



At the Feet of a Saint



Lessons, Stories, and Experiences with
Swami Kriyananda



by David & Anaya Gamow



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Dedication

from David

To Swamiji, who opened the door for me and encouraged me, both gently and firmly, to walk through it.

To my wife — my best friend and constant support and companion — with whom I have had the tremendous blessing of walking this path hand in hand for an entire lifetime.

To my Ananda family — too many people to name — who taught me in countless ways. Your support and blessings for this past forty years has made the striving for God a joy and a grand adventure.

from Anaya (Karen)

To Swamiji, for the depth of your wisdom that you shared so freely with us, for your example, and for your training.

To my husband, who showed me the path, offered gentle guidance, and walked with me for a lifetime. Words don't begin to express my gratitude for your earthly and spiritual friendship.

To my friend and colleague, Asha, who illuminated the path and deepened my understanding.

To my Ananda spiritual family, for your wisdom and love. And to my earthly family — James, Mary, and Judi — for your loving friendship and support.

People have no idea how to get out of their mental forest. Every path they attempt ends in a confusion of dense undergrowth, or leads them back to where they first started out. In time, the realization dawns on them that they are lost.

God sends the seeker indirect guidance at first, through books and lesser teachers. Only when the desire for Him is very strong does He send help in the form of a Self-realized guru.

The purpose of the guru is not to weaken your will. It is to teach you secrets of developing your inner power, until you can stand unshaken amidst the crash of breaking worlds.

— from *The Essence of Self-Realization*,
The Wisdom of Paramhansa Yogananda
compiled by Swami Kriyananda

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At the Feet of a Saint



KAREN'S JOURNEY

My childhood was joyful and fulfilling. My parents provided a home filled with music, creativity, and stimulating conversations. My nature was enthusiastic and high energy. I couldn't wait to see what the day would bring, loved learning and challenges, and was drawn to high ideals.

My interest in spirituality lay dormant until I met David during my freshman year of college. He was already deeply committed to a spiritual life. A thoughtful conversation with him was the start of our long relationship. It awakened a desire to begin my own inner journey. I was beginning to feel that outward successes were not enough. Like many people at that age, I began to ask myself if there was more to life.

Though my major was Economics, it was studies in eastern religion that captivated me. One day in the library stacks, I began reading an assigned text on Advaita Vedanta. The small volume printed in India looked as if it hadn't been touched in years. Opening it gently, the fragrance of sandalwood wafted up from the pages. It took my breath away. Time stopped. Reading a few short passages, I knew that this was truth unlike anything

I'd ever known before.

I read many books on eastern religion in the years afterward, and was particularly drawn to the teachings of Yoga. I studied yoga with an Indian teacher in Philadelphia, and had profound experiences on retreat with Swami Satchidananda. But it wasn't enough. I was done searching. I was ready to find.

So many teachers — so many traditions. Which were true? Which teacher was right for me?

Daily as I walked to work in the busy streets of Philadelphia, I prayed as I had never prayed before to know God. "Come to me," I repeated with all my heart. "Help me to know you." I remember one evening calling out with so much heart feeling that I wept.

In the summer of 1982, I could wait no longer. Determined to receive an answer to that prayer, I decided to go away on a long personal retreat. A small, peaceful-looking ad in a new age newspaper called to me. I was soon driving hours into the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania, to a remote retreat called White Cloud.

When I arrived, there were several photos on the walls of a man with long, dark hair. I asked the owner who he was, and he replied, "My Master, Paramhansa Yogananda." Lovely face, I thought, and picked up my room key.

I prayed again that night and the next morning, "Lord, who is my spiritual teacher?" I took long walks in the forest. I journaled. I waited for a reply.

One night, the retreat manager invited me to join him in chanting in the beautiful temple. He and I were the only ones in there. I prayed then, too. Singing the chant, "I Am the Bubble, Make Me the Sea," I found it powerfully affecting.

The next morning, I awoke to see an enormous photo of Yogananda at the foot of my bed, looking me straight in the eye. It had been there for days, but suddenly I noticed. All these days, God had been dropping hints. At last I received a clear answer.

From that moment, I became his student.

At breakfast that morning, the retreat manager remarked, "You know, after we chanted the other night, I had the deepest meditation I've had in many years." I inwardly took that as a small sign.

The retreat had a tiny bookshop filled with Yogananda's books. I bought everything they had. The manager smiled at my huge stack and said, "Take your time. There is a lifetime of teaching here."

A year or so earlier, there had been another hint of what was to come, though I didn't know it at the time. I was browsing in Garland of Letters, the largest metaphysical bookstore in Philadelphia. It was located on counter-culture South Street, alive with all the new vegetarian restaurants and health food stores in the city.

David's brother, Barry, was with me that day, and began recommending a book with some enthusiasm. He was a deeply spiritual man, a disciple¹ of Charan Singh, and a three-hour-a-day meditator. But his approach to life was different from mine, and I found myself inwardly resisting his suggestion.

I looked at the bookshelves earnestly, silently asking for help. Then my eyes fell on a beautiful face. It was a friendly-looking bearded swami with long hair and orange robe. I liked that face immediately. I took *The Path* off the shelf and brought it home with anticipation.

Rarely do I find books as captivating as this one. I read it cover to cover in a few days with hardly a pause. This swami's story and his writing spoke to me in way that few other books had. At the very end, there was a short chapter about Ananda, the community he founded. I sent a letter to the publisher asking to learn more. I didn't receive a reply, which I later learned was very unusual. Swamiji's autobiography stayed strongly with me, but his community faded from my awareness.

Still, Barry sensed that something in us was shifting. One day, he shared, "I see you living in a spiritual community, surrounded by loving friends, soon." It seemed unimaginable to us at the time.

During this period, David was a Vice President and a leading salesman with a stock brokerage firm (now UBS). I was the Executive Director of the Clean Air Council, an environmental advocacy group that took legal action against polluters and lobbied state and federal agencies. (This organization exists today, directed by the same attorney I hired and treasured working with in the early 80s, and now employs five times the staff). While I served as director, we won a major case before the U.S. Supreme Court. I appeared often in newspapers and TV news. The state Democratic party had just asked me to run for a seat in the Pennsylvania state legislature.

We had a beautiful large home, savings, and a close marriage. We were young (I was 23 and David was 26), but I'm sure we'd been on a life journey together before. Ours was the familiar story of many people who enter the spiritual life. We had everything we could wish for, but a spiritual hunger inside was growing. It was not fulfilled by the lives we were leading, as enjoyable as they were.

One night in response to a deep inner call, David received guidance unlike anything he'd ever experienced before: "Leave everything and drive west."

Much to his surprise, when he told me, I immediately agreed. Unbeknownst to him, I'd been praying earnestly for months for a way to deepen my spiritual life.

We gave notice at our workplaces and received unexpectedly warm support from our colleagues. Our home went up for sale, all our remaining possessions were packed into a Honda Civic, and we traveled west searching for a deep immersion in the spiritual life.

It was the greatest leap into the unknown I have ever made. But it felt so clearly right that we were filled with a joyous anticipation.

Leaving Philadelphia in June of 1983, we stopped for a few days in Illinois to visit my parents, who kindly refrained from showing that they thought we'd taken total leave of our senses. It was true that we had no idea where we were going. Their forbearance was heroic.

Three weeks later while camping in the Grand Tetons, we were ready for our next step. We decided to visit some spiritual communities. We had almost no possessions in our car, but among them was a small book, *Journey of Awakening: A Meditator's Guidebook* by Ram Dass. Conveniently, in the back was a list of places in the U.S. where one could study meditation.

Ananda started with an "A" so I called them first. I am grateful it wasn't called Zananda. (It was only after I arrived that I realized this was the place described in *The Path*).

Someone answered the phone (later, we learned it was

Keshava). He said, “We just started a month-long program 2 days ago.”

Immediately, I replied, “We’re on our way!”

We were only 13 hours away. We decided to drive straight through. Along the way, a tire blew out. We replaced it with a spare. Soon another tire blew out. It took a long time to get that replaced. We drove on. The third and then the fourth tire blew, delaying us yet again. Was something trying to prevent us from reaching

our destination? It made us all the more eager to arrive.

I had detailed directions about how to reach our destination, but when we reached the correct mile mark on Tyler Foote Road, all we saw was the ruin of an old weathered barn. David turned to me and said, “I don’t think I’m ready for this.” I sadly agreed. But we decided to drive a bit more in case the directions were wrong.

A short distance further was the sign for Ananda. I thought this was going to be one of many places we would visit on our spiritual journey. But two weeks later, we knew our search was over.

We arrived at Ananda Village on July 25, four weeks after



*David and Karen in 1983,
the year they arrived at Ananda*

we left Philadelphia. I can see that Master² set the hook about a year earlier in the Poconos, and gently pulled until we reached our destination.

I'd always hoped to find a spiritual teacher to guide my journey. Though I was studying Yogananda's lessons, they were a tiny reflection of what I was looking for. I wanted a living teacher. I had accepted Yogananda as my guru, but in my heart, Swami Kriyananda became my guru. Living and working at Ananda, I received life lessons that I could never have learned on my own.

In Swamiji, I found a teacher more sensitive and remarkable than I imagined was possible. Living and serving in the spiritual community he founded proved to be an ideal environment for learning.

It is an aphorism of the spiritual life that once the student is ready, the teacher appears. Now I believe that the teacher is always waiting. It's we who are asleep.

It is inconceivable to imagine how our lives would have been if we had continued on as before. Hardly a day goes by that we don't reflect on this with gratitude.

¹ *At Passover one year, David's mother turned to her guests and said, "It does a Jewish mother's heart good to know that her two sons are at their respective ashrams for the High Holy Days."*

² *Throughout this book, 'Master' refers to Paramhansa Yogananda. Swami Kriyananda was a close, direct disciple of Yogananda and served his guru's work for over 64 years. See the Appendix for a short biography of Swamiji.*

Note: Swamiji knew me as Karen; I use that name throughout the book, though my spiritual name is now Anaya.

About these stories

It is not possible for me to understand the consciousness of a spiritual teacher. With that caveat, this book is an effort to share experiences and stories about Swami Kriyananda that were meaningful to me. Nearly all are my own; a few are from others that gave permission to share.

Swamiji* was a gifted spiritual teacher. Like the greatest teachers and coaches, he guided us individually, according to our natures. I marveled at the sensitivity of his training.

I never met anyone who understood people as deeply. On several occasions, he answered unspoken thoughts. I felt my consciousness was an open book to him.

He was often indirect and gentle with people. Sometimes he waited years to correct someone, and did so with such subtlety that they might not even notice. He was usually direct with me and I appreciated it.

I worked on many of Swamiji's projects over a period of 30 years: Ananda's publishing company, his public lectures, music, community planning, and Ananda's retreats. I was present for many public talks, satsangs, and meetings.

I have also been greatly inspired and guided by the many great souls who are a part of this spiritual family. Their influence is inestimable. But that is another, much longer book. In any case, the threads of all our lives intersected because of Swamiji.

With that in mind, these are stories of my spiritual training and experiences with Swamiji — the stories I was alert enough to notice. They are arranged by theme, not chronologically.

** Swami or Swamiji are terms of respect for a yogic spiritual teacher. "One who knows his Self" in Sanskrit.*

1

ENERGY & AWARENESS

A study of the lives of successful men and women suggests two characteristics common to all of them: 1) an abundance of energy, particularly for those activities in which they achieved their success; and 2) a greater-than-usual degree of awareness.

— from *Twenty-Six Keys to Living with Greater Awareness*, by Swamiji



Do It Now

In 1995, Swami published *Do It Now*. Though Ananda was short of money then, he wanted to give this book as a gift to everyone. To receive, he said, we must be generous ourselves — though doing this when financially pinched is surprisingly hard. However, Swamiji's lesson plan included something else for me that day.

Hosting a big celebration in the beautiful gardens and grounds of his home at Crystal Hermitage, Swamiji seated himself by the pool, surrounded by boxes of the new book. An immense

line formed. Swamiji greeted each person and then rummaged around the boxes to pass them a book. Unusually, no one was nearby to help, so I dashed down and took up a position close behind him, so I could pass up a book whenever he reached back.

He took no apparent notice of me. Whenever his hand reached back for a book, I carefully placed it so he could easily grab it. The first time was pretty easy, and so was the second. The handoff reminded me of a track relay race. Within a moment or two, we established a pattern for an fast, smooth assembly line. Or so I thought.

Swamiji had other plans. Every time I aimed for his hand, it moved to a different spot. Or the hand came down at an irregular interval. Or suddenly it angled in a peculiar way. Over



Swamiji giving away copies of Do It Now! at Crystal Hermitage (1995)

the course of an hour without saying a word, each baton pass was different.

By the end, I was completely exhausted.

Swamiji stood up, turned around to smile at me, and walked off without a word.



Setting up a new computer

One day while visiting Ananda Palo Alto, Swamiji bought a new computer. His secretary and tech support, Lakshman, was in Italy at the time, so he was without his usual expert help. My friend, Asha*, suggested I could help, which was very far from true. But when Swami asked for me, I said yes in an effort to be willing.

In the early afternoon, I dropped by Asha's home where he was staying, picked up his new laptop, and set up shop in a room near his. The rest of the day and evening was spent nearly continuously on the phone with Lakshman to get it set up. Gradually, everyone went to bed. By midnight I was pretty tired, too. I decided to come back in the morning to finish up whatever was left.

Noiselessly I walked out of my work room. I'd gone no more than a foot when suddenly, his bedroom door swung open. Swamiji appeared in his bathrobe, looking a bit disheveled. He looked as if he'd awakened from a dead sleep.

There's no way he heard me; he was nearly deaf then.

"Where are you going?" he asked, cheerfully.

"I'm going to sleep now, sir. I thought I'd come back and

finish in the morning. There's not much left."

He said sweetly, "Oh. You couldn't stay and finish it now?"

I smiled inwardly at his successful interception. "I'd be happy to," I replied. He smiled approvingly and went back to bed.

I never saw him relax his energy or awareness, even for a moment. Apparently he wasn't about to let me do it, either. (Nor Lakshman, who continued working with me for as long as it took).

The computer set-up was finished before he awoke. If he ever slept.

I reflected later. This wasn't only a case of putting out more energy. Swamiji spoke often of this: when the energy is flowing, that's the time to complete the task. Often when we take a break, the momentum is lost.

It is easy to put a project aside and plan on finishing it soon. I wrote 90% of this book in 2013. I didn't finish it for 10 years.

** Asha has been the Spiritual Director of Ananda Palo Alto for many years and Swami's personal secretary before that.*



Writing: race against time

In the late 1980s, I worked at Crystal Clarity Publishers in offices near Swamiji's home. It was a period of enormous creativity by Swamiji and we were working hard to keep up.

He called one day and said, "I'm in the Bay Area getting ready to travel soon. Can you write back cover copy for eight new video talks, and get them to me in the next half an hour?"

Each of those talks was on a different topic.

I am a fast writer, but not this fast. Desperation produced an idea. I replied, “May I prepare two and send them in the next half hour? You’ll have something to review soon, and I’ll send the rest as quickly as possible afterward. Would that work?”

There was a moment’s pause, and then he said, with what sounded like reluctance, “Very good.” I am sure he wasn’t pleased with my quick work-around.

The first two went mercifully fast and were sent in the promised 30 minutes. I kept rolling. Everything was going smoothly until the last talk, which was on the Yugas. Why should the general public care about the Yugas? I knew too little about them to write something engaging for a wider audience. At that moment, the community manager, Jaya, happened to walk into the building. I’d never seen him there in my seven years on staff. But he was just the man I needed, with his thoughtful, philosophical nature. I asked him a few questions about the topic and he gladly obliged. The last write-up was finished and sent less than two hours after Swamiji first called. He was surprised and pleased.

With considerably more enthusiasm, he said, “Well done!”



Moods

One morning at work, my mood was low. Dismally low. The phone rang and I answered glumly, “Hello, this is Crystal Clarity.”

“Hello.” Swamiji’s unmistakable voice. “Is that you, Karen?”

(Pause) “Yes, sir,” I answered, only slightly less glumly.
“How ARE you?”

(Pause) I roused myself. It was an affirmation, no doubt, but I replied with slightly positive energy, “*Good*, sir.”

There was a pause, and then he said gently, “Good girl.”



Don't rest till it's finished

I worked on community planning for Ananda Village over a seven year period. We participated in a county-wide General Plan process in the 1980s-90s to expand our housing allowance, among other things. It is hard to convey the intensity and time this involved, working mostly alone and often outside of the community in long meetings with neighbors, county planners, engineers, and politicians.

I reported only to Jaya, the community manager. He had an unusual understanding of how to bring out the best in his people. He was a mentor and a support throughout, but also gave me enormous freedom to work as I felt best. I gave it my all. I'd done political organizing work like this for years before Ananda, and it felt natural to develop meaningful relationships with the people involved, including government staff and our neighbors. Few people at Ananda would have had interest in this, but I was glad to serve in this way. I prepared a lengthy application for approval for our zoning requests, including engineering reports, traffic impacts, water resources, fire mitigation, and more.

In October, 1993, 300 people showed up in yellow armbands

to protest various aspects of the new County's General Plan. Testimony was offered all day, much of it by neighbors who opposed our application. I had worked so closely with neighbors over this six year period that we had cultivated a mutual respect. They spoke highly of Ananda people; their concern was any increase in allowable density to our property.

The next day the Nevada County Supervisors began the voting process, going through one amendment after another. When they got to Ananda's application, instead of voting quickly and moving on, they paused. Each Supervisor spoke so favorably about Ananda, we were deeply moved. The final tally was 5 to 0 — unanimously in our favor.

The community had previously been limited to a maximum of 87 dwelling units. The new General Plan amendment increased that to 195.

Jaya and I stood joyful and speechless outside the council chambers afterwards. This was a remarkable end to our long labors. As soon as I could, I let Swamiji know.

He replied: "Don't rest for a moment until it's completely finished."

I was surprised after so much effort that this was his only comment (to me). But in retrospect, it turned out that the Village wasn't yet ready to submit a detailed development plan for those additional units. There wasn't demand for more housing at that time; Ananda's focus was on other priorities.

Swamiji was seeing the future in a way I couldn't. Once the Village was ready, years later, to finish up the process, building regulations had become much more onerous. Had we been able to act earlier, we would have saved enormous expense and time.



Shawl of Gold

It was a cold winter night at Ananda Assisi and we were brightening up the Christmas season with some singing in the main dining room. One of the musical offerings was *The Shawl of Gold*. It's a beautiful song about giving and kindness. I sang it with all my heart.

Swamiji was seated in a corner with about 20 staff and special guests. There were about 100 people visiting, the room packed as usual for the holidays. Later that evening I passed near his table and wished him a merry Christmas.

He looked stern and said, "Karen, I didn't like a single thing about the way you sang."

I was about 15 feet away, so Swamiji made sure he spoke loudly enough for me (and everyone else) to hear. There was a murmur of discomfort and averted gazes in consideration of my feelings.

I had an unexpected reaction. A wave of joy passed through me. I felt inexplicably happy. I replied, "I would welcome knowing how to sing it better." He asked me to schedule a time to make this happen.

A few days later, I walked into his living room to see him sitting on his sofa. He beckoned me to stand about 6 feet in front of him. David came, too, to take notes.

Swamiji began by saying, "You're a pitta* aren't you? It's your pitta that gets you in trouble." (Pitta is a dosha in Ayurvedic medicine, the others being vata and kapha. An imbalance of pitta can express as mental speediness and flashes of anger).

“Because I rush?”

He nodded, “Yes.”

He said, “Begin.”

I started the piece: “A..”

“STOP!” he said. “Don’t lose the word. It has meaning.”

I was surprised to be stopped so quickly, and at such a tiny word. And yes, it was true that I hadn’t given it any thought. But how much thought could I give an “a” anyway? No time to ponder, as he asked me to start again.

“A poor...”

“STOP!” he said.

And so it went, stopping on nearly every word or phrase of a very long piece of music. A (very) few times, Swami said “perfect” after something was sung. He was staring intently at my mouth the whole time — making sure no words were lost or mis-emphasized. I felt as if I were in a dentist’s chair.

At one point, David asked, “Sir, are you saying that we ought not to ever sacrifice your words for the sake of the music?”

Swami agreed emphatically, “That’s right. And especially in a song that is more poetic. This one is especially so, and is telling a story.”

He added, “You have to adapt the rhythm to the words in my songs. This is a very free rhythm song. There’s no way I can write the notes exactly as they are to be sung. Each verse is somewhat different, depending on the words.”

“The words are so important. In my song, “Truth Can Never Die,” people often rush the words ‘Don’t look back.’ But each word is important and needs to be clear.”

When we wrapped up about an hour later, Swamiji was fresh as a daisy. I staggered home for a long nap.

A day later, I received a note from his secretary.

“There aren’t many letters I enjoy sending as much as this one. Swami said to me, ‘Thank Karen for the beautiful way she takes correction.’ Then he told me to convey his exact words. And what a beautiful smile he had on his face when he said it.”

I aspire to take all correction this well. Meanwhile, the lesson was clear: *wake up*. It was, and is, all too easy for me to rush through things and not be awake in the present.



Adventures in teaching

In 1986, Swami had just written *Education for Life*. He invited a small group of people to explore the book in depth with him. The group included Nitai, Usha, Helen, Jyotish, Devi, Asha, Kabir, and for some unknown reason, David and me. We were the only people there with no connection whatsoever to Ananda’s schools. We’d only been at Ananda three years. We didn’t have children. We had no training as teachers. But we were absolutely delighted to be invited and no one else seemed to mind.

For three full days, we sat in the Crystal Hermitage living room in a small circle, with Swamiji reading the book aloud and expounding on the ideas. The teachers chimed in with thoughts and questions.

It was a rare moment in time. When Swamiji was working on a book, that was all he was thinking about. His focus was legendary. I felt we might never hear these thoughts directly from him again. Unusually, the meetings were not recorded. I took handwritten notes and spent many hours afterward typing

them up on an ancient manual typewriter.

At the end of the last day, Swami leaned back in his chair, looked around the room, and said, “I feel it’s very important for these ideas to be taken out and shared with professional educators. Among those who are here today, most of you are working full-time in our school, and it would be impractical to ask you. David and Karen, I’d like you to go out and lecture about these Education for Life principles. Reach teachers. Help them to understand these ideas and how they could revolutionize education.”

Aha! That’s why we had been invited. But the request seemed utterly out of left field. We’d never done anything like this before, especially not in this field of study. Our only experience with educational ideas had been gained during these last few days.

I prayed hard for help since it was abundantly clear that I wasn’t going to be able to do this myself. One would be hard-pressed to find someone *less* qualified. I’d been an enthusiastic public speaker and debater when I was an environmental lobbyist before coming to Ananda. But on philosophical or abstract concepts, I found myself extremely reluctant.

In the spirit of saying yes to his request, I started with an easy first step: research. I headed off to Sacramento, two hours away, to spend the day at a library looking for references for upcoming educational conferences. This was years before the advent of the internet, so I expected to spend a long time looking for needles in haystacks.

Sacramento is a large, spread-out city without much of a center. I didn’t know where the main library was, but as I drove into the city I passed a building that said Department of

Education. It occurred to me they might have a small library. I stopped in and asked for help in the first office I found on an upper floor.

A man greeted me warmly and asked about my project. When I was finished, he expressed unusual interest. His specialty was “values in education.” He recommended that I contact someone in Stockton who was hosting a conference on this topic soon, and gave me her contact information. She was an hour away; I made a mental note to call her.

Moments later, that woman walked into the room.

We spoke briefly. On the spot, she invited David and me to speak at her statewide conference before a large audience of veteran educators. (Are you kidding?). Adding to the miracle, I was very casually dressed, looked about 22, and was very far from conference-speaker material.

A few months later (properly dressed), we spoke at the conference to a room of about 60 educators from around California. Someone from Ananda came to observe and said with evident surprise afterward, “That was excellent.” Participants thanked us for sharing these educational ideals with them, and many took home a copy of Swamiji’s book.

Lest anyone doubt that God is the Doer...



How to write

Swamiji read something I’d written, evidently not up to snuff.

“I need to teach you how to write.” he announced one day.

Soon after, he called to share this advice:

- Treat each thing you do as unique — as a fresh challenge. When I teach meditation to beginners, I teach it as though I had never taught it before.
- Don't refer to anything that's been done before. (I think what he meant was this: Don't mindlessly repeat what you've done before, but consider the issue with a fresh perspective).
- Condense the public into a single person with desires and interests, likes and dislikes. Mentally imagine that person in front of you and talk directly to them as if they were a friend.
- When you think the piece is finished, read it aloud to yourself or someone who has a good sense for meaning, like David. This helps you to see if it's clear. Listen also to the rhythms and sounds. You can feel when a sentence has a quality that can easily be absorbed by the reader.
- Concentrate more. Work on a project as if it's the only thing you're doing.



Where there is right action...

There was a birthday celebration for Swamiji in his home one night. But I had a meeting a few miles away with neighbors, and our new County Supervisor was planning to attend. That was my dharma and I accepted it. I spent the evening attacked by neighbors over Ananda's plans to increase allowable housing on our land, doing my best to stay calm and build bridges. The

new Supervisor knew much about Ananda already, and came strongly to our defense many times. We made a new political friend that night.

It was 9:30 pm before I could get back to the Village. I drove over to the Hermitage in hopes of catching the last bit of the party, but saw only a small handful of people chatting in the living room. Swami had gone downstairs to bed. Sadly, I turned to leave when suddenly, Swamiji's apartment door swung open and he popped back into the living room.

He said brightly, "Would you all like to stay and watch me open my gifts?"

Yes, indeed! We all plopped right down around his chair. He opened gifts and chatted with the few of us remaining late into the evening.

Where there is right action, there is victory!



Marketing

We were in a long meeting about how to promote *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, which Swamiji had painstakingly edited from Master's writings. These beautiful quatrains are symbolic of the soul's romance with God, but not easily understood without interpretation.

Someone suggested a campaign of bonus points for buying products from Crystal Clarity. The idea fell flat. Other ideas were suggested. But they were all small and aimed at marketing to our own already interested people.

Swamiji was unusually impatient that day, shutting down all

the ideas offered. Everyone was uncomfortable.

Then Swamiji said, “Let’s not just sell 5,000 copies of a book to our own people and think we’re done. Let’s only talk about how to reach the broader public. How can we reach new audiences beyond our own people?”

Swamiji had made a deep, lifelong commitment to reach people with Master’s teachings. He moved heaven and earth to do it. He wanted us to do the same.



A channel for this work

Swamiji was speaking with a group of dedicated disciples.

“It takes tremendous will and energy to be a channel for this work. It’s not just about feeling Master’s presence within. You have to make this work your own. In the early years, I was able to put out the energy to make Ananda happen. But I have other work. Now you will need to do it.”



Accompanying Swamiji musically

When Swamiji performed his music, I often accompanied on piano. Good accompanists are accustomed to closely following the soloist. But Swamiji was in a category by himself. Todd Billingsley, a professional pianist and also often an accompanist for Swamiji, joked that he sang “Love is a Magician” in 7/16 time one measure and 9/8 the next. Sometimes he skipped whole sections of a song. Sometimes he started before you

were ready or sang twice as long as usual. Everything he did was fresh, in the moment. And accompanying him at a major event was an adrenaline rush like no other. For “Love is a Magician” in particular, I made sure to have every page of the music up and available without page turns so I could dash madly after him wherever he might go. I can confirm Todd’s testimony. He never sang, or did, anything the same way twice.



What will you do?

Swamiji called a group to his home for a meeting. I arrived to see every community leader there and another small batch of people like me, already responsible for three or four major projects. The early 1990s were an intensely active time at the Village. I loved it, but I was also experiencing symptoms of overwork.

Swamiji had a long list of projects in mind and asked for suggestions about who could take on each one. A few names were offered and quickly dismissed. We gradually realized with some horror that he wanted *us* to volunteer.

People began to sink more deeply into their chairs as Swamiji looked slowly around the room.

He finally said, “Well, what is everyone going to do?” He began with Vidura. “What about you?”

Swami had been advising him recently that he was doing too much.

Vidura replied, “Well, sir, I’m already doing X.” Swami interrupted, “Well, what else can you do?”

Vidura: “I’m also doing Y and Z now, sir. But I’m glad to do more. What do you suggest?”

This was what Swamiji was waiting for. He went around the circle one by one, making assignments and getting commitments.

“Good!” he concluded triumphantly, having pretty well worked over the room.

I grinned at him at the end and said, “You’re having fun with us, aren’t you, sir?” He grinned right back.

Though I was reluctant to take on another project, this one turned out to be the most fun I’d had in ages.

Swamiji had written an excellent and challenging piece called “Has SRF Lost Its Way?”* It was the first time he shared problems there that were deeply concerning to him in such a public way. I designed a layout that would catch people’s attention and we distributed the piece in areas where SRF was active, in an effort to reach SRF’s membership, very few of whom knew their organization was suing fellow disciples. This was about five years into what would ultimately be 12 years of defending ourselves against legal challenges involving SRF.**

Evidently, the spiritual path was not all gentle and harmonious. It was hard for most of us to accept we would need to engage in conflict.

Swamiji was an indispensable model. He did everything he could to resolve the differences with SRF privately and peacefully for many decades.

But he also trained us to speak out when true principle was involved.

I had always thrilled to read stories of great heroes and saints

who faced great challenges with courage. It was humbling to see how hard it was to face even these smaller challenges in real life. Some people left the community. It was a grace that David and I were able to remain and contribute to the defense effort in some way. The training we received during those years was rare and strengthening.

** Swamiji had served for years within Self-Realization Fellowship as a vice president of the board, a worldwide teacher, and head of the monks. He had an insider's experience. After many years of silence, he felt deeply that Master wanted these things known.*

*** SRF's lawsuit was a religious freedom case which was decided in Ananda's favor. Had we lost, we could not share Yogananda's teachings with the public, use the phrase "self-realization," or use any images of our guru. The case was so protracted and expensive that the federal judge accused SRF of trying to "put Ananda out of business." They nearly succeeded.*



Leadership

Swami had just finished composing the music for the album, *Mystic Harp*, a collection of beautiful instrumental music inspired by Ireland. One day, he invited a few people to the recording studio where a staffer was working on the arrangements. Swamiji was involved in every part of the process.

Though he was experiencing relentless pain in his hip, he stood up and down often, enthusiastically sharing different sections of the music.

He said, "I've been driving myself lately."

I asked, "Why do you always do this?"

He replied simply, “As God wills.”

He added, “I’ve been hoping to meditate more. Master said my life was to be one of intense activity and meditation. But so far, it’s been mostly service. Perhaps Master put meditation second because I’ll get to do it later. But if I never get to do it, I’m satisfied serving to create things that can change people spiritually.”

I asked Swamiji a question I’d long wondered about. “How do you have the patience to work with many people for such a long time when we are so slow to keep up with you?”

He replied, “It’s been a long time because we’ve been moving a whole army forward together, and not just a single spy.”

*Oh, I will come again and again!
Crossing a million crags of suffering,
With bleeding feet, I will come —
If need be, a trillion times —
So long as I know
One stray brother is left behind.
—from “God’s Boatman” by Paramhansa Yogananda*



Always giving

Swami was still weak and in bed from an illness. He asked his secretary, Lakshman, to bring a few typed thank-you notes, so he could add some handwritten personal notes. Lakshman observed, “He is always giving.”



Quotes by Swamiji about energy

“When I was a new disciple of Master’s, I found myself in a mood. ‘What shall we do about it?’ I asked my mental citizens. ‘Let’s meditate.’ Five minutes lifted my awareness enough to see things completely differently.”

“If one human being can do something, you can do it. God gives us the power. God has something unique to express through Ananda. God is looking for channels to express it. Master wants thousands of arms and feet to carry his message forward. I offer you this challenge: take these teachings out to everyone. If you feel inspired to help, for God’s sake, dive in!”

“Don’t think that I created Ananda. I was the willing slave. When you do what God wants you to do, no matter how difficult, you will grow stronger.”

“Sometimes devotees, in the name of non-attachment and non-desire, end up with non-energy.”

“We are not trying to convert anyone. We are trying to get people to relate to their own higher self.”

“When you work, work for God with the consciousness that you are serving others. In your work, don’t cut corners. Always adhere to truth. Where there is right action, there is victory.”

“Make no mistake. God will ask everything of you. You have to be willing to give it.”

“The subconscious memory of past illness can cause us to give up our will. We tend to be too timid. People grow old because they no longer have life charge running through them.”

“I have written seminally. We need to keep expanding from that flow, like a river. Expand on what I’ve written rather than digging a separate well. Discipleship means tuning into this flow and seeing how you can reach more and more people with it.

“Each of us has created limitations in ourselves of what we can’t do. We need to break those notions. We are the shock troops for Master. If we don’t do this, we can’t expect anyone else to do it. Make a deeper effort to offer up what limits you.”

Ananda’s specialty is reaching out to people where they’re at. We have such a great variety of people at Ananda. Our destiny is to reach millions of people who are willing to receive what we have to give.”

“The goal of life is to remember that God is the Doer. God is the dreamer of this dream. The secret of doing things well is to let God be the One who does it.”

“Be creative for God, letting God do it ... I’ve written with tears coming down my face. The beauty of doing it for God, with God. Everything is beautiful with God.”

“Live in such a way as to help other people. Otherwise, why are we here?”



Swamiji greeting us and others in the Ananda Palo Alto Temple (2007)



A sea of smiles as Swamiji walked to the Ananda Assisi Temple (2006)

2

COURAGE



Panic Attacks

It started without any warning. First it was just mild anxiety before I went to sleep. But soon it progressed to a mind-numbing fear that began every day at dusk and went on for many hours. The symptoms felt like a heart attack; the sensation was like dying. I soon learned that these were anxiety attacks.

Sometimes I stayed up most of the night watching movies to distract myself from the fear. I tried to analyze the cause — I had been through a long period of extreme overwork — but the analysis yielded no relief.

My doctor suggested tranquilizers. I had never taken one, but soon, they became a nightly companion to give some respite. The sleep they provided was poor, so I sought another solution. My doctor suggested anti-depressants.

“For how long?” I asked.

“For the rest of your life,” he said.

I was determined not to go that route. But after nearly five months of nightly attacks that were growing longer and more severe, I was running out of options.

One day, I listened to a recorded talk by Swamiji called “Spiritual Tests: Right Attitude.”

Swamiji talked about accepting whatever comes to us, and then giving it back to God. He said, “There isn’t anything, if you will share it with Him, that isn’t a mark of His love.” He described the process for doing it which I’d heard many times. But this time, it stuck.

That night, when the usual anxiety struck, I had the most interesting experience. I was terrified, but a part of me was also *bored*.

That was the mental wedge I needed. Instead of edging away from the fear as usual, through medication or distractions, I decided to try *accepting* this anxiety. I was ready to do anything, no matter how terrifying, rather than run away from this feeling again.

As I turned inward to face it, the anxiety was so tangible, it seemed to have a mass and shape of its own. I brought my awareness into the center of it. I was surprised to find that it didn’t overwhelm me as I thought it would. I stayed with it as long as I could, until I felt I was accepting it completely, without recoiling away from it even a little.

With focused awareness, I gently lifted that dark mass to the point between the eyebrows. It required great concentration and will.

“I am finished with this,” I prayed sincerely. “I give it back to You.” I visualized lifting it out through my forehead and

releasing it into the vast infinite.

In that moment, the fear disappeared completely.

I felt refreshed and back to my normal self, as if I'd never had anxiety in my life.

The freedom, however, was short-lived. Within moments the anxiety returned as strong as before. It took every ounce of focus to repeat the process again, and then a third time.

I sank into a long, peaceful sleep, the first in many months.

Since then I have never experienced another anxiety attack.

Afterward, David reminded me that for the first time, that night, we had placed a photo of Swamiji by my bedside.



Speak up

Swamiji had made a small change to one of his songs; he and a longtime Ananda musician were talking about it as I listened nearby.

He sang the phrase, turned to both us and asked, “What is that new note?”

“It’s an E,” said “Tamara”.

“Yes, that’s right,” replied Swamiji.

I knew that wasn’t right. “Sir, I think it’s an F.”

“No, it’s an E,” Swami replied firmly. Tamara nodded in agreement.

“Sir, I’m pretty sure it’s an F,” I said, slightly reluctantly.

He turned to Tamara once again. She said confidently, “It’s an E.”

I said one last time, “Sir, I’m afraid it’s an F.”

He paused just a moment, smiled, and said, “Don’t be afraid to speak up when you’re right. It *is* an F.”



Spread the teachings

In early 1995 at a satsang, Swamiji talked for the first time in my hearing about a war taking place on the causal plane between the forces of light and dark. He urged us each to step up and meet that energy. This was not just Swamiji’s work, but ours as well.

Swamiji said, “We have to feel a sense of authority and a sense of dignity in getting Yogananda’s message out to everyone. We have authority from Yogananda to do this. We have to lead from that strength.”

He shared how he’d been cared for in the hospital recently by very young nurses. They performed their work with complete confidence. They didn’t worry if they were capable of being nurses. They simply were, and they knew it.

“Be like those nurses. You all know enough now. You have so much to offer. Share what you know with confidence.” He added, “Reach people in ways they can easily understand.”

Forcefully he added, “If we don’t do this, God will send someone else who will!”

Inwardly, I felt a powerful inspiration to take up Swami’s call to action. The idea percolated in my heart, unbeknownst even to David. David and I were both happy in our work, with significant responsibilities and interesting challenges.

But not long afterward, David felt guided to leave his work

at Ananda Village and devote himself to sharing Master's teachings more directly with others. The guidance came unexpectedly and unasked for, while he was praying for a couple at their wedding ceremony.

He prayed for a sign that this guidance was real. Within 48 hours, we received five "proofs".

1) A friend said to David in passing, "You should be out teaching."

"Why do you say that?" he replied?

"I don't know," she said. "It just occurred to me when I saw you."

No one had said this to him in our 12 years at Ananda Village, except once when Swamiji asked us to share Education for Life principles with teachers.

2) A guest was visiting at Ananda's retreat center and asked me for help understanding the concept of inner guidance. This was a topic dear to my husband's heart. When I called him at his workplace nearby to ask him to come to the retreat, he hesitated a moment. But something inside said, "Yes, do it."

Afterward, the guest said to David, "That was the best explanation of inner guidance that I have ever heard. You don't know me, but I am a well-known public speaker and conference organizer. Would you please speak at my upcoming conference in the spring?"

(Several months later, David did speak at that conference to hundreds of people in the audience. The organizer said to him afterward, "You were born to do this.")

3) I, too, needed confirmation that this was the right decision for us. My husband was getting wonderful answers, but what about me? I prayed hard. And then I did something I've never

done before or since. I picked up a copy of Yogananda's *The Divine Romance*, closed my eyes, and let my fingers fall on a passage. It read, "Spread the teachings of Self-realization." (Whoa...)

4) I was worried about money, wondering how we would survive teaching like this. We would run through our small savings fast if it didn't work. That evening, we stopped at a hotel. I was hungry and went to the hotel restaurant only to find that it had closed. As I was leaving, a woman popped out from the kitchen and offered to make me dinner. I hesitated, but she insisted and I gratefully accepted.

When it came time to pay, she said, "Don't worry. No charge."

5) We received a check for \$1,000 for David's birthday from his mother. It was just the sum we needed to replace our old printer with something suitable for this new project.

"Mom," he asked on the phone that night, "why did you send such a large check? You've never sent money for my birthday before."

"I don't know," she replied. "I just wanted to."

Meanwhile, I'd written to Swamiji several times, asking for his guidance.

To my dismay, he hadn't responded at all. I couldn't recall a time when he hadn't replied to a letter. But this was total silence. I'd never done anything major at Ananda without connecting with him first.

A few weeks later, he was about to leave the Village for an extended trip. We'd be gone before he returned. A staffer let us know when he was departing so we could wave him off.

We stood sadly, a long way off, as his car pulled out of the drive.

He rolled down his window, and waved for us to come over, smiled warmly and said, “I wish you success in Palo Alto.”

At least he had seen my letters!

He added, “Do you know what I mean by success? I mean enjoy yourselves.”

He put his hands together in a pranam, smiled, and waved as the car slowly departed.

But I had a dark cloud over my head. I was deeply annoyed by this answer. This wasn’t guidance at all. Did he think it was a good idea? Should we go or stay? Were we making a terrible mistake?

A few days later, I realized he had given me excellent advice. It was such hard advice for me to hear, I didn’t notice it at all.

The very last thing I would think of doing is enjoying myself. I was already working in my usual way — too much, too long, too intensely. My deep habit was to accomplish by will power, and not enough with joy.

We departed from Ananda Village for the Ananda community in Palo Alto on March 1, 1996. Though we felt unmistakable guidance to do this, a part of us was also heartbroken to leave. In a sense, we’d grown up there. We arrived in our twenties and had lived there for 13 years. We were leaving Swamiji, too, who was everything to us.

Less than six months later, Swamiji felt the inner inspiration to move to Italy. I was so grateful I wasn’t living at the Village when that happened. His departure made it easier to sink new roots where Master had planted us.

Postscript: we have been doing what we call Clarity Seminars ever since, with the ongoing behind-the-scenes aid of Swami and Yogananda. We have provided stress, resilience, and

leadership training to nearly 40,000 employees in hundreds of companies and government agencies throughout the U.S.



Fear of flying

In my early 20s, I suddenly developed a fear of flying. It grounded me for a few years, but with effort, I got to the point where I could fly again. My mind understood that this was an irrational fear, but my body wasn't cooperating. I'd get tense, shrink in my seat, and could hardly breathe until the flight was over. If there was turbulence, I became stiff as a piece of wood. It sometimes took hours after a flight to release the tension.

In 1987, I found myself headed out on a month-long pilgrimage to India with many Ananda friends. The flights involved were long and many. I would *never* have willingly signed up for this. But when David's mother heard he was going and I wasn't, she insisted on paying my way. I couldn't refuse her kindness.

Swamiji happened to be visiting the Ananda San Francisco ashram house when the pilgrims were leaving for the airport. I shared my nervousness about the trip. His response was unexpected.

Swamiji looked at me. Without an ounce of sympathy, he said, "Karen, you have no faith."

He'd never spoken to me like this before. But it was true. I had no faith. Every bump and wiggle of the plane caused me to brace for a painful, agonizing death. I was certain that God was too busy with other things to bother with my flight.

Our trip began with a 20-hour flight. I boarded reluctantly

and awaited my doom. But the flight was uneventful. In fact, flight after flight was uneventful. Finally, we were flying over the Himalayas, and the flight was undeniably bumpy. And yet I was still fine. The fear was simply absent.

Swamiji had lifted the fear from my consciousness with no willing participation on my part. I was overcome with gratitude.

Ten years later, our work required us to take as many as 50 flights a year. I could never have done this without his healing intervention. I am happy and relieved to report that I fly effortlessly now.

As for faith, that's a work in progress.



Speaking the truth

Swami published his autobiography in 1977. It was titled *The Path: Autobiography of a Western Yogi*.

At a meeting during the SRF lawsuit years, our attorney said, “We shouldn’t imply that your autobiography is associated with, or a sequel to the *Autobiography of a Yogi*.” Forcefully Swami replied, “I would rather go to jail than not speak the truth. And the truth is that those two books *are* related.”



Quotes by Swamiji about courage:

“You must develop the capacity to completely accept whatever comes to you. Then God, also, can come to you.”

“Tell yourself: the world doesn’t owe me anything. Loved ones will disappear. People will disappoint and betray you. Just love.”

“Stand up firmly for what you believe. It’s not easy. Many people may stand against you. Remain calm, untouched by the opinions of others. Whatever comes, let it come. This builds courage so you can remain untouched by the world.”

“I won’t rest my hopes and happiness in anything outside myself.”

“When a broken bone heals, the place where it fractured becomes stronger than the bone around it. Don’t despair about your weaknesses. They will become your greatest strengths.”

“Whatever you have today could be gone by tomorrow. The one thing you can never lose is yourself. Everything else you have is on loan. Be satisfied, then, with whatever God gives you. Love God. Make that your conscious motive behind all that you do.”

“I’ve always had this personal rule, and I’ve never broken it: I will not allow anything to affect my peace of mind. That is my priority, Some people think of money as their bottom line. Peace is my bottom line.”

“Enjoy everything with the joy of God. Eat with him, work with him. Feel God’s energy making your limbs move. Feel his energy animating the trees. Feel that when a dog barks, God is saying something to you. When people speak, God is sharing something with you. When people insult you, take it as an opportunity to give it to God. Don’t take anything personally. In your heart, you will feel greater and greater freedom.”

“Always keep your focus on the horizon. Gradually, you’ll find yourself becoming more detached. Trace every emotion back to its source. The reactive process is the key. Everything comes from within, not from outside. Breathing is a large part of controlling the reactive process. Reason won’t always help us. We need to lift our consciousness up, and this will change our reactions.”

ANSWERED PRAYERS



Circling geese

We had been at Ananda Village just a few months. It was a thrilling time as well as a challenging one. The work of overcoming my limitations was harder than I had imagined.

One day, the loud sound of migrating geese became audible in the distance. David called me outside to see the magnificent flock soaring high over a nearby hillside at Ananda. They were a breathtaking sight against the light grey sky.

My thoughts turned to a story I'd heard from an American Indian medicine man. If geese make a circle over the earth during their flight, that spot is a place of high spiritual energy.

I found myself unexpectedly hoping for a sign of reassurance from Anyone Who Might Be In Charge. "If only these geese would circle over us, now," I earnestly prayed, to confirm that I had made the right choice in coming to Ananda.

Just as they were about to disappear from view, the leader slowly swung around with his whole flock, making a graceful full circle right over where we stood. Then they glided quietly back on their original way and flew out of sight.



Would you like to sing in Italy?

It was late springtime in 2002. We were at a wedding at the Crystal Hermitage. After the ceremony, everyone milled about the beautiful gardens. I walked out of the dining room onto the back patio. Usually at an event like this, Swami was surrounded by people. But there he was, sitting all by himself, no one within a 10 foot range. His arms were crossed as he stared intensely into the distance.

I looked earnestly for a way to get around that open space without being seen. No luck. Swami called out in a loud voice, “Karen, does David sing?”

I felt obligated to move closer to him, but the energy field around him was almost overwhelming.

With some effort I replied, “Yes, sir. He sings in a small group.”

“Does he sing with the choir?”

“Yes,” I replied, wondering why on earth Swamiji was asking these questions. Then I found out.

“Would you be willing to go to Italy and sing with a small group I am forming?”

My first reaction was, “Yes!” What an unusual and delightful invitation! “David is nearby. May I go and ask him?” Swamiji

nodded, and I dashed back into the dining room.

Within moments, we told Swamiji yes. Within a few hours, a group of about 10 people was sitting in Swamiji's home working out all the final details.

Swami knew the astral moment was now. Later we found out that he had been working on this for weeks. He had invited several others, but only a few so far had been able to say yes.

The group still needed a tenor and I suggested Frank Monahan. Instantly, Swamiji said, "Yes, please call him. He also plays guitar beautifully. That would give us a tenor and a second guitarist." Frank said yes, found a ride to Ananda Village from Palo Alto and was there the next day.

I was amazed how much energy Swamiji put out to make this happen. During the meeting in his home, he turned to a gifted tenor at Ananda Village and said, "Your life situation doesn't allow you to be a part of this group. But you can help by donating money to pay for a van. Will you do that?" The man generously said yes.

Many others were better singers or more deserving of the opportunity. But few were free enough to be able to leave their lives behind. We'd come to Ananda to grow spiritually. Saying yes to Swamiji was our top



*The Ananda Singers group in Italy.
(bottom left clockwise): Bhagavati, Frank,
Lewis, Bhaktan, Christina, Karen
(middle) Mantrini and David (2002-04)*

priority. We knew it would be life-changing, and it was.

We closed down Clarity Seminars to accept this invitation, though it meant losing considerable income. We also had to leave a home that I loved.

On both counts, God was taking better care of us than we knew. Had we continued with our work, it would never have survived the heavy recession happening then. When we returned home in the spring of 2004, the economy was picking up again, and we were able to resume our training work as if nothing had happened. A dear friend kindly moved out of our apartment to give it back to us, at considerable hardship to herself.

Remembering my chance encounter with Swamiji at the wedding that started this adventure rolling, David said, “I was grateful that Karen somehow wandered too close to the sun that day on the porch.”



Swamiji's last advice

Swamiji's last major event in America was a lecture at Foothill College in September, 2012. He passed away in Italy in the spring of 2013.

David was in charge of organizing the event and I handled the marketing. The hall was nearly full with over 800 in attendance. It was the largest event we'd hosted for Swamiji in America. Nearly everyone in the Bay Area who had once had a connection with him was there, even those we hadn't seen in some time. Somehow, their souls knew it was important to be there.

Swamiji gave a stirring talk. Though frail, he preferred to speak while standing. Asha stood at his side supporting him. The audience felt her pleasure in this small service, and shared in her appreciation of his lifetime of support to all of us.

Afterward, Swamiji had lunch with a small group and then returned to the Ananda community in Mountain View to rest.

We stopped by to chat with Asha and bask in the afterglow of the event. Swamiji was napping in a room nearby. We promised to leave quietly if he awoke.

Moments later, Swami walked into the living room. It had been a massive outpouring of energy that weekend. But he was completely wide awake and refreshed.

“Oh sir, we were just leaving. It was a wonderful weekend!”

“Why are you leaving so soon? Please sit down,” he said. We sat for a few minutes, chatted, and then stood up to leave.

“Sit down,” he said a bit more commandingly.

Aryavan, who had come to video the event, stopped by. Swamiji invited him to stay, too. We were there for about two uninterrupted hours of conversation. It was mostly light banter, but I felt there was something else happening under the words.

Swamiji was 86. For many years his health had not been good. He had no fear of death and often spoken enthusiastically about departing from this life soon. I treasured whatever moments we might have left with him.

I spent much of this time near tears, mentally saying, “I would so much like to ask you for a few words of guidance, but I don’t want to bother you.”

Finally, we could feel the energy winding down. Asha came in and said that dinner would be served soon. That was our cue to leave.

Swamiji turned to me and the tone was no longer chit-chat.

“You should sing,” he said, firmly.

Surprising advice. Not what I expected.

Apparently it was what I needed.

In the years since, whenever I have followed it, whether in my car, on long walks alone, or singing for others, I have felt greatly uplifted. Good advice for me, and for nearly everyone else, too, is this verse from one of his songs:

*Sing when the sun shines, sing when the rain falls,
Sing when your road seems strange.
In a tempest, seize the lightning flash,
And ride the winds of change!
from “The Secret of Laughter”*

This was the last conversation we would have with him. We didn’t know it at the time, but I believe he did.

In May of 2012, a reporter was visiting Ananda Village and met briefly with Swamiji. He encouraged her to return in April of the next year to see the tulips. She said she would and looked forward to seeing him again.

“I won’t be here anymore,” he said.

She understood him to mean that he wouldn’t be alive by then. She assumed everyone at Ananda knew, since he’d spoken so openly about it to her. But we didn’t. No one heard this story until she returned the following year, a month after he passed.



At the Whole Life Expo in San Francisco when Swamiji was the keynote speaker. His events were always introduced with music. Swamiji encouraged me to sing from my earliest years at Ananda. (Front left) Karen, Swamiji, Kirtani. (Back left) Anand, Dambara, Durga, David Hoogendyk (1989)



Fifth chakra

Pondering the simplicity of the advice that Swamiji gave me to sing, I recalled this story. In the late 80s, I visited a local integrative healer. During the session, he shared that he was clearing out blockages in my fifth chakra (also known as the throat chakra). He felt the presence of a powerful masculine being who communicated that the work of my lifetime was to clear out some remaining karma in that chakra.

I asked the healer what I could do to work on this. He said he was given permission to remove some of it in the session, and that there wasn't much left. He said it would work itself out.

On the 4 hour drive home, I felt like singing. I ended up singing all the way. My throat felt open in a new way. It was an expansive feeling of freedom and joy that I'd never experienced before.

About five years later, I ended up in a hospital emergency room, having felt that my life force was draining away. After hours of tests, the ER doctor could find nothing medically wrong. He closed the curtain around us and said in a quiet voice, "I think I know what the problem is. It's your fifth chakra." I suspect he noticed my East West Bookshop nametag, as I'd come directly there from the store. Even so, astonishment did not begin to describe my reaction to this unexpected diagnosis. He wrote down the name and number of a psychic healer and sent me home. That healer ended up helping me greatly.

A blocked fifth chakra can express as shyness, fear of speaking up, depression, anxiety, or boredom. A more open fifth chakra gives inner peace, mental clarity, creativity, and the power of communication — in speaking and understanding others.

This is not information I am normally privy to, nor would I have discovered it on my own. But I did notice how often the training I received from Swamiji had something to do with freeing up aspects of my nature that involved the fifth chakra. Conscious speaking and singing helps develop this chakra in a positive way.

Swamiji once said he could tell everything about someone simply by looking at them.



Obituary

Swamiji passed away in Assisi, Italy at about 11 pm Pacific Time on April 21, 2013. Asha walked through the community, knocking on each door to let us know and inviting everyone to meditate together in the temple.

My first thought was, “Oh no! He’s left us!” My second thought was less selfish. I thanked him inwardly and felt a joy in his freedom.

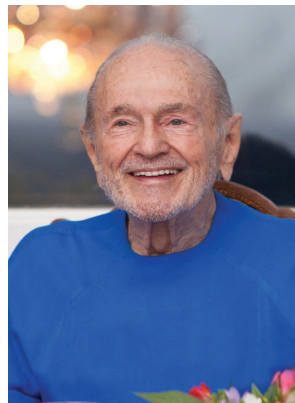
The next day, an obituary appeared about Swamiji in a local newspaper. I longed to express the impact and breadth of his gifts to us.

The Economist magazine includes an exquisitely written obituary on the last page of each issue, often written in a style reflecting the consciousness of the subject.

Determined to write something worthy to be published by them, I sat down with tears of gratitude to Swamiji and began to write.

I wrote like the wind in a voice I’ve never used before. In less than two hours, a most beautiful piece appeared to have written itself. (*see the Appendix for the complete text*).

The Economist obituary editor graciously wrote a personal reply, regretting not being able to publish it.



Swamiji's birthday (2012)



Connected

I was sitting in the small chapel near Crystal Hermitage. It was the first night that Swami, himself, would lead the Festival of Light.

The Festival of Light is an inspired allegory reminding the truth seeker how to find his way back to God. This ceremony has become an integral part of Ananda's weekly Sunday service.

The room was packed. But suddenly, I felt a huge presence, and knew Swami had just entered the room. Eyes closed, I mentally bowed at his feet with gratitude. I was sitting on the aisle, and as he walked by, he gently touched my shoulder, in silent reply.

ENCOURAGEMENT



Coming home

After a year of singing in Italy, we traveled to the U.S. for a month of intensive Clarity Seminars training work and some family visits. When we returned to Italy, Swamiji asked more than once, “Are you happy to be back?”

He wanted to know where our focus and energy was.

David replied sincerely that it felt good and right to be in Italy.

Swami seemed pleased with his answer. I replied that it was hard to be back, in contrast to the effortless life in Palo Alto. I shared what had been challenging in the 24 hours since we arrived: freezing showers, a 40 degree bedroom, slow internet. He expressed sympathy.

He added, “What you are doing with Clarity Seminars is important. I wouldn’t have taken you from it except that I felt

this would be beneficial for you.”

We both expressed gratitude for his caring and support. I said I thought it was really helping us to grow. He was pleased.

A few years after the tour ended, Swami said to us, “The reason I sent you to Italy was to help open your hearts.”



Dinner with Swamiji in Assisi, 2003. This was a celebratory evening with the singers. Wherever he was, everyone around him felt at ease and embraced.



Forgiveness

Swamiji was endlessly forgiving.

Once, a man in the Ananda community committed a minor theft. When Swamiji heard about it, he asked the man to step away from his responsibilities. The man was filled with remorse and sincerely desired to change. He asked Swamiji to pray for him and give him another chance.

Instantly, Swamiji agreed. When others heard the news, they were very surprised. But they shouldn't have been. Happily from then on, the man conducted himself with honesty and sincerity.

"How many times should I forgive?" Peter asked Jesus. "Seven times?"

"Not seven, but seventy times seven," said the Master.



Discouragement on the path

I wrote a letter to Swamiji sharing that I wasn't meditating well. I wondered if I really belonged at Ananda. It was a letter filled with abject misery. I wept as I wrote it.

He replied with these words of encouragement that I kept in daily sight for many years.

"Thank you for your fine spirit. Concentrate on your strengths. Do your best in areas where you feel weaker. Keep a joyful attitude and everything else will follow."



Discouragement on the path (part II)

I was feeling discouraged again. The usual litany of self-doubts, the quality of my meditations, whether I belonged on the path, moods, and so on.

I saw Swamiji at the Village soon after at a major event. He said, "I am thinking about your letter." Then a week or so later, he visited Palo Alto to give a Sunday talk. Afterward, he

greeted every person in the courtyard.

He looked especially otherworldly that day. I waited till near the end of the line. As soon as he saw me, he picked up the conversation as if without a break.

He said, “You are a wonderful person and a good devotee. You have nothing to be ashamed of. It’s all just small bumps on the road of life. Keep your chin up.”



A dream

In a dream, I was in a large room like a den. Swamiji was working at his desk. It was a warm summer day, and a friend was nearby, fixing something in the background.

Swami rose to embrace me. “You are dear to me. I am glad you came.”

He said, “You must love yourself. You must learn to relax and do nothing.”

Somehow, when he said to relax and do nothing, he seemed to be very light about it, smiling and laughing. The friend laughed in the background too, agreeing that it would be great for me, and enjoying the joke that I would find it so hard to do.



Very good

Whenever I was present at an event where Swamiji blessed people, I felt it was important to capture the moment. I’d always sit close by and click away with a silent digital camera. I knew

that for some people, this blessing might be their only contact with him. Over many years, I have taken perhaps thousands of photos like these. Occasionally I worried that this was intruding on a precious, private moment with Swamiji. Finally, one day I asked him if this was okay.

He said simply, “What you are doing is very good.”



Well done, lass

Though I was an experienced singer and soloist before coming to Ananda, I was musically invisible for the 13 years



Performing the Oratorio (1984-85)

I lived at Ananda Village. One small ensemble of singers performed and there was no opportunity for newcomers to join.

So it was a rare pleasure when I was invited to sing a solo, “Song of Mary Magdalene” in an early performance of Swamiji’s Oratorio. I sang with a full heart in that concert, feeling the joy Mary felt to be so close to Jesus. When I finished and walked back into place in the choir, Swamiji was standing right behind me. In those days, he often sang in the bass section.

He whispered, “Well done, lass.”



Another dream

Swami said to me, “I’ve been worried about you.” He gave some words of advice. Then he finished comfortingly, “You seem calmer than before.”



Sing

At Swamiji’s last event in Palo Alto in 2012, I conducted a large choir to open the program. He was sitting on the altar to right of the choir, so I could see both the singers and him. Several times during the singing, he looked at me and gestured “Why?” in a way I didn’t understand.

He explained later, “I thought you would be singing. Why were you conducting?”

“It’s my honor to serve the choir, sir.”

“Whenever I am here, I want to hear you sing.”

Now that he is free of his body and always around, whenever I sing, I try to feel I am singing for him.



Last photo

In 2010, Swamiji lived part of the year in Los Angeles to help launch Ananda’s work there. He was working extremely hard, but his health was very poor.



While we were visiting, he heard that it was my birthday. He invited us to sit with him in the beautiful back yard of the home where he was staying. Many of the support people around Swamiji were concerned about him expending so much energy. I'd have felt the same in their position. As usual, he was doing what he felt Master wanted him to do. I felt deeply sad for the pain he was experiencing, both inwardly and physically.

He spoke to us for a long time, very warmly. Then he asked, "Would you like to take a picture with me?"

That was an invitation we didn't hesitate to accept. I passed my small camera to someone nearby.

That was the last photo of the two of us together with Swamiji, and one of the most beautiful I have ever seen. In his eyes, I see the impersonal love he had for everyone. On another occasion he said. "I've only had two desires: to find God and to help others to find God. I have no interest in anything else."



Do you have a piano?

One day Swamiji asked, “Do you have a piano at home?”

“No,” I replied, murmuring something about noise in small apartments.

“You should have one.” He described the wonderful Kawai digital piano he’d just bought for the Village for performances.

“You *must* have a piano. I’ll buy you one.”

Mortified, I rushed to assure him that I would buy the piano myself. But I couldn’t imagine why he felt so strongly about it.

Upon reflection, this was a needed correction. I was naturally inclined to a simple, spare lifestyle. We’d lived happily in a tipi for a few years at Ananda and it had taken some cajoling to move us into a more traditional house. Wherever we lived, our



In a home in Los Angeles where Swamiji was speaking (2008)

friends often commented on how ‘zen’ our home decor was (or perhaps they really meant *lack* of home decor).

I grew up in a beautiful home devoted to the arts and music. Every room was a canvas for my parents’ creativity. In fact, every room was a different color: an orange billiard room, a purple entertainment room, a bright yellow dining room. Interesting paintings and unusual furniture were treasured.

My parents were professional musicians. We attended concerts often. A grand piano sat invitingly in the living room. I had early lessons on violin and piano and many years of performance, summer music camps, and music retreats. I’ve contributed to group music-making all of my life.

There was nothing about this early life that was incompatible with the spiritual life. Perhaps an ancient monastic memory inclined me toward a small, unadorned cell. But I wasn’t living in medieval Europe anymore.

Swamiji did everything with the most refined sense of beauty and aesthetic. He said, “Beauty is a reflection of the Divine. When we see beauty, we are seeing a reflection of God.”

I was grateful for the reminder. Beauty feeds the soul. When I play, I feel a renewed appreciation to my family and to Swamiji for the gift.



Encouraging quotes by Swamiji:

“People learn by making their own mistakes. This is how I work with people, not by command. Allow yourself and others to make mistakes and learn by them.”

“Never say ‘I have failed.’ Say ‘I haven’t yet succeeded.’ Remember no matter what your faults are, keep on trying. A saint is a sinner who never gave up.”

“In all my life, I have rarely seen an ashram filled with so many high-quality devotees. I didn’t make you that way. You came that way. I helped a little.”

“Ananda is based on friendship, kindness, and working together. All of our enterprises work because of kindness. Treat everyone as a friend and people will beat a path to your door.”

“It isn’t enough just to change your actions. You must also change your consciousness. In this world, you cannot always avoid harming others. What you must overcome is the *desire* to harm others. A woman baked a cake and put it on the counter. Later, she saw that there were ants all over it. She said, ‘Listen, I want to talk to your leader. I have made this cake to serve others. I will give you an hour to leave this cake and go out to that tree out there.’ An hour later, it was so.”

“It’s your job to love God. It’s His job to save you.”

HUMOR



Football

I often felt that Swamiji's spiritual power and magnetism was somewhat invisible. Most people, whether Ananda folks or the general public, didn't seem to "see" who he was.

I was involved in marketing for nearly 40 years at Ananda and made every effort to raise his profile.

In 2006, I put together a Curriculum Vitae (CV) for Swamiji and shared it online. This provided a helpful background piece for the media. I believe it's the only document that offers, as best we can, a complete record of his (outward) achievements. It included every piece of music composed, every book written, every award received, and his major life accomplishments.

I sent the finished version to Swamiji. His staff was glad to have it. But I didn't hear anything back from him.

A month or so later, he happened to be traveling through

Ananda Palo Alto. He stepped out of his car into a crowd of well-wishers. As he praned and smiled into the sea of welcomes, he spotted me and shouted merrily, “Chauvinist!”

He turned and greeted a few others. But my curiosity was sparked. Eventually he walked over to me and said with mock seriousness, “You left something *very* important out of my resume.”

What could it be? I really thought I’d been thorough.

With a smile he said, “You refused to include my Haverford football victory over Swarthmore.”

Swamiji’s Haverford football career was so unworthy of note, we had a good laugh over it. He also enjoyed teasing us. David and I had both graduated from Swarthmore, a sister school to Haverford and an athletic competitor. He was enjoying the good-natured rivalry.

For those who might not know, in his youth, Swami was a fast runner, played tennis, and loved to ski. He attended Haverford during the war years, and qualified for the football team because of the dearth of available candidates. Though his team had an undefeated season, he never considered himself a serious football player.

He enjoyed telling of the game when he tripped over his suddenly untied shoelaces, and made a stunning block, which allowed his team to score in the final 30 seconds. His teammates refused to believe that ineptitude rather than skill caused their victory.

Postscript: both colleges eliminated their football teams years ago. Swarthmore students used to attend games only to watch the band’s excellent half-time shows and then return back to their studies. This may explain why we struggled to

maintain football teams, as this was one of our cheers:

*Sophocles, Pericles, Peloponnesian War,
x squared, y squared, H2SO4,
Three point one four one five nine,
Come on, Garnet, hold that line!*



Bonhomie

Swamiji was an unusually intelligent man, widely read, thoughtful, and refined. While speaking informally one day to a group gathered in the living room at Crystal Hermitage, he dropped the word *bonhomie* in a sentence. He was met with more than a few blank stares and inquired, “Do you know what this means?”

Someone in the back of the room said, “It’s a cleanser, right?” (referring to the Bon Ami brand). Swamiji groaned and looked over at me. “Karen, surely you know what it means?”

“I’m afraid I don’t, sir,” I said.

“But you went to Bryn Mawr,”

“No, I went to Swarthmore.”

“Swarthmore!” Swami said in mock horror. “Bah!” he added, with more than a little delight.

Our lack of knowledge of the word *bonhomie* (cheerful friendliness, geniality) might imply that we were a rather ragtag bunch. I am happy to report, perhaps myself and the cleanser speaker excepted, Ananda is home to the highest concentration of exceptionally bright people I’ve ever known.



Ow, you're hurting me!

Swamiji needed periodic injections to treat his diabetes. He was fortunate to have a nurse on his staff during the last years of his life. When she needed to be away for a brief time, someone else was enlisted to help. "Kate" was a natural choice as she had worked a medical clinic before. Even so, giving injections was new for her.

I stopped by Swamiji's home one afternoon to find Kate at Swamiji's side, attempting to do the necessary.

"Ow! Ow!" Swamiji cried, "You're hurting me!" Kate was trying to be resolutely nurse-like and soldier on. But she looked uncomfortable.

I watched the scene with a sense of bemusement. A few more moments of agony were on display, and then I simply couldn't resist.

I said, "You visit dentists without novocaine. You can't possibly mind this. I think you are just giving Kate a hard time."

He smiled at me and stopped making any complaint.

After another few minutes, I said, "You know, giving an injection looks easy. I bet I could learn how to do that."

Hastily, Swami replied, "Yes, you could. But don't!"



Humorous moments

Swamiji's energy was legendary. Being around him inspired us to put out more energy and be more aware than most of us

were used to. When he left an Ananda community for another destination, many of us took a long-awaited rest to recover.

At the end of one of Swamiji's visits to Seattle, Padma remarked, "You sure have worn us all out."

"That reminds me," said Swamiji. "Did you pack my whip?"

"I'm sure there's one waiting for you in Assisi," she joked.

He smiled delightedly.

I'd written some promotional copy for *Mantra*, a new recording of Swamiji chanting two ancient Indian mantras. He wasn't happy with my writing.

He called me to his office to read an alternative version he had prepared. It was great. It was alive with energy — some of the best marketing copy I'd seen. The bio was great, too.

"I don't mean to chastise you," he said. "I just want to train you."

I replied, "My goal is — just once in this life — to present you with copy you don't need to edit."

He opened his palms upward and shrugged in a gesture of rabbinical supplication, as if to say, 'if God were ever to allow it, it would be great.' And then, he lifted his eyes to the heavens and said, "Oy!"

At Apple computer stores, all of the employees wear blue shirts. One day, an employee ran out to our group and asked, "Who is that man?" pointing to Swami, dressed head to toe in blue — the colors of his Nayaswami vow.

In all sincerity, the employee added, "I thought he was the Archangel of Apple!"

In Los Angeles, three men approached Swami, saying that they were the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. They asked for Swami's endorsement.

"Listen," said Swami, "if you are what you say you are, you don't need my endorsement."



*A warm welcome to Swamiji as he arrived at the
Ananda Community in Mountain View (1990s)*

TESTS

Swami gave counsel carefully. If you asked him for advice, you had to be serious about wanting it. How much more careful he was when urged to speak to someone else, uninvited, about changing a difficult behavior. Sometimes he'd wait years. Even then he would often do it in a lecture, and might not even look at the person. In general, he was very understated. Most of us could easily miss a corrective unless we were very receptive to it. In my case, he was usually straightforward, which I appreciated.



Attunement

A small group of singers started meeting together regularly in someone's home. We were all classically trained, good sight readers, and music lovers. Some had been professional singers before Ananda. We happily sight-read scores by Handel, Mozart and others, reveling in the beautiful sound.

All of us were also involved in the Ananda choir. But there were infrequent rehearsals and the choir performed rarely. For these devoted musicians, this filled a gap.

One evening, Swami asked to see me in his office. My manager, Padma, was there, too. They looked somber. I thought that perhaps I was about to be fired. But the conversation went in another direction.

Swami said, “I hear you have started singing with a small group.”

“Yes, sir,” I replied.

He named the people involved. I was surprised he knew anything about such a small detail of my life. I was more surprised that this was the topic of a very rare private meeting with Swami. I can count on one hand the number of times this happened.

Unexpectedly, he said, “I don’t want you singing with that group.”

I hesitated. It felt like a lot to give up. What could the harm be? I asked why it wasn’t okay to be singing classical music.

He smiled and said. “I myself often listen to classical music when I write. That is not the reason.”

“Then why, sir?”

All he said was, “It will be better for you not to sing with them.”

I couldn’t imagine why. They were all delightful people whose company I enjoyed. They were all members of Ananda, actively serving in many ways.

But I’d come to Ananda to grow spiritually. I’d asked for his training. Here was the rarest of opportunities to respond to a direct request.

“I will stop,” I promised him. He nodded and said good night.

Padma spoke to me the next day. “Swami was pleased with your response. I want you to know that.”

“What do you mean?”

“You listened. You didn’t defend yourself or fight back.”

Startled, I replied, “Isn’t that how everyone responds?”

She smiled sadly. “No,” she said, “almost no one even hears what he has said.”

Within a week, I found a diplomatic way to step out.

Within a few years, everyone in that group had left Ananda.

Yogananda said, “Environment is stronger than will power.” It seemed like harmless fun, but by singing together, we were attuning to each other vibrationally.

We’d all come to Ananda to change. But we were also bringing patterns with us that we already knew and continuing to express them, musically and otherwise.



Listen!

Ananda and Swamiji were caught up for more than a decade in very complicated litigation, in which the future of Ananda hung in the balance.

But all of that was unknown when we received the initial threatening letter from the opposing attorney. Inexplicably, Swamiji called me into his office and began to talk about the intricacies of the situation and the legal arguments we might present in the case. I was the only one there. I began to take notes, as was my long habit, so I’d have a record of the

conversation. I had no idea why Swami would share this with me. It was interesting and dense with detail. I was glad to be jotting it down.

“Karen, put that pen down and listen!” Swami said sharply.

Egad! I have always had a terrible, and I mean terrible audial memory. This was one of the harder tests I endured with Swamiji.

He spoke for about an hour, non-stop, sharing details and arguments which were complex and beyond my understanding.

As soon as we were finished, I knew my memory would only last a short time. I knew this was cheating, but I ran to my office nearby and typed everything I could remember before it all evanesced into the ether.

If he was trying to help me overcome my lifelong, weak auditory retention, all I can say is that it was a noble effort (on his part).

After the 12 years of lawsuits ended, it was remarkable to look back on that short meeting. None of us knew how this situation would unfold except him. He anticipated everything that would happen. That was a remarkable kind of courage — to know what was to come and to face fully into it.



Clever

Swami said, “You have an overly critical nature, a clever mind, and intellectual pride. Those things are particularly your flaws. I came to Master loaded with intellectual pride. I overcame it with devotion and concentration on eliminating it.”

I asked how I could have intellectual pride with a mind that didn't seem particularly clever to me. He looked at his desk and murmured, "Oh, you are clever. Give energy to the fact that there is something to be battled. It's not a paper tiger."

Then he said, "I hope you don't feel uncomfortable if I criticize you. It's for your benefit." He placed his hand on my head in blessing.



Ants

During our initial month of training at Ananda, the director of the program, Anandi, announced that we'd be going to hear a talk by Swami Kriyananda. How thrilled I was! Finally I would have the chance to meet the author of *The Path*, which I'd loved reading before coming to Ananda.

What a majestic figure Swamiji was on the cover of that book. He looked like a Himalayan yogi with his beard and orange robes. I was filled with anticipation.

The event was outdoors behind his home. A small stage was nestled in the trees and covered with a canopy. We settled expectantly into our seats and awaited Swami's appearance.

Soon the sound engineer came out and began moving the mikes a bit here and there. He sat down in the speaker's chair. I thought to myself, "He's certainly making himself comfortable."

Then the mikes were turned on. He began to speak. Holy cow! This was Swami Kriyananda? This man looked so different from the orange-robed man on the cover of *The Path*. He was beardless, wearing open sandals, shorts, and a Hawaiian shirt.

I was surprised and a bit crestfallen. I was a great lover of all things Indian. There wasn't a shred of it to be seen.

Within moments of starting to speak, he brushed some small insects from his legs. He casually stomped on them with some enthusiasm, stopping to speak just long enough to spot a few more and send them on to their next incarnation. He did this several times in the first ten minutes of his talk.

Having devoted the last four years of my life to environmental advocacy work, I was stunned and disappointed. I don't remember a thing he said that day.

That was my zen moment. Welcome to Ananda.

I can only guess why Swamiji did this. But I have read *many* stories of saints testing a new student. If the student wants God enough, he will stay through the initial challenge. Fortunately for me, this was a pint-sized test which I managed to pass.

In the 30 years of time I had with Swamiji, I never once saw him do anything like this again.



With open arms

One day, Swamiji asked us to accompany him into Assisi on an errand. We met him at his home. I jumped into the back seat; David sat in the front. Swami drove on the curving, beautiful rural road that led to town. He chattered away continuously about this and that, hardly taking a breath. I remember being struck at how much he was talking, and how light the conversation was.

After about 15 minutes, the conversation changed abruptly. He slowed down and began talking about someone who had

left Ananda some years back.

He said, “He doesn’t realize. No one will ever love him as much as I do.”

I reflected on my experience with this person. He was one of the most challenging people I’d ever known. He’d been intentionally unkind and manipulative to me and many others. When he left, I didn’t know anyone who mourned his departure.

Swami continued, “If he returned, I’m sure we’d all welcome him with open arms.”

A silence descended.

I felt the statement hang, awaiting my response. What seemed like an eternity passed. Silently I answered in my heart, “I would not be able to welcome him, Swamiji.”

I had always been truthful with Swamiji. I couldn’t say something that I didn’t feel.

There was a brief moment more of silence, and then Swamiji began chatting away again, as if nothing had happened.

Yes, there was a crack in this pot. Even today, all these years later, I’d be hard-pressed to welcome this man back to Ananda.

But I will never forget what that kind of love and forgiveness looks like.



Computer training

Swamiji was seated at a large dining room table with a new laptop in front of him. Someone had called me to help with the setup, but two others were already engaged, so I sat nearby and watched.

I'd never been around Swamiji without feeling that some interesting training was going on. I looked forward to today's session.

"Bill" was seated next to Swamiji giving instructions. Swamiji would type a bit, but nothing worked. Bill was frustrated and reached over, typing himself to help move things along faster. Swamiji brought his hands back to the keyboard, gently moving Bill's hands out of the way, and began typing so fast, I could hardly see his fingers. Bill moaned in dismay as the screen froze.

Swami inquired sweetly, "Why isn't it working?" Bill was annoyed. After another few minutes of the same scenario, he walked away. Someone else stepped in to help in the same way with the same result. Soon, Swamiji and I were the only ones left at the table.

"Can you help?" Swamiji turned to me. I was lucky to be third in line. It was easy to tell what not to do. I sat next to him and asked what he wanted to be able to do. I described the first step and waited while he tried it himself. Then a second step in the same way, and so on. He navigated naturally and effortlessly. We finished in short order.

I thought about it later. I doubt he needed any help on the computer. We're talking about someone who was a gifted student all through college, and someone who enjoyed buying and trying out new technology.

He was testing us to see if we could tune into someone else's reality.

I reflected also...he never forced or pushed anyone. I never once saw him frustrated or impatient with us. He trained us individually, according to our ability to accept and learn. He

allowed us the time to learn for ourselves, regardless of our limitations. This is such a rare gift, I imagine few of us have ever experienced it.

It was a reminder to watch out for any impatience that might arise in working with others — to give this gift to everyone, not just to Swamiji.



Support

I found someone's personality difficult to work with. He seemed overbearing and self-aggrandizing.

Swami said, "Recognize his flaws as stemming from a lack of self-confidence, and support him nonetheless."



Get thee behind me

When Swamiji was composing the Oratorio about the life of Christ, he worked day and night. He sometimes seemed near the point of a physical breakdown from exhaustion.

One day during rehearsal, he sat on a step, exhausted. He said he couldn't go on, but that he had to. I wanted to help him somehow. I was sitting right next to him and said, "Sir, why not rest for awhile? You can finish when you feel better."

Forcefully, he said, "Get thee behind me, Satan!"

Whoa! I retreated, mortified. It was a modest relief to learn later that others had received the same admonition.

When a major project is trying to manifest, it needs tremendous

focus and energy. If the impetus is lost, the work may never be completed. Swamiji demonstrated his understanding of this principle countless times throughout his life. He gave me many opportunities to learn to persevere, as well.



A series of tests using music

Not long after we arrived at Ananda, someone asked me to turn pages for a community member while she played a piano piece. It was a special outdoor event near Swami's home, and many people were present. Unbeknownst to me, she was also a well-known personality, sometimes demanding and difficult.

Being an experienced pianist and performer, I thought the page was being turned just when she might need it. I soon learned otherwise. She missed a few notes, stopped playing, and complained about my ineptitude. Swami joined in the criticism.

I thought to myself, "I'm surprised she's so unhappy about this. I could have sworn I'd gotten that page turn right. Any pianist would have been satisfied. Of course, Swami is taking her word over mine since he doesn't know me." I didn't react except to apologize to her, and I didn't defend myself.

Though I didn't know it at the time, I believe Swamiji was testing my reactivity. He saw that I had confidence as a musician, and didn't need external validation. From then on, Swamiji often chose music experiences to help me develop, spiritually and personally. Oversensitivity and resistance would have been signs that I was not receptive to training.

Not long after this, Swami asked me to play his piano sonata, *The Divine Romance*, for a group of about 50 people. It was an informal moment at the end of a choir rehearsal.

I played the first movement. Swami commented, “You didn’t play this *anything* like it should be played.”

I replied that I was seeing it for the first time. He sighed, “Well, that was pretty good for sight-reading. But you aren’t playing it with any feeling. I’ll need to teach you how it should be played.”

This opportunity never arose, though he threatened it a few more times over the course of many years.

In 2009 in Italy, Swamiji was to lecture at the Teatro di Roma. This is one of the premiere opera houses in Italy; it was



Performing at Teatro di Roma, Italy: Karen, Bhagavati, and Swamiji (2009)

an honor just to touch the stage. When he asked me to play *The Divine Romance* before his lecture, I said yes. Swamiji moved heaven and earth to rent a huge grand piano fit for this esteemed venue. His publicist, Nandini, made it all happen with her usual miraculous speed.

When the event began, I played with as much feeling as I could muster. I gave it everything I had. A discerning artist friend said it was the best he'd ever heard it performed. But I still wasn't reaching the target. In front of a large group afterward, Swamiji said, "It was nothing like it should have been." I believe he was trying to help me reach a deeper, more inspired flow of playing. It was not enough to do something well, externally. Even if others were pleased, Swamiji knew I was capable of more.

In the late 80s, Swami had just written the music for "He Who Clothes the Field," a song from his newly-composed Oratorio. Speaking to a full audience in the temple, he asked if anyone would like to sing it with him. I raised my hand. Sight reading. Piece of cake. I was a highly skilled sight reader. You'd be hard-pressed to meet anyone who read music as easily as I did.

He handed me the simplest piece of music imaginable.

I mis-sang the opening four notes.

With evident pleasure, Swamiji said, "That's not right!"

Pride cometh before a fall. Instant karma. To this day, I remember that moment with real embarrassment.

This last correction had nothing to do with music, and everything to do with helping calm my inner reactive process. Why be embarrassed by anything?



Prima donna

I'd been involved in a group activity at Ananda for a few years. But I didn't enjoy the get-togethers much and decided to drop out.

One day, Swamiji asked to see me at his office.

"Why are you not part of this group?" he asked.

"I don't enjoy the leader," I replied.

"Is it because you feel you know more than he does?"

"No, I just don't like him. He seems like a prima donna."

"Oh," said Swamiji, looking visibly relieved. "Good."

I thought my answer would merit a bit of a scolding. But he was searching for a more important flaw.

Pride, evidently, trumped distaste.



Where He Dwells

It was at one of those enchanting warm summer evenings after the sun had set. There was still a soft afterglow in the sky around the Crystal Hermitage. Swamiji was wearing his white jacket and was seated at one of the few long tables set near the pool and gardens for a fundraising dinner. Everything was sparkling in beautiful soft lights. There was an astral sparkle, too; the setting seemed much more beautiful than usual.

That evening I sang the solo "Where He Dwells." It was effortless given the mood. It was where Swamiji dwelled, too, in the deepest sense.



Evening fundraiser at Crystal Hermitage at Ananda Village (mid-2000s)

I'd studied his recording carefully for a few days and made many notes about his interpretation so I could understand what he was communicating. I rarely put in that kind of study.

When I finished singing, he smiled and said, "That was perfect."

Swamiji often told us that he didn't compose this music; he received it. His compositions were an attempt to write down what he heard. My musical training was not enough. I also needed to practice a level of attunement to a higher vibration. Wherever my consciousness was when I sang (or otherwise), he noticed. These are the lyrics to this song:

*Where He dwells, the earth in gladness
Puts forth green herbs, shading trees.
Gay streams bound through summer meadows;
Fragrance blows on every breeze.*

*They with happiness are blessed
Who the Lord have made their guest,
Who the Lord have made their guest.*



Typecast

I received a call one afternoon from Swamiji. “I am putting on a play. Would you like to be in it?”

How delightful, I thought. Of course I said yes immediately. “You will play the part of Crystal.”

Soon all the actors gathered to hear Swamiji share the plot and the characters with us. It did not take long for me to realize that he had personally selected each of the actors for their parts. It was more than disconcerting to feel how closely each of our personality quirks were reflected in the characters he was asking us to play. Crystal, for example, is a young woman who uses cleverness to justify her thinking. Ouch.

As I watched Swamiji coach the various actors, it felt *very* close to the sort of corrective lesson he might have given us in reality. I often found myself squirming sympathetically with the other actors during the rehearsals. When Swamiji referred to this play as a teaching vehicle, he meant it in more ways than one.

The Peace Treaty is a long play, easily 3 hours. We worked hard at it. This first staging was a readers’ theater, so we weren’t required to memorize our part. But for the challenge, I decided to try. By the time of the performance, I was ready.

I remembered nearly all of the lines, to my delight. Afterward, Swami walked on stage to greet all the players. He was full of praise and enthusiasm for everyone.

He turned to me, smiled mischievously and said, “You missed a line.”



How to be an actor in a play

Swamiji was involved in many of the play rehearsals for *The Peace Treaty*. It was performed for the first time at Spiritual Renewal Week in 1992. These are some of the instructions he shared about acting:

- I'm not a fan of the school of realism. Dialogue in drama should be the way people aspire to speak, not the way that they actually do.
- Modern speakers use words as beasts of burden for their ideas. In earlier times, people loved words as they were spoken by poets and troubadours.
- Project your center into the center of the role you're acting. Feel 'God is doing this role through me.' You can project charm in this way, and not get drawn down or away from your center.
- Don't try to use your own personal charm to win people to your character. Stay in your center and act the role from that center.
- Consider the role you are playing as if it were one of your own past lives. In the past, you played many parts, but God was always the one acting through you. God, through you, is playing the part you have in this play. In this way, an actor can also play an evil role without being pulled down by it. Hold the consciousness, 'This is not me. This is God acting through me.' By playing an evil role, you can release any lingering attachment you might have had to those qualities.



Show off

When I arrived at Ananda, I tended to wear dark colors and simple clothes. I didn't like to stand out (at least, I didn't think I did). But gradually, friends encouraged me to wear more colorful clothing and I began to expand my wardrobe. This was California, after all, and not the conservative East Coast where I'd grown up. I'd been a professional in Philadelphia where dark suits were the norm. Swamiji also spoke about dressing nicely and in beautiful colors as a service to others.

And wow — the weather was amazingly sunny and beautiful in California. I started adding some sundresses to my wardrobe. I'd never worn clothes like this before. It was a little counter-intuitive to come to a yoga community and begin dressing more beautifully.

But learning is directional. I needed to get jolted out of a dark color palette and appreciate that what I wore had an effect on the world around me.

One day while shopping, I tried on a one-piece pant suit in rich blue with a soft black pattern. I had a slightly uncomfortable feeling about it. It fit me beautifully. Maybe a little too beautifully. One could hardly escape noticing someone dressed like this. But I bought it anyway, thinking maybe it was an improvement.

A few weeks later, I wore it to a meeting at Swami's home.

Swami looked up disapprovingly. "Show-off," he said.

Swamiji periodically hosted pool parties at the Crystal

Hermitage. Everyone wore swim suits, naturally. I wore what I thought was a modest one-piece. It was more modest than what most others were wearing. But somehow I felt inwardly that Swamiji did not approve of it.

I soon left the pool to change out of the suit and back into summer clothes. I packed the swimsuit up with my things. When I got home, the swimsuit had vanished.

We were about to perform Swami's Oratorio, *Christ Lives!* in a beautiful church in the Bay Area. This music was still very new — within a year or so of its composition. We were looking forward to sharing it with new audiences.

In a dressing area, the women were putting on vibrant, jewel-colored dresses and applying makeup for the stage lighting.

I'd never worn makeup, so Durga offered some of her own and applied it for me. I looked in the mirror and thought, "Wow, I can see why people wear this stuff." I didn't think that personal vanity was a particular issue of mine. Apparently Swamiji thought this admiring glance into the mirror was not in my best interest.

I walked out toward the stage and passed Swami along the way.

He glanced at me briefly and called out to Durga, "Take that makeup off of her, now!"



To buy or not to buy

During a New York City Expo in the late 1980s, I spent nearly

all my time working in the booth with the public. Occasionally I'd dash out to take care of a booth errand or to connect with someone in the hall about Swamiji's talk.

Swami had been interested in showing videos in our booth, but we couldn't find equipment to do it anywhere at the conference. He talked several times about going out and buying what we needed, but each time I would reply, "I don't think it's worth it just for this weekend. We already have this equipment back at Ananda Village. We can always bring it to the next event."

I don't know why I felt so strongly about this, but I was really concerned about saving money for Ananda. These events were huge outlays for us. I am notoriously frugal. (On the first date with my husband, I ordered from a menu by scanning the right hand column to chose the least expensive meal).

On the last day of the Expo, Padma said, "Swami just asked for you. He was going shopping and wanted you to come with him. He just left 10 minutes ago." She kindly gave me leave to dash out of the booth. I was downstairs in a few moments, and started popping in and out of what seemed like dozens of tiny electronics shops near the conference center. I found him fairly quickly. Rather breathlessly, I greeted him.

"Ah, good. You're here." As if we'd never talked about it before, he said, "I'd like to buy a TV and a video machine so we can show some of our videos in our booth. Will you come with me?"

Off we went. In the first shop, we saw a whole wall of televisions. He walked over to one for \$750 and without hesitation said, "I'd like to buy this one."

I was stunned at how quickly Swamiji was making this

decision and his seeming lack of interest in the price. “Sir, I really don’t think we need such an expensive TV. How about if we look for a combo unit (a TV and video player in one device) and see if it’s less expensive?”

He kindly acquiesced and we kept looking. Everything was expensive.

Finally I said, “if I can find something to rent in the next 10 minutes that will do the job, would that be okay with you?” He said yes, and I dashed into a phone booth to start making some calls. He stood outside the booth waiting patiently.

As he waited, he said, as softly and sweetly as you can imagine, “You are an angel.”

Unexpected treasured words!

A few moments later, the deed was done. I popped out of the phone booth enthusiastically and said, “We’re all set. A rental unit will be delivered to our booth in an hour for \$50.”

“Wonderful,” said Swamiji.

I felt at ease for the first time all afternoon. Swamiji took my arm, and we walked slowly back toward the Expo hall.

“Sir,” I asked, “Am I too cheap?”

“Oh no,” he said energetically. “It’s very good to be careful with money. Of course, sometimes you need to spend money to get things going, but I wouldn’t worry.”

On another occasion in an Ananda satsang, he said, “Be careful how you spend the institution’s money. Treat it the same as you treat your own money. We are all Ananda.”

We stopped at another shop along the way and the shopkeeper greeted him warmly. He was an older man who looked like he had been in that tiny shop all of his life. He was maybe in his 60s, but a weary-looking 60s. Swami had bought some

gadgets there, evidently, the previous day. It was an activity he sometimes enjoyed — partly to connect with shopkeepers, and partly to stay abreast of whatever new technology had been developed since he last looked. He was not a “psychological antique.”

“Is that your daughter?” inquired the shopkeeper.

“Like a daughter,” Swami replied, kindly.

They spent a few more moments connecting, and I basked in the happy glow of an unforgettable afternoon adventure.



Fired

Swamiji said that Ananda is a very old spiritual family. Over many lifetimes, we’ve been all things to one another: friends and enemies. We come back together to face and work out these karmas. Nonetheless, whenever I ran into a challenging relationship at Ananda, it always caught me by surprise.

At the beginning of the lawsuit years in the 1990s, I was living at Ananda Village. I volunteered as a researcher, staying for weeks at a time at the Ananda community in Mountain View. One of the projects involved reading through countless books in the basement of the Stanford University Library to find references to “self-realization.” Ultimately, we provided thousands of citations to the court that the phrase had long been in general use and shouldn’t be trademarked. The courts ruled in our favor.

After a few months, another volunteer accused me of making a mistake in copying several pages, and said I should be thrown

off the team. The accusation was made by someone who had been unkind to me for years; I didn't know if I'd done something wrong or this was just personal animosity.

There was no conversation with the team leader; no meeting. I was fired from the project and told I'd be going back home to Ananda Village soon. I was fairly sure I hadn't made a mistake. Even if I had, the lack of communication seemed wrong.

I was weeping which was rare for me. It takes a lot to coax a tear out. But I felt unjustly accused.

The phone rang, and I picked it up. "Hello, Karen?" said Swamiji. I was staying in an empty apartment at the Mountain View community. *I* didn't even know the phone number there.

He said, "I have a question about how to say something in German, and I wondered if you could help me."

What? There were several Germans at Ananda he could have asked, including someone on his own staff. His own German was much better than mine. I don't think anyone even knew I spoke any German.

This was pure charity. He'd called as an excuse to reach out. We chatted for a bit, he wished me a good night, and I hung up the phone, dazed.

I could feel how much he was reaching out to comfort me. I wish I could say that there was a miracle healing. But there was the miracle of a simple, kind gesture — and the mystery of how he knew my situation or found me.

I was still fired from the lawsuit project. It left a real wound. Later, I mused that Swamiji was often unjustly accused and resolutely refused to defend himself. I was impressed how such a trivial life event had caused me such suffering. It helped me appreciate Swamiji's achievement all the more.

My paralegal “career” was short-lived in any case. The lawsuit project soon needed full-time paid staff. The big pool of volunteers soon gave way to Keshava and Rambhakta laboring endless hours, supporting the attorneys over many long years.



Forces of light and dark

Swamiji took a strong interest in the progress of the Joy Singers group, which toured Italy from 2002 to 2004. He was living in Italy then, near the Ananda Assisi community and retreat. He often commented on our singing and offered suggestions for performances. He encouraged and counseled us when there were challenges.

He felt there was no place in the world more receptive to beautiful music than Italy. He was right. This music was loved and appreciated everywhere we sang, from Venice to Sicily.

That experience was one of the highlights of our lives. The friendships among the singers and our generous Italian family who helped arrange the tours were warm and loving. It is impossible to describe the joy of singing Swamiji’s beautiful music to audiences that were so expressive in their appreciation. Everywhere we went, the Italians opened their hearts and homes to us. We sang throughout Italy in many of its most famous churches, with exquisite acoustics.

After about a year, there was a lull in opportunities to sing. The energy of the project began to fray. I was heartbroken that it seemed to be coming to an end. I felt powerless to do anything about it.

Swamiji had just moved from Assisi to India to begin Ananda's work there. When he heard we might be giving up the project, he contacted us with an urgent message. He felt this singing was of the utmost importance. He said there was a great battle between light and dark taking place in the astral and causal planes — and that the singing was part of that battle for light.

This was far beyond anything I'd ever imagined we were doing. I thought we were sharing music to uplift people, and along the way, we were individually learning some helpful spiritual lessons.

A few weeks later, the battle of darkness against light took a very different, more material form. In January of 2004, the Italian police mounted an early morning raid on Ananda Assisi, armed with guns and accompanied by fierce dogs. They confiscated all of the computers at the center as well as in many of the homes of staff nearby. Bank accounts were frozen. Without warning, the center was shut down.

Unbeknownst to us, a mentally unbalanced person who had been with Ananda for a time had made serious accusations against the community: that Ananda was a sect which held people against their will, enslaved them by forcing them to work without being paid, conspired to engage in criminal activities, and coerced handicapped and vulnerable individuals.

This was so far from true that one could only hear these accusations in utter disbelief. Even the police didn't act on this complaint immediately. But eventually it found its way to a prosecutor and a police official who saw the potential for a high-profile case that might advance their careers.

Even if the singing project had been flourishing, it would

have ended with this raid. Suddenly we were involved in something very different.

At this time, the Ananda Assisi center was closed for winter break. Many of its leaders were guiding a pilgrimage to India, which included visiting Swamiji and the new Ananda center near Delhi. There were only a very few people who had the experience to respond. David and I were among them. I'd had professional experience with crisis management, lawsuits, and working with the media from my time before Ananda, directing an environmental advocacy organization.

We found ourselves part of the tiny defense team led by Maya Devi, the only community leader present at this time. Nandini, who was a gifted PR professional, and a few other intrepid souls rounded out the team.

Though nearly everyone's computers were taken in the raid, ours were spared. The singers' home was a few miles from the center down a long, unpaved road. It wasn't on the police's radar. We could continue to work. The singers' home became the legal defense office.

Terrible as the situation was, I was filled with joy to be of service. We had witnessed the lawsuits in America from the sidelines, but hadn't been able to help much. Now, we all worked day and night to help defend the community — writing articles for the press, providing support to the attorneys, and staying in contact with community leadership and Swamiji in India.

The community leaders naturally wanted to fly back immediately to help. Swamiji said there was no need. He encouraged the leaders to stay in India for the rest of the pilgrimage. He felt the small group in Italy could carry on. He

gave suggestions early on in how best to respond, and we felt deeply supported and guided by him. It was a gift from him, entrusting our small team.

Two months later in early March, nine people from Ananda, including nearly all of the leadership, were arrested and put in jail. Photos appeared in the Italian media showing our people being escorted to jail. The police were hooded, as if they were arresting members of the Mafia.

Swami had been adamant about coming back to Assisi to support the community and a major conference we were hosting in March. But Master protected him. He came down with double pneumonia and was too ill to travel. He would have been jailed too, as the police were waiting for his arrival. They had tapped his Assisi home phone and hearing a male voice, assumed he was there; they were disappointed to find someone else: Jyotish and Devi*.

After 5 days, the community leaders were released from jail, placed under house arrest, and forbidden to speak to anyone.

For several months, the negative press throughout Italy was unrelenting. Ananda was accused of the worst abuses you could imagine. Members of the community received anxious calls from their Italian families, begging them to leave and avoid personal disgrace.

Years earlier, in the worst of the litigation in the U.S., our lawyer had insisted that we not communicate with the press. It was a grave error which Swamiji spoke against at the time. But our attorney had prevailed.

This time, Swami and we knew it was critical to speak to the press. Silence would only give more weight to the accusations. Nandini had a great gift for friendship and for working with

people, press included. Thanks to her, the press were very conscientious about reporting our side. It made all the difference.

Afterward, our attorneys said that they had never seen such a positive response from the media. It greatly helped to turn public opinion, and was an influence in the legal process.

Why did we end up in Italy? To sing? To grow spiritually? To help defend the community? Were we soldiers on a battlefield of light against dark?

These are usually just abstract concepts to me. But they became much more real in the context of this legal action.

I saw many examples of generosity and courage during this time. It felt like several lives rolled into one. When the center was shut down and access to bank accounts closed, there were easily 30 people dependent on the retreat for their income and meals. Within a short time, there was almost no food left in the kitchen. A long-time community member, whose bank accounts were also frozen, came into the community kitchen one day, took 50 euro out of his pocket (perhaps his last cash), and gave it to the kitchen manager to buy a few staples. I'll never forget how radiant he looked.

Despite the hardship and the strangeness of the situation, all we felt was joy. In fact, I would say it was one of the most joy-filled times of our lives. We felt Swamiji's guidance and support like wind in our sails.

Finally, there came a point later in March when everyone was freed from jail and house arrest. Meetings were now 10 to 15 people, instead of just a few of us. Leaders were able to attend meetings again and the whole community was deeply engaged. Our part was complete. All Americans without long-term visas were required to leave the center, the singers included. Within

two weeks, we traveled back to the U.S.

Postscript: It took a tremendous amount of time, wisdom, and money to defend the community against these accusations. On November 22, 2008, Judge Ricciarelli exonerated Swamiji and Ananda of all charges. He declared that there were no facts to support the accusations, and ordered that all charges be completely expunged from the legal records. That was the end. That particular battle of light against dark was over.

** Swamiji named Jyotish his spiritual successor. Jyotish and Devi are founding members of Ananda and spiritual directors of Ananda worldwide.*



Sensitivity

Before Ananda, I'd been immersed in the rough and tumble of politics. I was comfortable being on the receiving end of a great deal of hostility, and had a naturally thick skin. My mother commented once, admiringly, "no one can get to you."

It was only when I began living at Ananda that I discovered a sensitivity I had not known about before.

When I first arrived at Ananda Village, there were so many remarkable and inspiring community members, I assumed everyone at Ananda would be the same. My expectations were idealistic and unexamined.

As I learned more about karma and reincarnation, it was sobering to hear that we incarnate together often as friends, but also to work out past karmas. If we have a strong antipathy to anything, we can be sure to face it again in a future life. Egad!

I was having a hard time with a colleague at Ananda Village.

In truth, many people did. His behavior seemed well below Ananda ideals. But I seemed to be more affected and unhappy about it than most. I often wondered why he was allowed to live at Ananda, and daydreamed happily that he might be asked to leave.

A friend shared with me Swamiji's perspective: "Karen is too sensitive. But M is intentionally manipulative."

It was a relief to hear this, and after that, I determined to become less sensitive. I made some headway, but it took a long time. I understood that my spiritual growth depended on becoming more "unshaken by the crash of breaking worlds."

Interestingly some years later, Swamiji spoke to a group of leaders about this person: "I was able to keep people like him at Ananda. But you won't be able to, and it would be a mistake to try."

Perhaps Swamiji knew that after his passing, there might be no one else who had sufficient magnetism to help M. The disruption of his presence would be more than the community could absorb. As gifted as Ananda's leaders are (I've never known so many people possessing such wisdom and sensitivity) Swamiji's ability to work with unusually challenging people was likely saint-grade.

Swamiji was a master spiritual teacher. He could see into our



Karen at Ananda Village (1990)

natures with an unfathomable clarity and compassion.

This didn't excuse my inability to get along with M. The strength required to undertake the inner battle was greater than I expected. But I am glad that I had the opportunity to practice during this lifetime, without actually dying on a battlefield.



True teaching is individual

My first experience on the road with Swamiji was at the Los Angeles Whole Life Expo in the 1980s. I'd helped promote his appearance for months beforehand. When he was featured in the Los Angeles *Whole Life Times* with his photo taking up 100% of the cover, I was overjoyed. It was rare to obtain such good press coverage. Many people would have the opportunity to hear him for the first time.

Later that weekend, in his hotel suite with about six others, Swamiji was planning the music that would be sung before his talk. He was correcting one of our gifted soloists in minute detail. His singing sounded beautiful to my ears, so I was curious what the lesson was. I was impressed how well the man was accepting the corrections.

Then Swami turned to the others nearby. Smiling sweetly, he asked them if they would sing at the Expo. They looked quite surprised. This was a group of people who had rarely sung a note in public before. He had them stand up and sing for him. Truthfully, they didn't sing anything like the man I'd heard a few moments before. Yet he lavished praise about how wonderful they sounded.

That unpolished group sang at the Expo before his keynote. He (and they) were delighted. Whatever they lacked in musicality, they more than made up for in their shining smiles and faces. In fact, they beamed so much happiness and good will to the audience, I could see that they touched many more people than a more musically trained group would have.

That was one of my first experiences of how differently Swamiji worked with his students, and how much more was going on than met the eye — or ear.



Inwardly untouched

Swamiji had attracted some strong-minded people to his staff at Ananda's publishing company. Most were wonderful, but I clashed with a few. I wasn't alone in bearing scars from these interactions. Even though I was free to do writing and marketing on my own, I was one of many staffers crowded into a small work space. It was not easy to block out conversations or disharmony.

I asked for another work assignment. In response, Swamiji said, "Your dharma is writing on my staff. You shouldn't even think of making a change or an escape to another job."

My manager, Padma, added, "You let people get to you. Working here is helping you to become more objective and less personal in your relationships with others. This is important because now and in the future, you will have to write about Swami and his work."

Swamiji was right. This was an ideal place to face these

challenges. I could stay and learn what I could, or I could postpone the inevitable and face the tests again — in this lifetime or another.

Having committed to his training, I couldn't allow myself to walk an easier, less useful path of self-development.

Another year or so went by. I was still working at Crystal Clarity. One day, I wrote Swami saying that I was having a rough time. I was feeling low, with a lack of joy.

Soon after, Swami saw me and asked, "How are you? Are you doing better?"

I replied, "Sometimes. But my mood goes up and down."

Swami said, "Is it your work?"

I said, "No, it's more my interactions with other people."

"But your work is mostly solitary, isn't it?"

"Yes. But it does sometimes involve others."

"Well, where you are is perfect for you." Then smiling beatifically, he went on: "The cause of all suffering is the ego."

Then he waited expectantly, as though he had said everything that needed to be said.

I smiled back, but inside I fairly shouted, 'Please, sir, I need something more!'

Sensing my receptivity, he added, "This is a good challenge for you because it's within your power to do something about it. You must learn to be unaffected by the things around you. Even when life is hard, you can always remain inwardly untouched."

He paused for a moment and went on, "I have been very impressed with your work. Everything you do is excellent. Your tests are within yourself. Things can't always be enjoyable. You have to learn to continue to work hard even when you don't feel joy. Solitary work is good for you. When challenges come

at you, step back into your own calm center.”



The key is missing

Sometimes I was on the receiving end of a correction. Sometimes I had a ringside seat. One day a group of us were with Swamiji. He was chatting amiably with Bob. I was nearby enjoying the conversation.

Suddenly, Swami changed the topic and said that an item in his home had not been returned, and Bob was the last one to have it.

Bob became defensive. “I returned it. I’m sure of it.”

They went back and forth a few times. Bob spoke fast, squirming to avoid blame.

It was clear this was a test in progress.

I grinned and said, “I think he thinks he’s innocent, sir.”

Swamiji grinned back at me, rubbing his hands together, and said, “He’s washing his hands of the blood, like Lady Macbeth!”

Bob didn’t even notice our side conversation. Swamiji went a few more rounds and then changed the topic.

It was a sobering experience for me. Why be defensive? What, after all, are we protecting?



Build a group house

In about 1984, Swamiji formed a new department called the Joyful Arts Production Association (JAPA). It included the Joy

Singers' tours, Swamiji's photos, recordings he had made of humorous P.G. Wodehouse stories, and other creative projects.

One day while meeting with his staff, he asked us all to think about building a group house so that everyone could work and live together cooperatively. He suggested that each of us put in \$25,000 to help make the project happen.

Ananda is a cooperative community, but it's not communal. Everyone has their own individual homes, and most people appreciate their privacy. To live and work together under one roof would be a big challenge.

Equally challenging was that few of us had much money. This was a test beyond our comfort level.

David and I went to Asha for advice. She encouraged us. "When Swamiji invites you to do something, it's a rare opportunity. Why not say yes, and see where it leads?"

So we did say yes. This project was important to Swamiji. He understood that we would grow much faster if we could live and work together. He also understood that people don't choose to grow that quickly on their own. He was a necessary catalyst.

Few people in the group really embraced this project. Still, we all stretched to affirm the possibility, meeting a few times over the next month.

Ultimately, we were all too new, too poor, and too unsure to make it happen. But regardless of our limitations, within a few years we *were* living in a group home. The idea had captivated enough people that group living situations were beginning to be built. About 15 of us lived together sharing meals, meditations, and meaningful friendships. David and I lived that way for the next 11 years at Ananda Village.

I loved the camaraderie, the depth of relationships, and the chance to rub off more of my rough edges. It's much harder to see those edges when you are living on your own, comfortable in your habits.

It wasn't always easy, but living together was immensely growth-producing and rewarding. I know first-hand why Swamiji often advocated it.



What do you think?

There was a meeting of community managers in Swamiji's living room sometime in the late 80s. Everyone was seated in a large circle, including Swamiji. A difficult situation was being discussed.

At one point, Swamiji turned to Jyotish and said, "What do you think we should do?" Jyotish gave what seemed to be a wise and thoughtful solution.

Swamiji replied, "That's completely wrong."

Jyotish leaned back in his chair and smiled without a trace of embarrassment. Swamiji went on to propose another solution, and no one spoke again after that. I inwardly prayed to be as open to receiving a correction from Swamiji as Jyotish was.



Relationship blues

There's an old joke about marriage: "Today is our wedding anniversary. We're celebrating 3 wonderful years."

“But you were married 15 years ago!”

“As I said... 3 wonderful years.”

Happily, David and I have done much better. So far, we’ve had 45 wonderful years, plus two years that were very challenging. At some point during one of those years, I wrote to Swamiji, despondent that our marriage was in trouble. David was going through a hard time, and instead of supporting him, I’d been pushing him too hard to change. Nagging would be an excellent description.

In reply, Swamiji wrote this short note:

“I hope things are getting better now and pray for you both. I’ve often thought of disharmony between people who are close as dissonances in music, which, once resolved, make the music all the sweeter.”



Swamiji and Jyotish greeting us, among many others, at Crystal Hermitage (2007)

Swamiji modeled the attitude I should hold in marriage and in life: he gave everyone freedom to grow. Despite our (many) shortcomings, he never pushed or forced anyone to change.

Yogananda wrote, “Coercion or compulsion never brings about growth. It is freedom that accelerates evolution.”

Swamiji wrote the song, “Divine Friendship,” for couples to express to each other at an Ananda wedding. The lyrics:

*Dearest friend, In the blend
Of your life's path with mine,
I have found Love is crowned
With freedom's vine.
Sorrows all disappear
When friendship's gaze is clear.
May our sight, Shunning night,
Toward God incline.*



Facing negativity

Swamiji invited someone to go to town for a coffee. “Which coffee shop would you like to go to?” he asked.

“Well, anywhere except the one where the owners speak against Ananda,” she said. Next thing she knew, Swami was pulling into the parking lot of that very place. He walked in and sat down and they had coffee there, as naturally as could be.

Most people shy away from negative energy. Swamiji often walked boldly toward it, and treated everyone as if they were, and always had been, his friends. He was not influenced by how others treated him.



Another chance

People who aspire for spiritual development are often very strong personalities. Their good qualities shine forth with energy, and sometimes also their faults.

If someone was sincere in their desire to grow spiritually, Swamiji was ready to help them. He didn't give up easily and gave people repeated opportunities.

A manager of an Ananda project was increasingly negative and critical. Finally, Swamiji said to him, "I can't have this kind of disharmony." The man stormed out of the room.

Later, this man asked to come and see Swamiji again. Swamiji was happy about it, hoping he would ask for his role back. But the man was angry and it was a blowout meeting. He left Ananda for good after that.

I was struck how hopeful Swamiji was before this last meeting. If the man had been even a little open, or accepted some responsibility, I believe Swamiji would have welcomed him back.

In stark contrast, I could get a particularly hot head of steam over someone's misbehavior. Asha would say, "So, shall we take them out into the courtyard and shoot them?" Reluctantly, I'd say no.

There was another challenging personality in the early years of Ananda. He was outspoken and forceful. But he seemed devoted and sincere. Swamiji asked one leader after another to take him on. After even the most loyal manager said, "No sir, we just can't," Swamiji said, "Then I will take him, myself."

And he did, for many years.

This was someone I worked with, too, for years. I didn't have the same charitable attitude as Swamiji, and often wished he could be adorning some other workplace. Some years later, he became negative and left Ananda, writing one last, unkind letter to Swamiji.

I never heard Swamiji speak of these people again. But I think if they had asked, he would have given them another chance in a heartbeat. His capacity to help was endless, as was his forgiving heart.



Invitation

A man was visiting Ananda for the first time. A friend suggested that he join a gathering that Swamiji was hosting at his home later that afternoon. Swamiji overheard the invitation and said to the visitor, "Oh, I'm sorry, it's for members only."

The man felt disappointed for a moment, but replied cheerfully, "I can understand that."

Swamiji smiled and replied, "In that case, you should come!"



Low turnout

Ananda hosted a series of classes, but only a few people attended. Afterward, people said, "Well, I guess that was all Divine Mother wanted to see happen."

Swami remarked rather sternly, "Please. Leave a little room for human error."



Titiksha

Swami often told stories about how he went to the dentist and declined to receive an anesthetic, even for serious dental work. He shared one particularly detailed account over breakfast, much to everyone's discomfort.

I asked him, "Do you recommend that we do this, too?" Swami replied, "According to your capacity. Once many years ago as a practice in *titiksha* (patient endurance of suffering), I took an ice cold shower during the coldest time of the year with no heat in the house. It took a week before I felt warm again."



Little time left

Though Swamiji was often subtle and understated in the way he guided students, in the last few years of his life, he was sometimes much stronger. He said, "I hope my friends will forgive me for being so direct. I only have a little time left."



Marketing

I'd been marketing Swamiji's books for a few years. I mentioned to him one day that it would be great to have him on the cover of *Newsweek* magazine.

He replied, "I don't want to water down what we have for

the masses. I want to be what we are. Let those come who are interested. I'm not after big audiences. I want devotees."



Apologies

Someone played the flute for Swamiji, and he said to them, "You played very well tonight, the best ever." Swamiji was careful to speak the truth.

But she felt she hadn't performed at her best. Instead of accepting the compliment graciously, she apologized for what she felt was a poor performance. This is something trained musicians often do, myself included. They focus on their mistakes rather than the overall performance.

Swami replied to her, "People are always apologizing. Don't be so sensitive."



Draw on me

When Swamiji was weak or ill, I tended to keep my distance. I didn't write. I didn't wait in a long line to greet him unless I felt sure he was not too tired.

Once when he was visiting Palo Alto, he was very ill. Still, he insisted on seeing everyone who wanted to speak with him. There were some who didn't come out of concern for him. Afterward he asked, 'where was so and so? Why didn't so and so come? I wanted to greet him.'

Swamiji had devoted his life to finding God and helping

others to find God. On one occasion, he even said, “Part of the reason that I’m so tired now is that no one is using me.”



I was with you

Someone wrote a book interviewing many community leaders about their early years at Ananda. More than a few people mentioned receiving major assignments from Swamiji, and then being left on their own to figure out how to implement them.

When Swami read the book, he clarified, “I did not leave you alone. My consciousness was always with you. My way is to project thoughts. Those who are receptive and want to be in tune will be guided. A true teacher won’t impose. You have to reach out for it.

People say that I never give them advice. I *do* give advice, but I hint. People hear what they want to hear.”



Moderation

Swamiji had a tremendous capacity for work. His enthusiasm was infectious, and whoever wanted to join in was soon putting out lots of energy, too. But even for the most energetic of us, it was hard at times to keep up.

Among ourselves, we sometimes talked wistfully about the pleasures of a more balanced life. After all, the Bhagavad Gita speaks of moderation in all things, and some of us were not

above quoting it to serve our desire for a break.

I confess, however, that I never heard Swamiji talk about balance.

One day in a large meeting, he finally addressed the topic. Looking directly at me, he said, “Moderation is to do as much as you can without breaking. Some people can do a lot. Others can do less.”

Clarifying further in his book, *The Essence of the Bhagavad Gita*: “Moderation means doing everything you can to advance spiritually, without pushing yourself too far.”



Quotes from Swamiji about tests

“Admit your mistakes. Face them honestly. But don’t identify yourself with mistakes. Once you’ve learned how to do this, you’ve learned it for eternity.”

“Face everything with good cheer and humor. You will have obstacles and troubles — even concentration camps. You have to go through the ups and downs of life until you understand that behind it all, bliss is unchanging. Even if your whole life is tragic, it’s just one life — one of many.”

“In my astrological chart, I have a grand cross in fixed signs. Some astrologers have told me that this is so challenging, it could drive some people to suicide. But I’ve been perfectly happy. I’ve welcomed everything that comes to me.”

“As long as you have an attitude of rejection — ‘I don’t like this, I don’t want that’ — or you are trying to push something away, you will always be miserable.”

“I often say that people who have an easy life have an unfortunate life. Be thankful if God is interested enough in you to give you tests.”

“I’m offering you a hard path, but nothing else will give you freedom. You are a child of God. You will never find happiness except through Him.”

“A serious question is different from the state of mind of the chronic doubter. That kind of doubt can’t be satisfied, no matter how many answers you get. It can only be dissolved by love.”

“The karmic law is exact, but impersonal. It’s a friendly law if you follow it, and hard if you go against it.”

“I am not sorry for any suffering I have had in my life. If we don’t face and overcome challenges, we don’t grow. Everything that comes to us comes from God, and is always for the best. When I was thrown out of Self-Realization Fellowship where I had lived and served my guru for 14 years, I thought my life was destroyed. The great Indian saint Anandamoyee Ma said, ‘Take this as the grace of your Guru.’ At the time, I didn’t feel that I could. But later I came to see that she was right.”

“Be grateful for your tests and hard times. They’re the best things that can happen to you.”

“Everyone will have tragedy and pain at some point in life. When pain comes, don’t reject it. Accept it; live in it. With that attitude, you can face anything. This is a very important lesson in life. Even in a movie when you see terrible tragedy, try to imagine being that person. I always ask myself, ‘Could I handle that?’ When you can accept anything, you will be inwardly at peace, come what may.”



Swamiji amidst a sea of people, each lost in their own consciousness. Swamiji didn't usually show his inward state, but in later years, his inner bliss was no longer hidden. (Rome, 2010)

At the Feet of a Saint



Swamiji spoke at the San Jose Performing Arts Center in 2008. He also performed the Oratorio and held an Open House at the Mountain View community. It was the largest weekend we'd ever hosted. David coordinated the huge team effort. (Front left): Devaki, Swamiji, Asha. (Back): David, Shanti, Karen, Amara, Chidambar



I was almost always behind the camera; this photo was a rare gift. Jayadev, Swamiji, Anand, and Kirtani in Ananda Assisi Temple (2006)

MUSIC

Many stories in this book involve Swamiji's music as a means for my growth or self-understanding. This chapter is about Swamiji's music, itself.



A new ray

Swamiji composed over 340 pieces of music. He was often moved to tears as he composed, describing the process as receiving from a higher source.

There is a power in this music hidden behind its outward form. I've been immersed in it for many years — singing, playing, and supporting others.

One of its powers is inexplicable. It remains fresh and inspiring to me, despite its outward simplicity. By contrast, I find much great classical music immersive and enjoyable for a time, but then my interest fades.

Swami often encouraged people to sing or listen to his music.

Some chafed; most found deep inspiration in it.

I came to feel that Swamiji's music was an invisible carrier wave. It yielded a subtle wisdom and an upwelling of inner joy. It could dispel moods. For some, it was profoundly healing. Even after a lifetime, I have not begun to explore its depths.

Swamiji was rarely so explicit about the impact of this music. Only after many years did I hear these comments from him.

"Rajarshi told me that Master would give me the power I needed to do this work. What he meant, among other things, was the music."

At another time, he said, "Ananda would not be what it is today without the influence of the music. Books and lectures are the outer form of the teachings; music is its coursing blood. This music is not my music. It is a new consciousness coming into the world as music."



Vibration

We were fortunate to have hundreds of pieces of music in our canon, mainly from Swamiji and also including Yogananda's many beautiful chants. Still, musicians sometimes campaigned to include music by other composers.

I once asked Swamiji if he ever listened to other music. He said yes. He sometimes listened to classical music by the great composers.

He added, "There is only one place in the world to hear Ananda music. When we perform at Ananda, it's Ananda music we should be sharing with people. That's not to say other music isn't beautiful. But this music is unique to us."

If I'd given it a moment's thought, I would have realized even the humble store owner follows the same principle. An Italian restaurant doesn't play folk music. A French bistro doesn't play rock.

As I grew in sensitivity, I understood Swamiji's music as a vibration of our particular ray of grace.

It was uncanny how often someone brand new to Ananda would weep when first hearing this music. The more touched they were, the more quickly they seemed to dive into these teachings. The music was like a beacon calling out to anyone who might be receptive.

"Sound or vibration is the most powerful force in the universe.

*Music is a divine art, to be used not only for pleasure
but as a path to God-realization."*

— Paramhansa Yogananda



The eyes

Our small singing group was headed for Italy soon. To raise money for the tour, we performed a few concerts. Swami attended one of them.

Afterward he spoke to me, "Can you sing with your glasses off? Much is conveyed through the eyes that is blocked by glasses." I said yes, and have tried to do it ever since.

I hadn't really noticed before, but Swamiji nearly always lectured and sang without glasses.

Some months later in Italy, we were invited to perform at a new age trade show. It was the usual endless booths in a cavernous

hall. As we approached the stage, the program before us was in full swing. It was a lingerie show: a full runway with beautiful women and thumping rock music. The new age connection was unclear; perhaps the lingerie was made of organic cotton.

Our jaws were slack. We wondered how we could possibly follow an act like this. I looked at the modest style of my long red dress, and hoped it would be entertaining enough.

The show ended and the audience departed. A handful of people wandered in and sat, sprinkled lightly across a sea of empty chairs. We dutifully sang a very different sort of music for 30 minutes and then departed.

A few weeks later, a woman who had been in that tiny audience flew to the United States to visit Ananda Village. She told the front desk registrar, “I saw this woman dressed in red, singing in Italy. Something in her eyes touched me deeply. I knew I must visit the place where she came from.”



Devotion

Our choir in Palo Alto performed several pieces for Swamiji. While I conducted, I placed Swamiji in a chair between me and the choir. For the first time, they could sing to him directly. It was an unusual experience for the choir, and they sang with great feeling and expressiveness.

Afterward, he said, “Thank you for the beautiful music. It was beautiful technically as well. There’s no more that you need to do technically. The way to make the music more beautiful now is to increase your devotion.”



Quotes from Swamiji about music

At a satsang near the end of his life, I asked, “Do you want us to share the music in order to draw people to Ananda?”

“No,” he said. “The music speaks for itself.

“On the wings of Ananda’s music, we can bring uplifted consciousness to others.”

“The sound of the voice is a reflection of your consciousness. The practice of yoga and meditation gives people sweet voices. I’ve never heard a choir as beautiful as you all at Ananda. It’s music from the heart. It’s as much the singers as the songs.”

“I’m deeply aware of the unhappiness and pain of life. If you listen sensitively, you will hear that in my music.”

“If anyone challenges my right to be a Christian because I have an Indian guru, let them listen to the *Oratorio*.” (Swamiji’s *Oratorio, Christ Lives!*)

“Music is my deepest expression. If you want to know me, listen to my music.”

“The music is central to everything we do. The music is a very important part of our ministry. I would urge all of you to get involved with it. Sing with the choir. It will deepen your attunement.”

At the Feet of a Saint



One of many celebrations at Crystal Hermitage. Music is always a part of Ananda events. It's a carrier wave for Master's vibration through Swamiji. So many people have found themselves 'home' upon hearing the music for the first time.



I'd been photographing this event in Rome. But around Swamiji, one always needs to be ready. He asked me to sing O Master at the last moment. I dashed up, poorly dressed and still wearing my camera. Someone kindly slipped me the lyrics. (2010)

SWAMI



Like Master

Swamiji shared, “When I first met my guru, I knew he was mine. That’s all that mattered. Not everyone saw him for what he was. His hermitage was like a hotel. People didn’t stay long. They did not realize his greatness. Often, while living with Master, they would be reading about other saints and teachers.

“Once, a group of monks planned a trip to Mt. Shasta to see the masters they believed were living there. Master said, ‘There are no masters there.’ That’s all he said. Can you imagine?

“He didn’t hold himself apart. He never allowed people to crowd around him in adulation. He spoke in a natural way. He didn’t impose himself on others. People felt at ease around him.”

Several of us had a strange feeling at this point, realizing that Swami could just as easily be talking about himself.

At one point he turned to me and said, “I looked deeply into Master’s eyes, and saw nothing of his personality there at all.”

When I looked back into his eyes, Swami wasn’t there either.

At first, not having lived with Master, we rarely knew if Swamiji was doing or saying something just as Master would have. But gradually, we realized there wasn’t anything

Swamiji did that wasn’t an expression of his guru.



*Swamiji meditating before speaking
at a Yoga festival in Rome (2010)*



Welcome

During my first year at Ananda Village, I felt an intense desire to see Swami. He’d been away on a long overseas trip and was just returning home. We drove four hours to San Francisco to greet him. There were some 50 people gathered joyfully awaiting his arrival at the Ananda San Francisco House. This was a large, stately mansion that Ananda rented and converted into a beautiful ashram and teaching center. Large windows in

the dining room overlooked the city, with vistas of the sparkling blue water and Golden Gate Bridge.

Nearly all of the people there were long-time residents of the Village. We were still very new. The room was filled with conversation and laughter. But I started to feel I wasn't a part of this group; I would never be able to match their years of service or the depth of their relationships.

When the banquet started, I was too shy to grab a seat and ended up in a distant corner, watching the joyous reunions from afar.

After dinner, Swami announced he was going to a movie, and we could all join if we liked. Only a few old-timers seemed to be going, and I felt I'd be intruding to come.

My heart was broken. Here was a spiritual teacher I looked up to, giving his love only to his favorites. With deep sadness, I said inwardly to God, "This isn't for me."

I walked to an adjoining room and looked out the window over the San Francisco Bay, now foggy and dark like my mood. A moment later, there was a light touch on my shoulder. I turned around to see Swamiji already dressed in his coat, ready to leave. He was alone.

With a kindly gaze, he said, "I'm glad you are here," and gave me a hug.

I fell mentally at the feet of this remarkable teacher whose antenna was sensitive enough to pick up my unspoken thought.

There wasn't time to dwell in gratitude, for in that instant, a powerful surge of electricity jolted through my body.

He smiled warmly, invited me to join everyone going to the movie, put on his hat and departed.

But I wasn't going anywhere. I'd never experienced anything

like this before. For 15 minutes, my whole body vibrated with energy. The flow was so powerful, I was physically shaking.

The feeling of separation disappeared, replaced with loving connectedness with everyone and everything around me.

That hug somehow communicated to me — God *does* love all His children. There is no waiting line for His affection. I felt the Divine as an all-loving all-knowing friend for the first time.

I had inwardly asked Swamiji to be my spiritual teacher since my arrival at Ananda. Now I had received his answer.



Always here

About a year after Swamiji's passing, I had a dream. I walked into Swamiji's home. The scene was his original single dome that's now the Crystal Hermitage living room.

He welcomed me warmly and offered me a cup of tea.

"It's so good to see you," he said with a warm smile. "I'm always here. Please tell everyone they can come anytime."



Blue aura

Swamiji and a few staffers were walking through a large convention center at the Los Angeles Expo. I trailed about 30 feet behind enjoying the show.

A psychic stepped out of her booth and approached me.

"Who is that man?" she inquired.

“Swami Kriyananda,” I replied. “Why do you ask?”

“I have never seen anyone with an aura of that color. It is an unusually deep, rich blue. He has no need to be here, himself. He is free in this life. He has incarnated only to help others.”



The best gift

Swamiji was opening birthday gifts one year. Sometimes it was an original piece of art, clothing, or a book. One year someone gave him a card pledging to meditate three hours a day. Swamiji closed the card and looked around at all of us, his face beaming. “This is the best gift I could ever receive.”



Faith

Swamiji sometimes shared stories with us about how he committed to some major expense without having the funds in hand, and having no idea how the money would come. Then it would show up at just the last moment, in just the right amount. He had many such stories. Surely he was telling them for a reason.

It was rare in the early years of Ananda for anyone to have more than they needed; most struggled to have enough.

After a satsang where he told yet another story like this, I asked him, “Are you suggesting we should be doing the same thing?”

“Oh no!” Swami replied with surprise. “You should only go

as far as your own faith takes you. More would be reckless.”

Jesus often rebuked his disciples for misunderstanding him. At least I was in good company.

Swamiji respected us enough to share the view from the mountaintop. It was up to us to be self-honest about our skills as a climber. Many of us learned hard lessons along the way when we stretched too far.



Bliss

Swamiji gave a major talk in India. Afterward, he remained in a deep state of bliss with tears streaming down his face.

With difficulty he finally spoke to the few gathered around him, “It isn’t enough just to give people the teachings. You must also give them your bliss.”



What is truth?

In a satsang in Palo Alto, Swamiji talked about how truth is understood differently between East and West. He spoke of a yogi who interpreted a single passage of scripture in 24 different ways.

Someone asked him, “Is it really possible that all 24 interpretations could be true?”

Swamiji became very serious and replied, “If a truth is central enough, it has broad, cosmic meanings. It can be applied in countless aspects of life. Scripture doesn’t mean one thing and

one thing only. We are not trying to make exact definitions, as is normal in the West. This is the depth and wisdom of India.”

He continued, “To understand truth, you must understand intuitively. There is no other way. The only mistake you make is to declare dogmatically, ‘This is what Master meant, and only this.’ He meant so much more. In fact, you will never understand what is true until you become a Master yourself.”



Past lives

We were rehearsing a song from Swamiji’s play, *The Singer and the Nightingale*. Swami was sitting nearby, observing and helping direct the scene.

The music director, Jeannie, was working with a small group of women singers, myself included, who reply to the romantic overtures of a group of men calling them to dance. This is surely the silliest piece of music that Swamiji has ever written. It’s a caricature of demure women, quite unlike the unusually strong women I knew at Ananda. First the men sing:

*I love a little girl
I love a little girl
I love a little girl
Come closer TO ME!*

The women demurely sing in reply:

*I’m so dainty that I’m faintly —
Oh, so faintly — terrified.
What will happen if I happen
To come stand by YOUR SIDE?*

Swami was watching me struggle to express this shy, demure personality. He seemed to find my efforts especially humorous, and burst out with a deep belly laugh, “Ha! Karen! That’s a laugh!” And he laughed some more.

Jeannie gave me a quizzical look, but I shrugged my shoulders. I had no idea why this was so funny.

A few years later, someone was giving me a massage, when all of a sudden, she stepped back and said, “Oh my! I see a giant warrior in a forest with long flaming red hair and a mace. The look on his face is pure joy running into battle, hair streaming behind him. It’s you!”

That felt just like me, on the inside.

I’d always been drawn to battle and heroics, had read many war histories, and felt a strong impulse to serve in this way. I’d considered signing up for ROTC before college.

I think Swamiji knew us from many past lives, though he rarely told us what he saw.

He often said that those at Ananda have worked together many lifetimes. Without that, we wouldn’t have the magnetism to live harmoniously together and help sustain this remarkable project.



Included

Though Swamiji was the only one among us who had ever known Master when he was in the body, he spoke of him in such a way as to make us feel included, rather than deprived of an opportunity that only Swamiji had.

He shared, “Some disciples focus too much on Master’s personality, not on his consciousness. They talk about him in such a way to make others feel, ‘How lucky we are to have been with him. We are the fortunate ones.’ That’s not how Master would have spoken. The purpose of a spiritual teacher is to give us hope, not to make us feel sad and left out.”

Swamiji was masterful at this. We always felt that Master was as accessible to us as to those who had lived with him.



The buckshot of your smiles

“Master said I had a great work to do,” said Swamiji. “That great work doesn’t end here. It continues with all of you. If you see someone with a sad face, shoot him with the buckshot of your smiles. Feel kindness toward everyone, and be their friend. You can be more help to people than you know. The instrument is blessed by that which flows through it.”



Where the teacher is

David was a financial professional before coming to Ananda. Early in our time at Ananda, Swami asked David to come to his home and meet him to talk about investments.

Asha happened to see me elsewhere in the community. “Why aren’t you with David?”

“I wasn’t invited,” I replied.

“You should always be present if there is an opportunity to

be with Swami,” she replied simply, and drove me right over. I learned everything I needed to know about how to relate to Swamiji in that one brief sentence.

I was a bit shy to impose. But ever since then, I’ve been like the devotee who is regularly thrown out of his Master’s presence, and keeps climbing in through the back window.



Stalking

We saw Swamiji in Assisi during a visit. A week later, he was in America and so were we. We popped into the home where he was staying to say hello.

“What are you doing here?” he asked, with surprise.

“Stalking you, sir.” I replied, with a devilish grin.

He paused for just a moment, and then we all laughed. I’d meant to be funny, but it was closer to the truth than I’d realized. Wherever the teacher is, there we want to be.



A nail biter

A small group was meeting with Swamiji in his living room. The mood was tense. Problem after problem was discussed. He was in the thick of it, expressing concern and sympathizing with people’s worries.

A bubble of joy appeared in my mind. I could see that he was completely untouched by anything that was happening.

Instantly, Swamiji read my thoughts. He turned to me,

grinned, and started biting his fingernails in mock worry. It only lasted a few seconds. As fast as it started, it ended. No one else seemed to notice. He turned back to rejoin the discussion, as serious as everyone else.



Impersonal friendship

One day Swamiji invited us to his home, “Please come and see my shell collection.” We’d given him a few beautiful shells from our travels, and I think he wanted us to see that he appreciated the gift. He’d created a little sand display for them near the entrance to his apartment. We oohed and aahed.

He talked with us for more than an hour. Whenever we thought we ought to go, he’d start a new topic. He excused himself to make a sandwich, did a little bustling about in the kitchen, and then reappeared.

He spoke about how his life was intensely devoted to service for Master, and that it allowed for less meditation than he’d expected. He hoped that he’d have more time for meditation later in his life. But if it wasn’t to be, that was up to Master.

It was a rare, very long time with him, just the three of us. He spoke so tenderly about Master, and about his commitment to his own life of service. He was kind, but also impersonal, as if a part of him were anchored somewhere else. I felt he was responding to an inner voice. At the moment, what God wanted from him was to be with us. He was a willing vehicle.

At a certain moment, the inner voice called him elsewhere, and our time came to a gentle end. I will never forget my

impression of that afternoon. It was ray of Divine friendship that beamed warmly on our hearts — then gently withdrew to beam somewhere else.



Who were Swamiji's friends?

David and I were on a long-scheduled vacation to Assisi, sadly just a week after Swamiji's passing. We'd looked forward to seeing him. Now the opportunity would never come again.

His close companions and staff, Narayani and Shurjo, shared that Swamiji had been thinking of us and praying for us. When Asha was with him in India earlier that year, she'd asked him to pray for us. He had mentioned it to Narayani and Shurjo several times since then.

It was amazing how much Swamiji kept people in his consciousness. It is not possible to know how many people were touched by him.

I remember him saying that his outward friendships were no measure of his inner relationships with people. The number of people who could say, "He was my dearest friend" likely number in the thousands.



Mind reading

It was uncanny sometimes how Swamiji seemed to know what we were thinking. One day, a woman showed something to Swamiji. He remarked on its beauty. Right away, the woman

gave it to him. A man standing nearby silently wondered if Swamiji was being manipulative, complimenting her in order to obtain the item.

Swami turned to him and said, “I *never* do things for that reason.”



John Anderson

Robert Burns wrote a famous poem, “John Anderson” which has been set to music by several composers, including Swamiji.

I was about to perform this solo one night before Swamiji and a large audience in a beautiful outdoor amphitheater.

I had many years of experience singing solos, but tonight I felt more nervousness than expected.

“How annoying,” I thought. “I am disgusted with this ego!” I did some breathing exercises, but the nerves didn’t go away.

I’d had it. I allowed a strong powerful force to rise in me. I visualized slashing my body into pieces with a sword till there was nothing left. My focus was intense. It took less than 15 seconds to obliterate everything — my body, my personality, my nervousness.

Whatever was left walked on stage and sang. I both observed it and was part of an effortless flow. I sang for the orange blur that was Swamiji about half-way up the amphitheater. (My vision is poor without glasses; usefully, his orange blur was easy to spot.)

A short intermission followed. Another blur approached and said, “Swamiji wants to see you now.” I came over.

“I have never heard that song sung more beautifully,” Swamiji said, weeping. “And I have never heard you sing more beautifully.”

Dozens of people in the audience said they wept, too, and were profoundly affected by this song. Something else came through that night; I have never received feedback like it, before or since. Since then, I have listened to the recording. It was not as beautiful as others I’ve made. But it wasn’t the sound. It was the consciousness.

Master said to Swamiji, “I know every thought you think.” This was one of many times Swamiji showed he had the same gift.

I remembered, too, the experience he had with Master, when one night he said to himself with great force, “I’m absolutely sick of this ego. I don’t want it. Take it!”

Afterwards, Yogananda said, “Very good.”

Continued Swamiji, “Ever since, I have not been troubled by it. Sometimes we must do violence to our ego to overcome it.”



Cat and kitten

Very occasionally, Swami would greet me by gently squeezing the back of my neck — like the spot where a kitten is picked up by its mother and dragged off to some new location.

A small correction usually followed.

More than anything, I was willing to be trained by him, though I rarely said it out loud. I think this was his way of saying, “I know.”

Yogananda described that area (the medulla at the base of the skull) as the seat of the ego. With luck, Swamiji was helping to remove some of it.



A beautiful consciousness

Swamiji was watching the choir perform in Palo Alto. The stage was filled with many disciples, singing with hearts full of appreciation and love for him. Among the sea of faces, one stood out to him. Swamiji leaned over to Asha, “Who is that woman on the right?” Asha shared her name. Swamiji said, “She sings with a beautiful consciousness.”



What will we do without you?

As he approached the end of his life, Swami often remarked in satsangs, “Well, this may be my last time here.” He often added with a chuckle, “God willing!” He was ready to leave this world, though he made it clear how much he loved everyone and was glad to continue living if he were of service to others.

Many of us were at the last satsang he gave at Ananda Village before his passing. He asked if we had any questions. A few questions were raised. But I was near tears.

Finally I said, “Sir, what will we do without you?”

“You know the answer to that, Karen.”

“But I want to hear it again, sir.” Honestly, I didn’t know the answer. All I knew was that I’d be heartbroken.

His answer was long and touching. A few of the highlights:

“I’m humbly grateful that people feel something in my presence. But I won’t be here forever. I’m not even going to be here after tomorrow.” [laughter; he was leaving the U.S. the next day].

“I want you *all* to be lighthouses. God is within you.

“Naturally, when Master left his body, it was a great sadness for us. Yet, the light hadn’t gone out. (Swamiji touched his heart) He was here. That’s where I am within you.”

Feeling our sadness, he shared how hard it was for him to leave Anandamoyee Ma. While he was in her presence, he couldn’t depart. Finally, when she physically withdrew, he was able to leave. The magnetism of a great spiritual being is very strong. He encouraged us also to develop that magnetism within ourselves.



Swamiji giving a satsang in Beverly Hills (2009)

“It’s not presumption to aspire to be a saint. Feel pure in your heart and know that you only want Him.

“Don’t see people as separate from yourself. Realize that everyone wants what you want, though they may be seeking it in ways that won’t bring it to them. If you look at them with that thought, you can’t help loving them.” (he wept)

“This love is the one thing you can give away and never become poor in the giving. When you can see God in this way, you love people naturally.

“When you have that love and inner joy, people will feel it. That’s what they want. It isn’t you they want. It’s a reminder of what they have inside.

“What we all love and what we all want is that one Self. That’s your answer. I can’t leave. I can’t leave you because you’re always there (Swamiji touched his heart again). And that’s the only thing that was ever there in the first place. Live more in that awareness.”



Quotes by Swamiji about himself

“I don’t have self definitions. I haven’t done anything. Master has done it all.”



“I just want to help others. I would willingly be a martyr if I could be of any help to anyone. I am here as a sacrifice for other people. I am willing to give up my life, if necessary, to help you.”



“I’ve never said anything that didn’t come from Master. If Master didn’t say it, it’s not for me to say it.”

“I’ve only had two desires: to find God and to help others to find God. I have no interest in anything else.”



*Swamiji at an evening event during his
sojourn teaching in Los Angeles (2008)*



DAVID'S FORWARD

Dear friend, for if you are reading this book you are already a friend...

I have been blessed to have spent decades with Swami Kriyananda. This direct disciple of the great master Paramhansa Yogananda taught me how to be a true devotee. While I had been a student of spirituality before meeting him, I can say that everything of value on my continuing journey came from the deepening understanding I have absorbed thanks to his guidance. While my contact with him was not as frequent as for many others, or as much as I would have liked, the interactions and time spent with him are among the most precious of my life.

I had intended to write down these experiences for many years, and finally the right moment arrived. The process has been a pure joy. In the writing of these stories, I have found myself reliving those moments. Being in Swami's company once again has been a treasure.

Many years ago, I sent Swamiji my final paper for Honors Philosophy at Swarthmore College. I thought he'd get a kick out of it. The thesis was "The Philosophy faculty is trying to understand Truth, but the method by which they hope to achieve that goal is hopelessly flawed." The procedure was to send your final paper to the department professors and then sit for an oral

exam to defend your paper in front of the group of them. My friends in college wanted to buy tickets to that grilling! The faculty sat in an arc in front of me and went at it. Challenging questions were posed to me, attempted criticism of flawed logic, counter examples showing my point was not valid, etc. I defended the paper well, I thought. Despite my impolitic thesis, they voted to pass me and I received my degree. (Whew!)

The point of the paper was that the logical mind cannot capture Truth. It is an excellent tool that performs certain kinds of analyses. It takes things apart, compares the pieces, and rearranges things to foster new insights. But much like cutting a board in half, much is lost. The sawdust removed in the process has value! A holistic view of reality simply cannot be captured by the logical mind. Einstein himself said he received the theory of relativity in an intuitive flash, and it was not derived via analysis. As he himself said, “I believe in intuition and inspiration...At times I feel certain I am right while not knowing the reason.”

I was already a devotee in college in a general way, as I had not yet found my guru, Paramhansa Yogananda. One professor referred to me as “The Mystic,” with as dripping a tone as possible. He happened to be my favorite and most dynamic professor, even though we butted heads often.

After Swamiji read that final college paper, he wrote back, “You are a very good writer, but your writing would be better if you spent more time editing your work. Your paper reads like a rough draft.”

Well, sir, I have put quite a bit of energy into this book. I hope it meets with your approval!

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

It is said in India that even a moment in the presence of a saint can change your life. When I was 26, I had a very powerful experience with Swami Satchidananda, a great disciple in the Sivananda lineage.

I was in the middle of my short career as a stockbroker in Philadelphia. I was very successful and greatly enjoyed my work, but I could feel that my spiritual aspirations were not being fulfilled. That pull in me was very strong.

Fortunately my wife, Karen, was also deeply interested in the spiritual life. We decided to go to the Omega Institute for Holistic Studies in Upstate New York for a three-day weekend retreat. One of the speakers there was Swami Satchidananda. After he spoke, I was so deeply moved that something changed in me. For the first time I was with a real saint, and not just reading about one in a book. The love, peace, and wisdom that poured out of him was like nothing I had ever experienced before. Perhaps people are familiar how in some old movies the man sees the woman across a crowded room, and everyone else fades into the background. He walks towards her, their eyes meet, and suddenly she is all that exists. At the end of the talk



Swami Satchidananda

that's the experience I had with him.

He was seated on the floor of a low stage. When the talk finished, I moved towards the stage and was elbowing people aside as gently as I could. I would not be denied my chance to see him. When I reached him I said, "Your talk was very clever (he was an ardent punster) but I am not here for your cleverness. I feel like my heart is blocked."

I burst into tears, dropping my head into his lap. He stroked my hair for a long while as I sobbed. Finally he said, "Don't worry. Soon your problems will all be solved."

I woke up the next morning with a high fever. A fellow retreatant came to see how I was doing. I expressed to her my great regret at missing the rest of the weekend. She said, "You've already gotten what you needed out of this retreat." I felt as though the fever was burning off a deep karma.

Twelve months later Karen and I left our careers, put our 3,500 square foot home on the market, and were living at Ananda Village — the spiritual community Swami Kriyananda founded in 1968.

As my years at Ananda passed, I found I was very blessed to spend time working, traveling, and playing with Swami Kriyananda. Being in the presence of such a wonderful example of discipleship was instructive, inspiring, and tremendously

heart-opening. I was where I wanted and needed to be.

Swami passed away in April of 2013, but the lessons he imparted, the kindness he showed, and the inspiration he brought to the world will last forever. And in the case of this one of his many students, his loving presence and shining example profoundly changed a life.

The following stories are not meant merely to share my personal experiences with him, but to help others come to know the man as I saw him: a clear channel for God's love, wisdom, and joy. My hope is that these stories inspire others to reach for their own highest potential, as this was the effect Swami had on me and with all those he came in contact with.

I could always feel that Swamiji saw me as a soul striving to find God. And in seeing me that way, he subtly encouraged me to see myself that way, and not as a collection of flaws, foibles, and personality traits, so commonly the way we tend to see ourselves.

It has always seemed to me that lessons and insights imparted have more staying power and magnetism when shared through the vehicle of a story. I hope this is the case for you as you read these pages. They are offered with love — the love he awakened in me towards each of us as we strive to get Home — and with gratitude for the peace and joy I often found at his feet and, by extension, elsewhere in my life. One of my favorite ways to spend time is sharing stories like these with friends. Whether those of you reading this are old friends or new friends, I hope each of you finds something in these pages to uplift, entertain, and inspire your heart.

None of us at Ananda ever had the great fortune of meeting Swami Kriyananda's self-realized guru, Paramhansa

Yogananda. But through the countless stories Swami told us over the decades, many of us feel as though we knew the great Indian saint personally. There will be generations who will never have had the chance to meet Swami. I feel it is an obligation for each of us who did know him to share our precious stories, just as Swami shared those of his Master. I hope this book helps make Swami's presence alive for you, as he has made Yogananda's alive for me. This book is the result of that deeply-felt karmic duty. But it is also a great joy to share my personal experiences. He changed my life and there is little I myself can do other than to share and spread that light to the best of my ability. In that spirit, thank you for reading and sharing the divine play of life at the feet of this saint.

And now we begin...



Ananda means "joy." That word is not nearly enough to describe what I felt on discovering Swamiji's remarkable spiritual community. (1989)

SAY YES! TO LIFE

It was a strong principle of Yogananda's (and therefore of Swami's as well, as he was a model disciple), to embrace what came in life. Swami's phrase — "say Yes! to life" — really captured this ideal. The "yes" is not just with the mouth. It is an exhortation to embrace with enthusiasm whatever comes your way.

Yogananda said "conditions are neither good nor bad; all conditions are neutral." It is our reaction to circumstances that determines whether they are good or bad for us. The world simply is. Why then do we resist the experiences that come to us when seemingly unpalatable?

Sister Gyanamata, Yogananda's foremost female disciple, said, "What comes of itself, let it come!" In other words, true freedom can only be felt when we have no aversions and no cravings. Swami's teaching by example was clear in how he himself behaved. And, as the following stories show, he sometimes gave me the chance to rise to the occasion as well. And on occasion I even got the point...eventually!



Flyers

In the mid 1980's Swami was very active lecturing in various parts of the country. The Whole Life Expo [more recently called the New Life Expo] was a large gathering held each year in a major city's convention center. Hundreds of booths offered their own approach to making life better. Many interesting areas were covered: food alternatives, energy alternatives, natural healing methods, and spiritual paths. Ananda would be offered booth space wherever Swami was invited to speak. Our booth offered books, literature, recordings, and such. People attending the large conference stopped by all day long. It was great fun, and those of us in the booth were very happy to share Master's teachings in this way. And of course being there with Swami made the weekend special for all of us.

There were about six or eight of us staffing the New York City Expo booth when Swami happened by. He picked up a stack of flyers that were on display promoting his keynote talk scheduled for the following day. When he saw me he said, "I'd like you to stand at that busy intersection in the main aisle, and hand these out to everyone who passes by." He said this with great magnetism and focus, as if the whole event depended on my doing this.

I was less than enthusiastic about this task, picturing myself akin to those New York City street vendors eagerly trying to thrust an unwanted brochure into your hand. I always tried to avoid them as I passed by, and could thus easily picture the "enthusiasm" that would greet me as I waved my flyers in front of people.

Nonetheless, I had learned at least a little bit during my few years at Ananda, and immediately remembered another of Sister Gyanamata's invocations: "Say 'yes', and make it snappy!" So I said, "Yes Sir!" though I suspect my energy was not all that snappy. I grabbed the stack of flyers and slinked off to my prescribed destination. I believe I may have even managed a smile, but my body language no doubt indicated a different set of emotions. The modest stack of flyers seemed to have magically grown, and now felt as though it weighed 50 pounds, and was surely composed of many thousands of leaflets.

Grabbing the first flyer, I spotted a friendly-looking fellow whom I suspected would not be too difficult an initial target. I turned to him as he was passing by and said, "Hi! Swami Kriyananda is giving the keynote talk tomorrow. Here's some information about it." He grabbed the flyer and said, "Swami's here?! I've wanted to see him for years! Thank you so much for letting me know."

My spirits brightened and I thought, "Hey, maybe this isn't so bad after all." With my head several inches higher and my spine slightly straighter than just a few moments prior, I caught the attention of a woman passing by, and repeated my pitch: "Hi! Swami Kriyananda is giving the keynote talk tomorrow. Here's some information about it." The woman squealed, "Swami Kriyananda is coming here tomorrow?! I wasn't planning on coming back tomorrow, but I sure will now!"

Thoroughly emboldened by this initial spate of success, I was now prepared to chase down and tackle anyone I saw. I eagerly anticipated running back to the booth to get more flyers.

But right at the peak of my enthusiasm, a security guard came by and said, "You can't hand these out in the aisle. You

are welcome to hand them out in your booth, but not here, as it would block foot traffic.”

I went back to the booth with the stack, and Swami came by a moment later. Looking surprised, he asked, “What are you doing here?” I explained what the guard had told me and fully expected Swami to come up with a new plan of attack for me to implement. Maybe outside on the sidewalk? But he just said, “Oh. Never mind then.”

At that moment I realized that the whole thing had been a test for me to learn to say “yes” with joy. I saw that since I can never know the outcome of an action, I should embrace what comes as if offered by God. In fact, the outcome itself is of no real consequence. We are here to purify ourselves. We incarnate with the mistaken idea that matter is more real than Spirit. The entire material plane is simply the foil against which we hurl ourselves. It is only by overcoming the tendency to shrink rather than to expand that we can feel true joy and ultimately find God. Freedom comes from overcoming our likes and dislikes; our cravings and aversions. It is never really about the flyers, or any other seemingly important material plane concern.



Chicken fight

It was 1984, and a large group of us had gathered at the swimming pool at the Crystal Hermitage, Swami’s home. It was as much a community space as a home for him. A good number of people were in the backyard swimming, chatting, eating, and having general summer fun.

Swami was younger and more vital then, and upon getting into the pool he said, “Let’s have some chicken fights!” For those who don’t know, that’s a pool game where two pairs of people battle each other in waist-high water. One member of the pair sits on his partner’s shoulders and each team attempts to throw the other’s top man into the pool. I apologize to all the chickens of the world, but this is what it is called, and this is how it works.

If your pair wins, another pair can challenge you for supremacy. Swami kept winning. He was, in fact, very strong, having done Yogananda’s Energization Exercises for many decades, but I have to admit I think, in part, no one wanted to dunk Swami in his own pool (or anywhere else, for that matter).

The next pair to challenge Swami’s team had as their top man a wonderful devotee and an extremely enthusiastic sort. This long time member was well-known for doing nothing half-heartedly. He and Swami were each on top. As soon as he got close enough, he grabbed Swami by the shoulders and threw him over, dunking him into the water with a grand splash. Swami popped up from below the water and shouted, “That’s what I like. If you are going to do something, do it with full energy!”



Singing tour

In 2002, Swami had a major project brewing. He had conceived of the idea of sending a small group of singers to Italy to share his music. The thought was to have engagements

booked throughout the country for a small traveling band of singers that would be headquartered at the Ananda Assisi Center. From there they would be able to tour and sing, and a large van was acquired specifically for that purpose. Swami's music is unique, powerfully uplifting, and consciousness changing. He felt that the Italians, with their open hearts and appreciation of saints, would be a perfect audience, and so they proved to be!

While the plans were brewing I happened to be at an event at the Crystal Hermitage, talking with an old friend. After a bit, as we were chatting, he said, "My work has just given me the opportunity to move to Venice, Italy for a year or two. I don't have to say 'yes,' but part of me is intrigued. I am having a hard time deciding. What do you think?"

I said, "You know, opportunities like this don't come up very often. Such an adventure would surely be quite expansive and fun. I'd jump at it. Why not?!" At that moment Karen came up to me and said, "Swami just asked us to move to Italy to sing!"

I turned back to my friend and said, "Would you please repeat back to me what I just said to you?!" I thus discovered, once again, how much easier it is to give advice than to take it.

Karen and I said "yes" to Swami's request, and the experiences that followed over the next 18 months were both greatly blessed and life-changing, as several stories to come will make clear.

One of the blessings was Swami's instructions to me before we left for Italy. He was aware that I have a good number of material plane skills (marketing, business, strategic planning in complex situations, project management, etc.). But as we were preparing for departure He said to me, "I do not want you having any input on this tour. No help marketing, managing,

with finances, or anything else. I want you to go and just sing and love.”

This was an enormous challenge, as it is my nature to see better ways to do things, and then to share my thoughts as a service. I do my best to offer ideas and insights in a spirit of collaboration aiming towards success in whatever project I happen to be involved with. Would a doctor not act upon seeing a wounded person? A good portion of my life at Ananda these many decades has been about helping to make projects, events, and businesses manifest successfully. But this was entirely off limits to me on this trip. Swami had been unmistakably clear.

The first three months, my tongue was so calloused from biting it, I feared it would break off. The next three months I’d say the challenge was reduced to extremely difficult. But then a surprising thing happened: I gradually started to enjoy the role of being an observer, watching my own energy, and allowing the world around me to unfold as it would.

It was at this point that Swami saw me one evening in Rome after a restaurant dinner. He patted my cheek very affectionately as we were leaving and said, “You’re getting sweeter already.” My plan was never to wash that cheek again, but as Master said, “We must be practical in our idealism.” So I eventually did. But no soap can ever remove the blessing and sweetness I felt that night.

With my new sense of freedom from material plane concerns, the singing adventure in Italy became a joy, and not a burden of discipline and constraint. I could spend all my time watching my own energy without the excuse of, “But this is important!” which all too often means, “more important than anyone else’s feelings or concerns.” Whenever I was in a situation in which

the energy somehow got “off,” I could now assume that I had a part in it, and could look to see what I could have done better. To have the freedom day after day to practice this (since our housing and food were also taken care of) was a great blessing and gift. A true pilgrimage.

The experience brought me face to face with one of Swami’s most important aphorisms: “People are more important than things.” He had defined the project I was involved with as far secondary...as far as I was concerned, at least. And slow as I was, even I was starting to notice a pattern in the tests and lessons given to me by Swami and Master. Somehow it seems that our major life lessons take more than one assault even to be understood. Fancy that. Upon my return to America, I was once more thrust back into “important” projects, but the lesson had been driven deeper than ever before, and I believe permanently changed the way I approached my work and service.

The singing sojourn in Italy turned out to be the perfect next step for me. The thorough change of environment and activity, and the stripping away my excuses to fall into old patterns, was exactly what I needed. And I will never stop thanking Swami in my heart for his caring and the extraordinary opportunity he gifted me. Truly my best friend.

TEACHING IS INDIVIDUAL

For some years it seemed to me that Swami was at times inconsistent. He would talk about appropriate behavior or attitudes in a situation, and then later say something quite different. It did not happen regularly but it was often enough catch my attention. It took some years before I realized what was going on. Speaking "truth" was less important than speaking "Truth." That is to say, being factually correct was much less important than helping others find God. "Truth" with a capital T always takes the individual into account, whereas "truth" is focused on mere factual details. "Truth" is always kind, whereas the lesser form of truth is just accurate.

What seemed to be contradictions were in reality statements of Truth supplied with great wisdom, precision, and love, to different people in different circumstances. Swami could be strong one moment with one person and then unspeakably tender with someone else (or the same person!) a moment later. The goal was to do a spiritually appropriate "chiropractic adjustment" on the misaligned spine of our consciousness, not to follow some rule of thumb to be applied in the same way to everyone and at all times.



Book review

I was new to Ananda and living at the Village in 1984, having arrived one year before. Swami was rewriting a book entitled *Crises In Modern Thought* (now *Out of the Labyrinth*). As he often did, he sent draft copies to a number of people: Jyotish and Devi, Asha, Shivani, and several others of our great souls ...and unexpectedly to me and Karen!

Swamiji said that he wanted this book to be accepted in academic circles and asked for our thoughts. He knew I had majored in philosophy in a rigorous college program, and so I thought perhaps that's why he sent it to me. I threw myself enthusiastically into the task, working hard on my response. I sent a long and thorough letter back to Swami, detailing the ways in which I felt that parts of the book were not sufficiently rigorous, given his wish for it to be accepted in academia. I offered the kind of critique I had learned and practiced in the Honors philosophy courses I'd taken at Swarthmore College.

That training consisted of each of the seven to ten students taking turns weekly writing a paper. The author then defended what he had written while the rest of the seminar participants tried to show where the paper fell short in terms of logical cohesion and tightly constructed arguments. This developed a certain level of rigorous thinking, as there was not much chance of getting away with anything less. To me, then, this kind of approach is what it took to get a paper accepted in colleges and universities, and I knew the drill well.

Swami said he wanted this book to storm the halls of academia,

right? I sent him the result of my hard work, having dissected each sentence and paragraph, and waited for a response. I soon got a letter back from Swami. [It is a disappointment to me that I can no longer find that letter. But the gist of it is quite alive — burned, actually — into my mind!] It read:

Dear David,

Thank you for your careful critique. Your comments were, however, quite useless to me as they would require a complete rewriting of the book, which I have no intention of doing. Karen's comments were, on the other hand, just what I was looking for and I incorporated all of them.

Love, Swami

Needless to say, Swami's response came as a shock. Remember that we were new at Ananda. I was stunned and expected I would be asked to go help the soon-to-be created Irkutsk, Siberia Center — newly created so as to be far enough away to send me!

It took a while for me to get over being taken aback and the accompanying feelings of self-justification ("But it's what he asked for!") and a few more years to get the lesson in it. There's always a lesson in it. Swami had presented ideas and I went at them with my scalpel. That there was a person involved had not even occurred to me. Truth is always kind, and whether my comments were correct or not, they were not in the least constructed to be kind; just penetrating and accurate. In fact, while writing the critique, I was not taking Swami into account in the slightest, but merely operating coldly on a manuscript which had miraculously appeared without a human author. This

is how I had been trained, and it would be some time before that habit was broken. This first effort by Swamiji planted a seed idea that has never left me. As is often the case with a deep habit, Swami shined the light on it, but the subsequent decades of work was, and is, mine. We are, after all, trying to find God, not merely to gather and utter allegedly true statements for an encyclopedia of some sort.

This, however, does not allow us to ignore truth. Often when someone said something that Swami disagreed with, but that was dearly held by them, he would say something like, “I can see why you feel that way.” How elegant a response! Exactly true, without endorsing their wrong idea. Kind, yet correct. My letter did not even make a pretense of being kind. Thank you, Sir. Point well taken.

[A side note: I was fired from my first job at Ananda Village for bad attitude. My college training had me analytically dissecting everything my manager said. Shockingly, this was somehow not appreciated! My ideas were, however, mostly implemented after I was sacked. While truth with a small “t” is sometimes correct and of at least some small value, it is never the highest road to take.]



Teasing

I have a habit of teasing. It’s all in good fun and never at the expense of someone, and people seem to (mostly!) enjoy it. But early on at Ananda I was not as careful as I should have been. The following story unfolded over a period of many months...

Swami had seen me and my teasing ways in groups before. He endeavored to help me become more sensitive to those around me. If one is teasing, the teaser needs to be careful that he is not taken literally, which can leave the teasee feeling foolish. Kindness is much more important than attempts at humor.

Swami had just finished writing all of the music for his *Oratorio*. When first created, he felt that it would be good to have slides shown with the music, illustrating places described in the song or the vibration he wished to convey. One of the pieces, “A New Tomorrow,” was about the spirit of Israel. Karen has olive skin that would allow her to pass as Israeli. He asked her to come to the Crystal Hermitage, wrapped a blue and white scarf around her head, and took some photos. Her photo was one of several that would appear in the slide show during that song. She really looked perfect for that piece.

We saw him a week or so later and he said, “I’m sorry, Karen, but I have decided not to use your photo in the slideshow.” I replied, “Oh no! We have already sent press releases to the *New York Times* and all the other major newspapers!” This struck me as an obviously wildly exaggerated bit of silliness, but he replied, “Oh. I am so sorry. Maybe you can send them a follow-up explanatory letter.” He took me completely seriously, and caught me flatfooted. I sheepishly explained that I was just kidding. He just looked at me coldly and said, “Oh.” This sort of thing happened a few times over the years, so it became pretty obvious I was just not getting it, despite his best efforts.

Some months later, I was at the Crystal Hermitage talking with Swami. There was a small table nearby with a few flowers in a vase. I leaned over to smell the flowers and was thrilled at how intoxicating the scent was. I said to Swami, “These are

remarkable. I'm not sure I have ever seen flowers that smelled so strong and sweet." He immediately replied, "Oh, that's because we spray them with a perfume scent." I said, "Really? How interesting!" Then he chuckled and said, "Don't be absurd. Who would spray real flowers with perfume!" and he walked away. Ah, so that's what it feels like to take someone's joke seriously and feel foolish as a result. I had never known Swami to tease like that, but he sure knew how to get me to see his point.

This episode helped to ensure that I would be more cautious going forward. I'm afraid I still tease in that way, but am much more careful to take care that the other person is not left feeling awkward. This was a multi-month process on his part. What a lovely combination of patience and compassion. I am convinced that Swami usually did not have a conscious plan for such things. I believe he just did what Master told him to do, and things had a way of working out. He seemed always to be living in the moment and would go where Master asked and say what Master wanted said.



Meals out

Traveling with Swami was always an adventure and blessing. We would be extremely attentive at all times, lest a lesson or helpful idea slip away unnoticed. One time at the New York Whole Life Expo, five of us were tending the booth. After the day's activities, we would all join Swami to go out for a late meal. A very late meal — a very Italian thing to do!

Swami often went to fine restaurants. Not over the top, mind you, but a far cry from the simple fare we might have chosen for ourselves. In those early days especially, most Ananda folks were barely scraping by on the meager salaries available at the Village. So when Swami would say, “Let’s go out for dinner” with great joyful enthusiasm, I was always taken aback a bit at what seemed like a small extravagance on Swami’s part. The invitation happened as expected that first day in New York, so four of us went off with Swamiji (the rest remained to tend the booth, as on this occasion it was a lunch outing).

We passed a nice place and someone said, “This seems nice”, and to my (our?) shock he said, “No, that’s too expensive.” These were not words I had ever heard from him before. We went a little further and there was another place that seemed quite adequate, albeit not as nice as the first. Once again he said, “No, that’s too expensive.” We walked on. Finally he saw a place and said, “Here’s a good place to have our lunch.” It was — ahem — very modest. Plastic chairs, plastic red and white checkered tablecloths (that had clearly seen better days), with slightly wrinkled paper napkins as a final flourish. I waited for the tiny plastic packets of ketchup to show themselves... which they eventually did...unceremoniously dropped on our table by a waiter who needed a shave.

We went in, sat down, and had what actually turned out to be a surprisingly satisfactory meal (something about a book and its cover comes to mind). When the check came, we all expected to pay our share plus each pick up a little extra to cover Swami’s meal. This was a courtesy we always extended to him, and were totally happy to do. It was the least we could do, really, after all he had given us for so many years. Then

came the second shock of the outing. Swamiji grabbed the check and virtually bellowed, “My treat!” in a way made it clear that his offer was not open for discussion.

It took me some time, but I realized that on that particular outing, each person in our party was completely comfortable with money. Some had a fair bit, some didn’t, but money was just not an “issue” for even one person there.

The next day, a few more folks flew in to help. That night, once the new arrivals integrated into our group, it was back to fancier restaurants, with the new arrivals sweating a bit and concerned about how much the evening with Swami would cost.

I came to see that what Swami had been doing all those years was trying to break us out of the idea that money was a finite resource that had to be nervously guarded. Spending appropriately is always right, but tension around money is of no use or service to anyone. Worrying about it in the moment was not likely to create more of it. Money is part of God’s infinite storehouse for us, and tension, contractiveness, or misplaced concern about it will simply block the flow that is essential for true prosperity. Undoubtedly, many of our Ananda members have been monastics in a good number of past lives. Carrying that poverty consciousness forward, lifetime after lifetime, is a deep habit, and one that Swami was determined to help us uproot. With the first group, the ascetic attitude was either small or non-existent, so why spend money on a somewhat fancy meal for no real purpose? Joy is everywhere and is assuredly not extra-present in fancy restaurants (thought it sometimes feels like it is!) Teaching is individual. I never saw Swami do anything with people that was not ultimately for the

sake of their souls. Only our truest and deepest friend would so consistently treat us that way.



Too personal

I was always careful not to focus on my personal relationship with Swami. My focus was always on the fact that he was a pure channel for Master. His and my personal tastes in whatever topic came up were secondary to supporting him in his work, and drawing from him what might be beneficial for my own spiritual growth (which after all, was part of his work!)

He commented once that in some ways it may be easier for us to relate to Yogananda than it was for him. He pointed out that confusing Master's infinite spirit with His human personality was not a challenge for us, as none of us had ever met Him. That dichotomy was present for me in the case of Swami, however, as reconciling my relationship with his personality as well as with his infinite spirit, was not always easy.

One time in particular I let my attention slip and found myself feeling pleased with my personal relationship with him. Not for spiritual reasons, but more of an "Isn't this neat!" attitude on my part. Pride? Self-congratulation? Nearness to the teacher? I am not sure, but I came to see later that I was clearly off.

Shortly thereafter I found myself at the Crystal Hermitage. Swami usually greeted me warmly whenever we met, with something along the lines of, "David! How nice to see you. I'm so glad you could come." As I entered with a small group of people, I saw him and smiled. He looked right through me

as if I weren't there! It was naturally a bit disturbing to me. I searched my heart for a meaning behind this dramatic change of character. As I said before, there's always a meaning and a lesson. Given that, I always took every comment and glance seriously. Who knew what important spiritual clue could be present in even the most casual exchange? All the more when something striking happens, like this sudden change of a long-standing behavior on his part. After a short time I realized what had happened: I had demeaned our relationship by personalizing it, and even worse, by feeling proud of it. I had not noticed my drift in consciousness, but he certainly had!

That night, I worked to remove the self-centered and egoic attitude that had wormed its way into my heart. I apologized deeply to both Master and Swami, and for trivializing such a sacred relationship. When I saw him a few days later, his greeting was, "David! How nice to see you! I'm so glad you could come."



Karmic test

When I am in a meeting and the subject matter is important, I've had a tendency to get tense if the meeting is going in a direction I feel isn't helpful to achieving the agreed-upon goal. That tension, I have come to see, is a direct result of a lack of faith. Master is in charge, and if he wants to have something happen or not happen, he does not need me to guarantee His wishes are manifested. I have made progress over the years in learning to wait and to mentally support whomever is speaking.

Truth wins out in the end, and my tension just creates bad energy in the meeting as I try to control people or topics. I have gotten quite a bit better at this, and am now only fairly worse at it now than all my friends.

Many years ago at the Village, when I was just starting to perceive this flaw in my character, I was working at Crystal Clarity — Ananda's publishing house — with what is universally agreed to as perhaps the most difficult Ananda staff ever. They have almost all left Ananda since, but at the time, it was a cauldron of difficult energy. A meeting was called among a subgroup of the most hard boiled eggs there...and me (perhaps I too was one of the eggs?)

In any event, the meeting was scheduled for 2 pm. I was determined to get it right this time. I went to the Crystal Hermitage chapel near my office and meditated and prayed starting at 1:15. When I finished, I felt great and strongly centered. As I walked to the meeting I thought, "Nothing is going to get me off track this time!"

I walked in and was told, "We were just looking for you. We won't be able to start till 2:30." I figured I'd just go to my desk for a bit. I got wrapped up in my work, and when I eventually checked my watch it was 2:29. I rushed to the meeting room with a mind that was quite different than the one that was present at the end of my time in the chapel. I found my energy was significantly off within ten minutes of arriving. After it was over, I was distraught. It all seemed so unfair! I really had wanted to get it right!

The next day I went to see Swami. I told him the story, and asked why Master would do that to me, when I so much wanted to do better.

He said, “When you have a karmic test, sometimes Master does make it harder. But then when you finally succeed, you have really overcome it. He must believe that you can do this even under the most difficult circumstances.” I was comforted by those words, and they made sense to me. Yogananda said we become strong by wrestling strong people, not weaklings. I still raised an eyebrow at Master in my mind, but appreciated His testing me, as well as Swami’s explanation. I’ll get this right next time for sure! And I have occasionally and marginally gotten it right ever since.



Support

I was feeling a change in the air. I was quite happy with what I was doing at the Village, but could tell something new was coming. I spoke to my manager and he felt it too, even though he was pleased with my work and I was in a job I greatly enjoyed. In fact, as an entrepreneur, it was the perfect job for me, outwardly. I had enormous freedom to do whatever I thought was best in difficult and complex areas of the Village.

One day as I was meditating, I received very clear guidance that felt like it was straight from Master. It was not a voice but it was a deep certainty of knowledge: “I want you to move to Palo Alto and teach full time.” The instant calm that befell me and the sense of blessing that came simultaneously with the guidance made clear to me that it was Divinely inspired, and not my mind playing a trick. But immediately afterwards, I was shocked. After the feeling of calm and blessing subsided

a bit, I thought, “What? That seems crazy!” But instructions are instructions, so I started exploring possibilities, and Karen and I made plans to move. I also discovered that she had been feeling a change was coming as well.

I ran the idea past Jyotish and Swami, and while Jyotish approved, Swami, unusually, never replied to my inquiries. It can be hard to tell the difference between true guidance and one’s own subconscious reflections, so I always check such things with others I respect.

I have to admit the whole idea seemed a bit preposterous. “Hey, here’s a great idea! How about moving to the most expensive place in the United States, with no job and no credentials, and start a public speaking career?!” I pictured myself standing on a street corner with a sign that said, “Will speak for food.” I often do business counseling for folks, and if someone had proposed this idea to me I’d have suggested he take a shower and sleep it off.

I had been a disciple for about 15 years at that point, was a minister, and had dived deep into the teachings of yoga and self-realization, so I thought to call places where I at least had a little bit in the way of credentials. I began calling organizations where I might speak for some income, including Unity Churches, Religious Science Churches, yoga studios, and metaphysical bookstores. I had also been a phone salesman before coming to Ananda, so knew how to be both persistent and persuasive, and we managed to wind up with a pretty full schedule. By the time we were ready to leave for Palo Alto the first three months were well booked and our financial needs were covered for at least that long (it didn’t feel nearly long enough, I might add!).

The first two years were quite difficult. We worked long and

hard, brought in little money, and found ourselves in a very marginal financial circumstance. It felt to me like the dilemma of owning a used car. How much money do you repeatedly put in to keep it going? \$100 now, \$50 two weeks later, \$250 after that...when do you pull the plug and say it's just not worth it? Our modest savings were dwindling.

One night I had a strong chat with Master. "Look, this is your idea. If you want us to stay here, you need to show up! We are doing absolutely everything we can, and it is still not really working. We can always move back to the Village, so let us know your plans for us." Within a few days the phone rang with a tremendous opportunity for our new endeavor. We never looked back. (I guess Master wanted us to stay at it, and could tell I wasn't kidding.)

In all this time, Swami said nothing. I sent him occasional updates. A supportive word would have gone a long way, but there was nothing but silence. I was sure he was holding us in his heart and prayers, but an email or other outward sign would have been confirming and been much appreciated.

After a few years, we were pretty well established. Our speaking business (Clarity Seminars) had moved into corporate training. This was fertile ground for people who really needed help, and it provided significantly more income for us as well. We now offered "stress management training" which is really about how to feel better in life through changing one's attitude and inner responses to life, instead of constantly merely tinkering with circumstances to get them "just right." Everything we teach is straight out of the Bhagavad Gita as explained by Swamiji, but put in a way that anyone can grasp and relate to. The truths in the Gita are timeless and independent of whatever

words one might use in talking about them. Whether one calls it “stress” or “maya” (as the Gita calls it in Sankrit) makes no difference in reality. The Truth stands on its own regardless of the language used.

Clarity Seminars was finally on firm footing, and we were extremely grateful to have such deeply rewarding, and now financially solid, work. One day I received an email from a friend in Italy. He wrote, “Swami just mentioned you during a satsang here.” My friend sent the recording and I heard Swami say, “I hear my Clarity Seminars is doing well in America.” *My Clarity Seminars?* He hadn’t even mentioned it to us since we had left the Village for Palo Alto. I had wondered if he had even forgotten what we were doing!

I sat with this for some time, and then the lesson came to me. If he had said to us early on, “I am happy you are doing this” or “It’s wonderful you are helping people in this way” it would have changed our motivation. When things got hard, I’d have kept at it because he was pleased and endorsed what I was doing. Not receiving his outward support meant that I had to find the strength, guidance, and attunement inside myself to keep going, and not to do it just for him. I believe he knew that I could do this, and that his outward support would not actually be necessary. After all, the content of everything I taught was learned from Swami. Now it was my turn to make the sharing of those teachings work as a career based on my own inner strength and connection with him and Master. It’s a great leader who knows when to encourage, and when to back off and let the little fledgling use his own strength to fly. After a time, I found I could. Silently his support and consciousness had been there all the time. What a blessing to have such a friend!



Hard times predicted

I have been deeply involved in the financial markets for my entire adult life. My first job out of college was as a stockbroker, and I have kept a hand in that world ever since, though no longer in a licensed capacity. Studying the financial markets and world economies has always been a deep interest of mine.

Swami knew this, and for many years we tussled a bit over what was to come for society. He often shared Yogananda's words that hard times were on the way. He would occasionally ask for my thoughts, and I always said something like, "Well, I have no way of knowing for sure what is coming, but my study of U.S. and world economic history has me feeling that there is nothing especially dramatic on the horizon."

On one occasion in 2003, I was at his home for an afternoon tea with a small group of people. The conversation was light. Suddenly, Swamiji started talking about a financial newsletter that he subscribed to, quoting some of the things in the current edition. As it happened, I disagreed with everything this writer was saying. Swamiji very likely knew this when he raised the subject.

When he finished, he turned to me and said (I knew it was coming, mind you!) "And what do you think, David?" Somehow this time, and for the first time, I got the cosmic joke of it all. Rather than responding with my usual intensity and seriousness, I just smiled and said, "You're baiting me aren't you, Sir?"

He promptly looked away and changed the subject. About

five minutes later, he brought the discussion back around to the economy. He looked at me inquisitively without saying a word, clearly inviting me to say something. But I just smiled again and said, “You’re still baiting me, aren’t you Sir?” And that was that. He never again brought up the subject in my presence.

Everything he did was about helping us to purify our consciousness. Anything that strongly grabs us or repels us eventually needs to be let go of in our hearts. The goal is true and total freedom. Freedom cannot be achieved when our hearts are in bondage to fears and compulsions. As that inner freedom is slowly increased, we are more able to feel God’s wish for us and to see that heeding that small voice within will only expand our feeling of freedom and joy.

Years later, when the financial crisis hit in 2008, I wrote to him and said, “For the first time, Sir, I can see the seeds that might possibly result in the economic collapse that Master talked about.” He wrote back simply, “Let’s hope not.”



Curmudgeon

Karen and I were part of a team of about 8 people representing Ananda at the American Booksellers Association convention in Los Angeles. This was a huge show attended by publishers from all over the country as well as some from overseas. There were hundreds of booths, speakers, and various book-related events. Setting up our booth was a big job. Chairs, carpets, lighting, books, crystals, and more all had to be carried into the convention center. Then the booth was assembled, stocked,

and decorated. Next was three days of interacting with retail bookstore reps, as well as the many other types of convention-goers.

The final day of the show arrived and it was time for breakdown, packing, hauling everything out to our rental truck, and a nine hour drive back to Ananda Village. It was to be a long day after a very intense weekend — great fun, but completely exhausting.

One of our staff was on the team in name only (he is no longer part of Ananda). He spent the entire show wandering around collecting the free samples that most booths provided of books, gifts, giftbags, umbrellas, coffee mugs, and the like. He would stop by our booth occasionally to drop off his haul and leave again for another round of browsing and collecting.

The last day was particularly “profitable” for him because booth staffers would rather get rid of items than pack them. As we were packing up, he wandered by our booth and told me to hurry up with the packing because he wanted to get back home to the Village as soon as possible.

After smoldering about his behavior for three days, I let him have it. I neither shouted nor used offensive language, but I made it clear that if he wanted to get home quickly, he might bloody well consider doing something useful for a change.

That next morning the phone rang, and someone said, “Swami would like to talk to you.” A time was arranged for a few days later at his home at the Village.

When we met, Swamiji said he that had heard that there was a heated exchange at the show. He asked me, “You don’t want to grow up to be a crusty old curmudgeon, do you?” Well, thank goodness, that was an easy question to answer in the

affirmative. “No sir, I don’t!” (Who would?) He made clear that I am responsible for my own energy, and that regardless of what others do or say, my job is to keep myself centered and God-focused. I managed not to mention what the other person had done, the point I was trying to make at the show, or anything else that might have changed the focus from what I had done wrong. We spent about twenty minutes together. He said, “Very good, then,” and I left.

I heard shortly thereafter that he was very pleased with my energy at the meeting and how open and receptive I had been.

It has not been often over the decades that Swami stated his displeasure with an attitude of mine. (I am hoping that is not because I was beyond hope most of the time!) There was nothing wrong with my discrimination. Of course, the other fellow ought to have helped rather than just telling others to work harder. But we are here to find God, not to correct injustice, educate others, or anything else that the material plane seduces us into becoming disturbed about. My consciousness must always be my top priority, and needs to become increasingly independent of my circumstances. Even when that circumstance involves someone being an irresponsible and outrageous pain in the neck.

He also said, “You are not here for what you can offer but for what you can learn.” Swami was completely right; clear and simple. I had been upset and unkind. And exactly how does that help me find God? Master talked about standing unshaken amidst the crash of breaking worlds. And I couldn’t keep my cool about something as trivial as packing up after a show? Hmmm...



Tuning in

Karen and I were part of the staff of eight representing Ananda at the New York Expo, where Swami was one of the keynote speakers. At the conclusion of the event he was to fly to our center in Italy for several months. It was a good way for him to do it: leave from California for New York, spend a few days there, then go to Italy, breaking the long trip in half.

Swami always seemed to enjoy what was new, especially in the area of technology. As it happened, Sony had just created the tiny Walkman portable cassette tape player, and Swami had purchased one. He stopped by our booth and put the headphones on each of us in turn. It was playing some of his music, and he said, “Isn’t the fidelity wonderful?!” I had to admit that it was the best I had ever heard, especially out of such a small and intriguing newly invented device. He then went to the next booth staffer and repeated the exercise, looking quite delighted. This went on for some time as each of us took a turn. I was quite enjoying the spectacle as well as his enjoyment of the exercise.

After completing his rounds, he circled back to me and said, “As you know, I am leaving for Italy right after this. I am taking this player, but the case it comes in is somewhat large and bulky. I hope I don’t need it. What do you think?” I replied, “Well, sir, it is an expensive piece of equipment and looks a little fragile. Especially going overseas, the case probably would be a good idea.” He looked a bit disappointed and walked off.

Not five minutes later he returned and spoke to me again

and said, “As you know, I am leaving for Italy right after this. I am taking this player, but the case it comes in is somewhat large. I probably don’t need it. What do you think?” This struck me as a bit odd. Not having time to think about what was happening I said more carefully and slowly (perhaps I had been misunderstood?), “Well, Sir, it is an expensive piece of equipment and looks a little fragile. Especially going overseas, the case probably would be a good idea.” This time he sighed slightly and walked away.

Five minutes later — you guessed it — Swami was back asking the same question. I won’t repeat the question here as I myself had it pretty well memorized by this point. Being slow but not completely uneducable, this time I replied, “No. I bet you don’t need the case.” He brightened considerably and said “That’s just what I hoped,” and went off.

It took me a little while to recover from this series of exchanges, but then what was happening beneath the surface occurred to me: I was not taking Swami, the person, into account with my answers. I was answering the question as factually as I could, but would have given the same answer to anyone who had asked. It was not the answer that was the problem. It was my lack of awareness that resulted in my not focusing individual energy and attention on the feelings of the person I was talking with.

This was another example of Swami’s idea of “truth” with a small “t” being about facts, whereas “Truth” with a capital “T” is, and must always be, about people first. This kind of Truth is always kind. The Sony player was irrelevant, but the reminder and lesson was priceless. You may have noticed that this is the third story in this book revolving around the principle of putting

At the Feet of a Saint

people and their feelings first. Swami was pretty clearly trying to tell me something. I resolved to take it much more seriously.



An audience at a talk by Swamiji in the Expanding Light Temple, Ananda Village. I'm bearded in the foreground. To my right: Kirtani, Puru, Padma, Kabir, Jyotish, and Devi (1984)



Since we were married before Ananda, we felt inspired to have a 7th anniversary renewal with Swamiji's beautiful wedding ceremony at the Hermitage chapel (1987)

SAINTS MAKE LIFE UNCOMFORTABLE

We are here to find God, not to be comfortable!



A private letter

There was a large gathering at the Crystal Hermitage for a satsang with Swamiji.

Swami began by pulling out a letter someone had just written to him. The writer was a well-established community member and a friend to us all.

It was about someone else in the community whom the writer had to work with, and the letter was not favorable. To be fair, it was not scorching, but it was pretty strong, and the writer asked that Swami do something about the situation and this person. Exasperation was evident on the writer's part. He'd had enough and wrote to Swami hoping, I expect, for Divine Intercession.

Swami had received and read the letter earlier that day. What he did now, to our surprise, was to read the entire letter aloud

to all of us, omitting no names or particulars. We all listened either extremely uncomfortably and/or absolutely open-mouthed. It is very hard not to picture *yourself* being exposed — as this letter writer was — when things like this come up. Each of us had surely written at least one letter in the course of our own lives that we'd have been chagrined to have read out loud. Many of us were hoping the floor would open up so we could conveniently fall through it.

Just as Swami finished, the fellow who had written the letter walked into the room. All eyes turned to him in complete silence. You could hear a pin drop. I assume he could feel the energy in the room because he had a slightly sick look on his face, and just said “Hello?” in a weak and questioning voice. He did not know what had just happened and I myself do not know the fallout from the reading, but the lesson was driven home to me, and I trust to others as well. Everything we say or think is known by God. If there is a gap between what we do privately and publicly, there is a gap in our own consciousness. I now write as if my every letter or email will be published and read aloud.

As for why Swami embarrassed this fine Ananda member, I cannot know. But I have seen time and time again that what Swami did, he did for our growth as devotees and to help us find God, rather than to follow rules of behavior or custom. Only rarely did I see him being what even appeared to be less than kind, gracious, and polite, but when I saw him so, I either could see the good reason for it, or came to trust that there was one.



Question

Swami was having a satsang in Palo Alto — what turned out to be his last event in the Temple before he passed away the following spring. The Temple was at capacity with about 350 people. After he spoke, he asked for questions.

Someone asked how much of the world is predetermined. Are things the way they are for us, and in fact everything in the world, because of what has come before? How much free will do we really have? I remembered that he once said to someone, “Even the tie you select in the morning is determined by your past.” Quite honestly, as philosophically and metaphysically oriented as I am, I avoid such questions. I believe that as long as we are in a state of consciousness that perceives time as linear, free will and causality will remain a mystery to us. The Masters “predict” the future because to them — perceiving time as non-linear — the whole universe is essentially happening at the same time. At least this is what I tell myself to dodge this tricky question.

Nonetheless, Swami answered the question thoughtfully. He ended by saying, “In fact, the only choice we can ever make is to work at deepening our love for God, or not.” This seemed like a peculiar answer to me (for reasons that will become clear in a moment). I immediately had a follow up question I wanted to ask, but was not sure it was the right idea to ask it. Asking a question in a setting like that is not just about your question, but about keeping the vibration uplifted and serving all of those present, not just yourself or your own curiosity.

Given my hesitation, I am not sure why I chose to ask my question, but I did. I have worked hard never to ignore that gentle voice inside, so perhaps my philosophical nature trumped my better judgment. I raised my hand and Swami very sweetly looked at me and said, “Yes...David?” I asked, “Sir, if everything in the world is determined even down to what tie we select in the morning, why isn’t our decision about how hard we work to love God also predetermined? How is it that this one thing is free from the web of causality?”

Swami’s countenance grew dark. He looked right at me with penetrating eyes and said, “That is a stupid, useless question.”

Gosh, I thought it was a good question...at least it would have been in college! Shockingly, after an instant of surprise, I felt nothing but joy at his stern rebuke. I suppose my love and openness to him which had been cultivated for many decades was unshakably deep at this point. (In my earlier days I believe I’d have turned into a pillar of salt!) He must have known that, and felt he could say what he said without negative ramifications or any distancing in my heart from him. I sat for a moment and actually found myself smiling. Remarkably, I felt touched by his response. I am reminded of the time Yogananda walked on stage stumbling slightly on the corner of the carpet that had been laid there. His guru, Sri Yukteswar, said loudly in front of the entire audience, “You oaf!” Yogananda just smiled. While I make not the slightest pretense of being as free as Master, I at least felt that at that instant I was in good company. Testing is always welcome, and occasionally passing a test is even better!

Swami was of course well aware that there were many others in the room. I suspect that his response gave them something to think about. Perhaps seeing my smile and total lack of negative

reaction was itself intended to be instructive. I cannot speak for others, but am sure each devotee present had something to draw upon from his shockingly unusual response.

Someone came up to me afterwards and asked, “Are you ok? Wow. He said that was a useless question!” I replied, “He actually said ‘a *stupid* useless question.’ Don’t forget the stupid part.” Even as slow as I sometimes am, I could see that my losing focus on the purpose of the evening and giving in to a petty desire was perhaps not the best idea. It was a good question, and the kind I’d have asked him privately had the opportunity arisen, but in a room full of people who have a brief time with him and are trying to draw what inspiration they can, it was clearly not the best choice.

Saints sometimes make our lives complicated, if not overtly difficult. We are not here for ease, but to do battle with the ego. I think mine was challenged to some very interesting hand-to-hand combat that evening.

12

COMPASSION

Seeing everyone as a child of God and wanting nothing for oneself is a true blessing. Swami's entire focus on what was best for others spiritually was an expression of compassion I have never experienced from anyone else.



A beggar

While Karen and I were living in Italy, we saw Swami one day. He said to the two of us, out of the blue, "Say, how would you like to come into Assisi with me? I have some errands to do." We instantly and joyfully said yes. Would that all requests in my life could be so joyously agreed to! The Ananda Center is about a 30-minute drive from town, so it would be a nice ride over and back, on top of the time we would spend with him as he did his errands. We were soon off to town. We had barely gotten to town when Swami asked if we'd like to stop for a cappuccino and pastry. We went to his favorite small cafe, entered, and sat down.

Shortly thereafter, a bedraggled older man walked in. His clothes were a bit torn, his hair was uncombed, and he appeared to be either homeless or at least seriously disadvantaged. He

had a shallow low-cut cardboard box hanging from his neck like a tray, and walked up to our table to show us the large number of small plastic items it contained. He shyly asked if we wanted to buy anything.

My immediate inner response was to prefer him to go away. Here I was, alone with Swami, and feeling such a joy and gratitude at this rare opportunity, and I was not in favor of anyone crashing my personal party!

Swami gave the man a beautiful smile and said, “Well, what do you have here?” He carefully examined a number of items and selected a comb, a small fan, and a few other small things. He smiled kindly, paid the man the few euros due, and the man wandered off to the next table. Swami turned to me and said, “It is good to support someone who is trying to better himself in a dignified way.” I felt appropriately ashamed; the lesson was driven home with Swami not saying a word to me. It is always right to think of others rather than oneself.



I miss you

I have always been very careful in Swami’s presence. I almost never wanted to draw energy from him—whether counsel, a blessing, even a kind word—but to give him energy out of love, respect, and support for his great work for Master. But once on a flight to Italy, I had a passing feeling of “I miss you.” It felt more personal than usual for me, but just a warm glance or joyful smile from Swamiji at seeing me felt like it would really hit the spot. The thought disappeared almost as quickly as it had arisen. I didn’t really even notice it until later, when the

events described below unfolded.

We were flying into Rome and had timed our trip to coincide with a large event with Swami there, and had booked a room at his hotel. Of course, many had come from Assisi to participate as well. We landed, arrived at the hotel, and checked in.

The moment Karen and I walked into our hotel room, the phone rang. It was someone on Swami's staff calling to say, "Swami wants to see you." I can't even imagine how he knew we had just arrived. I was honestly surprised he even knew we were coming to Italy at all, as there were many people there, quite a bit was going on, and he had a big day the next day.

Of course we were delighted, and more than a bit curious as to why we were summoned. We went right up to his room, knocked, and someone opened the door. It was a modest sized suite, and there were about 20 to 25 people all gathered around Swamiji as he sat in the corner in a comfortable chair. I stood in



In Swamiji's hotel room before his event at the Teatro di Roma, Italy (2009)

the back of the room, as was my habit when there was a group. He saw me and said, "No. Come here," and pointed to a spot right at his feet on the floor. A few people moved aside and I happily plunked down right there. He spent the next 45 minutes of the informal satsang talking right to me.

It took a few minutes for me to realize what had happened. How can it be that such a small wistful passing tug on my heart in an airplane thousands of miles away could be answered so sweetly and so obviously within just a few hours? We expect God to take care of us in dire circumstances, but how much sweeter when He is so unbearably kind in the little ways, and that Swami, so free in himself, could feel the little ripple in the heart of one of his devoted students.



Sensitivity

At a large gathering in the Crystal Hermitage living room, Swami was answering questions. A woman asked a question that was somewhat halting, confused, and almost unintelligible. After stumbling for a bit and looking uncomfortable and embarrassed, Swami kindly said to her, "Do you mean to ask ..." and he then posed a question, the very expression of which was unusually subtle and thoughtful. She practically exploded in gratitude, "Yes ... that's just what I meant" and he proceeded to beautifully answer the newly formulated question. The woman was relieved and touched, as was I and everyone in that room. What a tender exchange, and what a wonderful example of empathy and compassion.



Pizza

After a major book launch in Milan, Italy, Swami and the ten or so of us that went to help were on a train heading back to Assisi. It was a long trip and everyone was quite tired. These big weekend events are a lot of work: meeting guests, staffing booths, setting up and taking down displays, etc. We were all glowing, but a bit spent as we approached the Assisi train station. Suddenly Swami looked up and said, “Say... who would like to go out for pizza?” We were all shocked at this



Swamiji on the train, shortly before his pizza invitation (Italy, 2005)

question. No one spoke up out of concern for Swami's energy. It had been a huge weekend for him, and no one wanted to take advantage of his kindness. Swami's suggestion was thus met with total silence. A moment later Swami said, "No one wants pizza?" Then turning to me he said, "David, surely you want pizza?!" I guess my reputation was known, even by him. Well, that crafty man was aiming straight for my Achilles heel! I said, "Yes, Sir. In fact, I'd love some pizza." He said, "Good! Let's go to Il Paradiso." The train pulled into Assisi soon after, and we headed off to what turned out to be a lovely evening together before heading home to the Center.

One cannot but help think of when Yogananda insisted the monks go with him for ice cream after an initial lack of enthusiasm amongst them. There were so many times when Swami did or said something, and then hours or days later I would recall something Yogananda did or said that was just the same or similar. At one point Swami said he did not know where his thoughts ended and Master's began.



Hegel

I moved from Ananda Village to Ananda Palo Alto in 1996. I missed being near Swami, but the move was clearly the right one for us, so off we went. One evening a year or two later, my phone rang. It was Swami. He was calling with a question about the dense writing of the German philosopher, Hegel. He knew that I had studied philosophy, but it had been a few years (30!) since I had been a student, so whatever knowledge I had

of Hegel had long faded. I must say, this fact had never before disappointed me. Nonetheless, this was Swami's request of me, so I said, "Sir, may I think about this and call you back in ten minutes or so?" He readily agreed and I got online to brush up on my knowledge of Hegelian philosophy. The answer was found simply, and my knowledge being prodded by a little reading, came back (It's amazing what we have stored deep in there!) I called Swami back and we chatted for a few minutes about Hegel, of all things — a conversation I never expected to have with anyone at Ananda — least of all Swamiji!

Afterwards, I smiled. This was just his way of reaching out and giving me a little energy. Anyone working with him could easily have done a few minutes of internet browsing and come up with the same answer, without the necessity of his calling someone hundreds of miles away. I was grateful and very touched by his kindness. We had left the Village because we felt it was what Master asked us to do, but knowing that Swami still held me in his consciousness made that distance vanish and the physical separation a good bit easier.

MIRACLES

Miracles surround us every day. Sometimes we even notice them!



Flower delivery

One afternoon while living in Italy, Karen and I were feeling deep appreciation for Swami's presence in our lives. We decided to get some flowers and leave them on the doorstep of his home, which was just a mile or two from the Ananda Center outside of Assisi.

As we went down the long driveway leading to his front door, we were filled with love and gratitude, and thrilled to be able to express our devotion in this small way. As we approached the house we were extremely careful and quiet, not wanting to disturb him. We walked onto the porch on tiptoes, even though we both knew full well that Swami was quite hard of hearing at this point in his life, and would scarcely have heard even a solid knock.

We were just laying the flowers down when the door swung open. There stood Swami. "What have you got there?! Oh, how lovely. Won't you come in?" We were delighted to come in....

but how did he know we were there? I am pretty sure Swami did not spend much time looking out the window at his driveway since the spectacular view was on the other side of the house. He really could not possibly have heard us. But...??



Pudding

This story is second-hand as I was not personally present when it happened, but it is little known and is too fun not to share....

Many years ago, a friend who worked at Crystal Hermitage went to see a well-known saint who was passing through the Bay Area. At the evening's end, blessed prasad was handed out in the form of small cups of pudding. When this friend got back to Ananda Village he was feeling unwell, so he finished up his tasks at the Hermitage, and placed the pudding in the Hermitage refrigerator, intending to pick it up the next morning.

That morning, however, Swami happened to walk into the kitchen, opened the refrigerator, and seeing the cup unmarked, took a spoonful. Immediately he called out, "Who made this?! A saint made this!" A single bite was all it took for him to feel the energy in what he was eating.

Swami had always said that we are very open when we are eating, and should be careful about where we eat, as the vibrations in the food can easily come into us. I guess the proof of that was in the pudding. (Sorry...I couldn't resist.)

HUMOR

As Swami was fond of quoting, “A sad saint is a sad saint indeed.” Swami loved a good joke as well as being playful, as the following stories hopefully illustrate.



Can you sing this?

Swami has always been an excellent singer with quite a large vocal range, from low bass notes to reasonably high tenor notes. As he got older he found that he could sing lower and lower. This is not unusual for an older man, and he seemed to enjoy this newfound ability. I myself can sing in an extremely low register, which he well knew. One day, with a glint in his eye, he walked up to me and said, “Can you sing this note?” and he sang a deep note. I had no trouble matching it, and did so. He then said, “What about this note?” and he dropped a couple of steps lower. I had no trouble singing that note either. He sang one more even lower note, which I effortlessly matched. He said in mock disappointment “Oh, this is a silly game,” and walked away. I think I laughed out loud.



You again?

Swami was wrapping up a major weekend of programs in the Bay Area. The Palo Alto Temple was filled to capacity for a members' satsang. At the end, he asked to greet everyone who wanted to see him. A chair was set out for him and immediately an enormous line formed. I waited in the back of the room. There were many people there who had never, or rarely, spoken to him before and, should he tire (it was a long line), I wanted to be sure that those people had a chance to connect with him.

He blessed and spoke to people one at a time for well over an hour. A couple of times someone suggested, "That's perhaps enough, Sir," but he would have none of it. Finally there was almost no one left and there he sat, so I moved forward figuring I'd certainly like to greet and thank him now that everyone else had had a chance.

When he saw me, he shrugged his shoulders and rolled his eyes, looking up and away as if to say, "You? I have to greet you?!" Asha was right next to him at that moment as she had been next to him the whole time. She immediately started laughing, knowing this was just his way of toying with me.

Sweetly, a few people in the congregation approached me afterwards, having seen this exchange, and asked, "Are you ok?" I assured them that this was just Swami's way of having a little fun. I was touched by their concern, but was even more touched by Swami's comfort in playing with me. He knew he fully had my heart.



Swamiji showing mock distaste at having to greet and bless me (2006)



Dinner assistance

One evening a group of us went into Assisi with Swami for dinner. As we walked in and got to the large table, Swami caught me and Anand, a long time leader of Ananda Assisi, and said, “I want you here (pointing to the seat to his left) and you here (directing me to the seat on his right). He continued, “I plan to order too much food tonight and you will need to help me with it!” Our reputations must have preceded us. We performed our duties admirably — entirely out of service, you understand...



Milan memories

Swami and a small group were in Milan waiting at the train station. Swami was having a cappuccino and sitting on his hard suitcase while Karen was taking lots of pictures. She said inquiringly, “I hope it’s ok I take photos.” He said, “Yes, but why didn’t people take more photos of me when I was young and beautiful?” I replied, “Would it be too cheeky of me to say it was because when you were young, cameras had not yet been invented?” With a big smile on his face he said, “Yes! It would!” and I replied, “Okay, Sir. Then I won’t say it.”



David and Swamiji sharing a good laugh (Italy, 2005)

Later, we walked down the wide and long stone stairs with me holding one arm of Swami and his secretary Lakshman,



Lakshman, Swamiji, and David (Italy, 2005)

(my dear friend for over 50 years), on the other side holding his other arm. Karen captured this sweet scene in this beautiful photograph.



If you see this logo...

Self Realization Fellowship has always felt they were the final authority on anything concerning Paramhansa Yogananda. On each of their books is a little lotus emblem with words to the effect of, “When you see this logo, you will know that you are getting the original teachings of Paramahansa Yogananda.” This is ironic, because as soon as he passed away SRF began

editing his books to paint their organization in as positive a light as possible, inserting praise, for example, where Master had not offered it. But that is another story...

Nonetheless, this logo and accompanying statement are well known to most of us at Ananda. One day I spoke to Swami suggesting that in all of our books we add the symbol Swami created for Ananda — the Joy symbol — with the words, “If you see this logo you will know you are getting Yogananda’s actual words, and not the words edited by others after His passing.” I thought it would be especially appropriate for the original edition of the *Autobiography of a Yogi*, which Ananda now publishes, and which is unedited by those who came after Yogananda. After considering my suggestion for just a moment and with a twinkle in his eye, he said, “That’s cheeky and would certainly cause quite a stir! But no, we won’t do it...”



World champ

It was always a special treat when Swami was in attendance while we performed his *Oratorio, Christ Lives!*

At the conclusion of one performance, there was the usual and expected silence for a few moments as everyone sat in the uplifted energy that filled the Expanding Light Temple. Once the applause started, several soloists and musicians took a bow. Then the cry went up “Composer! Composer!” Swami was near the stage and started to run up. He held his hands clasped together slightly in front of him over his right shoulder, then his left. He was shaking them like a prizefighter who had just

won a championship boxing match. There was a moment of “What is he doing?” and then a peal of laughter spread through the entire audience. Knowing how he always gave all credit for any inspiration he ever had to Master made the juxtaposition of his pantomimed “greatness” all the funnier. Seeing him run up on the stage like the “new and reigning World Champion” is an image I will never forget.



P.G. Wodehouse

Swami often read aloud stories by the great British humorist, P.G. Wodehouse. His humor pokes fun at various foibles of the many characters in his stories. The humor, however, is extremely kind, never sarcastic, and is generally uplifting, though not in an obvious way. With many humorists, I felt like I needed to take a shower afterwards, but never with Wodehouse.

Swami would read each character in a different voice so the listeners could easily track what was going on. Typically, a large group of us would be gathered around laughing. And I must say, part of the joy of it was seeing Swami laughing till tears streamed down his face, barely able to continue.

Early on, I wondered why he would occasionally spend time doing this with us. Perhaps it was to show us how important humor is on the spiritual path? Perhaps to encourage us not to take things too seriously? That was likely true, but it struck me that another reason was probably that he wanted to spend time with us in an informal way.

This contrasted with other times over the years when a group

of us was with him. It could happen that he'd sit there and everyone would just look at him. Eventually someone would ask a question, but that setting was a narrow, and even uncomfortable, way to share his energy. His satsangs where he read Wodehouse became an excellent alternative. In addition, the stories really were superb. And I will never forget those scenes of him laughing as he read.



I share a small interesting gadget with Swamiji. He was natural and easy with everyone, making them feel welcome and part of things. (Italy, 2005)

DARSHAN

The saints are always blessing us. Often this is through their eyes, which have rightly been called the window to the soul.



Swamiji's eyes

Swami was married to Rosanna in 1985. The wedding was an enormous event at the Crystal Hermitage with hundreds of people, food, decorations, and all the festivities one might expect. After the outdoor wedding ceremony, many, many people lined up to greet the couple in a very long receiving line. Swami and Rosanna sat with the beautiful setting sun and forested hills behind them in the backyard of the Hermitage. I got in line and merrily chatted with those near me as the line slowly snaked forward. After a time I was close to the front, and I pulled more inward, wanting to bless them in their new life together. When I finally reached them, I was filled with joy and well-wishes. I stared deeply into Swami's eyes and he stared deeply into mine. I had not engaged him quite like that ever before. This went on for some time and I would not look away or blink, and neither would he. I felt his energy going right into my soul and do not know how long we stood there in

silence. Time stopped. After a while I felt a little uncomfortable because there were so many still waiting behind me, so I broke off the contact, mumbled something, and moved on to greet Rosanna. I will never forget those eyes or that moment. The depth of love and calmness I felt is something that will never leave me.



Award

Swami was presented with an award at a large conference in Milan. Somehow the award itself — a large scroll — wound up in my hands. After the event, I was asked to deliver it to his room. When I knocked on his door, he asked me to come in. We were the only two there. I handed him the award and we had another very long deep look into each other's eyes. It had been about 20 years since the similar exchange of energy at his wedding, but the experience was again timeless and magical. I wept afterwards. Once again, that same love and depth of calmness was soul-nourishing. I felt like I had touched the hem of God's own cloak.

TREASURED MEMORIES

The following few stories do not fit neatly into any category, but are too good not to share.



Our first meeting with Swamiji

Karen and I arrived at Ananda to take a one month training program in July of 1983. I was so impressed with the people we had met, I could not imagine leaving until I figured out what they were doing that made them so special. Everyone looked bright-eyed, was considerate and loving, and had an enormous amount of joyful, enthusiastic energy.

About a year went by, and we were slowly integrating into the community. But there were challenges and conflicts. I wasn't sure how to move through them, and thought that perhaps this place was not really for us. I asked to have an appointment with Swamiji.

"So I hear you have both been fired from working at Publications." Swami smiled kindly as he said this. We explained that we were finding it difficult to work with others at Ananda, and wondered if we really belonged.

Swami said to me, "You must learn to love others before you

can love God. This lesson alone is worth staying here for.”

I took this in as best I could at the time. “Sir, I have enormous respect for you as a wise and deeply spiritual man (that much I knew, at least!), and Yogananda was clearly one of the greatest souls ever to have walked the Earth, but I don’t know that he is my guru. And even given the tremendous respect I have for you, I don’t know that you are my teacher this life, or that this is my path. Yet I love being here and feel that the Village has much to offer and teach me. Is it ok — given all of that — if we stay here? I don’t want to stay under false pretenses.”

Swami said “I don’t know you well. But those I trust say that you belong here. That’s good enough for me.” He added, “You are very much liked by many here.” [As an aside, and perhaps to balance the scales, two Ananda founders were chatting after we had lived at the Village for just a couple of months. One asked the other, speaking of me and Karen, “Do you think they are family?” The other replied, “Unfortunately, yes!” We were told this by them one year later after we had become dear friends. We were — ahem — a bit of handful in the early days.]

We talked with Swami about a few other things. I then asked why people didn’t communicate directly with us or each other when something wasn’t right. Our being fired came as shock and seemed out of the blue as no previous expression of dissatisfaction had been communicated.

Swami acknowledged that not to speak up is human, but inappropriate. However, it was better for people not to speak when the reactive process was involved. The issue should be resolved when the person’s emotions have calmed. People are human and err, but we must learn to be accepting and loving, regardless.

We thanked Swami for his time and expressed how wonderful it would be to see him more often. He said to stop by the house anytime and come to his Sunday pool parties. And to feel free to ask him questions there as they arise.

I also said that it seemed that he didn't often give guidance, even though his track record was excellent. Karen asked him to please give us guidance as he saw fit. We made clear that we were now formally requesting this of him and were eager to grow from it. He smiled and said, "All right."

I jumped in and said, "But I can't always promise that I'll do what you say." I smile at that, reflecting back on it, but I have always been a stickler for being straightforward and honest about such things.

It is hard to convey the sweetness that took place at this first meeting. We had been fired, I was not sure Ananda was my home, and we were unsettled about many things. I also was clearly not completely with the program. But Swami's energy was so kind and supportive, I left feeling on top of the world. I knew I would do whatever it took to integrate into this wonderful and remarkable place. I could not have imagined the amazing life-long adventure in God and joyful service that would unfold in the many decades to follow.



Catch

I had a very unusual karma with Swami that perhaps was not quite like anyone else's: catching him as he was about to fall! It happened three times when I was near him: once in Palo Alto

as he was getting off the stage in the Temple, once at Ananda Village in the amphitheater as he was coming off the stage in the semi-dark (who knew stages were such a menace?!), and once at a train station.

Having been a sprinter, drummer, and speed-game player since I was a boy, I was able to dart to him as soon as I saw him totter, and help him to avoid what could have been a very bad situation. Each time I was nearby and lunged just as he started to topple, I felt his full weight, which told me he'd have hit the ground had I not been there. But the remarkable thing about each experience was his reaction to the near mishap.

There was no comment, no looking behind to “see what happened,” no embarrassment, not even a big show of gratitude, or a sense of “Whew! That was close!” As soon as I righted him, he just kept moving forward.

For a moment, it felt ungracious and slightly odd. And unlike Swami who was always gracious. But then, as I thought about it, I realized how wonderful it was. What was to be embarrassed about? What was there to thank me for? Of course I rushed to catch him! Thanking me would have implied I'd done something special. Of course he just walked on. Why



*Helping Swamiji down the stairs
where he was staying in Los Angeles (2010)*

make a big deal out of something like that? It happens.

There's a saying I have always loved: "The Yogi is never surprised." What comes is what comes; face it with total equanimity. If you have a mishap, fine. If not, also fine. As I meditated on it after the second episode (I have to admit the first instance did not strike me quite the same way), I felt quite a lot of joy and inspiration in it. And maybe I received a little good karma for being in the right place at the right time. Interestingly, once the lesson had been absorbed, nothing like that ever happened again.



People first

There were many examples of Swami putting someone's soul evolution ahead of practical concerns. I remember once when Swami placed someone in charge of an Ananda business who seemed ill-suited to the task. I spoke to a good friend and long-time Ananda member and asked, "How long do you think it will be before this business gets into trouble?" I said six months and he said nine. He turned out to be right. The business struggled greatly due to inexperienced management.

But Swami was more insightful than either of us, and must have known what we had foreseen. So what was going on? Why would he put someone like that in charge of a major department? I came to see that he would make great sacrifices to help someone learn what they needed to learn. If that meant losing money or having an enterprise struggle, it was a small price to pay in order to help further that person's understanding

and unfoldment on the path. Greatly advancing an incarnation for someone is surely worth a few material setbacks now and then. We are here to find God, not to build enterprises. Swami was always there to help us in the only thing that ever really matters. He is truly our best friend, more than we can know.



Made with love

Karen and I were managing the Meditation Retreat in the early 90s. The month-long intensive offered there was a popular program and attracted many people.

Swami was coming for dinner with Anandi and Bharat, longtime directors of the program, and Karen and I were asked to make the dinner. I have always loved to cook, but this was my first time cooking for Swami. We spent the afternoon dicing, slicing, and preparing what we would need that night. I felt grateful that I could serve Swami in such a direct way. He had changed my whole life and I was deeply aware of that as I cooked. My heart was filled with love and gratitude.

As we were about to bring the food to his dome house at the Retreat, it occurred to me that he was so gracious, he just might invite us to stay. Knowing there was not much in the way of plates, dishes, or cutlery there, I brought an extra set of everything just in case. But it would have been awkward and presumptuous to walk in with extra settings, so I left the extra items just outside the front door to his home.

We brought the food in and sure enough, as we were leaving, Swami said, “Won’t you stay for dinner with us?” We were

naturally delighted. At an opportune moment I slipped out to the porch deck, slipped back in, and lo and behold! There were suddenly enough settings for everyone.

During the meal Swami stopped and looked up. He turned to me and said, “This food is very satisfying. Do you know what that means?” I said no. Very sweetly he said, “It means it was made with love.”



The English language and intuition

One day, while I was having an informal conversation with Swamiji at the Hermitage, he said, “You know, it is easier to be intuitive in English.” I have been a word person most of my life as a writer and public speaker, so this very much intrigued me. I asked why this would be the case. I will put this in quotes, but it may not be exact. He said, “The romance languages, for example, have masculine and feminine, and their construction is such that they require early agreement of adjectives and nouns. Once you start a sentence you are somewhat committed to it. In English, you can get part way into a sentence and change course easily, depending on the flow of inspiration.” I thought about this and found it to be quite true. When I do counseling or teaching I can start down a verbal path, feel the energy is not quite right, and bail out of the sentence or concept part way in, with no one being able to tell that I changed my originally intended course. This allows a sensitive openness to feeling because nothing is committed ahead of time. I found his comment and explanation fascinating.



Finding Happiness project

Life for devotees in Swami's world was not without challenges. I have long known that careful consideration of everything he did and said was an essential part of my process towards liberation. This story attempts to capture that aspect of my relationship with him, and the challenges it presented from time to time.

The movie *Finding Happiness* was going to be a major production about Ananda. We managed to land a Hollywood star and an experienced director. The originating energy for it was Swami, and the production started to take root in Italy.

As it happened, Karen and I were in Italy at that time and my name was floated as the one to spearhead the effort. I met with the producer and a few of the lead actors under consideration. I had no idea what the project would entail, but I have learned that when Swami asked something of you, you just said "yes" and hung on for dear life. There would be deep blessings and many tests. What a spiritual adventure this would be!

About ten days later I got a note from Swami saying that I was off the project and that Shivani would be in charge of it. This started a tiny "dark night of the soul" experience for me.

Was I removed because I was incompetent? Perhaps my energy was wrong? Not willing enough? Too lazy? The possibilities were endless. Swami had not said why I was removed.

I quickly moved on to wondering what in my character made me unsuitable. Whatever it was, I suspected it was something that needed to be addressed. I wanted to find God, not coddle

my own deficiencies. I decided to write to Swami to ask him.

I wrote a very careful letter making clear that I was writing not out of disappointment, and that I was perfectly fine being off the project. My letter's intent was to come to know what the cause for my removal was, in case it was something that was preventing my deepening attunement with him and with Master. If there was something for me to learn, not seeing it was of no service to me, or to his and Master's work.

I placed the email in my drafts folder, reread it later, and felt it was good. As I went to hit send, my hand suddenly weighed 100 pounds! Was I really ready to hear the answer? He didn't tell me in the first place. Maybe he knew I couldn't handle the response. But if that was so, he'd also not tell me now, so no harm sending it. But what if...?

After a time, I realized that this opportunity for growth was not to be passed up. I hit send. Shortly thereafter I got a brief email from Swami saying the change had nothing to do with my character. He merely felt that the initiating effort ought to be centered in Italy, and I did not live there (we had just been visiting), so the decision was clear.

Whew! But it was also a good wake up call for me. I have always felt that I took my life pretty impersonally. My hesitation showed me that there was still plenty of room to do better.



Feedback

Swami had always spoken about the elegance of understatement. More than once he had pointed out that people

listen more carefully to someone who is whispering rather than shouting.

One time, he was in the process of writing a letter to SRF. I don't recall the exact nature of it, but he was making some strong points with a fair bit of energy. He sent that letter to the colony leaders, a few other old-timers...and me(?!)

His points were excellent, but as his letter progressed the tone became increasingly strong. It went from normal text, to underlined, then underlined and bolded, then exclamation points started piling up, then all of this plus all CAPS. I felt like I was being shouted at by the end.

This was the third or fourth rendition of the letter. While asking us to comment he added pointedly, "I really expect that this is now done, and am looking forward to moving on to something else."

I was torn as to what to do. I sat with it for quite a while. I finally felt I had to say something. Mindful of how I had badly failed many years prior in my suggested edits to him about *Crises In Modern Thought* (as an earlier story describes), I put quite a bit of care into my response.

A day or two later, those of us in the loop received the following letter [excerpted here]

... I was anxious to get back to my more serious writing. Some of you were so considerate as to write me suggestions, but these came days after I had given what I felt was the final lick on my paper. I can't say I was pleased to get more suggestions at this point, for I'd — or so I believed — closed the book on this project. However, a final letter, this one from David Gamow, tipped the scales, making me feel I'd better (sigh!) take one more look at the &*\$#@!!! paper (See P.G. Wodehouse's story,

“The Day Father Swore in Hindustani.”) I did end up making more changes — many of them in fact. I hope I’ve covered all the ones suggested, but if I failed to do so: remember the title of that story!

Suffice it to say, I worked hard not to find anything to comment on in his final “final” version. After all, I did not want to feel compelled to go find a Hindustani dictionary! It also put my mind to rest regarding the question of whether Swami wanted “yes men” around him. I found that if I proposed something and my energy was good, he would always hear it. Not necessarily agree, of course, but hear it. The times when I spoke personally, with egoic motives, out of frustration, or in an unkind way, he acted as if I had not even spoken.



Last time with Swamiji

It was the fall of 2012. Swami was in Palo Alto to give a major talk, held at the Foothill College theater. For some years, I had the great blessing of being the project manager for his public events when he spoke in the Bay Area. In this case, I had spent months coordinating volunteers, planning the staging of the event, handling promo, coordinating the technology, etc. We had over 800 people attend and were thrilled at the positive response.

After it was over, we all headed back to the Community. I was not ready to let the wonderful experience go, so Karen and I went over to Asha’s home, where Swami would stay when he visited, to celebrate and talk about the weekend. I

knew Swami's routine and suspected he'd be napping in the guestroom, which indeed he was.

When Asha opened the door she said, "Good to see you. Let's talk quietly, and if Swami should arise, it's probably best for you to graciously go, so he can continue to rest." It had been a big event — for him and all of us!

But in just a few moments, Swamiji emerged from his room. We were very surprised he was up already.

We chatted for a few minutes so as not to be seen as bolting out the door, and thanked him for the weekend. I then said, "Well Sir, I am sure you could use a little rest. Thanks so much for greeting us, and thanks for the wonderful weekend." We moved towards the door. He said, "Where are you going? Come sit down." So we went with him into the living room and sat. After a few more minutes I stood and said, "Great to see you and thanks again." He looked right at me and said, "I said sit!" We, of course, sat down again. He kept us there for quite some time and then Asha said, "I have to go" and left the house. There we sat — for two hours. It was the longest time we had ever spent alone with Swami in the 30 years I had known him.

It was also the last time we ever saw him. We had tickets to fly to Italy in May to see him there, but he passed away that April. Months later I realized that in having us stay so long, he was saying goodbye. My eyes welled with tears when I realized what he had been doing that late afternoon. I still cannot call that time to mind without my heart melting. I had lost my best friend and he wanted to be sure I knew how much he cared.



A blessing in the amphitheater at Ananda Village (2007)

At the Feet of a Saint



Top: Swamiji's 60th birthday

Right: Bearded early years (1984)

Bottom left: from a group photo of Crystal Clarity staff in the 90s

Bottom right: Darshan as Swamiji departed from Ananda Palo Alto



Afterword

I hope this collection of stories about Swami has helped make his presence more real and accessible to you. As Swami himself said often, Jesus did not come to Earth to show how great he is, but to show how great we can each become. I share these stories not to show my good fortune at having been with Swami, but to show the consciousness he shared, and continues to share, with every one of us in our quest for God. Then, as now, I find that the more I try to tune into that consciousness, the more joy I feel and the more I am able to cast aside personal limitations. His presence is kept alive by such stories. Every story is a gem with many facets. I hope there are some here that will shine as brightly for you as they have for me.

Blessings,
David Gamow

APPENDIX

Below is the obituary I wrote about Swamiji soon after he passed. It came through in less than 2 hours, in a voice that felt very much like someone else. It is not easy to summarize a life; Swamiji's life is beyond my comprehension. Nonetheless, when it was finished, I felt anyone could read it and be touched by his saintliness. He gave his life, utterly, to loving God, and to helping others along the path. His life was a gift to countless others, beyond imagining. (*Anaya*)

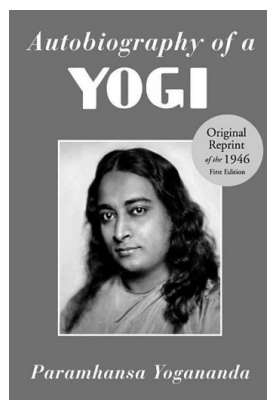
Swami Kriyananda (1926–2013) in memoriam

He was a young man of considerable intellect and a burning desire for truth that isolated him from most of his peers at the time. It was 1948, and life in post-WWII America was a desperate scramble for normalcy. Millions of young people were seeking home, family, and career — anything that could sooth the horrors of war and the insecurity of the Depression.

But James Donald Walters knew that kind of life would not bring him what he was looking for. He was hungry to know

what life was really about. Why we lived, what we were here to understand. Was there a Truth that could be known? He hadn't found it in philosophy, churches, nature, or simple living, though he had tried them all.

The first wave of what would later become many spiritual teachers from the East began in America in the 1890s with a lecture tour by Vivekananda. Paramhansa Yogananda (1893–1952) followed soon after, and became the first Indian yogi to make his home in America. Though he met two Presidents and lectured to many thousands around the country for years, it wasn't until his *Autobiography of a Yogi* was published in 1946 that Yogananda became known to a much wider audience. Eastern spirituality was just beginning to awaken Western minds in the 20th century with the possibility of direct, personal experience of transcendent spiritual realities. Ideas like meditation and yoga were introduced to many Americans by these two early yoga masters.



Walters read the *Autobiography* virtually without stop, and was overcome with the certainty that the author knew how to find what he was seeking. He boarded a bus and traveled cross-country for three days and nights to arrive at a Self-Realization Fellowship church where Yogananda had just lectured. Yogananda agreed to meet him because “Divine Mother told me to see you.” In that first meeting, he accepted the young man as a disciple. From Kriyananda’s description of that meeting in *The New Path*:

Gazing at me now with deep love, Yogananda said, “I give you my unconditional love.”

Immortal promise! I couldn’t begin to fathom the depth of meaning in those words.

“Will you give me your unconditional love?”

“Yes!”

“And will you also give me your unconditional obedience?”

Desperately though I desired acceptance, I had to be utterly honest. “Suppose, sometime,” I asked, “I think you’re wrong?”

“I will never ask anything of you,” he solemnly replied, “that God does not tell me to ask.”

He continued, “When I met my master, Sri Yukteswar, he said to me, ‘Allow me to discipline you.’ ‘Why, Sir?’ I inquired. ‘Because,’ he replied, ‘in the beginning of the spiritual path one’s will is guided by whims and fancies. Mine was, too,’ Sri Yukteswar continued, ‘until I met my guru, Lahiri Mahasaya. It was only by attuning my haphazard will to his wisdom-guided will that I found true freedom.’ In the same way, if you attune your will to mine, you too will find freedom. To act only on the inspiration of whims and fancies is not freedom, but bondage. Only by doing God’s will can you find what you are seeking.”

“I see,” I replied thoughtfully. Then from my heart I said, “I give you my unconditional obedience!”

My Guru continued: “When I met my master, he gave me his unconditional love, as I have given you mine. He then asked me to love him the same way, unconditionally. But I replied, ‘Sir, what if I should ever find you less than a Christlike master? Could I still love you the same way?’ My master looked at me sternly. ‘I don’t want your love,’ he said. ‘It stinks!’”

“I understand, Sir,” I assured him. He’d struck at the heart of my greatest weakness: intellectual doubt. With deep feeling I said to him, “I give you my unconditional love!”

He placed the forefinger of his right hand on my chest over the heart. For at least two minutes his arm vibrated almost violently. Incredibly, from that moment on, my consciousness in some all-

penetrating manner was transformed.

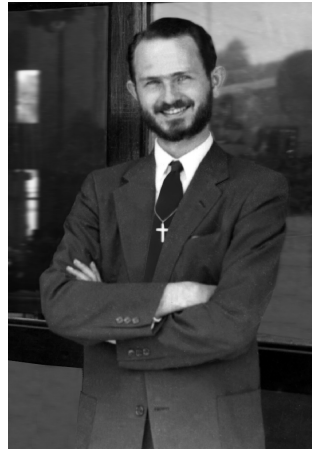
I left his interview room in a daze. Norman, on hearing that I'd been accepted, embraced me lovingly. It was unusual, to say the least, for anyone to be accepted so quickly. A few moments later, Master came out from behind the open curtain on the lecture platform. Smiling at us quietly, he said:

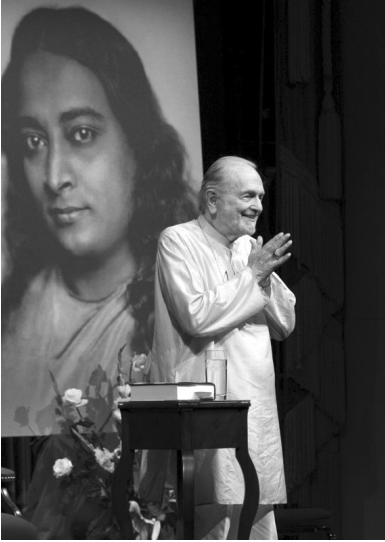
“We have a new brother.”

Unlike the 1960s when many young people were drawn to Eastern teachers, few came to live in Yogananda's monastery. And relatively few stayed. It was a life of long, daily meditation and service to others. But Walters blossomed. He had a natural capacity for long meditation, a deep mind, and an openness to learning.

Yogananda knew one of his own had come. He soon made 22-year-old Walters head of the male monastics, brought him to his desert retreat to help with editing his writings, and told him on several occasions, “You have a great work to do.” He spent many hours talking about the teachings of Yoga to his young disciple, and said that he would become a writer and a teacher. When Walters protested that he didn't feel adequate to the task of teaching, Yogananda replied sternly, “Living for God is martyrdom!” And then more gently he added, “You'd better learn to like it, for that is what you will have to do.”

And thus began a life of service to his guru that can scarcely be imagined, except that countless people personally witnessed





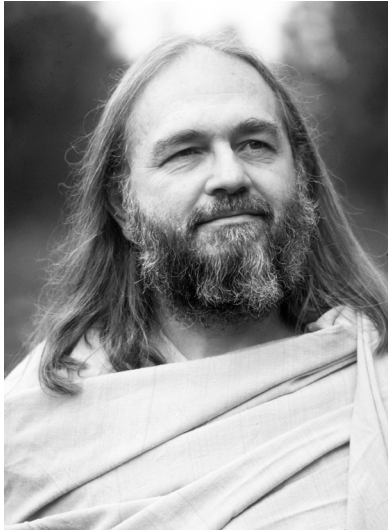
it, some for more than 40 years themselves on the path, working shoulder to shoulder with him. For a span of nearly 65 ceaselessly busy years, Walters (Swami Kriyananda) expended every ounce of energy in fulfilling his guru's work. That included writing some 110 books published in 50 languages, teaching nearly continuously in America, Europe, and recently also

throughout India to audiences in the thousands, founding ten spiritual communities around the world (a long-cherished dream of Yogananda's), composing hundreds of pieces of music, establishing a new model for children's education (Education for Life schools), keeping up with endless correspondence, praying for those in need, offering training and mentoring to countless students on the spiritual path in ways that were unique to the needs of each individual. Despite increasingly frail health, he continued a breakneck pace of teaching and writing even in his eighties until just weeks before his passing that left companions in their twenties racing to keep up.

Swami Kriyananda lived by two principles: "People are more important than things" and "Where there is adherence to dharma, there is victory." These ideals guided the development of the Ananda communities begun by him in the 1960s. He clung to them against all common sense — such as when the first community burned to the ground and all that was left

was one home. The cause was found to be a county vehicle. Neighbors sued and won, but Kriyananda wrote to the county saying he had no intention of suing.

“We didn’t come here to take, but to give,” he said. What little money the community raised, it gave first to families who



wanted to leave. Those who remained built again over time, and soon the community was flourishing beyond anything before the fire.

“The only way I want people to remember me,” said Swami Kriyananda, “is that, ‘He was a good disciple.’” Those who worked with him closely could verify that his only desire was to serve his guru’s work. Whether it was will power or love, or a peculiar grace, it was the fruit

of what yogis say are lifetimes of effort.

In his last years, he could hardly speak without tears. He often spoke of indescribable states of bliss, and when you looked into his eyes, you felt it too. He found the Truth he’d been seeking. And he told us we would find it, too. That Truth has long been the promise of the sacred texts of East and West. But not many make the effort. “The harvest is plenteous,” said Jesus. “But the laborers are few.” Farewell to one who labored well. And who showed the way, so others might do the same.

Swami Kriyananda passed away peacefully in Assisi, Italy at 8 am on Sunday, April 21, 2013. He was 86.



What is Ananda?

In 1968, Swami Kriyananda founded the first of what are now many Ananda communities worldwide. Yogananda spoke often of the need for small communities where spiritual seekers could live and work together. Ananda is an expression of that vision, and also includes retreat centers, temples, meditation groups, schools for children, farms, bookshops, cafes, and more.

Spiritual practices include meditation, service to others, satsang, chanting, and music.

Ananda means “joy” in Sanskrit. That joy refers to the inner joy found when we feel God’s presence within us. Outwardly, Ananda is expressed in many ways — through music and the performing arts, connecting over lovingly prepared meals, selfless service, how we live and work in the world, and how we relate to friends and newcomers.

To learn more, look for an Ananda center near you or reach out to www.ananda.org.



David and Anaya with Swamiji in Los Angeles (2010)

We hope this collection of stories about Swami will help make his presence more real and accessible to you. As Swami himself said often, Jesus did not come to Earth to show how great he is, but to show how great we can each become. These stories are shared not to show our good fortune at having been with Swami, but to show the consciousness he shared, and continues to share, with every one of us in our quest for God. Then, as now, the more one tries to tune into that consciousness, the more joy is felt, and the more easily we can cast aside personal limitations. Swamiji's presence is kept alive by such stories. Every story is a gem with many facets. May they touch your heart and illuminate your spiritual journey, as they have for us.

