers. The master was a living temple of God whose secret doors were open to all disciples through devotion.

“Lahiri Mahasaya was no bookish interpreter of the scriptures. Effortlessly he dipped into the ‘divine library.’ Foam of words and spray of thoughts gushed from the fountain of his omniscience. He had the wondrous *clavis* which unlocked the profound philosophical science embedded ages ago in the Vedas.<sup>6</sup> If asked to explain the different planes of consciousness mentioned in the ancient texts, he would smilingly assent.

“I will undergo those states, and presently tell you what I perceive.’ He was thus diametrically unlike the teachers who commit scripture to memory and then give forth unrealized abstractions.

“Please expound the holy stanzas as the meaning occurs to you.’ The taciturn guru often gave this instruction to a near-by disciple. ‘I will guide your thoughts, that the right interpretation be uttered.’ In this way many of Lahiri Mahasaya’s perceptions came to be recorded, with voluminous commentaries by various students.

“The master never counseled slavish belief. ‘Words are only shells,’ he said. ‘Win conviction of God’s presence through your own joyous contact in meditation.’

“No matter what the disciple’s problem, the guru advised *Kriya Yoga* for its solution.

“The yogic key will not lose its efficiency when I am no longer present in the body to guide you. This technique cannot be bound, filed, and forgotten, in the manner of theoretical inspirations. Continue ceaselessly on your path to liberation through *Kriya*, whose power lies in practice.’

“I myself consider *Kriya* the most effective device of salvation through self-effort ever to be evolved in man’s search for the Infinite.” Kealananda concluded with this earnest testimony. “Through its use, the omnipotent God, hidden in all men, became visibly incarnated in the flesh of Lahiri Mahasaya and a number of his disciples.”

A Christlike miracle by Lahiri Mahasaya took place in Kealananda’s presence. My saintly tutor recounted the story one day, his eyes remote from the Sanskrit texts before us.

“A blind disciple, Ramu, aroused my active pity. Should he have no light in his eyes, when he faithfully served our master, in whom the Divine was fully blazing? One morning I sought to speak to Ramu, but he sat for patient hours fanning the guru with a hand-made palm-leaf *punkha*. When the devotee finally left the room, I followed him.

“Ramu, how long have you been blind?”

“From my birth, sir! Never have my eyes been blessed with a glimpse of the sun.’

“Our omnipotent guru can help you. Please make a supplication.’

“The following day Ramu diffidently approached Lahiri Mahasaya. The disciple felt almost ashamed to ask that physical wealth be added to his spiritual superabundance.

“Master, the Illuminator of the cosmos is in you. I pray you to bring His light into my eyes, that I perceive the sun’s lesser glow.’

“Ramu, someone has connived to put me in a difficult position. I have no healing power.’

“Sir, the Infinite One within you can certainly heal.’

“That is indeed different, Ramu. God’s limit is nowhere! He who ignites the stars and the cells of flesh with mysterious life-effulgence can surely bring luster of vision into your eyes.’

“The master touched Ramu’s forehead at the point between the eyebrows.<sup>7</sup>

“Keep your mind concentrated there, and frequently chant the name of the prophet Rama<sup>8</sup> for seven days. The splendor of the sun shall have a special dawn for you.’

“Lo! in one week it was so. For the first time, Ramu beheld the fair face of nature. The Omniscient One had unerringly directed his disciple to repeat the name of Rama, adored by him above all other saints. Ramu’s faith was the devotionally ploughed soil in which the guru’s powerful seed of permanent healing sprouted.” Kebalananda was silent for a moment, then paid a further tribute to his guru.

“It was evident in all miracles performed by Lahiri Mahasaya that he never allowed the ego-principle<sup>9</sup> to consider itself a causative force. By perfection of resistless surrender, the master enabled the Prime Healing Power to flow freely through him.

“The numerous bodies which were spectacularly healed through Lahiri Mahasaya eventually had to feed the flames of cremation. But the silent spiritual awakenings he effected, the Christlike disciples he fashioned, are his imperishable miracles.”

I never became a Sanskrit scholar; Kebalananda taught me a diviner syntax.

1. Literally, “renunciate.” From Sanskrit verb roots, “to cast aside.”
2. Effects of past actions, in this or a former life; from Sanskrit kri, “to do.”
3. *Bhagavad Gita*, IX, 30-31. Krishna was the greatest prophet of India; Arjuna was his foremost disciple.
4. I always addressed him as Ananta-da. *Da* is a respectful suffix which the eldest brother in an Indian family receives from junior brothers and sisters.
5. At the time of our meeting, Kebalananda had not yet joined the Swami Order and was generally called “Shastri Mahasaya.” To avoid confusion with the name of Lahiri Mahasaya and of Master Mahasaya (chapter 9), I am referring to my Sanskrit tutor only by his later monastic name of Swami Kebalananda. His biography has been recently published in Bengali. Born in the Khulna district of Bengal in 1863, Kebalananda gave up his body in Benares at the age of sixty-eight. His family name was Ashutosh Chatterji.

6. The ancient four *Vedas* comprise over 100 extant canonical books. Emerson paid the following tribute in his *Journal* to Vedic thought: “It is sublime as heat and night and a breathless ocean. It contains every religious sentiment, all the grand ethics which visit in turn each noble poetic mind.... It is of no use to put away the book; if I trust myself in the woods or in a boat upon the pond, Nature makes a *Brahmin* of me presently: eternal necessity, eternal compensation, unfathomable power, unbroken silence.... This is her creed. Peace, she saith to me, and purity and absolute abandonment—these panaceas expiate all sin and bring you to the beatitude of the Eight Gods.”
7. The seat of the “single” or spiritual eye. At death the consciousness of man is usually drawn to this holy spot, accounting for the upraised eyes found in the dead.
8. The central sacred figure of the Sanskrit epic, Ramayana.
9. Ahankara, egoism; literally, “I do.” The root cause of dualism or illusion of *maya*, whereby the subject (ego) appears as object; the creatures imagine themselves to be creators.



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