

THE HILL OF FIRE

MONICA BOSE

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PART ONE

EARTH

Crawl to your Mother Earth! May she save you from the void.
(Rig Veda, X.18.10)

First Steps

This is the account of the long search for Truth made by my mother, Dr Suzanne Alexandra Curtil Sen, known in India as Sujata. Although there were severe initial difficulties, it seems that the need to overcome them gave impetus and strength of purpose to her endeavour which, in the end, was to lead to far from ordinary achievement.

She had an extraordinary life. She went to the distant lands of India, Ceylon and Tibet to obtain the instructions of the great Masters. She entered fields from which women were usually excluded. At the same time, out of compassion, she used her medical skills to alleviate the suffering of the local people. She had several remarkable spiritual experiences, culminating in the realization that Truth was the Self Absolute that dwelt in her heart and in the hearts of all others.

In relating her story I have made use of her letters, of which she kept copies, if they were important, and of the replies she received. I have also relied on what people have said or written about her either to me, or in books and articles. Above all, I have drawn on my recollection of our conversations together and of my observations of her over the years, made possible because of our closeness to each other. In fact, I grew up in the developing understanding of my mother and of the ideas that motivated her.

Suzanne was born in Paris on 13 December 1896, the daughter of Jeanne Curtil, a Parisian, and Gabriel Sursock, who came from a prominent banking family of Beirut. Born one month prematurely, she was a very frail child. She seemed to have so little hold on life that Jeanne felt fiercely protective towards her and gave up all her other interests to devote herself to her upbringing. But when Suzanne was three years old, the close relationship that she enjoyed with her mother was suddenly disrupted by the birth of her brother, Gabriel, since Jeanne turned her attention away from her to bestow it on her new child. Suzanne felt the loss of her mother's attention as an exclusion from her love and, as a result, there arose in her mind doubts of self-worth that would persist for years. Nor could she feel that her father valued her, for he was often away from home, and when he was there it was evident that all his interest was centred on his son.

At the age of six Suzanne spoke little and haltingly. Jeanne had her operated on for tongue-tie, but the operation did nothing to remedy her impediment. It seems likely that the real cause was Jeanne's preoccupation with her son at a time when Suzanne was forming her meanings for things and ideas. By not correcting or confirming her meanings, thereby bringing them in line with what was generally accepted, she did not fulfill the mother's intermediary function of helping her child to communicate with others. Suzanne's understanding of things remained locked in her mind, too imperfect and uncertain for her to want to expose.

During the cold bleak winter of 1903 she fell ill with diphtheria. She nearly succumbed to the illness, but got the better of it and started to recover. She was still convalescing when little Gabriel came down with the disease. At first he appeared only to have a mild attack, but after a few days meningitis set in and he lapsed into a coma. Jeanne would have done anything to help him, even given her own life, if it could have saved his. Yet she had to watch helplessly as he fought his losing battle against death. Gabriel was away in Beirut, and in his absence she had sent for two doctors who were said to be the best in Paris. When they did not come in answer to her urgent summons at the critical stage of little Gabriel's illness, she knew that it was because

they did not want to be associated with his death. In a frenzy of despair, she wrapped the child in a blanket and carried him in her arms to the Church of the Black Madonna. Kneeling before her statue, which was said to have miraculous powers, she implored the Madonna to intercede for her son's life. But he died that night, just before dawn. Jeanne's grief at his death was so great, that, as she would one day tell me, she wept every day for him for over twenty years.

Suzanne was taken into the room where her brother's little body had been laid out. The veil with which they had covered his face was removed for a moment so that she could give him the last kiss. She saw then what it was to be dead. It was to be in the midst of others, and yet apart from them. It was to be unable to speak or do anything. Before the sight of death, perhaps Suzanne felt confronted with the concrete form of what her own state virtually was. At any rate, later events showed that she retained from this sad episode a fear of death, not only physical death, but death in its subtler forms as well such as self-ignorance and the inability to find self-fulfilment. The certainty of being loved would have removed these fears, but that certainty she did not have.

One day, when her understanding had grown more mature, she would begin to see death of the ego not as a deprivation, but as plenitude; not as opposed to life, but as the very consummation of life. Her desire to know herself and to be fulfilled would then undergo a transformation and she would strive for something of immeasurably greater value, to realize the self that was of the Spirit.

When the news of his son's death reached him in Beirut, Gabriel rushed back to Paris, only to find that the tragedy has estranged his wife from him. She blamed him for not being there at the time of the children's illness. He tried to comfort her by saying that they could have another child, but those were words for which she never forgave him, since they implied that little Gabriel was replaceable. The situation confirmed for Suzanne that she could never hope to take her brother's place in her parents' pride and affection.

Gabriel had gone to Beirut to ask his family for financial help to save his business from bankruptcy. The family had come to his aid twice before when his business had come to the verge of ruin, but this time it had refused. Instead, through connections, it had secured for him a diplomatic post at the French Embassy in Vienna. At the time of his leaving, Jeanne had still not decided whether to rejoin him there or not and Gabriel left alone for Austria, a sad and lost man. On the long train journey he was suddenly taken ill and had to be taken off the train at a small station. A local doctor diagnosed acute appendicitis and performed an emergency operation on him in the station waiting room. No proper antiseptic precautions were taken and Gabriel died a few days later from his infected wound. It was six months before the news of his death reached Jeanne in Paris.

Jeanne bravely bore her bereavement and the sudden change in her circumstances. Courage and fortitude in the face of adversity were, indeed, characteristic of the women of the family, starting with Jeanne's mother, Claudia, who was descended from the old French nobility. An orphan, she had been brought up to be a lady by her grandfather who expected her to marry into aristocracy, although the family had lost practically everything during the Revolution. She, however, had set her heart on Jean Curtil, the son of a prosperous farmer. After they were married, the couple left their native Allier for Paris, hoping that with all the opportunities the great metropolis was reputed to offer they would be able to make good there. Instead, they were to have a hard struggle for existence. Jean found it difficult to hold down a job for long because

he had no special qualifications and, being proud by nature, did not like taking orders from his employers. Periods of relative prosperity alternated with periods of poverty and distress. Of the eight children born to them, only three--Jeanne and a younger sister and a brother--were to reach maturity. Yet the couple did not leave Paris in defeat. They held on to their dreams of achieving a better life, and their dreams would be passed on to Jeanne.

When she was eight Jeanne was sent to a convent-school in Rheims. Two years later, although she had no previous schooling, she passed her *Certificat d'études*. She was to say later on that those two years were the happiest of her life, for in the convent, from her observation of the nuns, she came to know about the kind of happiness that is stable and that nothing can spoil because it is not based on the things of this world. She wanted to finish her education and perhaps become a nun herself. But that was not to be. Jean died suddenly after a brief illness and she had to leave school and return home to be with her mother.

The family now drifted into abject poverty. Claudia barely managed to keep them alive by taking in sewing work. Jeanne was able to help her, for she had learnt to sew expertly at school. It was a skill that would stand her in good stead in the years to come. At the age of eighteen she married the Viscount of B_____, whose mother was one of Claudia's friends among the impoverished nobility living in Paris. He was fourteen years older than her and she knew very little of him, since they had never been allowed to be alone together. Yet she agreed to marry him because she thought it offered a way out of her miserable existence; and besides, she wanted to give her mother some happiness, knowing how little she had had in her life.

After her marriage, she soon discovered that the Viscount was '*complètement nul*' as she would tell me more than once in years to come. His father, a banker, had committed suicide. That tragic event coming on top of the loss of his family's fortune during the Revolution had left the Viscount morally destroyed by resentment and self-pity. He did not have the will to pursue a career, nor did he want Jeanne to try and make something of herself. Moreover, he had a mistress and two children by her, and had no intention of giving up that liaison for Jeanne's sake. Within a year she had left him and gone to live alone in Le Havre. Two years later he obtained a divorce on the ground of desertion. She then returned to Paris and supported herself and the family by working as a dressmaker's assistant

Very beautiful, with auburn hair and light blue eyes under dark lashes and the luminous look of some Frenchwomen that Renoir loved to paint, she did not find it difficult to obtain occasional work as an artist's model. It was in the studio of an artist that she met Gabriel Sursock, a somewhat sombre, distinguished-looking young man who ran his own business in Paris. She thought him to be gentle, refined and intelligent, qualities for which she could love him. As for him, Gabriel had been orphaned at an early age and sent by his guardians to school in Paris, where he had grown up lonely and rich. When he met Jeanne he had become jaded with all the pleasures the city had to offer. She gave him a new zest for life, whilst her love for him was a source of strength on which he could rely when things went wrong. Once when he was going through a period of misfortune, he wrote her a note in which he said, 'You love me, then all is well with the world.' In his eyes she was the Parisian woman at her best: vivacious, witty, warm-hearted and strong of character.

After obtaining Claudia's consent, Gabriel took Jeanne with him to Beirut to meet his two guardians: his uncle and the virtual head of the family, his Russian paternal grandmother. With their blessing Jeanne and he were married in the Sursock family home by a simple religious

ceremony. For their honeymoon they went to Egypt, visiting different places of interest but staying longest in Alexandria, which had been the home town of Gabriel's mother. But while they were in Alexandria, tragedy struck when Jeanne came down with smallpox. She recovered, but was partially disfigured, for she had lost her eyebrows and her face was pitted. It says much for her courage that when she had a photograph taken, although she wore a yashmak to hide the fresh scars, her beautiful eyes shone out so bright and cheerful that Claudia, who received a copy of the photograph, did not guess anything was wrong. On their return to Paris, the couple took an apartment on the fashionable Quai de Billy, now named the Avenue de New York. It was there that, a year later, Suzanne was born.

During the seven years of her marriage to Gabriel, Jeanne learnt the meaning of being 'in easy circumstances'. She was free to be herself without the restrictions of poverty. She could indulge her liking for the finer things of life, having discovered the theatre, books, and museums. She mixed with people who were interesting and cultured. After Gabriel's death, when she found that he had left her little more than what was needed to repay his debts, she resolved that her daughter should enjoy the same advantages that she had known, if not because of her fortune, then because of her education.

Jeanne gave up the apartment at the Quai de Billy and moved into a small flat in the Paris suburb of Neuilly. She went back to work at a dressmaker's, and in addition took an evening job in a millinery house so that she could afford to continue supporting her family as well as send Suzanne to a good private school. It was of necessity a boarding-school, owing to Jeanne's long hours of work. Suzanne, too young to understand her motives, saw the separation as one more proof that her mother did not care for her. It added to her unhappiness that being a strange, thin, mute, little girl she was not easily integrated into the school community. At first the other children left her out of their friendships and groups, and some cruelly teased or bullied her.

Yet it was in school that her condition was to improve. Her class-teacher was responsible for the change; feeling sorry for Suzanne, she spent time after class trying to help her with her speech. As she did so, she was surprised to find the quick mind that lay hidden behind the wall of her muteness. After that discovery, she took pride in drawing out and correcting her responses, thereby bringing her into a better relationship with the world around her. As a consequence her speech disability began to disappear.

In the course of time she was to reveal several talents. She had a gift for languages and eventually spoke five fluently, strangely enough for someone who had originally had so much difficulty speaking. She had a good ear for music and would learn to play the piano well. Above all, she was gifted for dancing. At the age of eight she was accepted as a pupil at the prestigious Ballet School of the Paris Opera House. She was captivated by the world of dance from that time on. To her it represented a world apart because it was free of the ugliness and disorder that existed in banal life. The refined beauty of ballet came to signify for her an aristocracy of being that was obtained by the exercise of a certain quality of will. This was best described by the '*Will-to-Harmony*' of Han Ryner, whose philosophical work she would one day read with interest because it defined what she had felt for years. She would want her life to show such an aristocracy of being, believing that by discipline and the constant effort to improve herself, her life could become like a perfect dance in which every action expressed harmony and created beauty.

Although an ugly duckling in childhood, Suzanne turned into a swan in her teens. She was tall, slim and had a dancer's graceful movements. She had an oval face, a straight classical nose, dark hair and brown eyes; beautiful intelligent eyes that yet reflected an innocence which she was never to lose. She was a very idealistic, serious-minded girl, but at the same time she had a keen sense of humour and liked to clown about to make people laugh. At school she was usually at the top of her class, and Jeanne entertained the hope that after getting her baccalaur^{at} she would go on to study medicine. At the time few professions were accessible to women but medicine was just beginning to open its door to them.

Suzanne, though, hated the thought of making medicine her career. She was convinced that she did not have a natural aptitude for it. Moreover, she saw it as a 'dirty profession', associated as it was with disease and death which frightened and revolted her. It seemed to her that Jeanne could only have picked that profession for her because she knew her so little. Her own desire to be a dancer was totally opposed by Jeanne, not for moral reasons, but because in her opinion Suzanne, though gifted, did not have exceptional talent and hence would never get to the top of her profession.

Jeanne's adamant refusal to let her have the career she wanted precipitated a crisis, because it put Suzanne in a position where she could neither accept her mother's authority nor revolt against it, since she loved her mother too much to want to cause her pain. At the end of the summer vacation, a few days before she was due to go back to school for the final year, she locked herself in her room and would not open the door to her mother, not even to take in the food which she brought her. After three days, a terribly anxious Jeanne was about to have the door forcibly opened, when Suzanne emerged quite calm and composed. During her 'retreat' she had in fact found a way out of the impasse. The idea had occurred to her to emulate one of her favourite heroines, Joan of Arc, and like her, to place herself under the Highest Authority of all. Because, if she obeyed the dictates of God, she would not have to openly revolt against her mother, but known only to herself, would not be subject to her authority any more. Moreover, by obeying His command she would be working towards the truest and best fulfilment of her potential. Before, it was as if she had been paralyzed because all action forced on her against her own inclination had seemed futile, but now from her new perspective the action asked of her appeared rewarding and worth doing. She returned to school and at the end of the year passed her baccalaur^{at}. She then enrolled in Pre-medical school. In the final examinations she stood first in her class in Chemistry.

The crisis represented a watershed for her, standing between her despair in the past and her hope for the future. This is confirmed by the fact that shortly afterwards she changed her name to Talitha, an apt choice since the name evokes the maiden who, when dead, was raised to life at the command of the Lord.

PART TWO

WATER

*And just as a drop of water contains within it
every element of the whole ocean, so each being
contains within itself the potentiality and possibilities
of the highest.*

Robert Crosbie in *Universal Theosophy*.

Theosophist

At the age of sixteen, Suzanne performed in public two dances that she had created herself with a little help for the choreography from her *Maître de Ballet* at the Opera. The dances formed part of a programme staged by the cultural group, *Idéal et Réalité*, at the Colyse Theatre in Paris.

The first dance, entitled 'The Oriental Awakening' tells the story of a young Sheikh who, while asleep in the desert, is awoken by the rising sun. He starts to pray but an enemy suddenly attacks him. In the battle that ensues the Sheikh emerges victorious. Finally, he performs a dance of thanksgiving to the sun above, the source of his strength. The theme is drawn from the Theosophical doctrine of man's spiritual awakening from the sleep of ignorance and inertia, and his fight against the base force that seeks to obstruct his upward progress. There was undoubtedly another more personal meaning, which was the enactment of Suzanne's own conflict with the authority in her life whom she saw as holding her back from fulfilment, and her victory presided over by the Sun, the Highest Authority of all.

In her second dance, 'The Invocation to Varouna', the audience who had previously seen her as a combative young man may have been surprised to see her now in the guise of a forlorn and helpless Maiden. These two contrasting roles were probably how Suzanne perceived the two sides of her personality. The dance begins with the Maiden imploring Varouna, the highest all-seeing god of the sky, to see her and to forgive her sin lest she be yielded unto death. Varouna heeds her plea and appears to her in all his splendour.

Ecstatic, she chants:

'He doth appear, my cry is answered,
I am delivered from my sin!'

In this drama of sight, the Maiden is saved from sin, or no worth, when Varouna not only sees her but also appears to her so that she can see him. This is because, out of the darkness of self-ignorance and doubt, it is herself that she sees in the radiant being, not as she is now but as she will be at the end of her spiritual evolution. For Varouna and the Maiden are two poles of the Divine Self, Varouna is the realized Self whilst the Maiden is the potential Self.

Contained here is the Theosophical idea of the perfectibility of man through the evolution of the Divine potential in him. The omniscient god Varouna is the archetype of the all-seeing spiritual Master, a mortal but perfect man who, after passing through successive lives, has reached the perfection of his faculties. With his superior sight he can see what is beyond the eyes of ordinary people, the transcendent Truth. He transmits the higher knowledge to his disciples through his teaching, and more directly, through revelation or initiation; the degree of initiation depending on the ability of the candidate to receive it. This concept of the all-seeing Master who initiates his disciples so that they too might come to see the Truth was to be very influential in Suzanne's life.

She first became interested in the writings of Theosophists while she was still at school, and at eighteen was to join the Theosophical Society, an organization founded by Mme H.P. Blavatsky and Colonel H.S. Olcott in 1875, with the aim of banding together seekers after Truth regardless of their race, sex or religion. That Suzanne, who had been brought up as a

Roman Catholic should have turned to Theosophy for inspiration and support when still so young, was partly due to the fact that Jeanne thought (and no one corrected her belief), that due to her divorce and re-marriage she had put herself beyond the pale of the Church. She suffered much anguish because she had been taught that to be excluded from the Sacraments was to be cut off from the Grace of God. Suzanne, who could not accept dogma which condemned her mother to anxiety and guilt, found in the doctrines expounded by Theosophists exactly what she wanted to hear: that what was necessary for salvation was not adherence to dogma but to Truth, and Truth which was the essence of all the great religions belonged to none of them exclusively. As Theosophists proclaimed, 'There is no religion higher than the Truth.'

It must be said though that Suzanne's attraction to Theosophy was not merely due to her particular circumstances, for it was her natural intuition that Truth was infinitely wide and could not be divided by exclusive divisions and barriers. She was inclined to believe in the inherent wisdom of people of all faiths, in all parts of the world, and in all ages, even before Theosophical writings opened up a window for her, as it did for many others in the West, on the rich treasures of philosophical thought and spiritual experience to be found in various religions, especially Eastern religions, whose outer structures might vary and even be opposed. She had what has been called 'the greater view of things', and this view influenced her whole life, from her religious choices to the way in which later on she would practise medicine.

The outbreak of the war in 1914 interrupted her studies, for Jeanne sent her out of France to the greater safety of England and Switzerland. She herself remained in Paris so as to continue working. While abroad Suzanne benefited from the encouragement and support given to her by Theosophists. Various Theosophical cultural groups invited her to perform her dances. She was able to improve her dancing skills and to extend her repertoire. She got appreciative audiences, good reviews, and a number of letters, one of them from a spectator who wrote how much she had been moved by the way she seemed not merely to depict but to live spiritual experiences in her dances. Suzanne began to believe that she could play a useful role in the Theosophical Society by propagating its doctrines through her art.

In 1917, by which time she had already made quite a name for herself as a dancer, Suzanne received a letter from the Countess of Prozor, a prominent Theosophist and a patroness of the arts who could have been very influential in promoting her career, who wrote: 'You are a true artist. By studying are you not wasting precious time? You are already twenty. You should know what you want to do and devote yourself to that entirely.'

The Countess surely meant that Suzanne should make up her mind about her future career and stand up to her mother if she opposed her decision. That was something, however, which Suzanne was still unable to do. When she returned to France she took up her studies again, apparently relegating her dancing to the rank of a mere social accomplishment as Jeanne wanted. Yet, in fact, it was always much more significant than that; for it would continue to be her best means of communication, conveying her otherwise unexpressed thoughts and feeling. She poured her inner life into her dances which is, no doubt, what made them so fascinating to watch.

Bowing to her mother's wishes did not provoke a crisis as it had during her school days. This is proof that Suzanne had been able to maintain the ideal which made her studies appear worthwhile. She preserved all her life a simple postcard sent by a Theosophist friend which depicts a doctor tending a sick native in the African jungle. Behind the doctor stands the figure

of Christ. The countenance of Christ and that of the doctor are almost identical; for the doctor, by working with Christ and for Christ, is becoming more and more one with him.

Whilst a student at the medical faculty of the Sorbonne, Suzanne seems to have been quite a firebrand, siding with the anti-vivisectionist students who protested often and vociferously against the appallingly cruel experiments and demonstrations that were carried out on live animals in the classroom. She became something of a feminist, too, after seeing how some of the authorities were prejudiced against women wanting to enter medicine, and were not above failing them to keep them out. Once her studies were over she would retain a combative attitude towards unfair treatment whomsoever it was directed against: women, the poor, or people of a different race.

During this period she embarked on quite another type of study by joining the Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society. The ES was a kind of elite occult school founded by Mme Blavatsky to bring the most deserving members in contact with the great Masters. There was nothing particularly occult about it, as the word is understood today. The pupils were required to adhere to strict rules of morality, to carry out prescribed meditations and to dedicate themselves to selfless service to others. The promise held out by the authorities to the pupils was that if they did well in their disciplines, one of the Masters would turn his glance towards them and single them out of the great mass of beings for admittance to the Path of Discipleship. This Path of spiritual advancement led, at the first Initiation, to membership of the Great White Brotherhood, the Band of the Elect who helped guide and guard mankind, then through four more Initiations finally to Adeptship or Perfection, a status on the very threshold of Divinity.

For over five years she was an exemplary pupil of the school, but at the end of that time she did not feel that she had anything to show for it. She had not been accepted by a Master and therefore had not even entered the probationary stage or in Theosophical parlance, 'the forecourt of the temple'. It was no comfort to her that none of the others in her group had met with greater success. Consequently, she began to think of seeking her Master directly, as indeed had Mrs Annie Besant and Mme Blavatsky before her. And like them, she believed she would find him in India, that spiritual land where it was said that the Ancient Wisdom had been preserved and the Masters and Rshis could still be met in their physical bodies.

In 1923 she took her MD. She dedicated her doctorate thesis to her mother, thus recognizing that her hard work and sacrifices had made her education possible. Then she added a post-graduate qualification in Tropical Hygiene and Medicine. She wanted to be prepared for rendering service in India should her dream of going there ever materialize. As it happened, her visit to India was soon to be made possible by two eminent Theosophists, George Arundale and his young Brahmin wife, Rukmini Devi. They had come on a tour of Europe from the International Headquarters of the Society at Adyar, South India. They were to sponsor her delegation from the Paris Lodge to the Jubilee Convention of the Society to be held at Adyar in December 1925. They had both taken an immediate liking for Suzanne because, as Rukmini would one day tell me, 'She was sincere, earnest, and we could discern a special spiritual quality about her.'

Rukmini and Suzanne shared a love of dance. At the time Rukmini was an exponent of Indian classical music and was not yet a dancer, but Suzanne's love of ballet and her great admiration for the ballerina, Anna Pavlova, may have influenced her, since when she met Pavlova in Australia in 1926 she arranged to learn ballet from her. She would go on from ballet, however,

to discover her true line in *Bharata Natyam*, the temple dance that was the oldest and purest of the Indian dance forms. This dance sadly had fallen into oblivion and disrepute because it was traditionally performed by 'brides of the gods', professional temple dancers whose promiscuity, deemed right and moral for them in antiquity, was not acceptable to modern society. Rukmini would courageously search out the last masters of the dance, study it under them, and eventually perform it on the stage, an event that took Madras by storm. In 1936, at Tiruvanmiyur near Adyar, she was to found Kalakshetra, an academy which would be mainly responsible for restoring the ancient dance to its rightful place in the pantheon of Indian classical art.

In August 1924, George and Rukmini left for Ommen, in Holland, to attend the first Camp organized for members of the Order of the Star in the East or OSE. This offshoot of the TS, in its original form had been started by George himself in 1911, while he was Principal of the Central Hindu College at Benares. Its object was to bring together young and forward-looking people who believed in the near Coming of the Messiah and who wanted to dedicate themselves to his work when he came.

The Messiah was known as the Christ in the West, the Buddha Maitreya in the East, or the World Teacher, a name given to him by Theosophists who thought it would be acceptable to people both in the East and the West. At first a movement outside mainstream Theosophy, the OSE would be given more and more importance by the leaders of the Society, in spite of the objections of some of the more far-sighted members who feared that the expectations it aroused might wreck the Society if they were not fulfilled.

Suzanne had not planned to go to the Star Camp although she was a member of the OSE--in those days it was the trend to belong to all worthwhile organizations. Like most of her fellow Theosophists at the Paris Lodge she believed that the Coming, though a wonderful event, was still distant, since Mme Blavatsky had predicted it would take place at least seventy-five years after the establishment of the Society. That she went to the Camp after all was probably because her talks with George and Rukmini had made her curious to see the one who had been chosen by the Lord to vehicle his incarnation on earth, a young Indian called Jiddu Krishnamurti who had been discovered by Theosophists in 1909.

Krishnamurti was born on 11 May 1895, at Madanapalle, in the district now within Andhra Pradesh State, a region known for its poets and visionaries. He was the eighth child to be born in the Jiddu family. Therefore his parents, Narianiah and Sanjeevamma, according to tradition, named him Krishna after the avatar or Divine incarnation of Vishnu, Sri Krishna, who had also been an eighth child. They had no idea that their son would one day be the avatar of the Lord Christ, whose near Coming was prophesied by Theosophists. Narianiah, though an orthodox Brahmin by caste, was a Theosophist, something that was admissible in his Hindu community because Theosophy was not regarded as a religion, but as a philosophy of life. He revered Mrs Besant as a seer and as an enlightened worker for the upliftment of the Indian people. Krishnamurti would remember her picture hanging among the sacred images in the prayer room of their house. Sanjeevamma was sympathetic to her husband's Theosophical leanings, but as a devout Hindu she taught her children to worship Sri Krishna. A vision of Sri Krishna, the god child with the flute whose music is the voice of universal life, was to be Krishnamurti's first religious experience.

Tragically, Sanjeevamma died when he was ten, and with her death he lost the one who loved

and cared for him the most, since Narianiah, an official in the Revenue Department, was too busy with his work to pay much attention to his children. Only six of his eleven children would reach adulthood.

Krishnamurti, in his teens, was thin and frail, having been debilitated by recurring bouts of malaria since infancy, and he had a weak chest like his younger brother, Nitya, who was to suffer from tuberculosis. He was also practically mute, happy to spend long hours silently observing or communing with nature, but far less able to communicate with people. Narianiah, fearing for the lives of his surviving children, wanted to take them to live in the more salubrious climate of Adyar. So when he retired, he applied for work at the Theosophical Society Headquarters and was eventually offered the post of Assistant Secretary when it fell vacant. He arrived with his family in Adyar on 3 January 1909.

Barely three weeks later a prominent Theosophist, Charles Webster Leadbeater, returned to the Society after an absence of nearly three years in Europe. It was he who discovered Krishnamurti as the chosen one of the Lord. He was to claim that when he first met Krishnamurti on the Adyar beach, he saw a great aura of light around him and knew at once that he was looking at no ordinary being. He predicted that the boy would one day be a spiritual teacher and a great orator; a prediction that few will dispute eventually came to be fulfilled. But Leadbeater went still further. After an occult investigation of Krishnamurti's lives over a thousand years, he declared that although still so young, he had in the past acquired the qualities which, after his preparation by Theosophists and provided that 'nothing went wrong', would make him suitable for the Lord's use when He came to earth.

Suzanne meets Krishnamurti

The Star Camp of 1924 was held on the Eerde Estate at Omen, Holland. The two-thousand hectare domain with its early 18th century castle and its ancient pine forests had been donated the year before by its owner, Baron van Pallandt van Eerde, to Krishnamurti, as the Head of the OSE.

Life at the Camp was deliberately kept simple and primitive so that the members could be as close to nature as possible; free of the clutter and superfluities of their usual lives. They slept under canvas, washed in streams, ate in communal tents or picnicked on the grass. Krishnamurti addressed small groups of them, often as they sat relaxed among the trees. In that informal setting there were no restrictions on speaking with him or questioning him, and many eagerly did so and received his spontaneous answers in return.

Suzanne thought that the exalted claims made about him seemed quite credible when one saw him face to face. His appearance, which was one of refined beauty informed by superior intelligence, marked him out as a spiritual aristocrat. Some of the members could not refrain from prostrating themselves before him though it was evident that he did not like any adulation or excessive deference to be shown to him. He brought that home to them in various ways. For instance, when a group photograph was about to be taken, a throne-like chair was brought for him but he refused to sit on it. Suzanne was asked to sit in the place of honour perhaps because she was the youngest in the group. Krishnamurti stood self-effacingly in the back row.

She had heard a reason for his reticence. One of her close friends at the Paris Lodge, the author Ludovic R?hault, who knew Krishnamurti well, had told her about his constant battle to prevent people worshipping his person or image. This tendency to deify him had arisen because he was presented everywhere by Theosophists as the Christ. He personally wanted to be thought of as the World Teacher and for people to listen to his teaching rather than to rely on being saved by the supernatural power he was believed to possess as the Messiah. In 1919 he found at the Paris office of the OSE a full-sized statue of himself evidently intended to be an object of worship, and had it smashed to pieces then and there despite the protestations of those present.

He had given a first expression to his individual teaching at the age of nineteen when drawing up the Aims of the OSE. In these Aims he advised the members to personally interest themselves in social problems and their solution 'along the various lines of human life and activity in its innumerable forms'. This meant that they were to seek their happiness by acquiring a knowledge of the realities of others. Only a change of spirit based on a broader understanding of life could bring to birth a new world in which the traditional philosophy of individualism and competition was replaced by the philosophy of universal brotherhood and cooperation.

Thus, while it was being proclaimed that the Messiah would come to bring new order to the world, he was, in effect, saying that if each one were to undertake to change himself or herself, the world order would change with them.

The Theosophical leadership paid scant heed to the Aims, pointing as they did to a self-reliant way of achieving the transformation of oneself and society. On the contrary, they gave increased importance to the mystical Path of Discipleship and the Occult Hierarchy. This

system made the members dependent not only on the Masters who, on the higher planes of existence, gave the instructions for their progress, but dependent also on the intermediaries, the high Initiates of the Society who occultly 'brought through' the instructions to this mundane plane. Incredibly, the rank and file members did not know whether they had been accepted or not as disciples by their Master, or what Initiation they had passed, or even what advancement they had made, until they were told about it by one of the intermediaries.

Krishnamurti wanted people to be free from dependence and to stand on their own feet. But the sad fact was, that he, himself, was not yet fully free. For years he took no decisive action against the policies of the leadership, prevented from doing so by the constraints they imposed on his free judgment, as well as by his own alternating states of belief and doubt in their teachings. There was also his reluctance to cause any hurt or humiliation to Mrs Besant who had been as a second mother to him ever since he had been brought into the Society. It was not until 1927, apparently after he had acquired strength and certainty through a definitive experience of Ultimate Truth, that he would break out of all the bonds that held him a prisoner to given ideas. In the course of a talk entitled, 'Who Brings the Truth?' he would make pronouncements about the occult system of Masters and Initiates that amounted to an attack on the very *raison d'être* of the OSE. For instance, he would tell Star members: 'Until now you have been depending on the two Protectors of the Order (Mrs Besant and Mr Leadbeater) for authority, on someone else to tell you the Truth, whereas the Truth lies within you. In your own hearts, in your own experience you will find the Truth, and that is the only thing of value.'

Before then, at the Star Camp of 1924, there would come his first major confrontation with the leadership. But this was still in the private domain since his criticism that the Elders of the Society were entrenched in orthodoxy and resistant to change was couched in words understood by those concerned, but not by the general public.

The event took place on the evening of the second day of the Camp. At dusk, the five hundred or so Star members present (mostly young people hailing from different countries) gathered around the log fire built at the centre of a big clearing in the pine forest. Krishnamurti addressed them, and as he spoke the audience thrilled to the powerful, magnetic quality they could feel in him. The theme he had chosen was the need for everyone to have a youthful attitude. He told his listeners that he had observed the young people of America and that he admired them because they did not compromise. They sought their happiness with an independent spirit, refusing to accept the authority of the old, who were 'set in their ways and narrow-minded'. He stressed that the attitude of the young had to be cultivated for only a youthful, impetuous spirit could usher in a new era which was a 'stepping aside from the old groove and ruts worn smooth by the prejudice of the old, the trying to escape from the stagnant waters into the clear, bubbling, sparkling waters of life'.

Suzanne, for one, was very much impressed by his words. It was as if what he said was personal to her, since for some time now she had felt that she must not let herself be overwhelmed any longer by the domination of those in a position of authority over her if she wanted to make something of her life. The import of Krishnamurti's message was precisely that it was necessary to cease compromising with authority if one wanted Liberation, which was to realize the untrammelled freedom and spontaneity of Life, or Truth without limitations.

The teaching that Suzanne heard from Krishnamurti that day had the important effect of making her more resolute and courageous than before in matters that vitally concerned her. She

would indeed always remember him, especially for his courage, which would become much more evident with later events. It would permit him to break out of the mould into which his guardians sought to cast him and to create himself. She might not have the independent spirit he lauded in his talk, yet she became more ready to make her own decisions. This is evident from the fact that a few months later, quite independently of Jeanne's opinion, she took some radical steps to lead her life in the way which she believed was best for her.

At the Theosophical Convention, Adyar

At the beginning of November 1925 Suzanne sailed on the liner Pilsna to attend the Jubilee Convention at Adyar. There were seventy-seven Theosophists on board including Charles Blech, Secretary of the French Section, and a prominent youth leader, Oscar K?llerstr?m. The Theosophists on board attracted some public attention, since at the Star Camp held in August that year Mrs Besant had given the members a message from the Lord of the World to the effect that the Coming was now imminent; that the Christ would take possession of his vehicle, Krishnamurti; and that the Christ had already chosen His twelve Apostles among the high Initiates of the Theosophical Society. Krishnamurti, who was to incarnate the Christ, was not present at the Camp and knew nothing until later about the momentous pronouncements that had been made there concerning himself and his Apostles. He was at Ojai, California, nursing his ailing brother, Nitya, who was seriously ill with tuberculosis.

Suzanne arrived at Adyar to find the Society near to overflowing with a crowd that was soon to number over three thousand people, as visitors and delegates converged on the Society from different parts of the world. Also present were the representatives of various national and foreign newspapers including the *New York Times*, all hoping to report to their readers news of some Divine manifestation heralding the prophesied Coming.

Krishnamurti was reluctant to leave his ailing brother. But the doctors in attendance assured him that there was some improvement in his condition, and after seeing that his brother was in good hands, Krishnamurti set off for the Convention, via Europe, where he joined Mrs Besant and her party and sailed with them to India. As their ship entered the Suez Canal he received a radio telegram informing him of Nitya's death. The sudden separation from the brother who had been so close to him plunged him into agonizing grief. He suffered much anguish too, since the loss of the one whom the Masters had designated as his helper in the work after the Coming undermined his belief in their other revelation, that the Lord had chosen him to be his vehicle when he came to earth. By shattering his beliefs about his role as the World Teacher, the tragedy brought about a complete reordering of his thinking. He knew that he would have to find out who he really was and what his role was, not from the messages of the Occult Hierarchy 'brought through' for him by others, but by listening only to the voice of his own intuition.

Suzanne, like everyone else, was curious to see how Krishnamurti had borne the loss of his beloved brother. When she saw him as he presided over a public meeting at Adyar she was surprised to see how calm and resolute he looked. She would learn later that he had emerged from his grief, not by obtaining solace from any person or any teaching, but by overcoming his sense of separation by himself. He had come to feel that Nitya lived on in him because in some indefinable way his essence, his Being, was in him. Before, there had been differences of personality between them; now that those had gone they were united. As he wrote: 'On the physical plane we could be separated and now we are inseparable...For my brother and I are one.'

During the four-day Convention, which started on 24 December, Krishnamurti did his best to make the occasion a success, no doubt for the sake of Mrs Besant. He delivered scheduled speeches on Theosophical subjects connected with the Ommen prophecies in which he did not really believe; and he attended, participated in and even conducted some religious ceremonies though he was becoming convinced that all ceremonies were unnecessary. Those who had

hoped to hear from him more bold new talk following what he had said at the Ommen Camp in 1924 were disappointed. Nor did he follow up what he had said soon after the Camp to some chosen friends holidaying with him at Pergine; talks in which he had stressed the need to ardently develop the qualities of discipleship which were unselfishness, love and sympathy. At the Convention, Krishnamurti's own teaching was submerged beneath the development given by Theosophists to their own prophetic pronouncements at Ommen.

However, as Mary Lutyens tells us in her book, *Krishnamurti the Years of Awakening*, he adamantly refused to accept as his disciples the seven Apostles, who included Mrs Besant, Leadbeater, Jinarajadasa, George and Rukmini Arundale, Oscar K?llerstr?m and James Ingall Wedgewood. Evidently, he believed that the revelations made by Mrs Besant, far from being a message 'brought through' by George from one of the highest-ranking personages of the Occult Hierarchy, was in reality nothing more than the 'machination' of George to collect all the spiritual power in the world for the inner circle of Theosophists. This conclusion was drawn from the fact that the Apostles were said to head three world institutions: the Liberal Catholic Church that would be the start of a new World Religion, the World University that would train the young for their duties, and Co-Masonry that would convey the occult teaching of the Lord. The leaders were fond of repeating that the Theosophical Society would be the Light-Bearer bringing the Divine Wisdom to a world in trouble and in darkness. It is evident that they considered whatever wisdom existed outside the Society to be negligible.

The rift between Krishnamurti and the Apostles was not the only discord within the Society. There were power struggles and rivalries between most of the other leaders as well. However, the rank and file members did not see the fissures in the structure of the leadership. They, for their part, drawing inspiration from the noble ideals of Theosophy, thought and lived their unity, so that for them the Convention was a 'solemn manifestation of universal brotherhood', as a French visitor would report to her lodge.

At one of the opening ceremonies the representatives of thirty-eight participating nations each planted a tree brought in its own clod of earth from its homeland. Thus, the earths of England, France, Germany, and so on were mingled into one earth. This was a beautiful symbol of the common Divine foundation of humanity, and one that was especially telling since they were only six years beyond the end of the war during which the divisions between nations had led to such carnage and suffering.

Since all the visitors could not be accommodated in the buildings of the Theosophical Compound, neat 'villages' of huts made of mats and covered with palm leaves had been erected for them on specially prepared sites. Suzanne shared a hut with two young women delegates from Holland. For all three it was their first visit to India and their first Theosophical event of such magnitude. They soon became friends and many were the confidences and impressions exchanged between them.

Each morning Suzanne would get up very early to spend some time in quiet meditation on the dunes of the Adyar beach before proceeding to the centre of the Compound for the start of the communal activities. One day, as usual, she sat facing the dark mass of waters of the Bay of Bengal that was just beginning to be touched by the golden rays of the rising sun. The time was nearing when she would be able to lose herself in the shining expanse of sea and sky. But that morning, as the light strengthened her attention was drawn to the people who began to appear on the broad stretch of sands. These were mostly fishermen putting their catamarans out to sea

in the face of strong salt-laden winds, and fisherchildren roaming the beach in search of any sea shells the night tides might have left for them. As she contemplated those people, for a moment when all separation had vanished, when thought was still, she had an experience of consubstantiality; an intense awareness of her essential oneness with them. Afterwards, there rose up in her an immense fondness for them and for all her co-sharers in the One Life. She told Ludovic R?hault about her experience and he was to mention it in his book *Krishnamurti* as an example of the 'not infrequent phenomenon of the expansion of the individual consciousness', which marked 'a first movement of the spirit towards infinite life'.

The mood of expectancy that had prevailed at the beginning of the Convention turned to one of anti-climax when the Convention itself passed without anything at all out of the ordinary taking place. On 27 December, the final evening of the Convention, it was raining heavily but Suzanne and her two Dutch friends stayed on till late in the evening at the Headquarters building to watch a cultural performance, and so returned only after nightfall to their hut. Suzanne went to pick up a jug of water and in the dim light saw, just in time, that a snake was coiled around it. Not knowing what to do to make the snake leave, they called for help to some passing fishermen. The fishermen, who came armed with sticks and stones, were surprised to be told that on no account were they to harm the snake because all forms of life were to be respected. In the end, they managed to entice it away with a pan of milk. One of the Dutch girls suggested that perhaps the incident was a portent, for she had read that in Indian tradition the appearance of a snake often presaged an important spiritual event. As it happened, on the following day, which was reserved for the Star Congress, there would occur what, to many, was just such an event.

By eight o'clock the next morning a large crowd had gathered under the giant old banyan tree where the meeting was to be held. The rain had stopped, and since Mrs Besant had given the order that the public-address system that had been used on previous days should be switched off, the proceedings got off in a strange hush.

Krishnamurti spoke to them about the Coming of the World Teacher. The talk was much as they had expected but towards the end, after a long pause, his expression and voice changed as he resumed speaking, not in the third person as before, but in the first person. The words rang out in the stillness: 'I come to those who want sympathy, who want happiness in all things. I come to reform and not to tear down, not to destroy but to build.' A good many of those present believed that they were witnessing the Lord's Consciousness overshadow Krishnamurti's consciousness, and were hearing the Lord's Voice speak through Krishnamurti of His love and care for them. Ludovic R?hault would write that the episode was the most wonderful moment of his life.

Afterwards, some controversy arose since not everyone thought that Krishnamurti's use of the first person was significant, whilst others had not noticed any change in his expression and voice during his talk. Suzanne had noticed but thought that it came at the moment when he had decided to speak to them not *of* the World Teacher, but for the first time, *as* the World Teacher starting his mission in the world. She wished they could have questioned Krishnamurti directly about the happening, but here at Adyar it was not as easy to gain access to him as it had been at Ommen. Charles Blech did manage to see him and he reported to the French members that Krishnamurti had simply told him that at the time of the phenomenon he had experienced a partial loss of consciousness. He had said much the same to Mrs Besant when she had questioned him earlier.

Mrs Besant must therefore have been gratified to hear him end his talk to a group of National Representatives with the words: ‘...Then when He comes again, and I am sure that he will come very soon, it will be for us a nobler and far more beautiful occasion than even last time.’ In her final address to the Star Congress, Mrs Besant declared that her prophecies were being fulfilled and that the event they had witnessed marked the definite consecration of the Vehicle chosen long before. She concluded with the triumphant words, ‘The Coming has begun!’ raising the religious fervour and excitement of the members to new heights.

Yet, did Krishnamurti attach the same meaning as Mrs Besant to the Coming? Did he accept the idea of possession by the Lord, and of playing a more or less mediumistic role in his manifestation? Or did he mean something quite different: becoming more and more united with the Lord through self-denial until, nothing of his individual self remaining, he was the Lord? After Nitya’s death he had had the experience of overcoming separation when, with the disappearance of the personality differences that had separated them in life, he had felt his beloved brother and he were one. That experience, if it had evolved on the planes of knowledge and love, could have been taking him to the ultimate realization of non-personal Being, at which level all life (which he called the Beloved) and he were one. The following year, addressing a two-thousand-strong gathering at Ommen at which several prominent Theosophists were present, after sternly telling them that they did not understand him, he made a cryptic comment which surely referred to the way Theosophists interpreted everything he said to their advantage. His comment was: ‘You give me phrases, and cover my Truth with your words.’

It was not until 2 August 1927, in the course of his talk ‘Who brings the Truth?’, that Krishnamurti explicitly acknowledged that he was the World Teacher, something which, on his own admission he had not been able to say before with any certainty. Making no mention of selection, possession, or incarnation, he affirmed he had become one with the World Teacher through his own efforts and by the way open to all, the eradication of everything that constituted the individual self. In his own words, ‘If I say, and I will say that I am one with the Beloved, it is because I feel and know it. I have found what I longed for, I have become united, so that henceforth there will be no separation, because my thoughts, my desires, my longings--those of the individual self--have been destroyed.’

Had Krishnamurti acknowledged that he was the World Teacher before the beginning of 1922, a time of decision for Suzanne, it is likely that she would have chosen to remain with his teaching and sought no other. It was certainly what she had heard from him that had impressed her the most in recent years. But since, at this point of time the enigma of his role had not been resolved and too little of his own teaching had yet been revealed, she still felt the need to seek a Master to guide her.

In the event, a new road opened for her right there at the Theosophical Society. It was to take her to the religious life in the Theravada Order, and to an encounter with one of the great Masters of Tibetan Buddhism.

PART THREE

AIR

On the Fifth Day, the green light of the primal form of the element air, the aggregate of volition will strike against thy heart.

The Tibetan Book of the Dead.

Buddhist Priestess

Suzanne met Sri Jinawansaswamy, sometimes called Prince-Priest because of his aristocratic descent, but generally known as the Swamiji, on 30 December 1925, when he came to inaugurate the small Buddhist temple the construction of which had just been completed in the compound of the Theosophical Society. He was a *Maha Thera*, a High Priest of the Theravada or Southern Buddhist Church, who had received the higher ordination from the Head of the famous Abhinawarama Temple in Waskaduwa Kalutara, in Ceylon. In 1920 he had been sent to India by the Maha Sangha Raja Sabha of the United Buddhist World. This was an international organization that gathered together the religious representatives of various southern Buddhist countries. The specific mission they had entrusted to him was the revival of Buddhism in India which had been the original homeland of the religion but from which it had practically disappeared.

The Swamiji was in his mid-thirties, a thin, gaunt man, whose habitually severe expression hid the kind and caring side of his character. He was a zealous missionary with a great capacity for self-sacrifice and, as he himself said, ‘an indomitable passion for service in the cause of Buddhism’. Subsequently, Suzanne went several times to hear him lecture at the Maha Bodhi Society which he used as his headquarters when he visited Madras. In his talks he presented the Buddhist *Dharma* as an upwardly spiralling and dynamic path to the attainment of Truth whose followers, taking as their starting point the practice of the disciplines of renunciation, by the merits obtained thereby achieved the perfection of their various faculties. Then, with the aid of the supernal and supranatural powers accruing therefrom, they went on to realize life’s highest ideals of ‘Supreme Enlightenment, Eternal Glory and the Blissful Peace of Nirvana.’

The Swamiji had implicit faith in the linkage of action and power. He believed that according to the Law of Karma or the Law of Cause and Effect, every action produced a power for good or for bad which influenced events, not only in this life, but in innumerable lives as well. As he said in one of his sermons, ‘A meritorious action produces a power that acts as a cause to redeem sorrows in immensities of world cycles.’ Furthermore, he held that the power of the action might be transferred to benefit another person who had not himself or herself committed the action. Thus in a letter to a prospective patron, Princess Bimla of Kashipur, whose husband was ailing, the Swamiji would write in 1928, ‘I shall share with you the merits of actions done by me in the past eight years of missionary work in India, and by the power of the above merits may your husband be blessed with good health.’ The Swamiji’s absolute belief in the power of the action would influence the conduct of his mission, and in all probability, the manner of its conclusion, as I shall relate later.

Suzanne became convinced that, even if he was not one of the Great Spiritual Masters, he was at least a realized being. Her conviction strengthened after he was able to demonstrate to her certain powers such as clairvoyance and thought-reading, which were said to come only to those who had reached an advanced grade of the higher life. In the letters exchanged between them there are several references to instances when he gave proof of such powers. She asked him to instruct her further in the *Dharma* or the Buddha’s doctrine. She was discovering in Theravada Buddhism a system of ideas which she had known only indirectly and incompletely through Theosophical writings and she was eager to learn more. At first the Swamiji saw her as a potential Buddhist convert. But as he got to know her better, he began to envisage the possibility of her becoming a Buddhist nun or, more exactly, priestess. This was a very bold idea because no woman had entered the Theravada Order in Ceylon for over eight hundred

years. However, the Swamiji hoped to persuade the Chief High Priests there to admit her since, as a medical doctor, she had proved she possessed qualities of intellect and character at least equal to that of a man.

The Swamiji genuinely cared about her spiritual welfare. At the same time, he knew that she would be very useful to him in his missionary work. As a European she could, in British India, open many doors for him. There was also the consideration that if she held equal rank to a monk in the Order, it would be proof of the point he liked to stress in his lectures and sermons, namely, that there was no discrimination of any kind in the Buddhist religion, which treated all people equally irrespective of caste, race, or sex.

Confident that the Swamiji had the competence to guide her, Suzanne felt ready to enter the Buddhist Order, for she had always had a great love and veneration for the Buddha. It seemed to her that no effort, no sacrifice was too great if it could help her to progress on the path traced by the Buddha, the Tathagata, He Who Walked in Truth. All those who she knew at the Theosophical Society approved of her plan to become a Buddhist nun. The notable exception was C. Jinarajadasa, an Elder of the Society and a former pupil of Leadbeater, who had been one of Krishnamurti's tutors and mentors whilst he was studying in England. Krishnamurti had not got on well with him because his heavy-handed authority and inflexible attitude towards him made it impossible for him to take any initiative of his own. He had written to Leadbeater asking that Jinarajadasa be recalled to India. Leadbeater unwillingly complied but the relationship between him and Krishnamurti would never be the same again. As for Krishnamurti and Jinarajadasa, it would be the start of a long conflict of authority between them.

Suzanne experienced something of Jinarajadasa's inflexible attitude when it came to her new project. A Sinhalese by birth, Jinarajadasa prided himself on being an upholder of his country's religious traditions. Since, according to the Theravada Canon, a woman could only be ordained by another woman and there was no other woman in the Order, he was insistent that she should not make a bid to obtain the ordination. Thinking that perhaps he had a prejudiced view of women, she brought to his attention whatever information she found in books regarding the achievements of Buddhist nuns in the past, but did not succeed in obtaining his approval.

Heedless of what future trouble with the Theosophical Society she might be laying up for herself, she continued all the same to prepare for the Buddhist higher life under the Swamiji's tutelage. She studied the Theravada Doctrine which, the Swamiji told her, perpetuated the pristine teachings of the Buddha without the additions and corruptions brought to them by Northern or Mahayana Buddhists. She learnt Pali, the vernacular in which the Buddha's teachings were originally transmitted. She also learnt from him ancient Buddhist techniques of meditation aimed at obtaining a transcendental trance. She would later express her gratitude to him for having initiated her and for his care, his trouble and his patience with her.

Towards the end of January they both wrote separately to Jeanne informing her of Suzanne's wish to enter the religious life. Jeanne was shocked and upset when she got the news. She had fully expected Suzanne to return to France once the Theosophical Convention was over. By that time, through her talent and industry she had risen in the millinery profession to occupy the top position of *Première* and had gone on to open her own millinery house which created hats for some of the most fashionable women of Paris. She was contemplating selling her establishment and investing the proceeds in a medical practice for Suzanne, when she heard of

the plans which might put her forever behind the walls of some distant religious institution.

In her reply to the Swamiji she wrote: 'I wish my daughter happy in her new life and precepts...I hope to see her soon.' From this, it is evident that her first reaction was not to give up her daughter so easily to the authority of another without seeing the situation for herself, and possibly trying to bring her back with her to France. Yet, in the end she did not go to India to intervene in the course of events, although it meant the complete negation of all that she had wanted for Suzanne and the renunciation of any return she might justifiably have expected for the sacrifices she had made for her education. Instead, she made one more sacrifice, and left her free to seek her happiness how and where she wished.

The Swamiji took Suzanne to Ceylon at the beginning of February 1926, and they went straight to the Abhinawarama Temple in Waskaduwa Kalutara where, at the Swamiji's request, the Chief High priests of Ceylon had gathered to interview her as a candidate for admission to the Theravada Order. After they had questioned her, they deliberated the matter for three days while she waited at the house of a lay-member. Finally they declared that they would permit her to enter the Sacred Order by taking the *Das Seelas*, the Ten Vows that are taken by a monk when he leaves the world to lead the higher life. She would be allowed to wear the yellow robe of a monk, and to have the authority of a monk, in that she would be permitted to preach, to teach, and to give the blessing to people. Of those privileges the one she seems to have most valued was the right to wear the yellow robe; yellow being the emblem of spiritual fulfilment attained through self-discipline and endeavour. The yellow robe represented to her the outer boundary of herself towards which she hoped to grow. As she would write, 'Let me grow to the beauty of the garment!' Before her, women in the Order, who were accorded only the lowly position of lay-sisters, wore white, not yellow.

Her *Pabbaja* or Going Forth ceremony was performed a few days later. The ceremony is simple but beautiful, since in this preliminary ordination the candidate makes an act of complete renunciation, vowing to turn away not only from the objects of sense (*Vattu-kama*), but also from the very thought of sensuality (*Kilesakama*), so as to pass a holy and noble life in keeping with that of the *Arahantas*, the enlightened Sages and Saints of yore who transcended passion and desire.

Early on the morning of her *Pabbaja*, Suzanne was taken into the temple hall where the rites were to be performed. First, her head was shaved. A little of her cut hair was put into the palm of her hand and she was bidden to meditate on the impurity of hair. Hair which can be pleasurable and attractive to the sight and touch, can also, under different circumstances, be ugly and offensive, and it thus serves to bring home to the candidate the relative value of the objects of sense. After she had bathed and put on a white gown, she was taken to the officiating Senior Monk. She handed him three yellow robes, each stitched from six pieces of cloth to commemorate the fact that originally the Buddhist robe was made from rags picked up in garbage heaps. The Senior Monk handed them back to her, and gave her the iron *pitha* or begging bowl, thereby investing her with the royal insignia, for a renunciate, according to the Scriptures, is really a 'king in the guise of a beggar'.

She clad the yellow robe that is worn over the left shoulder leaving the right shoulder bare. Again she came before the Senior Monk and kneeling before him, took the Three Refuges: in the Buddha, the *Dharma*, and the *Sangha* or religious community. Then she took the Ten Seelas, precepts which have remained substantially the same since the time of the Buddha, by

repeating:

‘I vow to abstain from the thought of taking the life of any living being. I shall live today as the holy and noble *Arahantas*.

‘I vow to abstain from the thought of taking anything with thievish intent. I shall live like a holy and noble *Arahantas*.

‘I vow to abstain from the thought of engaging in sexual intercourse and in any kind of impurity. I shall live the life of *Brahmas* in the *Brahma* heavens and as the holy and noble *Arahantas*.

‘I vow to abstain from the thought of telling lies and of slander. I shall speak only the truth and meritorious words and shall pass a sacred life like the *Arahantas* of the Sacred Order.

‘I vow to abstain from the thought of taking intoxicating drinks or any other intoxicating substance or drug into my body which might hinder the perfection of Wisdom. I shall live with a concentrated mind enlightened with intuitive powers.

‘I vow to abstain from taking food after midday.

‘I vow to abstain from dancing, singing, playing the drum and witnessing immoral entertainments.

‘I vow to abstain from adorning my person, by using perfumes, colours, ashes, creams, and putting marks or signs on my body. I shall pass a holy and sacred life as the *Arahantas* of the Sacred Order.

‘I vow to abstain from using high and broad seats or beds that arouse carnal passions.

‘I vow to abstain from accepting money or valuables since this will fetter me by worldly attachments. I shall live a supreme life such as the saints and *Arahantas*.’

There was no vow of obedience because the Buddha countenanced a good deal of independent judgement based on the higher wisdom inherent in man. At first, though, she would be under the tutelage of the Swamiji who the Chief High Priests had formally chosen as her preceptor. She would be his *samenera*, meaning the child (*nera*) of the monk (*saman*), to be taught, disciplined and taken care of by him in his capacity as a ‘competent and understanding monk’. Nor were the vows final. A religious was perfectly free to return to ordinary society at any time without there being the slightest stigma attached.

Lastly, to mark the start of her new life, she was given the religious name of Sujata, meaning Well-farer, after the young woman who, finding Gautama faint from the severe ascetic practices and strenuous meditative exertions he had undertaken in his search of Truth, offered him a dish of milk rice that revived him and gave him the strength to finally attain the highest Enlightenment and Buddhahood.

When the *Pabbaja* ceremony ended, Suzanne was a Buddhist nun. Later on when she was asked by a member of the Press whether she ever felt lonely as the only Buddhist nun in Ceylon and India, she answered, no, because she felt herself to be in the company of the nuns who had lived in the early days of Buddhism. Those heroic women who she wanted to emulate had succeeded in winning the acceptance, not only of a society deeply prejudiced against women, but of the Buddha himself who had entrusted to them the exposition of some of the most important points of his doctrine.

The Swamiji and Suzanne stepped out of the temple and into the courtyard to find a small crowd of spectators and well-wishers awaiting them. Some had brought the gifts which it was permitted to make to a monk: books, an umbrella, a palm-leaf fan, sandals, a woollen blanket. Those articles, together with her three religious robes and her begging bowl, were to constitute

practically the sum total of her worldly possessions. She would beg for her food, accepting whatever was put into her begging bowl 'with face averted' and eat 'with an attitude of complete indifference', and whatever her abode, she was always to see herself as a *paribbajaka*, one who has gone forth as a homeless wanderer in 'nature's own spacious lordless lands'.

On their return to India they went to Basavangudi in Bangalore. There, on land donated by the Maharaja of Mysore, the Swamiji in 1921 had founded the United Buddha Society, or UBS, the Indian branch of the Maha Sangha Raja Sabha, for the express purpose of 'promoting and protecting the Buddhist *Sasana* or Church in India and around the world'. His Holiness Thathanabaing Sayadow of Mandalay, Burma, who was the Patron of the parent organization, was also Patron of the United Buddha Society. The Swamiji was the President, and Suzanne became its General Secretary.

She was given the additional function of dealing with matters that pertained to women. The Swamiji wanted her to play an important part in the work of bringing about 'the spiritual upliftment of women', and the 'equality of women in national, religious and social life'. Permission was obtained from the religious Heads of the MSRS for her to start and direct a Ladies' Ashrama which would give instruction to women novices aspiring to become nuns and missionaries, as well as train lay women as teachers or workers in the service wing of the UBS. In the prospectus that she drew up for the Ladies' Ashrama, she wrote: 'Instructions will be given at the Ashrama on meditation, yoga and on the Inner Teaching that is the essence of all religions,' revealing that some Theosophical ideas were still with her.

At the time the UBS was still at its modest beginning. However, the Swamiji planned to build on the site a Buddhist Monastery and Temple as well as an International Institute that would be the most important Buddhist Centre in the world. He was already urging the religious authorities in Ceylon, Burma, Siam, Cambodia, Japan, China and Mongolia to send their representatives to the 'Central Office of the Buddhist World'. He hoped that, working together, they would be able not only to advance the propagation of Buddhism but also lead the way to Buddhist unity by settling any doctrinaire differences that divided their sects and by developing a sense of spiritual kinship and neighbourliness among themselves.

By far the most important work for Buddhist unity that remained to be done, however, was the unification of the two main Churches of Buddhism: the Theravada Church, which prevailed in the southern lands of Buddhism, and the Mahayana Church which existed in the Indian Himalayas, Tibet, and various other northern countries. The idea was not new. Colonel Olcott, the first President of the Theosophical Society, had sought to reconcile the two Churches which had been divided probably since as early as the third century BC, but that had proved to be very difficult.

At first he worked for Church unity with Anagarika Dharmapala, a Sinhalese Buddhist and Theosophist who had founded the Maha Bodhi Society of Calcutta to that end. In 1892, Dharmapala, as the appointed agent of the Chief High Priests of Ceylon, had met with a conclave of leading Tibetan and Cis-Himalayan lamas at the Tibetan monastery in Darjeeling. Yet nothing had come of 'his religious cavalcade', which is how the event was dubbed by Olcott, after a rift had developed between him and Dharmapala over the running of the Society. He had ascribed the debacle to Dharmapala's failure to present to the lamas an organized plan of action for carrying out the ideal into practical results. Olcott eventually had to give up his

grand scheme due to failing health, but after his death the idea of unification persisted in the minds of Buddhist leaders, especially of those in the South.

The Swamiji, wanting to avoid Dharmapala's alleged mistake, devised a plan for the establishment of a properly constituted Joint Ecclesiastical Authority in Bangalore that would unite the religious powers of the two Churches, as well as co-ordinate their missionary activities in a systematic manner. He decided to first send Suzanne to the Indian Himalayan District to convince the Buddhist authorities there of the merits of his plan and to obtain their support for it. Once she had paved the way, he himself would go to the North to finalize the details of their future collaboration.

He wasted no time, in view of the urgent need to obtain helpers and funds for their missionary work. At the beginning of March, he wrote to the Heads of the Buddhist monasteries in Darjeeling, Ghoom, Gangtok, and others, informing them that they were to expect the visit of the delegate from the Maha Sangha Raja Sabha, the 'Reverend Sujatalitha, a Buddhist priestess of ten precepts, a clever Homeopathic as well as Allopathic lady doctor, now practising a holy religious life'. She was coming to give them 'a noble and divine message concerning the promotion of the power and prosperity of the Buddhist world'.

Mission to the North

Suzanne arrived in Darjeeling on 27 March and without difficulty contacted some members of the Buddhist community there. The Abbot of the Bhutia Busti the Tibetan monastery in Darjeeling had received the Swamiji's letter, and on hearing that she was in town sent one of his monks to introduce her to the President and Patron of the monastery, Sardar Bahadur S.W. Laden La. The Sardar Bahadur was a very remarkable man. A Tibetan grandee, he was not only the Darjeeling Chief of Police and a distinguished diplomat, but also a Buddhist scholar and an ardent supporter of the *Dharma*, well known in the Indian Himalayan region for his many religious, educational and philanthropic activities.

Mr Laden La took Suzanne to the Bhutia Busti and acted as interpreter for her and the Abbot. She spoke to them about the United Buddha Society founded in the South by the Swamiji and conveyed the Swamiji's call to northern Buddhists to support its work for the propagation of the *Dharma* and the reconciliation of the different Buddhist Churches and Sects. They replied that if the Swamiji kept in touch they would do whatever they could to help, perhaps by sending them one or two priests as well as some women novices for the Ladies' Ashrama. Money, though, they could not give because the monastery was very poor.

They offered her the shrine to sleep in and Suzanne was so glad to be in such a holy place. Women were as a rule not allowed to stay in the temple proper after nightfall, so it was a special honour that they were paying her. The monks belonged to the *Kargyud* Sect, an old semi-reformed Order which did not enjoin its monks to abstinence, celibacy or voluntary poverty, yet they appreciated the total renunciation to which she was vowed even though she had made no mention of it. As she said in her letter to the Swamiji, 'You know, strangely enough...it is not at all depending on me but every one admitted the *Pabbaja Seela* without my telling them, they respect and reverence, and I, knowing that I represent our mission, do my best to give them a high impression of our character.'

Mr Laden La, in the course of their talk, had advised her to meet 'a very holy lama who had great powers', Tromo Geshe Rinpoche (Precious Doctor of the Wheat Valley), since 'he could do much for them'. He generally resided in Tibet, but after a trip to India would stay briefly at his monastery in Kalimpong where she could meet him.

After informing the Swamiji of Mr Laden La's suggestion, she wrote that she had heard of a big Lamini convent in Tibet. She asked whether she might not go and stay there for some time so that she might see how such convents were run before starting the Ladies' Ashrama in Bangalore. In the same letter, she requested his permission to wear stockings and some warm clothes. As her preceptor, he controlled even such small details of her life, since he believed that it was essential for the success of their mission that no power should be lost by her unwittingly committing an unmeritorious action. Until she received his reply she stoically continued to wear a habit meant for a tropical climate, in spite of the cold and blustery Himalayan weather.

She would visit most of the other monasteries in the region. Everywhere she carried out her assigned task to the best of her ability, but though she was heard with sympathy and kindness, she could obtain little more than moral support for their work. The Swamiji had expected more concrete help since he had assumed that the long-established Buddhist institutions of the North were wealthy. She could see for herself, though, that that was far from being the case. The

hill-monasteries, since they were situated outside Tibet, received no subsidies from Lhasa and depended for their support on the contributions made by their adherents. They might possess old ritual objects of some value in their shrines, and the main statues were sometimes adorned with semi-precious gems offered by the devotees, but the faded draperies and tawdry altar decorations, often of artificial flowers, as well as the peeling, discoloured frescoes deteriorated by damp and age, gave the place an air of decrepitude reminiscent of a theatre going to seed. She thought that their real wealth consisted in the gilded statues representing wisdom, love, compassion and the light of knowledge. Not because of any great artistry on the part of their fashioners, nor because their gold was anything more than paint, but because they were the projections of man's true shining nature as known to him through introspection--the golden flowers of his most vital experiences.

She learnt many new things during her stay in the North. She witnessed a dance of demons, for which the lamas donned the masks of fierce demoniacal beings in a rite that ended with the killing and dismemberment of the effigy of a man. Chief of the demons was Mahakala, the Great Black One, of Buddhist Tantric fame. He was a survivor of a bygone age when a myriad of fierce demons had stalked the landscape of people's minds. But wise Buddhist teachers had subjugated him, not only mythically, not only ritually, but above all by turning him from a destroyer of men into a destroyer of the human ego. As the dark force of mystical death, he became the counterpart of Chenrezig, the Buddha of Infinite Light. In the words of one lama, 'Without darkness there is no light.' Because he reconciles these two opposites he is called the Lord of Transcendental Wisdom. Whilst, as the Great Destroyer, without whom there is no new creation, no transformation, no law of existence, he is the awesome Protector of the Dharma and of life itself, and his swift and secret aid is customarily invoked in times of dire danger.

The mask, in general, is a means of effacing one's personal self in favour of another identity. But in the case of Mahakala, the means and the end coincide; there is no distance between them. That is the reason why Mahakala, the force of the mystical death of the ego, is said to reside in his mask, and why his mask itself is kept in some monasteries as an object of worship.

Years later, Suzanne would stage the dance of the masked lama which had made a marked impression on her. It seems too, that she applied its lesson of hidden strength in her own life. At a difficult time, when she felt beset by enemies, she made a determined effort to efface the desires and feelings of the self so as to live more in the Self and by so doing obtained not only a greater feeling of invulnerability but an objective result as well, because when she became less assertive and hence less of a target, the attacks of her enemies would abate.

If Suzanne found much of interest in local beliefs, she, herself, a young foreign woman who so earnestly endeavoured to realize the ideals of Buddhism, was of considerable interest to the local population. She was visited in the monasteries where she resided by many people, quite a few of whom asked her for spiritual guidance or for advice on the problems they were facing in their lives, and she gave them the best advice she could. She also went into the villages or small towns, where, in small halls or outdoors, in the fresh windswept air, or in the rain and mist, she preached the *Dharma* to the congregations who gathered to hear her. Those who wished took the Three Refuges and the five vows, an act not so much of conversion as of renewal in the perfections of the disciplines. Then she gave them the benediction by tying on their arms a red thread as she had been empowered to do. She reported in a letter to the Swamiji, 'I have blessed hundreds of people already. In one village I spoke and there were forty people with the thread. You do not know what kind of life this is.' It was indeed a very different situation for the

Swamiji in the South where he had made a few thousand converts but where the progress of his missionary work was painfully slow because of financial constraints and the strong hostility shown to Buddhist conversion, mainly by caste Hindus.

Tromo Geshe Rinpoche and the Way to Unity

Suzanne requested an audience with Tromo Geshe Rinpoche and was granted one on the following Wednesday, 6 April, in Kalimpong. She spent the days before her audience finding out as much as she could about the great Sage from the lamas of the Yiga-Cho-Ling monastery in Ghoom where she was staying.

Tromo Geshe Rinpoche was born in Gangtok to a Sikkimese family of Tibetan origin. His original name was Ngawang Kalzang. As the name 'Kalzang' indicates, they were hereditary landowners. At a young age he entered the famous Sera monastery belonging to the Gelug sect. Unlike some of his fellow religious destined to hold high rank in the ecclesiastical hierarchy, he was an ordinary monk in that he was not the reincarnation of a previous Master or Enlightened Being. Nonetheless, his teachers singled him out for special instruction because of his exceptional qualities. He was given the chance to be instructed by some of the most renowned lamas of his day, including the then Dalai Lama (the Great Thirteenth as he came to be called), as well as the Dalai Lama's own tutors. Once he had completed his studies he was ordained and eventually passed with distinction the final examination, which earned him the title of *Geshe* or Doctor of Divinity.

His last Master was Geshe Jampa Chohey of Eastern Tibet who told him to carry out his Yogic meditations in the southern Tibetan valley of Tromo, prophesying that there he would one day gather many disciples around him. In Tromo the Rinpoche dwelt in ascetic isolation in mountain caves and forest retreats. In the manner of Tibetan Yogis he used no means of heating even at sub-zero temperatures. He subsisted on whatever fruits and herbs he found in the wilderness. People say that the apes, which were his first disciples, brought him his food.

For some twelve years the Rinpoche persevered with his meditative practices aimed at going beyond the illusion of phenomena which have no intrinsic self-reality independent of thought, and attaining the intuitive realization of Sunyata or Emptiness, the Absolute Consciousness which is the ultimate reality of the Universe. One day, as he sat in his cave meditating in the peace of one whose mind is steeped in truth, he was discovered by a passing herdsman. The herdsman told others about his discovery and the wonderful experience he had had when the Rinpoche had spoken to him and blessed him. The news soon spread in the valley that there was a holy man dwelling in the mountains. Braving the steep climb, people came to see him in ever increasing numbers. Amongst them were the monks of the Dungkar Gompa (Monastery of the White Conch) who offered him the Abbotship of their monastery. Although the Gompa was a very poor and unknown monastery situated to the north of the small town of Yatung, the Rinpoche accepted to come to them. He knew that it was now time for him to return to the world and to put whatever merits and powers he had acquired to the service of others.

For some time he limited his activities to the spiritual direction of the Gompa. But one day, without abandoning the Gompa, he embarked on the wider mission of awakening the minds of people everywhere to the *Dharma* as the teaching whose essence was love. Some say that the change that took place in the direction and scope of his work was the result of a wondrous vision of Maitreya, the Buddha of Love, whose figure appeared to him in the sky. But Tibetans also say that to see the Buddha in the sky is to have already found the truth in one's heart. At any rate, the Rinpoche's teaching and actions, following the years he spent in spiritual practice, were instinct with the realization that love is the fruit of the conscientious discipline of the mind. Not the ordinary kind of love, as one lama explained, because that is limited and divided,

being in part self-love. Rather, it is the kind of love which can be compared to a mother's love for her child, a complete love which knows no division since the child is but a part of the mother. Such enlightened love liberates one from sorrow and conflict, for it brings about not only one's harmony with the outside world, but also the inner unification one's mind and heart.

The Rinpoche believed that what he taught was in the spirit of the Buddha's teaching. In order to convert people to truth, Buddha relied less on words and more on love which had the directness and indisputability that argument or persuasion lacked. In support of the Rinpoche's belief one can quote some of the earliest Buddhist texts such as the Manjhima Nikaya, which has the Buddha tell his missionary disciples that when faced with hostility and criticism they are to deal with their opponents by 'permeating them with loving thought' and in like manner are to deal with the whole world.

The Rinpoche held in great reverence the Precious Guru, Padma Sambhava, the eighth century Yogic Master and Saint. This, in spite of the fact that the community that came to be formed by his followers in Tibet, the Nyingmapa, was looked down upon by the reformed sect or community, the Gelugpa, to which the Rinpoche belonged. What counted for the Rinpoche was that Padma Sambhava, when invited to Tibet in AD 747 by King Trison Detsan who wanted to see Buddhism established in his country, succeeded in overcoming the opposition of the powerful heads of the various native traditions collectively known as the Bon, by using means not of repression but of mediation. His way was to accept into his system certain features of the native religion including the worship of some of its fiercest demonic deities, whilst at the same time introducing into Tibet the great peaceful deities of Buddhist India. The most influential of these was to be Maitreya, the Future Buddha, whose name in Sanskrit means Loving Kindness but who came to be known in Tibet as Chumba, The Loving One.

The Buddha Maitreya was able to play an important conciliatory role between Buddhists and Bonpo because, as the Buddha of Universal Love, He was not judgemental. He was the Saviour who would incarnate on earth in a future World Age, not to reward the righteous and punish the guilty, but to revivify the Teaching and to bring about concord amongst men by the power of Love. Moreover, the future Messiah of Love was non-sectarian, in that nowhere in the Scriptures did he advocate doctrines that were the exclusive possession of any one sect or school.

Twelve centuries later, the Rinpoche would also view the worship of the Buddha Maitreya and the elevation of the value of Universal Love as the best way of bringing about unity in Tibet of which there was a crying need in his day. As historians tell us, there existed rivalries between aristocratic families, between political clans, between religious sects, and even between monasteries of the same sect whilst it was feared that the heads of some powerful eastern monasteries who resented the strict regime imposed on them by the Thirteenth Dalai Lama would seek to obtain their autonomy by mounting a rebellion against the rule of Lhasa with the help of the Chinese.

The Dalai Lama, the supreme religious and secular authority of Tibet, believed that the prevailing situation in which internal disunity was combined with isolation from the world outside, if it were to continue, could put the nation in extreme jeopardy. He personally would have liked to introduce some measures of modernization and to forge friendly relations with neighbouring countries, but the chief ecclesiastical officers of his Government resisted his wishes. They did not want to open Tibet to foreign influences lest they corrupt the religion and

diminish the power of their monasteries. In 1932, one year before his death, the Dalai Lama wrote a letter that came to be known as his 'Last Testament'. In it he exhorted his people to look beyond narrow self-interest and to work in harmony for the good of the religion and the country. He gave them dire warning of the fate that awaited Tibet should they fail to do so: 'It may happen that here in the centre of Tibet the Religion and secular administration may be attacked both from the outside and from the inside. Unless we can guard our country, it will be destroyed. The administrative customs of the Three Religious Kings will be weakened. The officers of the State, ecclesiastical and secular, will find their lands seized and their other property confiscated, and they themselves made to serve their enemies, or wander about the country as beggars do.' Unfortunately, his words would go largely unheeded, and the Tibetan theocratic State, folded in on itself with its attention absorbed by internecine conflicts, would remain unaware of the forces of non-religion that were massing on its eastern frontier. The invasion and occupation of Tibet by the forces of Communist China that was to take place in 1950, and the subsequent suppression of the native religion and culture, would prove how prophetic the Dalai Lama's warning was.

Whilst the Dalai Lama urged his people to practise harmony, the Rinpoche, for his part, showed the inner way of achieving it. He spread the message of Universal Love as widely as possible, travelling from place to place in Tibet, and also outside Tibet in the Indian Himalayas and in neighbouring countries. He founded many new temples and shrines for the worship of the Buddha Maitreya, or else introduced his image in long-standing temples such as the Yiga-Cho-Ling in Ghoom, and the Dungkar Gumpa in Yatung, which became an important seat of learning and devotion to the Buddha of Love. He was, moreover, one of the few Masters of Tibet in those days, prepared to reach out to non-Tibetans by imparting to them hitherto highly guarded knowledge. For instance, he instructed Suzanne in an ancient Yogic meditation, and at about the same time instructed the German-born Lama Anagarika Govinda who, through his writings, was to convey some of the mystical teachings of his Guru to the world at large.

Another of the Rinpoche's disciples, Mr Laden La, would extend the work of mediation into the political field with singular success. Entrusted by the British Indian Government with important diplomatic missions, he helped to bring about better relations between India and Tibet, and was instrumental in averting war between Tibet and Nepal. On one occasion, after a misunderstanding had estranged the two highest religious authorities in the land, the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama, he succeeded by inspired diplomacy in restoring friendly relations between them.

Suzanne meets the Rinpoche

When the time came for Suzanne to meet Tromo Geshe Rinpoche at Kalimpong, Mr Laden La took her there by car and again offered his services as interpreter. At the monastery, she was shown into the small unostentatious room where the Rinpoche received visitors. He was seated on a meditation seat and was dressed in the yellow shirt and maroon habit of the Gelug Order. He was sixty-one years at the time but looked much younger. His full countenance shone with enlightenment and kindness. When her eyes met his, she remembered that he was called the Great Healer, for the intense gaze he directed to her was that of a physician whose look sought to find out how best he could help you.

After a few words of introduction by Mr Laden La, she conveyed to the Rinpoche the Swamiji's message concerning their work and aims. The Rinpoche listened attentively to what she had to say, and after putting several questions to her, mainly about the United Buddhist Service which the Swamiji was planning to establish, he told her that he was very interested in their work and would help them when they were ready. Suzanne was happy to hear such an eminent man express interest in what they were trying to achieve. She did not pay much attention to the word 'ready' which he had used. Only later would she understand its significance.

Once she had completed her task for the Swamiji she requested the Rinpoche to give her some guidance for her spiritual quest. When he did not reply she began to fear that he did not think her worthy of his instruction, for she knew only of a great emptiness in herself. But presently he said: 'The goal of spiritual quest is Reality, which you feel is very distant from you, but know that there is no need to seek anywhere for Reality, since it is already within you. It is your innate true nature which is not different from the Mind of all the Conquerors and Buddhas.' His reply showed a remarkable perception of her aspirations as well as of her self-doubts. 'He is a Yogi of great powers,' she would comment with wonder and reverence when describing her audience with him to the Swamiji.

To her joy she heard the Rinpoche say, 'I shall teach you a meditation that will help to awaken your true nature.' The meditation basically consists in the visualization of the Buddha seated above one's head and illuminating one's mind; then, once His presence has become real to oneself through practice, going on to the next stage, that of the visualization of the Buddha seated in one's heart and illuminating one's heart. The Rinpoche told her, 'When the feeling comes to you that He dwells in your heart you will have found your Inner Light.' And he further instructed her on how to keep the Light from getting extinguished by remaining mindful always of the Buddha within, by submitting her will to His Will, and by developing genuine love and compassion for others. Finally, he imparted to her the sacred mantra, *Om Mani Padme Hum*, which literally means The Jewel in the Lotus. It is the invocation mantra of the Buddha Avalokiteswara, the All-Compassionate, who is incarnated in Padma Sambhava as well as the Dalai Lamas. The mantra is popularly repeated to gain merit or deliverance but it is also used more specially by Yogis to generate the perfect and complete Buddha nature.

For the mantra expresses more than one dimension of Reality. *Mani*, the pure and radiant jewel, is the Buddha nature in its dimension of suchness or absoluteness. *Hum*, as the seed invocation of the Buddha Aksobya who essences the Mind of all the Buddhas, is the Buddha nature in its profound dimension of Knowledge. Whilst *Om*, as the seed invocation of the Buddha Vairochana who essences the Body of all the Buddhas, is the Buddha nature in its vast

dimension of Love and Compassion. There is a saying that when the Illumination flashes forth in someone's mind the entire Universe is illumined.

The Swamiji, encouraged by Suzanne's report that the Rinpoche had shown interest in their work, wanted to leave the following spring for the North but was prevented from doing so by certain developments. One of these was Suzanne's marriage to an army surgeon, Captain Ranjit Sen, IMS, on 14 April 1927. He would not meet the Rinpoche until the summer of 1928. So the narrative moves forwards two years to 1928 so as to cover this important meeting between the two Buddhist leaders, for which the Swamiji travelled north from Bangalore, and the Rinpoche travelled south from Tibet.

It was held at the Rinpoche's monastery in Ghoom, the Yiga-Cho-Ling. Mr Laden La was very closely associated with this monastery and as its Patron and President he had recently personally borne the greater part of the cost of rebuilding it and of installing a tall golden image of the Buddha Maitreya in its shrine, evidence of the impress that the Rinpoche's teaching had made on him. Like his Master he was also a fervent devotee of Padma Sambhava (as indeed were the Abbot and chief lamas of the monastery), and would later translate excerpts from his medieval biography for the writer W. Y. Evans-Wentz.

Concerned not only for the maintenance of the *Dharma* among the hill people, but also for their upliftment and education, he had become, in 1909, the Founding President of the Children's Advancement Association. My father's elder brother, Ranabir Sen, was engaged in several welfare activities in the district (and a few years later would found the first Girls' School in Ghoom), and was a good friend of Mr Laden La. It was he who, at the Swamiji's request, appealed to Mr Laden La to arrange the meeting with the Rinpoche. My father's second youngest brother, Arindama Sen (later given the honorific title *Pundit* by the community), had then just started what was to be a lifelong involvement in the education of hill children. Ranabir and he were both invited to attend the meeting at the Yiga-Cho-Ling, together with the Buddhist dignitaries of the region.

My uncle Arindama would one day give me the following details of the event. The Swamiji began by asking the Rinpoche about what, in his view, was one of the worst abuses of Northern Buddhism--namely, the worship of deities and even demons in the temples. The Rinpoche replied that Northern Buddhists were allowed to worship the peaceful or fierce forms of deities as long as they felt the need for their help or protection. However, they were also taught that deific forms were no more real than all the other forms of this world, from the point of Ultimate Reality. Therefore their worship did not constitute a fundamental difference between the doctrines of the Northern and Southern Churches. My uncle commented, 'The Rinpoche made a great impression on me because he knew Hinayana well and he was so rational and liberal. It was said of him that he could pick out the truth in every sect or religion without any bias. He was truly non-sectarian.'

The Swamiji proceeded to outline to the Rinpoche his plan for the establishment of a Joint Ecclesiastical Authority in Bangalore, which he described as a first step towards translating into reality their common ideal of Buddhist unity. The Rinpoche, who did not believe that unity would result from merely putting into place the external structures of cooperation, replied that their two communities were more likely to come together if Theravadins engaged like their northern brethren in the worship of the Buddha Maitreya.

Now, although Maitreya, as the successor of the Buddha, is honoured in Theravada temples, Theravadins do not consider him (or any other personage for that matter) to be a deified Saviour. Nor, since they hold that each one must work out his own salvation, do they make the religious vow to obtain Liberation so as to succour their fellow men, as do Northern Buddhists. This has led to the belief that Theravadins seek perfection only for their individual advantage, and therefore have a narrower view of spiritual achievement than Northern Buddhists. Had Theravadins accepted to worship the Saviour Maitreya as the Rinpoche suggested, it would have gone a long way towards mitigating that criticism against them. But what the Rinpoche proposed by the worship went further: it was to remove not only the object of criticism but criticism itself. For Universal Love, being love of others as they are, would have eradicated the sense of superiority stemming from judgement which each sect harboured with regard to the other, and which was the real cause of their separation. His vision was of a great movement of love and tolerance, so dynamic and vital that it would sweep away the barriers arising from age-old prejudice and rigid doctrinaire adhesion.

The Swamiji, however, rejected outright the worship of the Buddha Maitreya, giving as his reason that Theravadins did not engage in worship, not even of the Lord Buddha, since they considered prayer to be unworthy of a Buddhist. As he later reiterated in a sermon, 'A Buddhist does not pray. Prayer is begging. A Buddhist should be noble and manly. He should master himself and produce great merits for the good of gods and men.' He raised a second objection. Prominence, he maintained, should not be given to a Buddha designated for another World Age. Buddhists should be concerned, not with the Buddhas of the past, nor with Maitreya of the future dispensation, but only with the Buddha of the present dispensation.

The meeting ended without any agreement being reached as to the best way of achieving unity. Thus it was that although the time for it had never before been so propitious, with both leaders working, each on his side, to bring about greater harmony among Buddhists as part of their work for the *Dharma*, the moment in history passed without the ideal of Church unification coming any closer to its realization. It has not been realized to this day.

An article written by one of the Rinpoche's followers, a learned and prominent Nepali Buddhist, Rev. Dr Dharma Aditya Dharmacharya, was published by the Swamiji in the August 1933 issue of the *Buddhist World*, the organ of the United Buddha Society. Dharmacharya's article is interesting to us because, since he was very close to the Rinpoche, the views he expressed must have reflected to a certain extent those of his Guru. Dharmacharya first countered the argument put forward by the Swamiji that the teachings of the Buddha Maitreya were not meant for the present World Age by pointing out that the Buddha, Himself, affirmed that the teachings of the future Buddha Maitreya would not depart from the fundamental principles He had enunciated. Dharmacharya then went on to speak about conversion: 'Having the facts of existence, Lord Buddha formed no sect and strongly decried force or persuasion as preemptory postulates in the diffusion of His truths. Rather he taught a strict individual obedience and a conscientious discipline as the greatest factors capable of expanding Buddhism by radiating love, which is the essence of His teachings. Love being inherently an attribute of the human soul could be the only true conversion in which the stains of compulsion and hypocrisy were inconceivable.' It is evident from his words that Northern Buddhist believed there could be no effective collaboration between themselves and Southern Buddhists in the work of conversion as long as their approaches to it remained so much at variance.

Not long after this article was published, Dharmacharya requested the Swamiji appoint him as

an Honorary Sub-Editor of the *Buddhist World*, probably with the intention of continuing to communicate with Southern Buddhists through that medium. Since it was difficult to find money for its publication, the Swamiji, as he confided to Suzanne, was prepared to grant Dharmacharya's request in the hope that if Northern Buddhists became involved in editing the journal, they might also become involved in financing it.

Still, it appears that the Swamiji was not entirely untouched by his meeting with the Rinpoche. In the circular letter he wrote to the members of the UBS shortly after returning from Ghoom, he altered the sentence 'to meet and discuss together' by adding two words by hand, so that it now read: 'to meet and discuss together *with love*'.

Suzanne's Monastic Life at the Yiga-Cho-Ling

To go back to 1926, in May of that year Suzanne returned to the Yiga-Cho-Ling after staying at the Tibetan monastery in Takim. When she left, all the monks accompanied her on her way, that being the customary manner of honouring a guest. It rained and they arrived in Ghoom wet through and laughing like children. Tibetans in general like to laugh and the religious are no exception, perhaps because they know that a sense of humour is the best safeguard against feelings of self-importance or self-righteousness.

The Yiga-Cho-Ling was founded in 1850 by Lama Sharab Gyatso, a Mongolian monk who was well known in Tibet as a Yogic astrologer-mathematician. The story is told locally that one day while he was meditating on the hills overlooking the little town of Ghoom, a party of Englishmen happened to pass by. They dismounted from their horses and engaged in conversation with him. Hearing about his special powers of calculation, they gave him an extremely difficult problem to solve. He gave them the answer in minutes. Impressed, the travellers asked Sharab Gyatso whether they could do anything for him. He replied that he would like to gather some disciples around him. They collected the money for a small monastery to be built and that is how the Yiga-Cho-Ling, which was to inspire many, came into being; the result of the collaboration between people of different nationalities and faiths, a Mongolian Buddhist and some Christian Englishmen. It was a not unfitting foundation story for what was to become the monastery of Tromo Geshe Rinpoche, the Apostle of Unity.

When you enter the Yiga-Cho-Ling and come into the main shrine, you are at once struck by the tall golden image of the Buddha Maitreya that rises from the centre of the altar and reaches almost to the ceiling. Standing before this image, the Buddha completely fills your mind. He is depicted with his blue eyes wide open, not closed in the absorption of trance nor downward-looking in private mercy, but outward-looking to the vast sphere of non-exclusive love. He is seated on a throne in Western fashion and his hands are in the *mudra* or gesture of Turning the Wheel, the symbol both of the Universal Monarch and of the Universal Teacher.

While residing at the Yiga-Cho-Ling, Suzanne led the same life as the monks. She stayed in a small cell, unfurnished except for a narrow bed. She participated in the monks' religious ceremonies, studied and meditated with them. She fasted when they did, and like them took only one main meal a day. Since the food did not agree with her she scarcely ate anything. 'I am starving joyfully!' she wrote to the Swamiji in the first enthusiastic days of her monastic life there.

When the lamas learnt that she was a medical doctor they came to consult her for their ailments, and it was not long before her small stock of medicines was practically exhausted. That meant she had to keep up her resistance to disease. Hygiene, though, was almost totally disregarded and that was particularly hard to bear. For instance, all the monks' plates and cups were washed in a single bucket of water, and she suspected that at least one was suffering from tuberculosis. The washing of clothes, which was something of an occasion, required a trip to the nearest waterfall. The monks did not appear to be at all embarrassed or self-conscious because there was a woman living amongst them. One lama who she had gone to see over some matter that needed explaining even invited her to sit on his bed, as there was no chair in the room. Nor did the monks ever show any disrespect to her, fully accepting her as a member of their religious community, one vowed like them to observing the highest moral precepts.

However, for the Swamiji, her adherence to the precepts was a matter of great concern. He wanted to be kept informed about any transgression that she had made, since he believed that any serious transgression might jeopardize the successful accomplishment of her mission. In one letter Suzanne assured him she had broken none of the *brahmacharia* precepts but had broken some of the other rules, which she listed so that he could tell her what penances to perform. On the list were: 'I have smelt one or two roses' and, 'I have also touched money owing to the ridiculously long time it takes to get payment of postage and travelling expenses.' If there is a note of defiance detectable here it is because she was beginning to feel that if no mitigations of the rules were made to suit the circumstances, the very continuance of her mission would soon become impossible as she was losing her health and strength in the conditions in which she was living.

She also had to report her dreams to him as her preceptor, according to ancient monastic practice. The first dream she describes reads as follows: 'I dreamt I had some water left in my hand with the duty of pouring it on a plant. All around me the nice green plants were abundantly watered. I settled on a growing field of Indian grain in miniature on the slope of a hill. As soon as I spread the water, underneath a hidden staircase and a secret door opened and to my amazement, I took the passage leading underground and I found myself in a treasure room.'

In the next few dreams there emerge strong emotions, some very painful, relating to her mother. In one dream her mother appears looking very poor and distressed, and Suzanne feels concern and sympathy for her: 'I heard wonderful music, an orchestra of religious instruments...I saw mother coming to me and I took her in my arms and I asked her, "Do you hear the music?"' She said very little, and the more I told her to listen, the more she heard, and we were dressed very poorly, and I comforted her and gave her courage and hope.' Their roles are strangely reversed, Jeanne is like the child Suzanne has once been--she speaks very little, she is isolated and afraid. Suzanne plays the part of the mother, and helps her to communicate, what she must have felt Jeanne failed to do for her when she was a child. But there is no trace left of her former childish resentment against her. She sees her now as someone who calls for her generosity and solicitude, and in real life that would be her attitude towards her from now on. Suzanne was coming into her maturity, as far as her relationship with her mother was concerned. In the next dream about her mother, simply by seeing Jeanne she saves her from death: 'Mother was dead and I was conducted into a room where she was in a sheet. After much struggle I had to see her face for the last look. Oh! I suffered so much in that dream and when I uncovered her face the corpse came alive, and it was not her face.'

But in the last dream which she narrates, it seems to be a dead part of herself that demands her attention: 'I was carrying a burden, a dead body that I had to deliver to the City of the Dead. The corpse would not lie still and I told him to stay quiet or I could not carry him. Then I met someone who told me that I had lost my way and that it was right through the moon that I had to go--and I went and delivered my burden.' Is her burden all that is still selfish and untransformed in herself? Or does she speak of it as 'him' because it is the male component of her personality; that part of herself which desires achievements in no way inferior to those of men in intellectual and spiritual fields--an ambition accompanied by a tendency to be combative when opposed, which deep down she knows will impede her progress if she does not become free from it? In her dream deliverance is to be found by 'going right through the moon'. Surely this is a symbol of rebirth or at least of a new beginning; new because better balanced than before by taking in the need to develop equally the faculties of both head and

heart, which was indeed one of the implications of the Rinpoche's instruction to her.

During her stay at the Yiga-Cho-Ling there occurred what would later be interpreted not so much as coincidences, but rather as mysterious presentiments of her destiny. Close to the monastery there was a small hill which one morning Suzanne felt prompted to climb. At its foot there was a dense copse of trees given fantastic, even sinister shapes by the dark moss that hung from their branches. In the dark places between the trees she could discern small wooden altars bearing a melted, white substance that looked like animal fat but which must simply have been melted dough on altars discarded after innocuous offering rites in the nearby monastery. Seen here outside their Buddhist framework, the altars recalled an age when animal and human sacrifices were performed to appease or coerce demonic beings. It was as if in this dark place she was at the foot of the long rise from ignorance and superstition that had taken place in the evolution of mankind. When she reached the summit of the hill things were very different. It was all space and light, with a tall Buddhist prayer flag benevolently wafting on the breeze its wisdom words for the benefit of all living beings. For a moment her view was obscured by mist rising from the valley. When it cleared, she saw on the range of hills opposite a white house standing on a small plateau bordered by pine trees and surmounting a spring of water. She remembered a scene described by the Swamiji in one of his letters which resembled it. He had never visited the Himalayan region but had seen the place in a 'flash of intuition' which had gone through his mind. He believed that it would be of importance to them, perhaps as the site of their new Buddhist centre in the North. She stayed for a long time gazing at the scene before her, wondering whether there was some karmic link between the place and herself. There would indeed be an important connection though not as she envisaged, for what she was looking at was the ancestral home of her future husband.

The Swamiji had already shown powers of supranatural sight when he had written to her earlier, 'I was with you - some days you were sleeping in a sorrowful state, that was on the 26th and 27th.' Those were precisely the days in April when she had had her anguished dreams about her mother.

Then there came an unexpected development in her mission. The news that the Southern Buddhist authorities represented by the Maha Sangha Raja Sabha as well as the Chief High Priests of Ceylon, had agreed to the Swamiji's proposal that she be sent as their representative to His Holiness the Dalai Lama in Tibet. She was specifically to request the Dalai Lama to be Joint Patron with His Holiness Thathanabaing Sayadow of the Maha Sangha Raja Sabha. The Swamiji informed her in the same letter that he was dispatching her deputation papers by the next post. Suzanne could hardly believe that those leading Southern Churchmen had had sufficient confidence in her to appoint her as their agent in discussions with the Dalai Lama on this important matter. And that, despite some articles which had recently appeared in the vernacular press in Ceylon criticizing the Swamiji for working in association with a woman, and even making some innuendoes about their relationship. In her reply to the Swamiji, she affirmed her resolve to prove worthy of the trust which had been placed in her: 'I am deeply, in my heart so glad that Ceylon has approved us. What a great promise for the future! and let me grow to the beauty of the garment as indeed I must find my inner Light and be without reproach in the eyes of the world when I work with you.'

She was able to make arrangements to join a caravan that was due to leave for Tibet some three weeks later. Meanwhile, she went down to Calcutta to spend a week with Mr and Mrs Delafontaine, who she had known at the Theosophical Society at Adyar. They were on friendly

terms with the Governor of Bengal and she hoped that with their help she might be able to obtain an official permit to travel in Tibet. On her arrival in Calcutta, she went to meet Mr Delafontaine at the office of the West End Watch Company, of which he was the Regional Manager. The sight of a white woman with her head shaved and dressed in the ochre robe of a Buddhist monk created quite a sensation in the big office full of people. Mr Delafontaine, though, treated her with great respect. She was unable to procure a travel permit within the short time that she had at her disposal, but she regained some of her strength in the home of her friends and felt more prepared for the arduous journey ahead.

Back in Darjeeling she was faced with a new problem. The leader of the caravan, who she had not met until then, told her that she could not travel in her Southern Buddhist habit because in a land strictly forbidden to foreigners, her unusual appearance would be sure to attract attention. He was anxious to avoid the interference not only of the bandits who infested the caravan routes, but also of the Tibetan Government officials who were unlikely to accept her deputation papers as valid travel documents. If there was any untoward incident because of her presence, the entire caravan might be held up.

There was no time to ask the Swamiji for instructions. She would have to take the initiative if she were to make the journey to Tibet and back before the close of the travelling season. Since she was being asked to travel as inconspicuously as possible, she decided to go disguised as a young Nepali man. For this character she chose, for no particular reason, the name of Mr Seni. By another strange anticipation of events, this name, which means 'belonging to the Sens', would actually come to apply to her before long. As part of her disguise she darkened her skin slightly with herbal oil. She does not seem to have minded in the least playing this role and the last letter she wrote to the Swamiji before entering Tibet is signed with something of a flourish, 'Your Boy Samanera!'

Still, throughout her journey she carried with her the Buddhist robe and begging bowl. They represented her spiritual life to which her most fundamental allegiance continued, and indeed, would always continue, whatever the circumstances or appearances of the moment.

Journey to Tibet

On 27 May, the caravan that Suzanne was travelling with reached Kalimpong. It was the full moon day of May, or *Vesak*, on which is celebrated the triple anniversary of the Buddha's birth, enlightenment and death. On the sacred night of *Vesak* the Lord is believed to return to earth to shed His blessing upon it, and hence the whole Buddhist world is at prayer. In the evening Suzanne made her way to the Buddhist monastery where she had had her audience with the Rimpoche. People were converging on it from different directions, and some must have come from distant places for they carried their bedding and provisions on their backs. They walked reciting a rosary or turning a mantra-wheel to gather merit or to concentrate their minds in preparation for the ceremony ahead.

In the monastery a great animation reigned. The hall was closely packed with worshippers and many, unable to find room inside, had to remain in the courtyard or in the outer shrines. The ceremony was a solemn one presided over by a Tulku, or reincarnate lama, who had come from Tibet for the celebration.

That day Suzanne felt the close Presence of the Lord for the first time. As she confided to the Swamiji in her next letter: 'I have felt this day a marvellous and deep understanding and the feeling of nearness to the Lord.... I have had a tremendous experience. I cannot explain it to you but I write so that you may receive something of what I have felt. I have asked many things of the Lord Tathagata and you know how I hope to become a true disciple and to see one day something of His nature awaken in me.' She then made what amounted to the Bodhisattva vow: 'May I never find rest through ages and ages till I become one day a Saviour of Humanity. May it be my only aim, and no pain, no suffering, no struggle will ever make me change and forget the ideal. Many years ago have I for this day very far away, changed my home for a sanctuary, and today it has seemed to me I was very near Him.'

After *Vesak*, the caravan resumed its journey, halting briefly at Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim. Then it took the route up the mountains and after four days of hard climbing ending in an almost vertical ascent, reached the Nathu-la, a high, narrow, wind-swept pass that was the main artery linking Tibet with Sikkim. On the descent from the Nathu-la on the Tibetan side members of the party had to dismount from their ponies and proceed on foot as the ground was slippery with mud and melting snow. They reached the first dak-bungalow or rest house in Tibet late at night and could get only a few hours sleep there.

The next day, descending further into the valley, as they came round a bend they saw the golden roof of the Kargyu monastery situated far below them, and further down still the white waters of the powerful Amo-chu torrent. Suzanne thought that she must be looking at the ravine in Tibet described by Madame Blavatsky as the abode of three of the Great Ones: the Master Morya, the Master Koot Hoomi and the Master Diwal Kul. According to Madame Blavatsky, the Master Diwal Kul had occultly precipitated a picture of the scene for her. This picture was in the Archive Room in Adyar and Suzanne had seen a reproduction of it. However, when they stopped at the Kargyu monastery and she tried to find out whether the Masters lived in the vicinity, no one seemed to have heard of them.

When they reached the lower slopes the pine woods gave way to meadows in which wildflowers, medicinal plants and wild strawberries grew in profusion. On the valley floor, on either side of the river there were verdant pastures and the rich arable lands sown with wheat or

tromo that gave the place its name, for she was in the beautiful Tromo Valley made famous by Tromo Geshe Rinpoche.

After years spent in stern Yogic disciplines in the caves of the rock mountains nearby, he had travelled through the valley many times, on his way healing, instructing and awakening many a soul to the *Dharma*. So great was his fame that appointments to meet him at the places where he halted on his itineraries were made weeks in advance. Suzanne heard from the local people about several miracles, mostly of healing, that he had performed. My uncle Arindama later came to learn about one of the Rinpoche's lesser-known miracles from his friend, Lama Anagarika Govinda. What happened was as follows. At the end of 1935, which was about one year before his death, the Rinpoche went on a pilgrimage, led and organized by Mr Laden La, to Sarnath, Gaya and Rajgir, the holy sites of Buddhism in India. Lama Govinda rejoined the Rinpoche at Sarnath where he was camped with some forty of his disciples. It was to be Lama Govinda's last meeting with his Guru. One evening while they were out walking together in the Indian countryside, the Rinpoche showed him a wonderful landscape of golden mountains where a moment before there had been only a flat plain. Lama Govinda did not say how he interpreted the revelation. But perhaps it meant that one day the sacred teachings of the High Country would find an abode outside Tibet, as indeed they were to do after 1950, when Tibetan Buddhists in exile reconstituted their main institutions on foreign soil, under the overall guidance of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama.

Whether Tibetan Buddhism will return one day in full force to its homeland is not predictable from the present situation. But in the meantime, many more people than before in the West and elsewhere are coming into contact with the doctrines of the Enlightened Ones, and those who feel the need to follow those teachings are able to obtain the right guidance for their practice from accessible Buddhist teachers. Undoubtedly, the work of teachers like Tromo Geshe Rinpoche, which resulted in a climate of greater trust and respect between the different sects even before the exodus from Tibet, paved the way for the attitude of openness towards foreigners which characterizes them today. Several communities, such as the Kagyu Samye Ling in Dumfriesshire, Scotland, have admitted foreigners into their midst and have ordained a number of them, men and women alike. This extension is seen by the religious authorities, not as a corruption or weakening of former forms, but rather as an invigoration that will ensure the preservation of the religious heritage and the continuance of the various lineages into the future.

Suzanne's caravan continued northward with a halt at the small town of Yatung. The Dungkar Gompa was not far away but their itinerary did not permit them to visit it, to Suzanne's regret. They hastened on their way through the river valley now enclosed between mountains so high that they did not see the sun until midday. After hours of climbing they reached at last an elevated pass that led them to the plateau that was Tibet proper. The landscape that unfurled before them was one of incomparable vastness, luminosity and grandeur. The tall mountains that girdled the plateau were the highest in the world, some rising as high as eight kilometres into the sky. On their peaks, the pristine snow, shining diamond bright, was a symbol of the Eternal Wisdom for Tibetan Buddhists. The crystalline shapes and gem-like colours of the hills and lakes recalled the qualities of perfection and purity developed on the Path, whilst the special quality of the sunlight in the limpid air evoked the Space of Clear Light, the Yogic vision of primordial and ultimate Reality.

However, there was little in that allegorical landscape for man the creature. The caravan

travelled kilometre after kilometre over a seemingly endless stretch of sand and rocks, with no vegetation visible save scrub and lichen. The terrain of the plateau was unexpectedly rugged, making progress difficult. It has been compared to a turbulent sea petrified at the moment of its greatest fury. In fact, this highest of the world's plateaux was once the seabed, waiting in the dark depths of time for the day of its emergence into the light.

The caravan halted for a few days at the market town of Phari-Jung in the middle of a high-altitude valley situated at the foot of the majestic sacred mountain, Chomolhari. The town was little more than an untidy cluster of mud cottages built around an old fort. In spite of its poor appearance, however, it was an important centre for the collection and distribution of wood and other goods which arrived from India and were then sent on to different parts of Tibet loaded on the back of mules. Here the members of Suzanne's caravan were able to change their ponies for mules. The ground of the market place was covered by thick black mud churned up by the comings and goings of men and beasts. The rest of the town was not much cleaner since there was little attempt to solve the problem of refuse removal. On the other hand, the inhabitants were friendly and helpful. Suzanne enjoyed the simple hospitality of the family with whom she lodged. Here, as elsewhere on her journey, she had no difficulty in maintaining her disguise. In fact, one of her problems was to ward off without giving offence the advances of the uninhibited Tibetan girls. They evidently thought her to be a charming young man, even if dumb, for when she was with strangers she pretended to be dumb so as to hide her inability to speak the Nepali language.

One day, in the market place she saw the dead body of a young monk being carried in procession through the town. She was told that he had been an immured recluse. A monk could choose to be immured, sometimes for life, in a tiny cell, sometimes in total darkness, so as to carry on with his meditations undisturbed. Regularly, other monks left a supply of barley meal and water outside his cell. When it was no longer collected, they knew that the occupant had died. A monk who had passed away in meditation was considered to have wilfully relinquished his body as being of no more use to him since he had achieved his goal of liberation. His body, which was considered to be sacred, was traditionally exhibited so that everyone could share in his merit. When the procession of this young monk passed, people paused in their activities to pay him silent homage. Suzanne was able to see his face and saw that it bore a fine, peaceful expression, but with her trained eye she noted also the symptoms of anaemia which had almost certainly been the physical cause of death.

After Phari-Jung, they traversed still more desolate country. A tropical sun shone in the deep blue sky but at altitudes nearing 4,600 metres, the cold was intense. By afternoon, strong winds arose making the cold still harder to bear. Suzanne, inadequately clad and equipped for such conditions, tried to keep warm by stuffing paper in her boots and between her body and her clothes. They passed mountains which were so steep that it was a wonder how the monasteries perched on their slopes were not swept away by the onslaughts of the wind and rain. Suzanne visited a monastery that was inaccessible to outsiders for nine months of the year. She would report that within the limits of those lonely eyries, the monks, far from suffering any sense of isolation, enjoyed the widest communion possible. As she wrote later: 'At meditation time the mantra "Om Mani Padme Hum" is chanted. It is the chain of union between the Illuminated Souls. The individual consciousness is withdrawn within and united with the greater Consciousness of the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas of the Past, Present and Future.'

She also visited some nunneries and gathered as much information about their organization as

she could. She learnt that girls were admitted into nunneries from the age of eight. The nuns of the Gelug Order utilized the Scripture entitled *Gelong Mei Dho*, which prescribed 364 rules of conduct--more even than the rules enjoined on the monks. The size of the religious communities varied greatly, from small groups of four or five women living in isolated retreats to highly organized, well-known convents of three hundred nuns or more. There were also women ascetics who led a Yogi's life alone in mountain caves or forests, and there were itinerant nuns who fearlessly trod the lonely and dangerous pilgrim paths. With the flexibility characteristic of the Buddhist religion, another alternative was countenanced, especially in southern Tibet. This was for the priestesses to be married women who lived in convents and performed the religious ceremonies for the community that were usually the function of priests, while their husbands stayed at home and cultivated the land; an arrangement that was said to work well.

Women religious were accorded a status inferior to that of the monks since it was held that they could obtain liberation only after they had been reborn as men. All the same, there were nuns who had earned the respect of the community because of their saintly lives, erudition, or special powers acquired through discipline. Suzanne heard of a highly revered nun, the Abbess Dorje Jamo of the big convent in Nenyang. She, like some of the emancipated lamas such as Tromo Geshe Rinpoche, had overcome the need to sleep and had so much control over her body that she could remain upright in the meditation seat without stretching her limbs throughout the night.

Suzanne did not reach Lhasa. She fell ill and the caravan had to leave her behind in a village in the care of an old farmer and his wife. One night when her body was burning with fever, she faced the possibility that she would die there, thousands of kilometres away from Jeanne and the Swamiji. She saw as if in slow motion her death, attended only by the old couple and the priest who came to perform the Bardo rites. This was followed by the last journey when her body wrapped in a white cotton cloth was carried outside the village to the cremation ground to be consumed by the flames. And she saw the wind blow her ashes with the snow over that strange land. But in the morning, when she awoke from the sleep that had come to her in the early hours of the morning, her temperature was down and she knew that she would recover.

It would be impossible, though, for her to go on to Lhasa. By the time she was strong enough to travel, the season would be so far advanced that on her way back from Lhasa she was likely to find the passes blocked with snow. She felt very badly that she had to abandon her mission for the Southern Church. However, with the benefit of hindsight it seems highly unlikely that even if she had met the Thirteenth Dalai Lama she would have been successful in persuading him to share his religious power with the Patron of the Maha Sangha Raja Sabha who, though he acted for most of the Southern Buddhist sects, must have been seen Lhasa as a distant foreign authority of no great relevance to them. This surmise appears to be borne out by the fact that after Suzanne's return to India, the Swamiji wrote directly to the Dalai Lama about the need to bring about greater cooperation between Northern and Southern Buddhists, but got no reply other than a mere acknowledgement of receipt from the Dalai Lama's office in Lhasa.

Suzanne was disappointed, too, that while in Tibet, she had not found any of the Great Ones; those Teachers and Guides of Humanity who were said by Theosophists to have made their abode there. The only great Master she had encountered in the North had been Tromo Geshe Rinpoche, and she had met him in India. Still, her journey to Tibet had not been a waste of time, as we know from this passage in a letter she wrote some time later to her future mother-in-law:

‘In TibetI have known the incommensurable Peace, have felt sometimes in the great solitudes of nature the Presence of the invisible.’

She was able to join a caravan that was heading south and via the Nathu-la reached Sikkim, and from there passed back into India.

Wife and Mother

Suzanne did not go straight back to Bangalore as the Swamiji had expected. Instead she went to Adyar to stay with Theosophist friends who looked after until she had fully recovered her health. They said that she had aged ten years since they had seen her last, which had been as recently as the beginning of the year, when she was on her way to Ceylon with the Swamiji.

In every letter the Swamiji pressed her to come to Bangalore. She seems to have been hesitating. Perhaps she was trying to understand why her mission to the North had failed. Was it because the Swamiji's project had not been realistic enough? His expectations of material help from the Northern Buddhist authorities had certainly not been well grounded. Nor had he foreseen the practical difficulties she would have to face. Or was it that she herself had not been up to the task entrusted to her? Would she have succeeded better had she made more preparation? Maybe these were some of the questions in her mind. At any rate, when the Swamiji informed her that the Maharaja of Mysore had approved of the plan she had drawn up earlier for the establishment of a public dispensary in Bangalore, she replied that she did not feel ready to start the practice. In her next letter she announced that she had enrolled for a four-month post-graduate course in Obstetrics and Gynaecology which was being offered at the Government Maternity Hospital, Egmore, in Madras.

The Swamiji was very distressed by the independent stance she was taking. He had certainly not expected her to make such an important decision without first seeking his permission. It was difficult for him to come to terms with the fact that she was not as submissive as when she had left for the North under his instructions. He was also dismayed to hear that she had still not resumed wearing the monastic robe and was contemplating not wearing it while on her medical course, as it was 'too impractical'. In an angry letter he told her to return to him the robe and the other insignias of the Order, the begging-bowl and palm-leaf fan. This brought a veritable heart's cry from her. After reminding him that she had carried them with her throughout her Tibetan journey, she wrote, 'You cannot separate me from what is more precious to me than anything else, more even a part of myself....to do so would be separating me from everything and breaking a special religious link between us. As ever, these will be in my care and I will be able to come back.' The Swamiji, showing patience and understanding, did not insist.

Coming back, however, was to take longer than what she must have anticipated at the time. In her class at the Egmore Maternity Hospital there was an army surgeon who had come for the course all the way from his posting in the Sialkot Cantonment in the Punjab. She was astonished to learn that it was his family house in Ghoom that she had seen from the hill near the Yiga-Cho-Ling monastery. He was Captain Ranjit Sen, IMS, and here again there was a strange coincidence, since she had taken the name 'Seni' on her journey to Tibet. She could not help feeling that it was part of God's plan that they should meet.

Ranjit was interested in her not only because of her beauty, not only because she was European and he had great admiration and respect for the British whom he served and by extension for other Europeans as well, but above all because he believed her to be someone very special. His name for her was 'Doveto' and the dove describes well the qualities of gentleness, nobility and spirituality which he saw in her. Ranjit was thirty-five years old at this time. He was good-looking, dashing and brave. He was fond of the worldly life, but he also had a religious side and high-minded ideals of duty and service to others. He believed that though there were some incompatibilities, the aim they both shared of serving humanity was a good common

ground between them and one on which they could build a life together. He therefore set about wooing her with all his considerable charm and force of character.

Suzanne let herself be persuaded. Perhaps she wanted to prove to herself that she was capable of loving, and in her eyes he had all the qualities that made it possible for her to love. In a touching letter to his mother in Bengal, written on 27 March 1927, she speaks of how delighted she is to discover in Ranjit 'All that is true, noble, great and real.' She adds that she has so far led the pure and holy life of a *sannyasi* and that only Ranjit could have made her leave that life. Obviously she saw Ranjit, a clever practising doctor who shared her ideals, as someone who could be her guide. She says as much in the following passage: 'I hope to be able to help Ranjit in his work as we are both doctors, together we shall strive and fight and help others.'

A few days before writing this letter she had informed Jeanne and the Swamiji that she was going to marry Ranjit the following month. Jeanne bowed to the inevitable. With no other ties to keep her in France, she sold her millinery house in Paris so as to have the means to go to India and to live there, as close to Suzanne as possible. As for the Swamiji, after the initial shock he, too, found it possible to accept this new development. He was very impressed by the fact that in his vision he had seen Ranjit's house in Ghoom. It occurred to him that Suzanne's marriage might provide a possibility of furthering their work for Buddhism. Suzanne, with the support of Ranjit, might well achieve more than she alone had been able to do. He was therefore gratified when Ranjit wrote to him, 'I can assure you, that Doctor Sujatalitha's marriage will in no way stop her from carrying on the good work she is ordained for.' Both Jeanne and the Swamiji had secret misgivings about the marriage. They thought that Suzanne's decision had been too hasty and that she had not had sufficient time to get to know Ranjit well. However, both were content to stay on the sidelines, hoping for her sake that the marriage would be a happy one, but there and ready should she want to come back to either of them.

They were married on 14 April 1927, by Vedic rites, in the Bharat Samaj Mandir at the Theosophical Society. Jeanne was present, as well as Ranjit's brother, Arindama, but the Swamiji had remained in Bangalore. After the wedding Suzanne and Ranjit went there to receive his blessing. For their honeymoon they stayed at Senabas, the family house in Ghoom. From there, looking across the valley she could see the hill that she had once climbed when staying at the Yiga-Cho-Ling monastery. She may have wondered whether she had done the right thing in abandoning her religious life for marriage, which for her was very much an adventure with an unknown ending.

Ranjit took her back with him to his Sialkot Cantonment posting, where she did her best to fit into her role as an officer's wife. She took part in the round of invitations and return invitations, and in club life of which Ranjit was very fond. She accompanied him to Simla where she gave a performance of her dances at the little Gaiety Theatre. She and Ranjit also won first prize in a ballroom dancing competition. When they got back, she applied to the military authorities for permission to start a charitable dispensary in the Cantonment. She also made the first moves to open a Buddhist Centre for the Maha Sabha Raja Sabha. But she did not allow her real interests to come in the way of mastering the social skills that were expected of her, and set about learning bridge, tennis, swimming and riding with her usual earnestness. She learnt in a hard school, because if she made a mistake Ranjit would berate her, even in the presence of others, for he had a quick and violent temper.

It was not long before she made the distressing discovery that he was continuing to have affairs

with women just as before his marriage. He was very attractive to women, something of which he was very proud. I believe he thought Suzanne understood that as his wife she was in an entirely different category from his other partners. Suzanne, however, did not see things in that way and felt humiliated by his conduct. When this did not change in spite of the way she felt about it, she became convinced that he did not really care for her.

The birth of their child--myself--did not do much to improve the situation. Both of them must have felt a little unreal as parents. At any rate, they started to raise me more as doctors than as parents, with more science than common sense. When I was four months old, Suzanne was worried because I was not making satisfactory progress and sent for Jeanne, who was living alone at Ooty, in South India. When she arrived she took complete charge of my care. She would continue to look after me from then on. Suzanne knew that she was giving me up into a plenitude of love. When I was older, I once heard Jeanne tell some nuns she knew in Madras that the Dark Madonna to whom she had prayed to intercede for her little son's life had instead given her another child to love and care for; one dark like Herself! Suzanne may have wanted to give Jeanne a new purpose in life, perhaps even to make amends for surviving rather than her brother, the preferred child. Whatever her reasons, I lost nothing from the arrangement. Jeanne was strong enough in character and loving enough by nature to be both father and mother to me. Until I was ten, except for brief visits to India, I lived with her in Europe and was so content that I did not miss my parents at all, satisfied with their remaining benign presences in the background of my life. Suzanne, on the other hand, had never felt so much alone as she did now that she was a wife and mother. It would be some years before I got to know her well and we grew close to each other, to our mutual benefit, but especially to mine.

In 1929, when my father went to Vienna on study leave, my mother took the Swamiji's advice and accompanied him, although she had originally not wanted to go. In Vienna my father was busy with his medical courses and with his old friends. Left to her own devices Suzanne gave some lectures on Buddhism at the University. Thinking it might be useful to her, the Swamiji provided the information that some members of the Austrian royal family had come to Ceylon before the war and had received the ordination in the Dodandowa temple. They had been ordained by his teacher, and had later translated several Buddhist books in their language. Suzanne also tried to raise money for the Swamiji's work in India. However, when he urged her to find the money needed to purchase some old Buddhist sites in India including the Kaneri caves, she protested indignantly. She wrote that it was quite impossible for her to raise the hundreds of thousands of rupees which he was asking for and warned him against embarking on such grandiose schemes: 'Believe me the best is to start in a small way without any expenses. You cannot throw yourself into such big ventures, it would trouble your peace and trouble your meditations through worries - endless worries.'

For two years longer Suzanne lived with Ranjit, but by the end of that time their relationship had deteriorated still further. Adding to her sense of disappointment was that she had not been able to start her medical work since the military authorities had turned down her request for permission to start a charitable dispensary. Nor had she succeeded in starting a new Buddhist centre. In fact, her work for the *Dharma* had been reduced to writing a few letters to prospective donors. The situation had become unbearable for her, yet she did not tell Ranjit that she wanted to leave him. Instead, she asked him to release her so that she might go and fulfil her mission of service to humanity to which she had long ago dedicated herself. Ranjit reluctantly accepted that reason and agreed to let her go.

Their noble ideals, which had not helped them to live harmoniously together, would permit them to stay amicably apart. They would not live together again but the question of divorce would never arise. Nor did he remarry after her death. Although there were other women in his life at the time, when she had gone he missed her and sought to retain a link with her. Knowing of her anxieties about Jeanne and myself, he promised the material aid that would leave her free to lead the life of her choice, thereby making himself a partner in her spiritual endeavour. He wrote, 'do not worry about anything worldly, for as long as I am able I shall carry out my duties faithfully, serving you and those you love and care for'. This was a promise that he would keep. His financial support was never to fail us as long as Jeanne, Suzanne or myself needed it.

Back to the Swamiji

Suzanne went back to the Swamiji and to the religious life. For the next three years she strictly observed the ten precepts as if she wanted to give the disciplines a chance to work for her. She again clad the yellow robe, shaved her head and begged for her food. She resumed her studies of Pali and of the Scriptures. She worked very hard for the United Buddha Society; accompanying the Swamiji on his travels all over India to lecture, raise funds, open new Buddhist offices and institutions, as well as to attend various committee meetings at which she was invariably the only woman present. She also helped with the editing of the *Buddhist World* and the office work.

She still respected the Swamiji as her preceptor, but all the same she did not hesitate to give him advice on practical matters when she felt it was necessary. She especially dissuaded him from taking reckless action in a bid to force the pace of progress, and held him back from wasting their meagre resources on unfeasible projects. On the other hand, she encouraged him when he suffered from despair and disillusionment. Such moments were becoming more and more frequent because, although he laboured unceasingly, never sparing himself even when his health began to fail, it was becoming apparent to him that he would never fulfil even the most essential of the aims which had brought him to India. Due to their inability to raise sufficient funds, the Buddhist Institute and Temple in Bangalore, which was to have been a rallying centre for Buddhists from all over the world, had still not been built; their missionary programme was being increasingly curtailed; and even their journal, *The Buddhist World*, was becoming difficult to publish.

Then, out of the blue, in 1933 they received invitations to attend the All-India Buddhist Conference in Chittagong to be held in April 1934, as well as to the Buddhist World Conference in Mandalay during May and June of that year. The President of the All-India Buddhist Conference (founded in 1928) was an old friend, Sardar Bahadur Laden La, whilst its General Secretary, Rev. Dharma Aditya Dharmacharya was also known to them. Those prominent Northern Buddhists invited them not only to attend the Conferences but, more importantly, to preside over some of the meetings that were to be held under their aegis. In effect, they were giving them the opportunity to have some of the resolutions of the Maha Sangha Raja Sabha accepted by the two international organizations that represented thousands of Buddhists from Africa, Burma, India, Ceylon and other countries. The Swamiji was elated to receive the invitations. It seemed to him that they were going to obtain world recognition at last. 'These are our fruitful days, after so many years of hard work,' he wrote to Suzanne while she was away in Madras.

In the event, she did not accompany him to the Conferences and the Swamiji went alone to Chittagong and Mandalay. His letters did not say whether or not he had been able to obtain the support he was seeking. Finally, he wrote from Mandalay that he was proceeding to Japan to meet the Buddhist authorities there. She waited a long time for a letter from him, but instead she received the news of his death in Japan. From a reliable source she heard that he had starved himself to death. She asked the Chief High Priests of Ceylon if that were true. They replied that they had not been informed as to the exact cause of his death, but that they knew of no reason why he should have taken his own life.

However, Suzanne knew of a possible reason, which was the Swamiji's belief in the power of the meritorious action. There was a passage in his letter which had appeared enigmatic to her

when she had first read it, but the meaning of which was now clear. His words were, 'You have sacrificed your life for this great work, now be vigilant and work hard--I shall sacrifice my life for you and make it a success.' The Swamij had a great devotion to the Buddha and total commitment to the cause of propagating His teaching. But, now that he was so worn out and ill that he could physically contribute very little more to their missionary activities, he was considering taking the only course that appeared to be still open to him. This was to make the renunciation of the desire for life itself, so that by the merit of his selfless action she might gain the power to carry on the work and to accomplish their aims.

Suzanne did her utmost for the Society, yet in spite of her best efforts and the help of a number of devoted members, its situation continued to deteriorate. The day came when even the publication of the *Buddhist World* had to be given up as their plans for financing it failed one by one. The Maha Sangha Raja Sabha did not send another emissary to replace the Swamiji. They would allow the United Buddha Society which he had founded to run down and to eventually disappear. However, some of the branch societies opened by him in various parts of India would survive.

Suzanne sadly decided to leave India and to return to Europe. She could have remained and enjoyed some prestige as the Directress of the Ladies' Ashrama, to which six novices had been sent for training by the authorities in Ceylon. This was a position which might have tempted a more ambitious person, but which she did not feel she could take up until she, herself, had made more progress with the guidance of a Master. She rejoined Jeanne and myself in Brighton where we had been living since 1935, and would remain with us for one-and-a-half years. I came to know her better during her stay with us. I thought her to be gentle, tender, brave and immensely interesting. I remember her meditating, also studying in preparation for the day when she would have her own spiritual school.

Yet she had other interests as well, especially carrying out experiments with colour divining or Chromo-Vibratory methods of diagnosis and therapy. The 'science of the divining rod' as she called it, attracted her because it seemed to bridge the concrete physical world and the invisible world of subtle reality. Besides, she loved colours and had felt they were important to life, even before she learnt that in Tibetan Buddhism they played a vital role as conveyors of the powers of spiritual, psychological and physical healing. She had found that she had a special aptitude for divining during her student days but had not thought of putting it to use until now. It was only after she had been asked by a Theosophist friend to verify, by orthodox methods, some of the diagnostic results of the well-known diviner, Jacqueline Chantereine, and had discovered how accurate her findings were, that she decided to carry out her own experiments. She did not have many patients but she was able to help most of those she treated. I remember one intriguing result she obtained with the use of divining rods. The magnetic field or aura of a patient who had come to consult her for a chronic complaint showed a preponderance of grey, which was puzzling to Suzanne since it was found in terminal illnesses and had little relevance to the patient's actual condition. Two days later the patient was killed in a road accident. It was as if the share of energy with which she had come into the world was nearing depletion when she came to consult Suzanne.

During the winter of 1935-6, Suzanne put together for the coming spring a programme of fourteen 'secular and sacred dances'. They recapitulated the ideals that had motivated her so far, and restated her goal. It was as if she were taking her bearings before continuing towards her destination. With the backing of a Sufi group in Brighton her dances were staged on 1 April

1936 at the West Pier Theatre. The performance started with her very first dance 'The Oriental Awakening', which was followed by a number of dances that expressed her Indian and Tibetan experiences, including the 'Tibetan Dance' which brought to the stage the ritual steps of the masked lama she had seen in a Himalayan monastery. Indeed, in several of her dances there were hieratic poses or movements. The entire second half of the programme consisted of a Tibetan dance-poem by Maitreya Yogini, which told the classic tale of a Bodhisattva's Illumination and his supreme renunciation of personal bliss so as to stay in the world and help the suffering. In the final movement of the dance a rose, the token of his Master's love, materialized in the hand of Bodhisattva. As he held out the Mystic Rose in blessing, rays of coloured light radiated out from it into the audience with beautiful effect. Thus ended a scintillating performance, rightly hailed by one critic as a 'feast for the eyes'.

Adyar Revisited

In June 1936 Suzanne returned to Adyar, which had been her starting point in the subcontinent eleven years before. In the past the Theosophical Society had been like a home to her; a place where she had always been made to feel welcome and been given care and moral support when she had needed them, and this is what she had expected to find. Many others like her had enjoyed the benefits of the members' broad-mindedness and readiness to help the Truth-seeker on his path, whatever that path might be.

However, since she had last been there the Society had suffered a major blow when Krishnamurti had left it at the end of 1929. This was the only eloquent way he could express his total opposition to the occult system of guidance by the Masters; a system which in his opinion hid the truth from people that 'man is his own liberator'. His protest had led to a big exodus of members, and as a result those who had remained in the Society went through a phase characterized by increased sensitivity to criticism and a mistrust of anyone not prepared to toe the line laid down by the authorities.

Suzanne was to discover how few of those she had believed to be her friends were prepared to take her side, when she became embroiled in a dispute with one of the Society's prominent leaders, C. Jinarajadasa, known in the Society as the Archangel for his defence of its orthodox views. George, who had become President of the Society after the death of Mrs. Besant in 1933, was away with Rukmini on a world tour when Suzanne arrived. Had he been there, it is likely that the dispute would not have arisen. It was over her wearing the Buddhist robe, which she had donned again because it signified renunciation which, this time, she wanted to make complete. Jinarajadasa had objected in 1926 to her seeking admission to the Theravada Order since that meant breaking its ancient tradition of excluding women from the religious life, but he had not been able to prevent her from carrying out her plan. Now that the high position he had come to occupy in the Society gave him the authority he needed, he forbade her to stay in the Theosophical Compound as long as she continued to wear the robe of the Order. Suzanne thought that such an attitude was quite out of keeping with the tolerance taught by Buddhism and, indeed, by true Theosophy. A solution of sorts was found when Rukmini's mother let her stay in a small house that she owned just outside the Theosophical Compound.

Jinarajadasa's intention was probably to force her to leave the Society altogether. He probably had the support of some Theosophists with extreme views in whose eyes she belonged to the enemy camp, since during her stay in 1925 she had made known her admiration for the teaching of Krishnamurti, and moreover was still a close friend of Ludovic R?hault, one of his staunchest supporters. Krishnamurti's teachings, now anathema to the leadership, were declared to be contrary to the 'Divinely inspired wisdom of Theosophy.' In a Presidential message to the members George warned them, 'We are at a critical time of testing....are we alert, balanced and watchful to see that the movement goes along the right lines?' In the same message he expressed the hope that the much-depleted membership would soon recover: 'Things are now settling down and it seems we have passed the lowest end of the curve.'

Although the Society has since recovered to a certain extent, it has been unable to regain the power and prestige it enjoyed prior to what may be called the 'Fiasco of the Coming'. An unfortunate result of the undue attention focussed by the Theosophical leaders on the Coming of the Messiah was that when events did not take place exactly as they had predicted the general credibility of the Society was seriously damaged. People began to forget the very real

contribution that Theosophists had made in the past to better global unity and understanding. For instance, it is little known that Mrs Besant was one of the first to advocate a union of European nations as a means of ensuring peace in the region. Had her teaching of the brotherhood of man been more widely followed, undoubtedly much conflict and suffering in the world would have been avoided. Another important aspect of the work of Theosophists was that through their writings people in the West came into contact with Eastern ideas to the enrichment of their own thought and culture. On the other hand, in countries such as India and Ceylon, where the effect of colonial rule had been to make people despise their own ancient philosophies and religions, the study and valorization of those traditions by Theosophists helped to bring about their renaissance. As Mme Sophia Wadia, the late President of the United Lodge of Theosophists, reminded her audience at the Parliament of Religions in Bombay on 9 May 1936, 'Before the dawn of the Theosophical movement....the educated Hindu scoffed at the spiritual inheritance of the Motherland while orthodoxy enveloped the vast majority, and the great art of Krishna and Buddha and Shankara was practised only by a few....'

Krishnamurti himself once commented on the effect that his revolt had had on the Theosophical Society, saying with some sadness, 'I have shattered the rock on which I grew.' I met Rukmini Devi in Adyar in 1984, and she told me that it was not only the Society which had been shattered by Krishnamurti's teaching, but people's lives as well. For some of his declarations were too sweeping, especially when he said that all Gurus and Masters could only step down the Truth when they tried to teach it to others and so betrayed it. It left many people feeling lost because they had no guide to follow and no ideal of discipleship to ennoble their lives. She did not believe he was the World Teacher but that he could have been (presumably if he had abided by the teachings of Theosophists). Still, he was in touch with the 'inner side', she conceded, 'and this was what drew so many people to his talks'.

Suzanne could understand that Theosophists like George and Rukmini should feel aggrieved about the independent stance Krishnamurti had taken. They had been among those who had brought up Krishnamurti to help the world and who saw him do just that, only to have him dismiss their teachings as false and their experiences as illusions. But Suzanne knew also of the suffering of some of Krishnamurti's supporters, like Ludowic R?nault, who felt they were being cruelly and unjustly persecuted by Theosophists because of their loyalty to the one who the Society itself had proclaimed as the World Teacher.

In 1934, Ludowic R?nault published his controversial book, *Krishnamurti*. He had written it some years earlier when Krishnamurti was still in the Society and the leadership publicly accepted his 'direct path' as one of several paths to Truth. Ludowic had therefore been shocked to discover that secretly the leaders were creating a systematic hostility against him within the Society and were drawing up a plan of action to misrepresent and discredit his teachings, even to put them under a ban. After making these revelations, Ludowic soon found his own works threatened with a ban. Krishnamurti had not asked Ludowic to write the book, but he approved of it. When Ludowic told him what the reaction had been, he replied, 'I was afraid that you would get into trouble with Theosophists for writing openly and frankly, and I am sure you do not mind so I will not express my regrets for any inconvenience you may have had through this book.'

Ludowic, indeed, was undaunted and determined to continue collaborating with Krishnamurti in the great work of sweeping away 'all falsities and unessentials that obstructed man's understanding of truth'. He was, as he declared, 'not for Krishnamurti but with him'. He took it

upon himself to write and lecture through the breadth of France to familiarize people with Krishnamurti's real teaching and to contradict the misrepresentations made by his opponents. His next work *Krishnamurti and Individualism* sought to clear him of the accusation made by Jinarajadasa and others that the individualism he precognized was nothing more than a form of egoism. The book was well received in France and brought a number of letters from readers expressing solidarity with Krishnamurti, some from famous people like Romain Rolland. Theosophists retaliated by stopping the funding of Ludowic's lecture tours, which effectively brought them to an end. Ludowic took this set-back with resignation, remarking in a letter to Krishnamurti that he would now be able to get a little physical rest, as his extensive lecture tour during the previous winter had left him in a poor state of health. He was in fact suffering from tuberculosis. He now concentrated on writing, and started his next work, *Krishnamurti and the Revolution*.

Ironically, a policy decision made at this time by Krishnamurti, which was to forbid the use of extracts or quotations from his talks and writings for the purpose of publication, threatened to bring Ludowic's career as a writer to an end as well. Krishnamurti's letter to Ludowic announcing this decision was as follows:-

“Henan”
Ommen (O). Holland.
5th September, 1936.

My dear friend,

Thank you very much for your letter of the 31st July and I am very sorry for the delay in replying but I have been busy here with interviews and the Camp and so I hope you will forgive me for not answering sooner.

Because many people have quoted many pages of what I have said and formed a book of their own without any original thought of their own, and as others have compiled pamphlets, articles, and writings out of what I have said with a view to having them published, all this has led to considerable misunderstanding and I have been forced to say that from now on no permission will be given for such extracts, or for interviews, for such a purpose.

I hope you will see why we have been obliged to do this. As many people all over the world have tried to exploit, thus spreading misunderstanding I have thought it necessary to come to this decision and I hope you will see the necessity of it.

My Rajagopal and I both send you our kindest regards.

(Signed) Krishnamurti.

I do not know whether Ludowic took the interdiction to apply to his own works, which Krishnamurti had so far accepted without criticism. To jump ahead some months, in the spring of 1937, Krishnamurti, on his return from India, went to Rome to give some talks there. Ludowic was very ill by this time, yet in spite of the risk that it posed to his life, made the journey to Rome to meet him, accompanied by his wife, Blanche. Refused admission to the talks by the organizers because they were 'not in the French language', Ludowic still managed to obtain a private interview with Krishnamurti. Was he granted permission to publish his book, completed but not yet printed when he had left France? If so, then there was a happy ending to his life, for he died shortly afterwards whilst still in Rome. My godmother left me Krishnamurti's letters to Ludowic as the most valuable part of her legacy to me. Included in the correspondence is a copy of her letter to Krishnamurti in which she speaks of how his visit after her husband's death helped her to bear her immense loss. On her return to their home in Nice she took over Ludowic's private press and would continue his work for many years by supplying copies of his books and pamphlets on demand.

I do not think that Suzanne fully understood why she was no longer *persona grata* at the Theosophical Society. In a letter to Jinarajadasa she sounds bewildered by his request that she leave the Esoteric Section. The Section was the elite core of the Society, where important information was disclosed that was kept from the rank and file members. If there were some who thought that she might use something she had learnt there to harm the Society, they need not have worried, for she was by nature quite incapable of guile or of any vindictive action.

It was at this juncture in her life, when she felt baffled, distressed, and uncertain as to what to do next, that she came across a newspaper article about Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. This described him as a Sage whose Self-Realization through discriminating intuition had brought back to mankind the reality of the ancient Seers, or Rshis. He had made his abode on the sacred Hill Arunachala, in Tiruvannamalai, a temple-town some 160 kilometres south-west of Madras. Suzanne felt a great desire to go and see him, and so, accompanied by two European ladies from the Theosophical Society who also wished to visit him, she set off for Tiruvannamalai on a day in December 1936.

PART FOUR

FIRE

He that is near to me is near to the fire.
Origen, *Jeremiam Homiliae*, XX3.

Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi

Venkataraman (it was only later that he would be called Ramana) was born in 1879, in the village of Tiruchuli, situated in the Tamil heartland of South India. He entered the world at 1 a.m. on 30 December, an auspicious day since it was the Feast of *Arudra Darshan*, or the Sight of Siva, that commemorated the manifestation of Lord Siva on earth in primeval times. According to one Puranic legend, Lord Siva manifested as a blazing Column of Light and Fire that had no beginning, no middle and no end. The sight of the infinite Pillar of Light and Fire is really one's flash of intuition into Absolute Reality. When such an experience occurs one's life is changed irrevocably, for the old pattern of thoughts and emotions is destroyed and a new harmony with the discovered Truth is established. That was exactly what would happen to Venkataraman when still a young boy.

His parents, Sundaram Iyer and Alagammal, belonged to the *Saivite Brahmin* caste who worshipped Lord Siva as the Supreme Being. Sundaram Iyer, a self-made man who had built up a large practice as a pleader at the local Magistrate's Court, was a 'towering personality' as Venkataraman would later say while reminiscing on how his father's reserve and dignity dissuaded most people from approaching him with easy familiarity. He commanded respect, but at the same time he earned the affection of the community by his gentle manner and his sympathetic nature which prompted him to perform numerous acts of kindness and generosity. As for Alagammal, a devoted wife and a loving mother, she already showed the noble qualities that would in time develop into those of saintliness.

The couple was used to having relatives, clients and friends share their meals with them. Their hospitality extended to Venkataraman's friends, one of whom, Abdul Wahab, would many years thence speak with emotion of the kindness and affection shown to him by Alagammal when he visited their house in Tiruchuli. On seeing him, Alagammal would announce his arrival to Venkataraman with the words 'Your dear Muslim friend has come.' She would give him whatever food had been prepared, even though caste Brahmins generally treated Muslims as untouchables in those days. One day her son would welcome all people without reserve to the spiritual feast he had ready for them.

Just next to the family house was the Bhuminatha temple, famous since medieval times for being celebrated in the hymns of two Tamil poet-saints, Sundaramurti and Manikkavachakar. Young Venkataraman and his friends played freely in the temple's open spaces and in its large exterior hall used by pilgrims. Its sacred tank, too, entered into their games. In the month of *Magha*, on the day of the star *Magha*, when the waters started to swell and rise, the boys used to mark ten different water levels on the sides of the tank. It was a source of great fun for them was to see the marks submerged at the rate of one a day as the month progressed towards the full moon. In their play they were discovering nature's time governed by the phases of the moon and the seasons of the year. They had other activities particular to each season. For instance, in the pre-monsoon season when the winds were stronger, Venkataraman and his friends would go outside the village to the sacred Koundiniya River. There they flew their kites and sailed their paper boats, ending their outing by making offerings of food to the deity in the little temple there. Afterwards they would eat the blessed *prasadam* as a kind of holy picnic.

When Venkataraman was twelve his father died after a brief illness. This tragic event marked the end of Venkataraman's happy and carefree childhood. The family unit was now split up and he was sent to nearby Madurai to live under the authority and protection of his paternal uncle,

Subba Iyer. There, Venkataraman studied first at Scott's Middle School, then at the American Mission High School. He was to find in this big town that time was far from having the cosmic quality it had had in his native village. Here, reflecting the ways of the world, it was directed towards result; to be used for gain. In school, time was to be spent on doing a task and the task was given a mark. It became a sort of commodity with an affixed value which, when compared to that of other students, entered into a tariff of values, soon becoming the gauge of the worth of the one who had earned it. Sensing the conditioning effect of this kind of time, no doubt Venkataraman spent as little time as possible on his studies, although he was very intelligent and had a remarkable memory. He preferred to play outdoor games or to take part in sports such as wrestling and swimming. Needless to say these activities found no favour with his elders for whom, since they were not rich, it was important that he should study and eventually qualify for a good post that would ensure the family's security. Venkataraman had an unassuaged feeling that something much greater existed than the mundane order of things into which family and society were trying to fit him. Yet he did not make any effort to find out what that greater good was, nor did he show any desire to follow the example of a paternal uncle who had left his family and village to go in quest for God.

Then at the age of seventeen, quite unexpectedly, he had an experience of death that would open up an entirely new dimension to his life. It took place on 21 August 1896, a day that had been much like any other. In the evening he was sitting alone in a room on the first floor of the house, when, for no obvious reason, since he was in good health, he was seized with an overwhelming fear of death. As the Tibetan Saint Milarepa said, fear makes for one-pointedness of mind and alertness, so that liberation is easier at such a time. Fear, indeed, powerfully concentrated Venkataraman's mind and he began an intense enquiry. Enacting death by making his limbs stiff and holding his breath, he asked himself, 'Now the body is dead. It will be carried to the cremation pyre, and there reduced to ashes. But do I die with the death of this body? Am I the body?' The answer came to him when, with sudden insight, he discovered 'I', not the ego-I with its attributes and associations, but 'I' supremely alone, unqualified, unconditioned and timeless. With 'I', he entered into the experience of supreme Being, I Am. At a deep level, he was never to lose it. Pure Awareness would henceforth continue intact, whatever surface thoughts might come and go in his mind.

He did not at once know that the deathless Self he had realized was the immutable Real which so many people sought. Later on, whilst reading the religious books brought by his devotees, he would be surprised to find that what was written there tallied with his own experience. He would likewise pick up in books some established terms which he could use when questions were put to him about the Self, terms such as '*Brahman*', 'The One Real', 'Impersonal Real', 'Essence', 'Spirit', 'Self'. None of these words, though, could adequately convey the ineffable That, whose living force he could feel so strongly within himself.

Venkataraman had, in the language of mystics, died from the ego and been born into the life of the Spirit. Yet he knew nothing about mystical traditions, not even those of his own religion. His only knowledge of mystical experience was what he had read the previous year in a copy of the *Periapuranam*, a twelfth century compilation of the lives and poems of sixty-three Tamil Saints. He had been moved by the accounts of the Saints' love for God and of their final attainment of union with Him, yet when it came to him, his supreme experience was very much his own. It is also unlikely that when he read the lives of the Saints, he fully understood their extolment of the Heart as the abode of the Lord, as when Saint Appar sings of 'the loving Heart He ever dwells in'. After his Realization, Venkataraman knew what they meant because he had

discovered the Heart for himself. He would often speak of the Lord of the Heart with the meaning of the indwelling Self Absolute, as in his *Hymn of Five Verses to Arunachala* where he says, 'In the Heart, Thou dost dance as "I", as the Self, O Lord, they call Thee by the name "Heart"'.

Interestingly, to a limited extent there is a resemblance between Venkataraman's experience of death and an event in the life of the renowned French novelist, Gustave Flaubert. In 1841, when Gustave was twenty, he went through a simulation of death so intense that for several hours he remained inert and senseless. He was to say that it had been the most important happening of his life, for it had marked the moment when one man had died and another had been born. He now had the feeling that he was immutable, eternal, "I am becoming *Brahman!*" he wrote to a friend. Before this event ideas had flooded through his mind without his knowing what to do with them. Now he knew, and he would later hold this to be the key to his success as a writer, that he was to see the world around him not as reality but as appearance, whilst he himself remained 'as much of the impersonal spirit as possible'.

Venkataraman, unlike Gustave, did not have to try and remain as much of the impersonal spirit as possible, since the knowledge that he *was* the Impersonal Spirit was with him always. He could also plunge into the trance of *samadhi* at will and remain totally immersed in Self-awareness, and then nothing at all that was personal existed for him.

About six weeks after his Self-realization, his elder brother, Nagaswami, happened to come into the room where he was sitting in *samadhi*. Rousing him, Nagaswami pointed to the school-books he had left aside and said, 'Why should one who behaves in this way, retain all this?' Venkataraman thought, 'What my brother says is true, what business have I here now?' Since his experience he had completely changed. He no longer felt self-assertive, rebellious, nor attached to anything. His old self had belonged to the family, the school, and so on, but since he did not identify himself with that self now, he did not feel he fitted into its categories of existence any more. Nagaswami, he knew, meant that if he behaved like a holy man he should go and live in the wilderness as was the tradition. Yes, but where was he to go?

As it happened, a few months earlier he had met a relative from Tiruchuli who was in an ecstatic mood after returning from a pilgrimage to the Mountain Arunachala. Venkataraman had asked him, 'What is Arunachala?' and the man had replied, 'It is the same as Tiruvannamalai' which means, in Tamil, the Holy Unapproachable Hill. The boy had felt a thrill at these words for they had given him his first apprehension of the Absolute. Now that he knew he was nothing, had nothing, desired nothing, it dawned on him that it was to Arunachala, the Beyond-All-Things, that he belonged. That same day, leaving a note for the family so as to allay any worry on his account, but not disclosing his destination, nor signing his name, he departed for Tiruvannamalai.

When he caught his first glimpse of Arunachala, all thought ceased, time vanished, and his mind fixed in the stillness of eternity. He experienced Arunachala not as distant and unapproachable, but thrillingly, as one with himself. Later on, in his hymn, *The Marital Garland of Letters to Arunachala*, he would recall the moment with the words 'When I came close...you stood unmoving, being one with me.' The Unmoving which is without movement in space or time, which is forever without change or becoming, is the still inner core of all movement and change. Venkataraman would not have had this revelation if he had not already realized the immutable Self in his heart. What took place when he saw Arunachala was a

recognition, at a level of knowledge far beyond thought, that the innermost individual being was no other than *Brahman*, the innermost being of the Cosmos.

As soon as he alighted in Tiruvannamalai he made his way to the temple of Lord Arunachaleswara, the tall gate-towers or gopuras of which he had seen from the train. The great temple was usually closed so early in the morning, but that day the gates of its three enclosures as well as its inner doors were all open, as if it were waiting to welcome him. There was no one about and he went freely through the enclosures, passing numerous shrines, courts, ponds, gardens, and an abundance of carved images expressing the exuberance and complexity of the Divine Power's manifestation in the Cosmos. At last he reached the small original temple that was now the sanctum sanctorum. In the bare space of that imageless chamber there stood the plain granite column of the *Siva Linga*, which, because of its sheer simplicity, is worshipped as the mark of formless *Brahman* or Pure Consciousness, the Primal Cause of all form and all creation. Venkataraman felt that he had reached his Source, and he started to pray as a son who has come in answer to his Father's call. But soon prayer ceased. There was no more I and Thou, and now experiencing the essential oneness of the Real, he just 'let the Deep within flow into the Deep without', in a sublime communion of being with all that is.

Venkataraman stayed some eighteen months in the temple precinct and a further year in various shrines and retreats around the Hill. In 1899 he went up the Hill to live in the Satguru cave, a coincidence since his devotees would one day speak of him as a *Satguru*, a Teacher who embodies Truth. From the Satguru cave he moved to the Guhu Namasivaya cave and then to the Virupaksha cave, named after the medieval hermit-saint Virupaksha who had inhabited it and had been buried there. Venkataraman with his own hands constructed a platform of earth and stone in the cave which served him as a bed. Altogether, he would live some twenty years in one or another of the caves of Arunachala. Not attached to any one residence, he moved when circumstances, such as the supply of water, required it.

Although he was very young when he came to the Hill, local people showed themselves to be instinctive judges of spiritual worth and gave him the name of Brahmana Swami, which can be translated as Saint of the Absolute. As it happened, it was by this title that he would one day become known in Christian contemplative circles in the West.

People soon started coming up the Hill to see him. In 1902 a Government official called Sivaprakasam Pillai visited him in the hope of obtaining from him the answer to a question that had long been needling him: 'How can one know one's true identity?' The fourteen questions that he put to the young Sage led to the first enunciation of the teaching that was based on his own discovery of true identity. It would come to be known as the Doctrine of Self-Enquiry, and would eventually be published in book form under the title *Who am I?* Since Venkataraman was observing silence at the time he replied by gestures, and when those were not understood by writing on a slate brought by Pillai, or else with his finger on the sand of the cave floor. The answers were at once written down in a notebook by one of the visitors.

Pillai began by asking, 'Swami, who am I? How is salvation attained?' The Sage's reply was that it was attained by incessantly pursuing within oneself the enquiry 'Who am I?', for when, through enquiry, one eliminates all that one is not, one arrives at what alone remains, which is pure Consciousness or Awareness. Later on he would make clear that the practice does not mean one is to repeat 'Who am I?' nor '*Neti, Neti*' ('Not this, not this') like a mantra. It means holding steadfastly to the absolute idea 'I am' which is always there, and getting rid of all the

relative ideas 'I am the body, I am the mind,' and so on. It means, in fact, arriving at the point reached by Venkataraman himself, when after a brief enquiry he realized I AM to be his true Self.

Pillai then asked what was the nature of Awareness, and the Sage replied using the Vedantic terms of transcendent Reality: 'It is *Sat-Chit-Ananda* (Being-Consciousness-Bliss) in which there is not even the slightest trace of the thought I (the ego). It is also called Mouna (Silence) or *Atman* (the Self). That alone is.' Yet the Sage, already revealing himself to be a great Master, did not stop there. Lest the definition he had given of Reality lead Pillai to dismiss all personal realities as illusions, he at once went on to stress that if the trinity of world, ego and personal God were considered as being rooted in the Absolute and as Its manifestations, then they were real. Thus he established straightaway that the aim of spiritual practice was not to escape from one's personal realities, but rather to abide in the greater all-encompassing Reality.

More than one of his devotees would later tell him of their desire to take *sannyas* or the vows of asceticism and to leave home and family. Generally, he dissuaded them from taking this course unless they were well advanced in selflessness, because true renunciation meant giving up the narrow sense of identity, and this sense could persist and even be aggravated after becoming a *sannyasin*. To one devotee who objected, 'But single-minded devotion to God may not be possible unless one gets out of the world,' the Sage replied, 'No, one who truly renounces actually merges in the world and expands his love so as to embrace the whole world. It would be more correct to characterize the attitude of the devotee as one of universal love than that of a person forsaking the home to don ochre robes.'

In 1907 Kavyakantha Ganapati Sastri, known as Ganapati Muni, came to seek the help of the young Sage. Sastri was a brilliant Sanskrit scholar, a prolific poet, and a Tantrist practitioner of some repute who had already gathered a small group of disciples around him. He had visited Venkataraman twice before, but he had not put any questions to him, perhaps because the Sage looked to him like a simple village boy. What troubled Sastri was that although he had read all the Scriptures and for over twelve years had rigorously practised *tapas*, or mental disciplines, which in his case was *Mantra Japam*, or the repetition of the Holy Name of Siva, he had so far failed to generate sufficient mind-power to make Siva physically manifest. Hence, had not been able to obtain from him the boon of supernatural powers, such as the deity was said to have granted to Rshis of yore. Sastri wanted such powers to accomplish his aims of reforming society; especially Indian society which he felt had lost its former purity and greatness. Could his failure be due to his not fully understanding the essential nature of *tapas*? he wondered. He entreated Venkataraman to enlighten him.

The Sage answered this master of words with the minimum use of words. Using short, impactful Tamil sentences to avoid intellectual obstacles, he said to Sastri, 'If one observes whence this notion "I" springs, the mind is absorbed into that. That is *tapas*. When a mantra sound is produced, the mind is absorbed into that. That is *tapas*.'

What was new about the Sage's teaching is that the *tapas* of Self-enquiry is linked to the *tapas* of mantra meditation, so that it, too, results in the mind's absorption into its Source. When that all-important mental absorption takes place, the Self, which alone remains in the absence of thought, experiences itself. Then doth the mighty Siva manifest, not in any external shape of form, but inwardly, as the pure Consciousness that shines forth in Self-experience. The Sage, on another occasion, would speak of the manifestation in these words: 'In the hearts of those

who, seeking with keen insight stay in steadfast and tranquil abidance in the Self, there shines forth Arunachala Siva as “I-am-That”--Consciousness, self-luminous and perfect.’

Sastri, on hearing these words began to see *tapas* in a different light. He believed that the Goddess Uma whom he worshipped had, in her Grace, vouchsafed him the revelation through Venkataraman’s instruction. He at once composed five verses in praise of his Guru, shortening his name to Ramana; the significance of this being that Rama is the son of Siva. The next day he wrote about the event to his family and followers, requesting them to henceforth address him as Bhagavan because he had realized the Self, and as Maharshi or Great Seer because of the originality of his teaching.

Sastri practised the method taught to him by the Maharshi (as we shall call Venkataraman from now on). But about a year later he came back and asked the Maharshi, ‘Is seeking the source of the I-thought sufficient for the accomplishment of all my aims or is Mantra meditation needed?’ The Maharshi replied, ‘The former would suffice.’ But for Sastri, dissolving the individuality in the Impersonal Self may not have been compatible with his idea of becoming a kind of superman divinely endowed with powers to help mankind. So, some months later he again raised the question of the best means of attaining his aims, and the Maharshi told him, ‘You had better throw the entire burden on the Lord. He will carry all your burdens and you will be free. Leave it to Him.’ In these few words he addresses Sastri’s problem--self-assertion however noble and altruistic his motives--whilst at the same time giving him the solution: he will obtain the power to do good once he has understood that in reality *he* does nothing, and that God alone is the doer.

In 1912 the Maharshi underwent a second experience of death, one that marked the reaching of a still higher level of Realization. It resulted in a state when even the deepest absorption in inner awareness was no longer accompanied by the loss of outer awareness. During the years following his first experience of death, the inner Reality had exerted such a powerful fascination on him that he had spent most of the time totally lost to the outer reality. Rising from meditation he would not know what day or time it was, and food was often put in his mouth whilst he was in trance. Fortunately, there were around other ascetics or holy men who could recognize the state that has been called the ‘intoxication with God’ and who gave him the care he needed to survive.

His second death experience did not take place when he was alone, as had the first, but when he was in the company of a group of devotees. He was returning from a pond where he had bathed when suddenly he felt unwell. The landscape was blotted out from his sight as if a bright white curtain were being drawn across his vision. Yet he was aware that for the space of fifteen minutes he showed the symptoms of death. He was aware, too, of the grieving reactions of his companions. Unlike the first experience of death, this event was not attended by any fear on his part, for his inner awareness of Being continued undiminished throughout.

From that time on, he would manifest the kind of supraconsciousness spoken of in the Scriptures as *Sahaja Nirvikalpa Samadhi*. This is a state which the Maharshi once simply described as a continuous fixation in the Self with, at the same time, the full use of the thinking mind and other normal faculties. Henceforth, the world would never again be shut out from his awareness even while in meditation. Other people would no longer disturb him and he would have no need to remain in seclusion for he perceived the Self in everyone alike.

His spiritual maturity was reflected in his readiness to admit members of his family into his hermitage on Arunachala. His family had learnt that he was in Tiruvannamalai about two years after he had left home. Members of his family, including his mother, had come several times to see him, but each time had left without successfully communicating with him. On her first visit his mother had found him lying practically naked, unkempt and emaciated on a rock at Pavalakkunru, a spur of Arunachala. When she had tearfully entreated him to return with her to Madurai so that she might give him proper shelter and care, he had simply got up and gone away from there and for some time no one could find him.

However in 1914 when she came to see him, she fell ill. Far from distancing himself from her now, the Maharshi looked after her until she recovered. At the critical stage of her illness he prayed for her to survive in the manner of a son who is also a Sage. He entreated Arunachala, the blazing Fire of Knowledge, to save her--not so much from physical death as from spiritual death--by enfolding her in Its Light and making her one with Itself. She came to understand during her stay with him that he really was a Sage and was not just pretending to be one so as to escape his family obligations, which was what they had believed until then. The thought may have crossed her mind that at some future time it was she who would come to him for refuge.

In the event, that time came barely two years later, precipitated by the last of a number of deaths in the family. In 1900 her son Nagaswami died at the age of twenty-three, his promising career in Government service unfulfilled. When her brother-in-law Subba Iyer died, her other brother-in-law Nellaiappa Iyer became head of the family, but he died early in 1916. The house in Madura was then sold. The wife of her youngest son, Nagasundaram, died leaving an infant son who was being brought up by her daughter, Alamelu. Alagammal had nowhere to go but to the Maharshi. When he took her in, devotees who resided with him in the Virupaksha cave at first objected, afraid that her presence would cause him to leave the place. But he assured them that that would not happen. He also took in Nagasundaram, for Alagammal wanted to place him under the Maharshi's protection as well.

Alagammal found happiness in caring for her sons and the extended family of visitors and resident devotees. She saw to it that all those who wanted to stay with their Guru were looked after. That naturally resulted in an increase in the number of residents. When they became too numerous for the Virupaksha cave, they were all obliged to move to a bigger cave higher up the hill, called the Skandashram cave. There she set up a cave kitchen and cooked food for the whole Ashram. Some of the original devotees in the retreat regretted the end of the freedom they had enjoyed when they had lived outside the family environment and gone down daily to the town to beg for their food as mendicants. But the Maharshi was asking them to reach a still higher degree of renunciation, by realizing that true liberty was not dependent on living as a recluse but rather was an inner state independent of all conditions.

Alagammal became her son's most ardent pupil. Her spiritual training at his hands was a hard one. As a Hindu widow she had led an ascetic life for many years. Now she became a *sannyasini* and donned the ochre robe that indicated total self-denial. But what she had to overcome was not only the desire for material things, but also the pride and expectations that arose from the fact that the Guru was her son. Naturally enough, she felt he should show a filial love for her. Once when she complained that he gave other women devotees his attention but did not reply when she spoke to him although she was his mother, he replied, 'All women are mothers to me.' It was difficult, but Alagammal knew that she must expect no special treatment for herself and must learn to appreciate love that was given to all alike, without distinction or

attachment. Devoted to her son to the end, she yet succeeded in overcoming the ills of personal relationship.

During the last three years of her life she was often ill and the Maharshi looked after her during her bouts of sickness. She learnt from him at such times how not to identify herself with the body, but to keep her mind on the Self, even when her body was racked with pain.

At the beginning of May 1922 she entered on her last illness, and on 19 May it became evident that she was dying. All day long the Maharshi remained by her side. In the evening the devotees joined them and chanted in different groups 'The Marital Garland To Arunachala', the Vedas and the Name of God. For the last hour, the Maharshi sat with his right hand on her heart and his left hand on her head. He would say that, though the outer senses had already gone, she showed some restlessness as innate tendencies and memories of the past rose up again and again in her subtle consciousness. But her mind was finally quieted, and in the last moments before death she attained the peace of Liberation. Later on, someone would say in the Maharshi's presence, 'The Mother passed away....' and the Maharshi would correct firmly, 'Not passed away, absorbed,' which meant that, as he had once prayed, Arunachala had made her one with Itself.

She left the body at about 8 p.m. There was no grieving following her death. When they brought her out and sat her on the veranda there were still no visible signs of death on her face and she looked as if she was in deep meditation. In her lifetime she had been a simple and modest person, but now there was a kind of holy resplendence about her. Since the body of Self-realized saint is not subjected to the purificatory fire of cremation, the decision was made to bury the mother's body. It was carried down to Palakothis at the foot of the Hill on the south-facing side, the wild land was cleared of cacti and bushes, and the body was interred at a spot indicated by the Maharshi. In time, a tomb was built over the grave and it was crowned with a *Linga*, which was called the *Mathrubhuteswara Linga* or 'Sign of the Lord who Became the Mother'. In effect, the installation of that sign depersonalized the tomb. Henceforth, it would be seen as a shrine to Siva in his tender maternal aspect.

For six months the Maharshi came daily to visit the shrine and would sit for some time beside it. One day some people from the town, for whom the climb to the Skandashram cave was beyond their ability, hastened to come and see him while he was there. When much the same thing happened on succeeding days, the Maharshi simply stayed on in a place where he was more easily accessible to those who wanted to come to him. The devotees at the Skandashram soon rejoined him at the foot of the Hill. A thatched shed and some cottages sprung up one by one around the Mathrubhuteswara shrine, and so centred, the Sri Ramanashram came into being.

It has been said that a genuine Teacher cannot remain hidden, that his influence will reach out far and wide even if he does not deliberately try to make this happen. The humble Sri Ramanashram would become known worldwide and attract people from all walks of life and of different beliefs because of the Truth that lived there through the Self-realization of a boy of seventeen.

Suzanne comes to the Maharshi

As Suzanne made the journey by train to Tiruvannamalai, kilometre after kilometre of arid splendour unfurled before her eyes. She saw tawny earth and tawny hills and giant piles of rocks that were the skeletal remains of ancient mountains. A desert vegetation of thorn-scrub and cactus-like euphorbia scabbled for existence in the dry, unrewarding soil. Unexpectedly, there would be a copse of tall trees revealing the presence of underground water, the sudden brilliant green of paddy standing waist-high, or the mellow gold of mustard fields.

Early in the morning the train slowed as it approached a mountain taller and standing apart from the rest. She did not recognize it at once and thought only that it looked very denuded and ancient. Its soil was eroded and the rocky structure beneath was exposed like the ribs of a skeleton. It was only when they had gone around it and she saw its less rugged eastern aspect that she recognized it to be the Hill Arunachala. In the early sunlight it glowed a fiery red and she remembered that Arunachala was held to be the manifestation of Siva in the form of Fire.

She would learn that the entire Hill is worshipped as a *Tejo Linga*, the Blazing Mark of Truth Absolute. Declared in the Skanda Scriptures to be the secret sacred Heart-centre of Siva and hence the spiritual centre of the world, for centuries it has been a much-frequented place of worship and pilgrimage, as well as the abode of Saints and Sages.

Suzanne and her two companions alighted at the small, neat station of Tiruvannamalai. Outside the station they found a horse-drawn cart to take them to the Ashram, which was about five-and-a-half kilometres from the town. Their vehicle took the Big Street, the main residential street of the town, which went up to meet the road skirting the base of the Hill.

The thirteen-kilometre-long circumambulatory road first passes between the massive wall of the Lord Arunachaleswar temple on the left, and the majestic Hill on the right. Once the road leaves behind the town and comes to open country, there opens for the traveller the vista of an antique landscape of temples, shrines, sacred tanks and pilgrim halls. Some temples have filigree carved domes; others, more primitive, are of rough-hewn rock. In these simple dolmens the deity is usually not free-standing but carved in the solid stone, seeming to emerge only reluctantly into the airy dimension of form. Stone is everywhere in evidence in Tiruvannamalai. From the rock of the Hill itself, through the stone foundation of the great temple where it has a complex symbology, and the diverse stone shrines with their stone-stepped tanks, to the mandapams constructed from massive blocks of granite which have stood the onslaught of the elements for centuries. Without the need of words, the stone transmits to the onlooker the message of the fundamental, full and enduring nature of Being.

Their vehicle passed a simple stone shrine which was dedicated to Siva as Dakshinamurti, the Divine Yogi who teaches the ineffable Truth in the silence of the Spirit. He is the deity who faces south, and since south is the direction of death, He is also known as Mrutyunjaya, the Conqueror of Death. Death, indeed, is conquered by awakening to the ultimate truth of ourselves and our world.

Just after passing the shrine of Dakshinamurti they reached their destination, announced by an archway bearing the words 'Sri Ramanashram'. Entering the grounds they dismounted from their vehicle under a big mango tree. To their left there was a pond surrounded by trees, and ahead of them a small whitewashed building which turned out to be the Ashram office. The

Maharshi's younger brother Nagasundaram greeted them there. He had changed his name to Niranjananda Swami after taking *sannyas* so as to dedicate himself completely to the running of the Ashram, but most people addressed him as Sarvadhikari or Manager. He asked them a few particulars about themselves and Suzanne gave her name as Sujata. He gave them small packets of holy ash as *prasadam*, then instructed Raja Iyer, the genial postmaster of the Ashram, to take them to the Maharshi. They crossed a small courtyard and came to a long hall with all its doors open. They went up a few steps and there, seated before them on a couch, was the Sage of Arunachala.

Suzanne saw a slender, golden-skinned man in his late fifties. Except for a loincloth, he was completely bare. She thought that his face was very beautiful, not only because of the Brahmin fineness of the features, but above all because it had the highest expression of awareness that she had ever seen. There was about him a certain indefinable quality; the splendour of Realization perhaps described it best. She saw how the psychological labels which the modern mind tended to affix to spiritual experience turned out to be irrelevant and unworthy when one was confronted with true achievement.

When Raja Iyer introduced them to the Maharshi, he nodded in acknowledgement and for a moment gave them his attention, but did not speak. Suzanne was so engrossed in her contemplation of the Maharshi that at first she did not hear when one of the attendants told them that they should take their place among the women, who sat on his left. The men, who were more numerous, sat facing him down the length of the hall.

The hall in which they found themselves was simply decorated and furnished. A frieze of blue flowers ran along the walls. A clock hung on the wall facing the devotees. Below it, on a shelf, there were a few tin containers. Presently, she saw the Maharshi take some nuts out of one of the containers for the squirrel that had run to him along the back of the couch. Next to the couch was a revolving bookcase and further down the hall stood two plain wooden cupboards holding more books and a small store of stationery. Little attempt had been made to create a mystical or spiritual background for the Maharshi. The furniture was functional, the surroundings ordinary. Yet the banal setting could not detract from the grandeur of the Sage. He was exceptional first of all in just being himself. In every action he made, whether he was correcting a manuscript or reading a letter, there was a complete naturalness and absence of pose. This is very rarely seen, for few are those who, being rooted in their true identity, have no need to seek a flattering image of themselves or confirmation of what they are from the impression they make on others.

Once during the morning the Maharshi turned and looked directly at Suzanne. She would write to us about his wonderful gaze, his brilliant eyes 'shining like stars'. She was sure that she had found her Master.

At eleven o'clock the Maharshi and the devotees rose and left the hall, for it was time for the main meal of the day. Someone from the Ashram invited Suzanne and the two ladies with her to join the others. The meal was served in the communal dining hall where rows of freshly washed plantain leaves had been laid out on the spotlessly clean stone floor. The Maharshi took his place among the devotees. The Brahmins sat on one side of him and the non-Brahmins on the other, thus respecting religious customs. The Maharshi, though, did not wear the Brahmin thread, and she remembered that on arriving in Tiruvannamalai he had thrown away the thread worn by the hereditary, sacerdotal caste that indicated superiority over others.

They were served rice, vegetables, pepper-water and milk-curd. The Maharshi ate very frugally. He asked Suzanne whether the food was not too pungent for them. These words of solicitude were the first words he spoke to her. In the hall she then joined the devotees who had come to spend the afternoon with the Maharshi. She did not see some of those who had been present in the morning, but several newcomers were there. She was surprised to hear that devotees might come into the hall as early as four o'clock in the morning, though seven o'clock was the time most morning visitors gathered. They spent a few hours with him, but he was accessible to them all day.

As in the morning, the mood was rather informal. To these pupils aspiring to attain the highest grades of knowledge, the Maharshi apparently did not give any discourses. He replied to questions when they were put to him, usually very succinctly, as if to let the one word or the few words he said make their way directly into the understanding of the questioner. On the other hand, when a young man struggled to grasp what the Self was, the Maharshi with great patience guided him through his reasoning until at last he got some glimmering of what the Maharshi meant. Of course, the answer to the nature of the Self is only to be found on the intuitive level, but the breakthrough of intuition can be hampered by faulty reasoning. Apart from these exceptions to silence, there were long quiet moments when the Maharshi said and did nothing, but which were more effective in conveying transcendent Truth than any lecture or sermon would have been. The afternoon ended with a twenty-minute break.

The Maharshi and the devotees gathered in the hall again at five o'clock for the evening session. Suzanne found that the atmosphere now was quite different; much more solemn and charged with more energy than earlier on in the day. First there was the recitation of the Vedas by a group of young Brahmin boys and their preceptor. As the powerful Sanskrit syllables vibrated in the hall, the Maharshi's appearance underwent a remarkable change. His expression became austere, his gaze turned inwards. His face appeared translucent as if lit by inner illumination, whilst the constant slight trembling of his body which Suzanne had noticed earlier, had now completely stopped. Yet even in this state it was evident that he was not oblivious of his surroundings, and that he had an awareness of both the inner and outer reality. Suzanne was to write about her impression of the Maharshi in these words: 'He is an Adept of the highest order, a king of Yogis. The splendour of his Realization radiates like a sun...Robed in ether his Yogic powers are unique, subtle and rare. He lifts you far above the world.'

After the Vedas, the devotees sang together a hymn to Arunachala. Then they sat in deep silence, capturing the force emanating from their Master, a force so strong as to be almost tangible. To her surprise she now saw all the women rise, and after prostrating to the Maharshi file out of the hall. She did not go with them. One of the men came and explained to her that the Ashram Management had made the rule that women must leave the Ashram before 6.30 p.m. so that they could safely return home before dark. She protested that she was not afraid of the dark and asked to be allowed to stay as long as the men. The Sarvadhikari, alerted that there was some trouble in the hall, arrived and told her himself that the Ashram rules must be respected. The Maharshi did not intervene at any time during this incident.

Very upset, Suzanne left the hall. She found her two friends from Adyar waiting for her outside. They looked dejected because they had just found out that there was no guesthouse for women at the Ashram and they would have to find some accommodation in town. They tried to persuade her to go with them, but since she refused they left without her. Suzanne declared to

the small group of Ashramites who were trying to pacify her, that since she could not stay at the Ashram she would go and spend the night on the Hill.

She climbed some way up the Hill and without difficulty found a cave in which to shelter. She entered its dark interior, in spite of her bravado a little afraid of finding herself confronted by some wild animal. But she was alone. She had meant to spend the night in meditation, but it was impossible for her to meditate so great was her feeling of indignation at what had happened. Meeting a true Master had been the event she had longed for and she had so much hoped to receive some indication from him that he had accepted her as his disciple. Instead, at what had been the most significant moment of the day for her, she had been made to leave his presence because she was a woman, which in this society obviously meant someone weak and inferior. The incident aroused in her an old impulse to revolt against exclusion because of arbitrarily determined inferiority, a reaction which went back to her student days when more than once she had been indignant at the unfair discrimination against women. In fact, the feeling went still further back to her early childhood when she had first understood that her parents valued her less than her brother and that, whatever she might do, she would never be able to take his place in their pride and affection. It was strange that on her very first day with the Maharshi her oldest pain and anger should have risen to the surface.

Her anger drove all other thoughts from her mind. It was then that she had a vision of Arunachala as a Hill of Fire. In its many caves, Siddhas or Realized beings in their pure and invulnerable bodies sat or moved unharmed in the flames. In her vision she was taken into the Hill, and she, too, entered its Fire, but felt no fear, no pain. And she saw many worlds existing within the Hill, in a series of extraordinary revelations.

Some time afterwards, she confided what she had seen to another devotee, Mrs Lucia Osborne. At the time, Mrs Osborne did not think it was important, but a few years later when another person reported a similar experience, she asked the Maharshi about it. As she would write in her editorial in the January 1974 issue of the Ashram journal, *The Mountain Path*, 'Sujata was taken into the hill and found a whole Universe there. When I asked the Maharshi if it could be so, he replied, "Yes", and then added, "The Hill is the Heart."'

While Suzanne was on the Hill that night, the Maharshi, knowing that there were wild animals such as cheetahs, leopards and jackals on its slopes, asked Mr Cohen, a former Theosophist who had known her at Adyar, to go and persuade her to come down. When Mr Cohen and his party found her she was calm, being still under the influence of her wondrous vision. Without further protest she agreed to spend the rest of the night in a hotel in town.

The next day she came to the Ashram somewhat embarrassed by her impulsive action and wondering whether she would be reprimanded for it. But the Maharshi did not say anything about it. When somebody asked to take a photograph of the Maharshi with the foreign devotees at the Ashram, he agreed, although he did not always agree to be photographed. Seeing that Suzanne hung back a little diffidently, he made a sign to her that she was to join them. In this photograph, the devotees are grouped before Arunachala as if forming a hill with the Maharshi at the centre.

This is the last photograph in which Suzanne appears clad in the Buddhist robe, for she stopped wearing it shortly afterwards. In Bangalore and in the Buddhist monasteries in the North where she had been accepted unquestioningly as a Buddhist nun, she had not felt self-conscious when

wearing the habit. Here, in this predominantly Hindu milieu, her Buddhist robe was not understood and as a result she felt self-conscious and on the defensive. The Maharshi did not ask her to stop wearing it. That was not his way. There were never any dictates from him. His teachings did not lay down rules of conduct; they provided guidance as to how to achieve selflessness which was the basis of Realization. She had read some of his teachings before coming to Tiruvannamalai and had grasped enough to know that in the quest which required the abandonment of all thought of self, there was no place for self-consciousness or even for self-defence.

The Start of Practice

Suzanne stayed on in Tiruvannamalai. In the context of the ideas of Masters and Initiations which she had brought with her, she made the decision to follow the Maharshi's teaching. She hoped that one day he would find she had gained sufficient merit to accept her as his disciple and to bestow the Initiation on her. She practised his meditation of Self-enquiry and tried to simply be, not be this or that. In practice it was trying to stay poised on the pinpoint of reality. It required vigilance and application practically at each moment, for the ego continually rose up and demanded satisfaction in some guise or other. But she was determined to succeed.

She found accommodation in the Bose Compound, a colony started for the Ashram devotees by Mr A. Bose, a Bengali industrialist. His wife, the daughter of a German Admiral, soon became a good friend. The colony was situated just across the road from the Sri Ramanashram so that she could easily go there once or even several times a day. The little cottage she rented had no electricity or running water but the compound was clean, peaceful and conducive to study and contemplation. From there she could see the details of Arunachala's velvety green lower slopes which passed on to tawny rock going all the way up to the craggy summit that was always plumed with cloud. When darkness fell, the Hill, darker than the night and now offering nothing to the enjoyment of the senses, was still a powerful presence, evocative of the hidden mystery that lies beyond our eyes.

Vishwanatha Swami, a *sannyasi* who had been brought up by the Maharshi's parents in Tiruchuli after the death of his mother in early childhood, was one of Suzanne's favourite persons at the Ashram. He recalled later in a letter which he wrote to me after her death, that both he and Suzanne thought it such a pity to spend the magical hours of the night in sleep, that sometimes they would sit with their backs to the west wall of the compound and meditate till morning.

The two ladies from the Theosophical Society who had come to Tiruvannamalai with Suzanne returned to Adyar after a couple of days. Like several other Theosophists who visited the Maharshi, they were disappointed by his attitude towards altruistic service. They believed that it was through service to others that one developed one's Divine potential. The Maharshi, however, did not teach that service was to be deliberately used as a means of Self-realization, but rather that Self-realization was to be sought so as to be able to render the greatest service to others. For what was the use of wanting to bring peace or happiness to the world when one did not have it oneself? He compared such an attitude to that of a lame man who said, 'If only someone holds me up, I can beat off the thieves!' He did not mean that one could turn away from the suffering of others under the pretext of concentrating on achieving one's spiritual goal. Nor that one should offer only spiritual help to the needy. The Maharshi himself set the example of care and compassion by seeing that the poor were fed each day at the Ashram. He ate only after they had been fed, and if, as it sometimes happened, he was told that the provisions had run out and they could not be fed that day, he would refuse to go for his meal until food had been found for them.

Suzanne had been a few months in Tiruvannamalai when one of the visitors to the Ashram, who had learnt that she was a doctor, asked her whether she could come to his village to visit his wife who was too ill to travel to the hospital in town.

She agreed and the next day accompanied him to his village. They travelled a long distance by bullock-cart, which was the only means of transport into the interior. When they reached their destination she was surprised to find a long line of sick people awaiting her arrival. She had brought very few medicines with her, just enough for her patient, so could do little for them. But she promised she would soon return better equipped.

She was shocked by what she saw that day and on subsequent visits to the interior villages. Diseases that could easily have been cured were to be seen in their most advanced stages. One little boy suffering from jaws had an ulcer on his head as big as a man's fist. One woman was blind after she had been treated for cataract by a local healer. A young mother still in her teens, had been handled so badly during forty-eight hours in labour that her bladder had been pierced and urine dripped from her constantly. Had Suzanne not seen it for herself she would never have believed such horrors existed in this modern age, and that people could suffer so much from neglect. The nearest dispensary or hospital was thirty kilometres away from the first village she visited and more than double that distance from the most interior areas. When a sick person arrived at the municipal hospital in Tiruvannamalai, after hours spent in a wooden-wheeled bullock-cart jolting over rutted mud roads, he or she was often dead or too far-gone to be saved.

Her first patient in the village came from a family of relatively well-to-do farmers, and they offered Suzanne the verandah of their house as a temporary dispensary where she could treat the sick. Healing the sick had been one of her ideals since her teens, yet when her practice began it was not so much in the pursuance of an ideal as a spontaneous response to a crying need for help that she could not ignore. In her student days she had doubted whether she had the ability to be a doctor. In her practice in India she would prove herself to be a very good doctor. She combined science and intuition, which made for the best results. She was open-minded about the mode of therapy, treating mostly by Allopathy but not disdaining Homeopathy or any other remedy if it worked for the patient. Ahead of her time in treating the whole person, she did not write a stock prescription for a particular ailment, but an individual prescription for the person as a whole. Another unusual feature of her practice was that she preferred to have the medicines compounded by herself, or by someone in her employ if that was not possible. For two-and-a-half years she travelled to the villages and back by bullock-cart taking with her basic substances so as to compound the medicines on the spot. She was assisted by her faithful servant, Naren, who she trained as a compounder and who also acted as her interpreter until she learnt Tamil.

When war was declared in 1939, Ranjit was on leave in Europe. He wrote to her from France that he had been posted to the Middle East, and that since he would be unable to use the Peugeot car he had just purchased, he was having it shipped to her. This car came as a godsend to Suzanne in her work, for it greatly facilitated her travel into the rural areas. In time she became well known in the villages. The children who had once shouted at her in a hostile manner, '*Veli kari!*' or 'White Face!', now called out '*Amma!*', and saluted or waved to her as she passed.

When she came to know that there was a demand for her medical services in the town as well, she decided to start a practice in Tiruvannamalai, whilst maintaining regular visits to the villages. She found a house for rent at number 58 Big Street, where she opened a dispensary named the 'Matangi Dispensary' after the green goddess Matangi who presided over the

life-force. To channel the life-force to those in need she would work very hard in the years to come.

It was her system that those who could pay were charged for their treatment, and those who were too poor were treated all the same. Many of her patients willingly paid, especially those who were cultivators, for they did not expect something for nothing, unlike some of the town officials who expected to be treated free. She sometimes told Jeanne of her hope that the practice would enable her eventually to become independent of Ranjit's financial support. But in fact, because she could never refuse medical help to anyone merely because they could not afford it, a large part of the allowance that she received from him was spent on her patients. In the end, when she stopped practising after years of service, it was a source of embarrassment for her that she owed a small sum of money to the chemist shop in Tiruvannamalai. I was able to clear that sum quite easily once I started working.

Our Life in Tiruvannamalai

In September 1940, when the war began to threaten the safety of Jeanne and me in England, Suzanne wrote urging us to come to India. She told the Maharshi about her fears for us, and he replied that there was no need to worry, as we would be quite safe. Soon afterwards she had a dream in which she saw him sitting on the threshold of our house in England, with one hand raised in the gesture of protection.

It did seem to us that we were specially protected during those hazardous days. Jeanne, who had been trying for some time to get a passage to India, suddenly received notice to embark on a liner that was due to sail from Liverpool three days later. She put the furniture in storage thinking that we would eventually return to our house, but we were to hear that it was destroyed during the bombing. The day that we embarked in Liverpool there was an air raid on the port, but the bombers missed our ship, which must have been a target of attack since it was carrying troops as well as civilians. Yet we made the long journey to India round the Cape of Good Hope without any mishap.

When we reached Bombay, Suzanne was there to meet us, having driven all the way from the South. She brought us back with her to Tiruvannamalai and to the house in the Big Street. The very next day she took us to the Sri Ramanashram to see the Maharshi. Thus she introduced me straight away to that side of India which is the most valuable and rewarding, and I am very grateful to her for it.

At first I was a little afraid to come before her great Master about whom she had written so much to us. But when he looked at me I felt wonderfully safe and happy. He seemed to be infinitely wise and yet completely innocent, like a child. I saw in him great sweetness and gentleness; at the same time I felt his power. I knew that he would continue to protect us and, indeed, both Jeanne and I felt his protection again quite soon--I, in my difficulties of adjustment in India where I found myself practically a foreigner, and Jeanne a couple of years later at a time when she felt she was losing all sense of purpose in life.

The manner in which the Maharshi helped her, revealed extraordinary insight. In 1942, when we came to Tiruvannamalai from Madras it had been decided that I should go to boarding-school in Bangalore. It was the first time that Jeanne and I were to be separated from each other, and it brought home to her that I was growing up and would need her less and less in the future. She was so despondent that Suzanne suggested she ask the Maharshi to guide her. So the next morning when we went to him, Jeanne handed the attendant a little slip of paper on which she had written the simple request: 'Please give me your guidance for the future.' His spontaneous answer was, 'Go back to your religion.'

This was an amazing answer because Jeanne had not informed him or anyone else at the Ashram that she had left her religion, that fact was embedded in her past and never brought out not even before the family. Her presence at the Ashram did not indicate it either, for there were people of different faiths there, seeing that the Maharshi's doctrine of Self-Enquiry could be practised within the structures of any religion or even without them. Besides, as Suzanne's mother it was only natural that she should visit the Ashram.

Soon after we moved to Bangalore, Jeanne passed in front of the Church of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour. She did not go in, finding it difficult to take the first step. However, a few

days later she went back taking with her some clothes for the poor so as to have a pretext for entering. She was received there by an old and wise Redemptorist priest who, after listening attentively to what she had to say, spoke to her not of God's wrath, nor of sin, but only of God's love. Finally, pointing to the bundle which she had brought with her, he said, 'You see this bundle?' and putting it behind her, continued, 'It is behind you just as your past is behind you. Go now and look forward only to your life with Christ.'

She felt spiritually healed by attending Mass and receiving communion once more. Every day she read a passage from the *Imitation of Christ* by Thomas a Kempis and meditated on it. It was her aim to walk in the steps of Christ by conforming her life wholly to His. That intention meant, in effect, putting herself under disciplines of self-denial and of turning inwards to God that were practically those of a monastic regime. She prayed for Grace that she might persevere on her path, and persevere she did, for twenty-three years until her death in 1965.

Her story brings to mind that the Maharshi obtained some of his best results with women who suffered on account of a child, as in the case of his own mother who had had to 'lose' him, in the sense that after his Realization he would never again be her son in an ordinary mother and son relationship. Then there was Echamma, one of the earliest devotees, who had come to him when she was almost out of her mind with grief after losing her husband, only son and daughter, one after the other. In the Maharshi's compassionate presence she began to feel some relief, but soon fate struck her another cruel blow when she lost her adopted daughter. It was through the practice of his meditation of Self-enquiry that she would finally find peace, since the Self alone holds lasting happiness. In time she became a well-known figure at the Ashram, held in respect for the equanimity of mind she had acquired as well as her hospitality and her great devotion to the Maharshi. When she died on 27 December 1945, she had fulfilled a thirty-eight year vow not to eat until she had first served the food she had prepared to her Guru, and had seen him eat at least a morsel of it.

For over twelve years, from 1940 to 1952, I went to Tiruvannamalai at least once and sometimes twice a year during my school and, later, college holidays. I loved the place. Our house was in the Street of Priests, as the Big Street was known. The sumptuous temple processions with their gold and silver images on their equally precious vehicles drawn on huge temple cars, used to pass down the street on feast days, stopping in front of the houses of the chief high priests so that offering of the light or *arti* might be made to the deities. I was never bored while in Tiruvannamalai, a town into which the life of the temple extended in many ways.

Number 58 was similar to most of the neighbouring houses. In front there was a wide verandah, part of which was covered by a thatched roof. On this verandah there were stone benches for sitting and enjoying the cool early morning hours, or the balmy evening breezes. The massive, carved wooden front door opened with a key about thirty centimetres long. One entered into a short passage with rooms to the right and left which Suzanne used for her dispensary. After them came two more rooms that served as our bedrooms when it was not possible for us to sleep on the flat terrace roof above. The passage opened into a large hall, divided into three sections by two rows of carved pillars painted a bright primitive blue, the same demon-repelling blue that one saw in the temple. Right at the top of the hall there were small barred windows which gave on to the roof above. Often the monkeys, which used to travel in families from one rooftop to the next on their way from the forest to the Hill and back, would peer down inquisitively at us through the windows. In this hall, in the left-hand side section

between the wall and the first row of pillars we had placed a piano and some bookshelves; in the central section a settee, some arm-chairs and a small round table to create a drawing-room; and in the last section a plain dining table and chairs. It was quite a different scene in the houses of the neighbouring high priests and their families, for, from choice not necessity, they contained practically no furniture nor any decoration, not even on the walls which were bare except for the customary row of sacred pictures. On the far side of our hall a door led to the back of the house, where, surrounded by a verandah, there was an inner courtyard that was open to the sky, and in the middle of which there grew a sacred tulsi plant. The open courtyard was a replica on a small scale of the big enclosures in the Lord Arunachaleswar temple, all in keeping with the religious architectural principle of encompassing within earthen walls the infinite expanse of Brahman. Hence our house was built to be a 'House of the Open Space', which is what the Maharshi once called the Heart.

In the small back garden there were fresh-smelling plants such as lantana, as well as bushes of jasmine and passion flower no doubt planted by a former tenant to provide the offerings for the daily pujas to the household gods. There were also plantain trees, useful not only for their fruit but also for their supply of leaf-plates which, being fresh at every meal, ensured both hygiene and the purity required by caste Hindus. Wildlife in the form of small black pigs would occasionally make an appearance, squeezing under the back gate and scurrying around the garden intent on their own pursuits. Formerly, deer, bears and even elephants used to roam freely around Arunachala, as the medieval *Periya Puranam* relates, but since those days many wild animals have disappeared. There were still cheetahs and leopards though, and once someone brought a leopard cub to the dispensary to consult Suzanne on how to rear it. Its mother had been shot by Government hunters because leopards from the forest had taken to attacking the lorries plying on the Chengam road, one of the main commercial arteries of the town. Beyond our back gate it was open country.

Nearby, just outside the town limits, there was a hillock topped by an aboriginal village. At certain times of the year its inhabitants would celebrate the cult of an ancient Mother Goddess. All night long there would be drum-beating and ritual dancing that probably ended in mediumistic prophecy. In the morning the image of the deity would be taken in a small procession to a pond for immersion. A youth, bearing the image on his head and believing himself possessed by the goddess's spirit, would dance in ecstatic abandon down the Big Street followed rather helter-skelter by the other celebrants. The Brahmin priests, reading their newspapers on their front verandahs, would look up cursorily as autochthonous India made the small defiant parade of its cult before them, their Aryan conquerors.

Upstairs, on the terrace of our house there was only one small room which, situated next to the stairs, must have corresponded to the first-floor room in the house in Tiruchuli where Venkataraman attained Self-Realization. Suzanne used the room for meditation and it was there that she spent whatever free time she had. Although she lived as a householder, at heart she was still a 'homeless wanderer', sincerely detached from material comforts. Often, the only occupant of our 'drawing-room' downstairs was one of her patients, an elderly lady who sat with stiff dignity on the settee for an hour or so, because Suzanne believed her health would only improve if she could get away for a time from her family environment.

When Suzanne was upstairs, I would come up to be with her, occupying myself with reading or writing, or else practising on the terrace the ballet steps she had taught me. Or I would try to acquire the skill of dowsing with the help of a divining rod and a container of water. This came

so easily to Suzanne but I showed not the slightest talent for it. I was occasionally watched with some interest by the young Brahmin woman on the opposite rooftop, where she stayed during her 'unclean' days of the month, by tradition not allowed to enter the house proper where the household deities were kept.

Weather permitting, we slept outside the meditation room in the open. As we lay on our beds, the mosquito nets would billow out in the breeze like the sails of a boat. The distinctive smell of old stone, incense and burning oil reached us from the temple, as did the sounds that accompanied the *pujas*--the bursting of fire crackers, and the music of the ritual instruments that rose in a crashing crescendo as the moment of the god's manifestation approached. There were *pujas* for different moments in the deity's day, from the early morning awakening, through the bathing, the feeding, to the twilight worship at the time of the putting to rest at night. God was here among His people and the Divine life could be felt by his worshippers to be intertwined with their own.

The huge temple complex covering about ten hectares was only one street away from us. Of its three enclosures, the innermost contained the small original tenth-century temple which was now the Holy-of-Holies. The temple complex had grown over the centuries and the outermost enclosure, which had the highest gopuras or gate-towers, had been added in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Of these, it was the north-facing gopura which faced our house. Unlike the others, it did not carry the multitude of otherworldly beings that usually figure on those pyramidal edifices representing Mount Meru, the mythical mountain that rises from earth to heaven. Instead, it displayed orderly rows of empty niches or miniature pavilions; heaven's empty mansions so to speak. I do not know whether the construction had been halted due to war or the failing finances of kings, but the empty spaces seemed to state that even when there are no visible forms, the principles of order and organization that underlie them and make their appearance possible are always present in the Cosmos.

A Dravidian gopura rises tier upon tier, like the different stages of spiritual practice, the gods and goddesses they carry representing the powers and qualities attained at each stage. Above the last tier, there is the vimana, a curious tubular structure carved to resemble the bamboo roof of the antique predecessor of the temple, the shed of initiation where man met God. Apparently, it is simply to preserve the memory of the place of the highest meeting that the vimana has been raised to its elevated position since it serves no other purpose in the gopura. Surmounting the roof of the vimana on either side are the great solar Faces of Glory or Lion Faces. The sight of those solar signs high in the sky recall the Maharshi's words: 'The Sun of Realization shining in the sky of mind,' which is how he described the state of consciousness attained at the summit of one's spiritual ascent.

The Hill towered above both city and temple. Our house at the upper end of the Big Street was very close and we were familiar with its appearance at every moment of the day and in every season of the year. We went to sleep in its deep protective presence. We woke to see it in the lustral morning air when it glowed red like the dawn, 'aruna', which is its name. By midday, as the sun reached its zenith, the Hill became dazzlingly white in the intense heat, unbearable to look upon with the naked eye. During the rains its sides flowed with copious streams like Grace. On some monsoon nights I have seen the Hill stand thrillingly tall, withdrawn and mysterious behind a great swirling mantle of white mist hemmed with pale opals by the lights of the passing traffic.

The Hill was at its most dramatic on the last night of the ten-day *Kartikhai* festival. This was held at the conjunction of the pleiades with the full moon which usually fell in November, for on that night there took place the annual Festival of Light that centred on the Hill as the *Tejo Linga*. At sunset priests climbed up the mountain path bearing sacred fire taken from each of the temple shrines for lighting the hilltop flame. The long file of priestly fire-bearers followed by torch-bearing worshippers made a coiling garland of fire for the Hill. At the exact moment when the sun disappeared in the west and the moon appeared in the east, the priests ignited the butter, oil and ghee kept in the crater at the summit. The flames soared into the night sky and for many kilometres around Arunachala could be seen standing as the Fire of Siva. People revered it and worshipped it in their homes, in temples and at the Ashram, where, the moment it was seen, the continuous light or *akhanda jyoti* was lit facing the Maharshi. Then the priests performed *arti*, the waved offering of the fire, which ended with the lighting of the camphor flame. The devotees pressed forward, holding their hands out towards it, no doubt praying to be blessed or to become pure and ardent like the flame. In ancient Vedic ritual the officiating priest symbolically took the sacred fire into himself and externalized it at the next ceremony so that there would never be any discontinuity of the fire.

Rituals have their place in spiritual life and the Maharshi was always very reverent when they were performed. But he taught us that becoming one with the Flame was by incessant and arduous effort to uncover the fundamental I AM deep in our soul from beneath all the superfluous and extraneous thoughts that hide it from our sight. On one Festival of Light he remarked, 'It is the Self shining through which is the real continuous light.'

During worship he would sit mostly in silence, beautiful to see in his Self-knowledge. That look with which we were all familiar is spoken of in a verse of the *Chandogya Upanishad* (111,13, 7). It says: 'And the light that shines beyond the sky, on top of all, on every height, in the highest worlds beyond which there is none higher. That light is the same as the light in the heart of man...Beautiful to see and of great renown is he who knows this, who knows this!'

The most important part of the day for us was naturally the time we spent with the Maharshi at the Ashram. That was sometimes in the morning but more often in the late afternoon because of Suzanne's work. We liked to go there about five o'clock, so as to be on the Maharshi's path when he came down from the Hill after the twenty minute break that preceded the recitation of the Vedas. Those who lined his path were able to enjoy an intimate moment with him, often rewarded for their waiting with a look, a smile or a few words. It was while she was there that he asked an American visitor, Mrs Pauline Noye, 'Do you have more peace now?' She replied with a thankful 'Yes.' She had arrived in Tiruvannamalai some days earlier in anguish and mental torment, but since her first meeting with the Maharshi, had started to feel calmer so that the previous night she had been able to sleep well for the first time in weeks. On her return to America she would write about her experience in an article, commenting, 'The inner peace which is his is radiated to us all.'

Quite often the Maharshi would stop in the little Ashram garden to spend a few minutes with the animals there. He would feed and talk to the white peacocks which somebody had donated to the Ashram, or else watch the squirrels and bandicoots at play. He had a great fondness and respect for animals, feelings which they fully reciprocated. One of the early devotees wrote that he treated animals as if they were fellow ascetics, different only in having to work out their karma in animal bodies.

I can relate an amusing anecdote about Lakshmi, the Ashram cow. One evening when we had arrived at the Ashram late and the Maharshi and the devotees had already taken their place in the hall, Jeanne, who was walking briskly ahead of Suzanne and myself, felt herself being firmly pushed out of the way from behind. She turned round indignantly to find herself face to face with Lakshmi, who was also in a hurry to reach the Maharshi. Her shed was quite a distance away but frequently she would come all the way to see him. She would go up the steps to the hall, tread carefully on the Cuddapah tiles worn smooth and slippery by the feet of the devotees, come up to the couch where the Maharshi was sitting and lower her head to receive his caress or place her head at his feet. Then she would turn and with dignity like an elderly devotee make her way out.

In the hall I would observe what was going on. Many sat with their eyes closed in meditation, but I did not meditate since I did not know how. Mostly, I would just concentrate my thoughts on making my mind a fit vessel for the Maharshi's power and grace. I never felt left out. I knew that the Maharshi was there for me too, at my level. Not everybody who meditated knew how to do it properly. One devotee was afflicted with a nervous tic on the left side of his face while meditating, another bent over backwards more and more as he went into a trance. The Maharshi would advise them and help them to correct their faults. Nor, as I learnt, did meditation always give the right results. Once a devotee returned from his village excited by the news that a man there who had been practising for years had acquired supernatural powers and found that now he had only to raise his arm to project a beam of light. The Maharshi commented what a waste of time his years of meditation had been if that was all that he had achieved.

Sometimes devotees in the hall sang some sacred verses or recited a passage from the Scriptures. If they made a mistake, the Maharshi would gently correct them. He had a remarkable knowledge of the Scriptures, both as to content and meaning, owing to the many passages he had been asked to translate or explain by attendants or devotees. He had picked up a number of languages in the same way and could compose verse in the appropriate metre in Tamil, Telegu, Sanskrit and Malayalam. The years he had spent in silence and samadhi had not impaired his intellect in any way. In fact, they seemed to have enhanced it.

It was in 1943 to the best of my recollection, that a young European woman came to visit the Ashram. Since I was spending Christmas in Tiruvannamalai that year, my mother invited some of the Ashramites including this young woman home for a meal. While she was with us I noticed a strange look in her eyes. Nothing in her behaviour, however, gave us any indication of what was to follow. When she got back to her small cottage near the Ashram she found that all her belongings had been stolen. Theft in those parts was not infrequent since the surrounding population was very poor. The shock she got when she found all her things had gone seriously disturbed the balance of her mind, and we heard the next day that she had been found lying naked and unconscious in the ditch that ran along the temple wall. She was taken to the hospital in Vellore for treatment. I saw her again at the Ashram a year or two later and she looked a different person. I think that the Maharshi's instruction on how to abide in the still centre of oneself, away from the turmoil of thought and emotion, must have helped her, as it did many others.

Once there was something of a scandal at the Ashram when it became known that a middle-aged devotee had been found in a field alone with a six-year-old girl. Her mother confided to Suzanne that fortunately the little girl had not been harmed in any way. The erring

devotee was taken to the Maharshi who talked to him in private. I do not know what the Maharshi said, but I know that according to his teaching, sin, being an unruly impulse of the ego, is fundamentally ignorance of oneself and for ignorance there is the cure of Self-enquiry. As the Maharshi says in *Who Am I?*, 'However, sinful a person may be, if he would stop wailing inconsolably, "Alas, I am a sinner; how shall I attain Liberation?" and, casting away even the thought that he is a sinner, if he would zealously carry on meditation on the Self, he would most assuredly get reformed.' Which undoubtedly is what happened in the case of this devotee for he eventually became a valued and well-liked members of the Ashram community.

I remember an ascetic who used to come and visit the Maharshi occasionally. He would prostrate full-length before him with great ardour and the Maharshi would sometimes glance with some tenderness at him. But once when the ascetic rose from his salutation I saw something new, like a flash of joyful understanding pass between them. I did not know what it meant, but I have since come to believe that it was the renunciate's recognition of the unlimited freedom enjoyed by the Maharshi, and the Maharshi's acknowledgement of it. There he was, a virtual prisoner of the couch on which he stayed in public view all day, and sometimes on festivals part of the night also; a prisoner of his extended 'family', by then numbering thousands worldwide, who asked him for salvation, guidance, peace, help, comfort, strength, grace, and so on; a prisoner, too, of the Ashram Management's rules and controls, which for reasons of safety controlled everything that went on, even which visitors were allowed to come to him. Yet he was free, gloriously free, because, as he once affirmed, he lived in the Ultimate Truth, which was all that he had and all that he wanted.

An Australian visitor asked the Maharshi why Love was not included in the Vedantic Trinity of *Sat-Chit-Ananda*: Being-Consciousness-Bliss (or Peace). The Maharshi replied, 'Peace is Love.' Hence, in his teaching Love was not separate from the Supreme Reality, and was also a natural attribute of the Self. Questions about love were very rare at the Ashram, and to the best of my knowledge love does not figure in the index section of works written about him. The reason for this is that *Advaitist* commentators interpreted his teaching according to the conventional *Advaitic* or Non-dual Path of Transcendental Knowledge, *Jnana*, on which the final achievement comes at a point when absolute or non-dual union with God is realized. Love was considered by them to belong to the path of *Bhakti* or Devotion, a lower path in their view since it posited an 'Other'-- the Loved One -- and therefore had not gone beyond duality. However, the Maharshi's teaching, like that of all great Masters, could not be confined within any conventional framework.

In his five spontaneously composed poems to Arunachala, he revealed not only a heart overflowing with love for the sacred Hill, but also his perception of the Hill as Love Itself. In one hymn he said, 'Let me melt with Love in Thee Who art Love Itself,' and in another, he addressed the Hill with the words, 'Kinder even than one's own mother...Such is Thy love!' When he addressed the Hill as Mother, it was to speak, not of power which is usually associated with the Universal Mother or Sakti, but of Love and Grace. Doubts disturbed the minds of some of the Ashramites; some asked themselves, how could someone who addressed Arunachala in terms of love be an *Advaitist*? At the height of the controversy, one of them declared in an article which appeared in the journal *The Path Divine* that the famous work, the *Ramana Gita*, had been written by Sastri with the intent to prove that the Maharshi was not fully *Advaitist*. And one day in the hall, an old devotee asked him to put an end to the controversy by himself telling them what he was. The Maharshi replied that the love that was in him for the Self, was the Self, 'for the Self is Love. God is Love.' He, unlike the questioners,

had had the experience of Self-realization and could speak of a love which surpassed duality and objectivity.

Silence, called the language of the Self, is also Love, for in true silence there is no trace of ego, no conflict. The Maharshi himself once gave the definition of silence as the embodiment of love. We owe to the careful reporting of the devotee, Suri Nagama, the details of the occasion on which this occurred. As she relates in a letter to her brother dated 16 February 1949. (published in *Letters from Sri Ramanashram*, 1962), a devotee was proposing to donate a cover made of brass and coated with silver for the *Sri Chakra*, an important cult object in the Mother's temple (about which I shall write again further on) but the Ashram authorities were of the opinion that one made of solid silver would be more appropriate. Unable to come to an agreement the devotee and a representative of the Ashram authorities came before the Maharshi and requested him to tell them what he would like best. The Maharshi rebuked them quite sharply, saying, 'What Bhagavan likes best is to remain silent without doing anything. If people with different opinions give up their *silence which is the embodiment of love*, and come to me and say "We will do this," and "We will do that," and enquire of me what I like better, what can I say? If you all agree upon a course of action and then ask me for my opinion, I would then say it is all right. But when you are of two opinions why do you come to me and ask me which I like better? What I like is, to know who I am and to remain as I am with the knowledge that what is to happen will happen and what is not to happen will not happen.'

His silence was not a withdrawal or an absence of communication; on the contrary it transmitted a power which calmed the mind; brought solace and knowledge. There was no need for any other action on his part except to be there and to convey the silence that, as love, was healing and transformative. He would not have been there with us had he chosen to follow the *Advaitist* usage of leaving behind society so as to be alone with the One Alone. His own paternal uncle, after taking to the life of an anchorite, disappeared from his village never to be seen again by those who knew him. The Maharshi, after living as an anchorite in the caves of the Hill, made the return from seclusion to society, in that he allowed the Ashram to evolve around him. Yet, at a certain level, it is true to say that he never did leave the cave of Arunachala.

The renunciate tradition in India is very old, but historians like M. Biardeau tell us that it gained considerable momentum in the second and third centuries BC. At that time, many Hindus left temples and towns for mountain caves and forests, preferring to take an inward contemplative way to spiritual fulfilment in isolation. For them, the temple fire rituals were replaced by the sacrifice of the self on the fire altar of the heart. However, there always remained a close connection between the lone ascetic in the cave and the temple priest who stayed in the midst of the community and acted for the community. In one of the caves of Arunachala there is evidence carved in stone of the link which existed between cave and temple. For the carvings of its pillars and its mural band of animal heads, which have been dated to the tenth century by a French scholar, are exactly similar and are hence contemporary to those carved on the original temple in the big temple complex below. Thus, with intent the temple is in the cave, the symbol of the One; whilst the cave, symbolized by the dark imageless space of the innermost shrine, is in the temple which represents the community of beings. All are in the One, and the One is in all, yet beyond all. Those who know this are rightly called Seers, for they see the fundamental oneness of the whole of existence. For them, no more irreconcilable contraries exist, such as inner and outer reality, transcendence and immanence, seclusion and society, and even Guru and devotee. As the Maharshi once said, 'In reality, there

are no “others” to be helped.’

In the evening, after leaving the Ashram we usually went for a walk around the Hill. It was only rarely that we made the entire Giripradakshina or circumambulation of the Hill along the thirteen-kilometre encircling road. It is traditionally performed following the movement of the planets around the unmoving sun, which means keeping the Hill always at one’s right. The eight cardinal points are marked by shrines, tanks and *mandapams*, for those edifices date from an earlier medieval period when the *Vaisnava* faith was in the ascendant over the *Saiva* faith, and the Hill was then regarded as the Wheel of Time in the hands of Mahavisnu, the Lord of the Sun.

Years later, I was talking to some French people who had just visited Tiruvannamalai, and they asked me what I had seen when performing the *pradakshina*, as they were afraid they might have missed something. I told them that as the Maharshi had advised the devotees, we did not make the circuit in an outward-looking way, but walked very slowly, trying to keep our minds on the Self, which is the inner Arunachala.

Early devotees, like B. V. Narasimha Swami, tell us that until 1926 the Maharshi made the *pradakshina* of the Hill several times a year, accompanied by a group of his devotees. He would take the whole night to complete the circuit, sometimes longer, for he walked most of the way in the deeply absorbed state of *samadhi*. When recalling the happiness and pleasure they felt when making the *pradakshina*, the Maharshi specially mentioned time. He said that the usual constraints of time were avoided, for they started when they felt like it, stopped when they were tired, cooked and ate when they were hungry. Since there was no compulsion to reach a particular place at a particular time, no anxiety or preoccupation came to mar their concentration. And with concentration came blissful absorption in the timeless Self. Thus it is possible to be liberated from time even as one treads the Wheel of Time.

There were many monuments of religious and historical interest in Tiruvannamalai and my mother liked to show them to me. I remember particularly the hollow stone sphinxes along the *pradakshina* road, each standing next to its purificatory tank. These sphinxes appear to have the head of a lion, but in fact they have the same countenance as the great Faces of Glory situated at the summit of the temple. These, as Stella Kramrich points out, are composed of three faces: the face of man, the face of the lion representing the Sun or Supreme Spirit, and the face of the dragon who, as the Destroyer of the Universe, stands for Transcendental Wisdom. All three are superimposed on, and hence overwhelm the just discernible Death’s head underlying them. Today, these enigmatic sphinxes are used as mere shrines at which pilgrims, after taking a bath in the tank, make their offerings to Arunachala. But did they have a more important function in the past? For their symbology suggest that in long-forgotten rites they may have been ‘gateways’ to the Sun, places of initiation where the neophytes, after being cleansed of sin and animal nature, received the highest knowledge that led to immortality in the Sun.

The area surrounding the Hill is like a palimpsest, for besides the *Vaisnava* and *Saiva* monuments, much older forms of worship survive, such as the cult of fertility trees. To this day, women who wish for a child go to such a tree, usually a numba tree, and tie to its branches a strip of cloth in the shape of a cradle, much as in ancient Celtic practice. Nearby there is usually a small stone chamber or dolmen through whose narrow central channel the women pass in a re-enactment of birth, yet another way of awakening the life-giving force of the Great Mother of all beings.

The vegetation of the forest offers little more than prickly pears, wood-apples, bark and leaves for the sustenance of life, so it is surprising that *sadhus* manage to live there. We knew a venerable old ascetic called Siva who lived alone in the forest off the Chengam road. Some of his visitors had built him a stone platform or bench on which he sat in the meditative position. On one of our visits he instructed me in the age-old yoga of achieving mental concentration by linking the repetition of the sacred syllable *Om* to the respiration. For my initiation I had to get down with him into a narrow pit where I sat facing him cross-legged. He smelt, not unpleasantly, of oil and the wild. I cannot tell what benefit I would have derived from the Yogic practice which he assured me would bring me liberation within six months, since I did not keep it up. Perhaps this was because my faith in him was eroded when he asked us, in my opinion betraying some envy, why the Maharshi attracted so many people to his Ashram, while so few came to see him. And then, once when we had brought him a bunch of bananas, he told Suzanne that the next time she came she should bring him a good warm blanket. With the severity of the young, I was shocked--it was impossible to imagine the Maharshi making such a request--but my mother, more tolerant than myself, brought him the blanket on our next visit.

Exploring the dense forest on the northern side of the Hill, we made the discovery of a temple which for some unknown reason had been abandoned by man and allowed to fall into ruin. Nature was reasserting itself and a tree had pushed its way through the domed roof. We stood before the temple for some time, letting our imagination conjure up its deities and rites, but we did not venture in since it was likely to have become a home to snakes, scorpions or other beasts. The light filtered down to us through the foliage of the thick canopy of trees. When we found a place where we could look above it, we saw Arunachala very near, looking much more austere than from any other aspect and steeply rising to its high brilliant peak pointing into the sky.

Suzanne's favourite place for meditation was on a spur of Arunachala under the Bodhi tree that faced the Unnamalai tank. The large tank stood before a small shrine and had long stone steps that must once have been trodden by crowds of pilgrims. Now, we always saw it deserted. It was a lovely spot, especially at sunset when it was bathed in warm colours. There was no sound other than the constant susurration of cicadas, the occasional flap of bright wings over the treetops or the lonely call of a koel.

The atmosphere was replete with the spirit of the highest endeavour, since in a Puranic story about the origin of Arunachala, this was where Parvati, the bride of Lord Siva, performed the last part of her penance to atone for her sin, which can be described as an action unbecoming of who she was. In a moment of play she had put both her hands over Lord Siva's eyes, whereupon he had withdrawn into himself in deep trance, thereby depriving her and the world of his sight. Parvati, determined to overcome the separation from her Lord, persevered for aeons with her *tapas* of mortification until she became all dried up and her body was reduced to skin and bones. Artists for centuries have depicted her in a state of extreme emaciation, fondly investing her image with the qualities of sacrifice, devotion and courage that lend beauty even to those who are most worn by the trials of life. In the end, in her search for a means of gaining back her Lord's attention she came to Tiruvannamalai. She met there the Sage Gotama Muni who taught her how to make her thought of Siva one-pointed like an arrow. After assiduous practice, her thought was at last able to pierce into his heart. Roused from his self-absorption, Siva opened his eyes and saw her. To commemorate his return to awareness and love, he appeared as an infinite Pillar of Light and Fire, thereby granting her the sight of Ultimate Truth.

Knowing now that she has never been separated from her Divine Lord because she was inherently one with him, she merged into him as half his being. The Pillar of Light and Fire is still there, we are told, but in the form of the hill of earth and stone called Arunachala, so that ordinary people might see it and be blessed in preparation for the final *darshan*, the direct perception of its true nature.

Suzanne liked this story, perhaps because it bore some resemblance to the theme of one of her earliest dances, 'The Invocation to Varouna', in which the maiden implores the god of the sky to see her lest she be yielded to death. To be seen by the reigning authority in her life had indeed always been important to Suzanne. Now she wanted to be sure that she had the attention of the Maharshi, and that he would watch over her as Masters do, and guide her from ignorance to Self-knowledge.

Departure from the Sri Ramanashram

The end of 1945 found Suzanne in an anxious and dejected frame of mind. Although she had been at the Sri Ramanashram for nearly ten years, and in spite of the effort she had put into her spiritual practice, she did not feel that she had come any closer to being accepted as a disciple by the Maharshi. In fact, it seemed to her that the distance between the Maharshi and herself had increased rather than decreased during the last couple of years.

It added to her unhappiness that she was in frequent conflict with the Sarvadhikari, especially over what she saw as the discriminatory treatment of women at the Ashram, though it must be said that their disagreements never became bitter or vindictive on either side. There was still no guesthouse for women at the Ashram (although one would eventually be built mainly through the donations of some of the wealthier women devotees). Different regulations for men and women were still in force. Women were obliged to leave the Ashram before the men in the evening, and they were not allowed to take the evening meal with the Maharshi, nor to sit facing him in the hall (when for a short time they were allowed to do so, they were allocated a place right at the back of the hall, behind the men). The Maharshi did not want the devotees to go against the rules made by the Management. He, himself, observed them although he could not always have been in favour of them. He did not engage in debate, since he knew that it only inflamed passion and led to endless argument. In controversial issues he preferred to keep silent or to convey the truth through symbols (I will speak of a notable instance further on). But sometimes he set an example as he did by instructing women on a par with men, thereby establishing that they were as capable as men of reaching the highest levels of achievement. Indeed, his mother had been the first of his pupils to attain Self-realization.

Suzanne also suffered because of an unfortunate episode that started at the Ashram when she had come into conflict with one of the Ashramites. A woman devotee interpreted a remark made by Suzanne in the hall as a criticism of her spiritual practice, a particularly sensitive subject with this ambitious devotee. The misunderstanding turned what had hitherto been a friend into a dangerous enemy. Soon after, some very ugly rumours about Suzanne started to circulate among the Ashramites. There was no doubt that a determined attempt was being made by this woman and her coterie to destroy whatever prestige Suzanne enjoyed as a member of the early community of European devotees at the Ashram.

Sadly, some of the Ashramites suffered from a disease of the psyche which not infrequently afflicted those grouped around a Master, in that each one wanted to be recognized as the devotee closest to him, or most in his favour. This feeling was perhaps more pronounced at the Sri Ramanashram than in other Ashrams because there were no Elders or any prominent woman devotee raised to the position of 'Mother'. Hence the ambitious few resorted to creating their own importance and surrounded themselves with those prepared to support them. As a result, there existed cliques which engaged in sometimes quite vicious warfare against each other, or against anyone who stood outside all cliques, like Suzanne, when they considered that person to be a threat to their superiority. The Maharshi's disapproval of their behaviour was expressed in one word, 'Mischief', according to Mrs Lucia Osborne, in her editorial in the *Mountain Path* of October 1971. She writes, 'All troubles...come from self-centredness of the ego which does the mischief. Hate takes the place of love and the most unlikely object will be chosen to vent it on. Effort, instead of being towards *sadhana* will be swallowed up in an all-consuming surge of egoism unrestrained by considerations for the injury or hurt caused to others with scant regard for facts.'

Suzanne felt that she could have borne the pain of her situation with greater courage if she had been sure that the ordeal she was passing through was but a means to the end that her Master had in view for her. His Initiation would have been an end worth waiting for. But that was not on offer, at least not in a formal way. For the Maharshi, unlike other Gurus, categorically declared that he was not a Guru and that he did not give the Initiation to anyone. He agreed that Initiation from the Guru was necessary to lift a person from banal to spiritual life, but at the same time he said that the Guru did not always declare himself to be one, and even that the Guru did not necessarily appear in human form. When the Maharshi was told by a visitor that he was reputed not to have had a Guru, he replied, 'I might have had at some time or another. And didn't I sing hymns to Arunachala?' This low-key reference to Initiation could not have been further removed from what Suzanne imagined about the marvellous act by which the Master's supramundane power and knowledge were transmitted to his disciple, a concept full of beautiful imagery, sentiment and inspiration which she had cherished since her teens.

The Maharshi's teaching was, rather, that the Initiation was the work of the subjective Spirit within, of which the outer Master was the manifestation. This broader definition of Initiation makes it possible for me to ask myself whether Suzanne had not been initiated a long time before, when as a young girl she had felt the first stirring of inner intuition regarding the Highest Authority after which the worldly life and its ambitions would never again hold any attraction for her. Since then, there had been other events such as the experience of nearness to the Lord that had come to her in a Himalayan monastery on *Vesak* night, and the feeling of being 'lifted far above the world' when she became receptive to the unique and rare Yogic powers of the Maharshi.

If Suzanne personally did not rate any happening that had taken place so far in her life as an Initiation, it was because she could not see any positive change in herself resulting from it. Yet when the Maharshi once commented that progress was not always known to the person in whom it had taken place, he surely meant that Initiation could be the start of the gradual maturing of one's understanding, a quiet inner transformation that was no less real for not being as yet manifest.

One of Suzanne's good friends at the Ashram was Major Alan Chadwick, an Englishman who had come to the Ashram in 1935. In 1940, he went through a phase of doubt wondering whether he had done right to stay on so long at the Ashram when it meant renouncing all ties with his country and family, if no initiation was to be got from the Maharshi. He therefore tried to obtain from the Maharshi an explicit statement as to whether or not he had disciples. The Maharshi's reply to his question was that since the Guru saw no difference between himself and others he could not say that they were disciples and that he was a Guru. But from their viewpoint of duality, since they saw all as different from themselves, the Guru-disciple relationship existed and the Guru bestowed initiations on them by look, touch or silence. The Maharshi then added that to the devotee, the Grace of the Guru was like an ocean. 'If he comes with a cup he will get only a cupful. It is no use complaining of the niggardliness of the ocean: the bigger the vessel the more he will be able to carry. It is entirely up to him.'

Suzanne had never doubted the Maharshi's ability to bestow Grace but she had wondered why he seemed to withhold it from her. When he said that there was no limit to the Guru's Grace, and that it was all up to the devotee, she understood that the limit existed only in the devotee's mind and was conditional upon his knowledge of the Guru. For the devotee made the Guru in

the image of himself with his human limitations, whereas the real Guru was the immanent Supreme Being whose Grace was infinite. On one occasion the Maharshi had affirmed the interiority of Grace in these words: ‘...the moment you effect the subsidence or merging of the mind into its Source, Grace rushes forth as a spring within you’.

Suzanne could grasp the Maharshi’s reasons for not giving the Initiation. However, understanding his teaching was not enough; she had to accept it to the point of totally surrendering her life and future to him without receiving any assurance that he would keep her in his care and her progress in his hands.

Major Chadwick made just such an act of faith. He abandoned all thought of leaving in search of another Guru and would remain at the Ashram even after the Maharshi’s *Maha Samadhi*, in fact until his own passing in 1962. He had always felt a strong spiritual attraction to the Maharshi, and said more than once, ‘he is as a magnet to my metal’. Now he surrendered himself unquestioningly to that force.

It was more difficult for Suzanne to stay on. She had so much need of all that she had long associated with the idea of discipleship, guidance and above all the higher form of the relationship of love that was said to exist between Master and disciple. Undoubtedly she also sought the valorization or confirmation of worth which the Master’s acceptance of herself as his disciple would have meant. Moreover, she could not see that her *sadhana* had made her a better person, since she had come to a point when she harboured feelings of anger and bitterness. She had admired loftiness in her Master. Now, suddenly, loftiness was too hard for her to bear. It was apparent to her therefore that in her present state of mind she could not stay on at the Sri Ramanashram any longer. She had always had, and much more strongly of late, an impelling sense of urgency. Time was passing, and she was afraid that if she did not press on towards her goal she would become incapacitated by illness or old age and lose the chance of achieving something worthwhile in her lifetime.

Therefore, after much hesitation and soul-searching on her part, she decided to go and visit another renowned Guru of South India, Swami Ramdas, whom her friend Jean Herbert had described as the ‘Apostle of Love’. He had told her that Swami Ramdas gave the initiation readily to all those who sought it, so she would go and ask him for it in the hope that it would help her.

On 20 December 1945 she came to the Ashram to take her leave of the Maharshi. Sorrowfully, she told him that she was going away. The Maharshi did not reply. But then something very strange happened, for she saw the Maharshi as Dakshinamurti, the Divine Inner Guru who teaches the unutterable Truth in the silence of the Spirit. As she would write, ‘When I was talking to him his appearance changed and I thought that Dakshinamurti was sitting before me. In the silence I heard, “There is no separation, all Gurus are one. They are the indwelling Self of everyone. I shall ever remain as the Jewel shining in the lotus of your heart.”’

It seems that at this moment, the Maharshi’s teaching and the Rinpoche’s wisdom words, which were still deep in her mind, combined to take her beyond appearance and objectivity to an experience of the Master within.

The Abode of Bliss

The Anandashram, or Abode of Bliss, was situated in the South Kanara District, on the range of hills that runs along the Malabar coast. The nearest station was Kanhangad, and when Suzanne arrived after a long and tedious journey she was glad to find that two disciples of Swami Ramdas had come to meet her.

They travelled quite a long way in the Ashram cart drawn by a sturdy little white bullock. Suzanne would give the following description of her journey: 'I left the town and slowly entered the countryside, a vast scenery unfolding itself. As I was going up the hill I could see also the sea shining in the distance. Suddenly the cart turned and took a beautiful straight road leading to the Ashram; I alighted at the gate and found myself enveloped in an apotheosis of colours. It was the sunset hour. Turning round I saw, at a distance, higher up, facing the central path, a mysterious temple...the atmosphere was full of peace and blessedness.'

She went up the steps of the temple and found there Swami Ramdas, 'a marvellous being, his eyes radiating love'. A few days later she would receive the initiation from him. His mode of initiation was to transmit to the disciple the mantra that was simply, 'Ram', the Name of God. In practice, the mantra was not to be mechanically repeated but was to be used to humbly invoke God and to surrender oneself to Him. Having received this mantra-initiation from his saintly father, Swami Ramdas in turn bestowed it on his spiritual children, who were all those who earnestly desired to receive it from him.

The temple, or Bhajan Mandir as it was called, was the hub of the Ashram. It was where Swami Ramdas resided and where the disciples met with him and sang the sacred hymns together. On the wall there was an inscription which Ramdas pointed out to Suzanne. It read, 'Behold! Ram's Will alone is supreme, bend and bow to that Will.' At the Anandashram, Suzanne would find the inspiration to renew her vow to surrender to the Divine Will. In the article that she wrote for the *Silver Jubilee Souvenir* of Swami Ramdas, she compared the two great Masters, Sri Ramana Maharshi and Swami Ramdas in these words: 'When I left Ramana I left Mount Kailas for the Ganges. Ramana can be compared to Mount Kailas on account of his transcendental Realization, the sublimity and loftiness of his influence. Ramdas is comparable to the Ganges, descending from the Himalayas and giving itself to all without distinction.'

The Path of Swami Ramdas was that of love and devotion for God, on which relationship was of prime importance. The whole purpose of *sadhana*, the disciples were told, was to recover man's original relationship of love with God, since it was because they had forgotten it that they suffered and felt isolated in this world. The first step towards that recovery was to enter into a filial relationship with the Guru, God's representative on earth. Indeed, they found in Swami Ramdas, whom they affectionately called 'Papa', an ideal father; loving, accessible, caring, guiding, at times even playful. After the numerous regulations that the Management of the Ramanashram had introduced to keep the growing number of devotees at a safe distance from the Maharshi, the intimate rapport that existed here between Swami Ramdas and his family of sixty or so resident disciples made Suzanne exclaim joyfully in the same article, 'We can approach the Guru, talk freely to him, sit near him, take care of him, serve him, nurse him, touch him...I do not mind anymore if I attain liberation or not. I only wish to remain a disciple, a child all my life.'

All the beauty and grace of the spiritual child that one could acquire on this Path was seen in

Mataji Krishna Bai, a former disciple of Swami Ramdas, who, on attaining Liberation, had been raised by him to the position of Mother of the Ashram. She herself, though, did not claim that title. When addressed as 'Mother' she was wont to reply, 'No, no, I am only your child; I am the child of all and nothing more.' She was of such simplicity and love that she would perform any task, even the most menial, if it could be of help to someone, and was not above nursing the sick herself, or even picking up their soiled clothes from the floor, as Suzanne once saw her doing.

Ramdas was thirty-eight years old when his soul had been set ablaze with a passionate love of God by the single word 'Ram'. He had left the worldly life and for years had wandered as a *sannyasin* in search of Ram. In his divine obsession he saw Him in the man who walked by his side, in the woman who gave him his meal, even in the snake which coiled itself round his foot in his meditation cave. At last, impelled by the Power that had completely mastered him, he reached a Vision in which he saw God in every being, and in everything. He passed on his wonderful discovery to his disciples, enjoining them to love God by serving Him in His creation.

The Ashram was accordingly organized to render as much service to others as possible. All the disciples were allotted tasks to that end, in keeping with their abilities. The Ashram workers ran a school for the children of the region, and since most of them were very poor, the children were not only taught, but also bathed, clothed and fed. There was a craft and weaving centre providing training and employment to the local cultivators and their families during the slack seasons. There was also a dispensary where medical care was given free. Since it had been run by a trained nurse, Suzanne was immediately put in charge of it. As the only doctor in the region she had to deal with all kinds of cases, including work accidents, some of them very serious. According to the dispensary records, in the first twelve months of her stay she treated over 18,000 patients. But she spoke of her work with humility. After observing that Mataji was present whenever there was a crisis, pain, birth or death, she went on to say, 'I feel that compared to the great power of love and service radiated by Mataji and Papa, my capacity to love is very poor and that I must try in my small way to walk in their footsteps.'

She often repeated in her letters to us that the disciples were full of joy. That was not surprising since they lived together as one family with no class, caste, sex or religious discriminations to mar their unity; an achievement based on the deep foundation of harmony provided by Swami Ramdas's doctrine that tolerance and freedom were of the essence of the Spirit. Of course, not all the disciples were able to fully live that ideal. Some had the defects that were the counterparts of their virtues. For instance, like children they would occasionally bicker among themselves, or carry tales about each other to their 'parents', who kept a caring and careful eye on everything that went on in the Ashram. However, enough of the Master's teaching was assimilated and practised to create a very special atmosphere. As one visitor said, it was as if joy breathed in the very air of the place.

Six months into Suzanne's stay at the Anandashram, in June 1947, my father, who had risen to the rank of Lt. Colonel and was then CO of the British-Indian military hospital at Nowsheera, resigned his commission for health reasons four years before he was due for retirement. He came down to Madras to meet Suzanne and myself, and we stayed together for a couple of weeks at the Bosotto Hotel, where they had held their wedding reception in 1927.

He had not yet made up his mind how and where to spend the years of his retirement. My

mother suggested that he stay on in India and that they practise medicine there together. Before their marriage, helping him in his work for the people of India was she kind of life she had hoped to have with him. Had she not written to her future mother-in-law, 'There is a tremendous need of workers in India and it is the duty of those who have (something) to give to remain and work in the country.'? My father told her that he had to attend to various matters in Europe, but that he would return by the end of the year. In the event, he never did return. He settled happily in Menton in the south of France, and would remain there for twenty-seven years until his death in 1974, a popular and respected resident of that little town.

After her meeting with Ranjit, she stayed a year longer at the Anandashram. The most important development for her during her stay was that her feeling of the Inner Guru, which had come to her at the moment of parting with the Maharshi, grew stronger as the weeks passed. She became less preoccupied with the thought that she was inadequately equipped in love and strength for carrying out her work as she felt more and more that it was not she who was doing the work, but the indwelling Lord. As she wrote, 'The driving force of His Love takes hold of us. We forget ourselves. It is He who works, and it is He who loves.'

The day came when she was ready to go back to the Maharshi. It is true that she had declared soon after arriving at the Anandashram that she did not mind any more if she attained liberation or not and that she only wished to remain a disciple, a child all her life. But I think the very fact that she mentioned this betrays that deep down she did mind, for from the start what she had sought was maturity of understanding. Her chosen Path had been that of Knowledge, and if she were to abandon it now she would always harbour a sense of failure.

She was very grateful to Swami Ramdas for having taken her in when she had needed it, and through his teaching of love, helping her to overcome the negative feelings that had depleted her energies. He seemed to know quite well why she had come and that when she felt ready she would return to the Maharshi. When someone at the Ashram brought the news of a robbery in the neighbourhood, he remarked, 'Disciples, too, are thieves for they come to rob the Guru's force.' At which Suzanne exclaimed, 'But that is only natural, isn't it? A disciple must recharge his spiritual dynamo with the force of the Master,' and Swami Ramdas smilingly agreed.

On the morning of her departure she went to the temple where Swami Ramdas awaited her. He gave her his last instruction, then placed his hands on her head and blessed her as a father blesses his child before she leaves the parental home to go out into the world.

In spite of the early hour, Mataji walked down with her to the gate of the Ashram compound. They were followed by a procession of fellow-disciples and patients who had come to see her off. At the gate Mataji gave her a packet of food thoughtfully prepared for her journey. After saying farewell, Suzanne got into the little Ashram bullock-cart and started down the hill. For a long time, until the road turned, she could see them standing there still waving to her. She had been happy with them in the Abode of Bliss nestled among the Kanara hills. Yet she felt she must return to try to follow Arunachala's path to the end, however lonely and rugged the way might prove to be.

Last Days and Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi

Suzanne took up her residence in the Big Street once more, this time at house number 59, and resumed her medical work in Tiruvannamalai and its surrounding villages. Many of her former patients flocked back to her. Jeanne, knowing about her financial difficulties, wrote giving her advice: 'See to it this time that they [the patients] pay you.' But it was not Suzanne's natural reaction when confronted with helpless need, and the pattern of her practice continued much as before.

She faced re-entering Ashram life without unduly dreading the enmity of those who were not well disposed towards her. It had occurred to her that the best way to deal with them was to subdue her self-assertiveness as much as possible so as to be less of a target for their attacks. That tactic would have good results.

On the other hand, having come to know from her friends that those same people had spoken of her going to Swami Ramdas as if it were a betrayal of the Maharshi, she was concerned to let him know that her devotion and reverence for him had never diminished. She expressed her feelings in a message that she wrote on the inside cover of a beautiful leather writing-case which she presented to him on the day she returned to the Ashram. As a rule, the Maharshi did not accept expensive presents, and in most cases they were simply returned by him to the office through one of the attendants. He preferred to receive simple, inexpensive offerings which could be shared with the other devotees; fruit for instance. On a previous occasion she had brought back from a visit to Madras a silk cover for his couch but he had refused it saying that it was too luxurious for him. She, understandably, had wanted to give him only the best. This time, when she offered him the letter-writing case, he did take the plain block of paper from inside but returned the leather cover. I think that that was painful for her, although she did not say anything about it. At any rate, she kept the cover inscribed with her message and I found it among her things after her death.

The Maharshi acted to help each of those who came to him in a way that he knew was best for the particular individual. In the case of Suzanne, the stern refusal to let her feel that he had accepted her as a disciple, with all that that relationship meant to her, was to be his last lesson. One surely given out of care for her, since he could tell she had still not turned her mind definitively towards the Guru within her own heart. For in absolute surrender to the Will of the Immanent Lord, there is no plea for guidance, or for acceptance, or even for fulfilment.

There were people--I was one of them--who found protection, happiness and peace with the Maharshi. For Suzanne, the experience of being with the Maharshi was like going through the fire. There must have been times when she wondered how much more suffering she had to endure before what was wanted of her was done. On the flyleaf of a book that she gave me at this time she wrote the question that she must have been asking herself, 'Hast Thy Will be done in me?' It has occurred to me that the degree of suffering she went through was the measure of the achievement her Master envisaged for her.

It was in the middle of the 1948 that I asked the Maharshi to guide me, as I was in a predicament. I did not know what career to choose now that I had passed my Intermediate Science or Pre-medical examinations. I had grown up with the ideal of becoming a doctor like my parents, and my father, especially, expected me to follow in his footsteps. However, as I prepared to enter medical college I realized that I had neither the temperament nor the abilities

required for that profession. My worry was that perhaps I was simply lacking in self-confidence. The Maharshi read the little note that I had written asking for his guidance. He said at once to a devotee standing beside him who translated for me, 'Whatever she chooses will be right decision.' I chose not to study medicine, but to read Arts instead, and I know that I took the right course then. The Maharshi very rarely advised someone on what decision to take (Jeanne's case was a notable exception). I think the reason for that was that had he given me advice (which I was sure to have followed), it would have been a further constraint on my freedom of choice. Enough the constraints of family expectations and of romantic ideals; I was to be left free to exercise my judgement and to act according to my deepest inclination, something as basic to a successful career as it was to spiritual progress.

Towards the end of the year there began an event that would affect us all. This was the start of the final illness of the Maharshi and the sight of him marked by pain and wasted by disease more and more. He had been in poor health since the end of 1945, and when Suzanne returned from the Anandashram she was dismayed to see how frail he looked. In November 1948 a small nodule appeared below his left elbow. The Ashram doctors were of the opinion that it should be removed surgically. We know from one of the devotees present at the time that the Sarvadhikari came into the hall to speak to the Maharshi about the removal of the growth, and that the Maharshi said, 'Do not touch it, it is best left alone'. The Sarvadhikari, however, acting with best of intentions, gave the Ashram doctors permission to operate. The Maharshi did not oppose that decision and the operation was duly performed.

For about a month all seemed to be well and there was general relief that the ailment had been cured. Suzanne, I know, did not share their complacency. No one had asked for her opinion, but had they done so she would have told them that she was against surgical intervention in his case because it could exacerbate the growth, causing it to reappear in an aggravated form. It did reappear in the middle of March, this time above the elbow and bigger than before. The Sarvadhikari now sent for two of the best surgeons from Madras who operated to remove the growth completely. The operation was declared to have been successful and scrapings taken from the wound were found to be negative in laboratory tests.

After the operation, so that the Maharshi might get rest after the midday meal, the Management asked the devotees not to come into the hall until two o'clock, but did not inform him. However, one devotee who had not heard about the instruction entered the hall as usual after midday, only to be sent out by the attendant. The Maharshi thus learnt that the devotees were being kept away from him. The next day, after lunch, they found him sitting on the steps outside the hall door, waiting for them. Since they could not come in, he would go out to them. It was only with great difficulty that he was eventually persuaded to take the short afternoon break. He surely knew, even if they did not, that he would not be with them in the body for very much longer.

Meanwhile, the Sarvadhikari was hastening with the completion of the Mathrubhuteswara temple and the adjoining audience hall, the construction of which had been started in 1939. When it was finally completed, the Maharshi attended the four-day *Khumbhabhishekam* or consecration ceremonies that ended on 17 March 1949, in spite of his failing health. On the last night he went in procession round the new edifices, opened the doors that led into the hall and temple, then went into the inner sanctuary where the Mother's *samadhi* was situated. He touched the various objects there and stood for some five minutes with his hands on the *Sri Chakra*, the Tantrik cult object associated with the divine Sakti, the Mother of the World.

Major Chadwick, who inexplicably felt compelled to remain by the Maharshi's side during the whole ritual, would testify to his interest in the *Sri Chakra*. Also, in response to the evident wish of the Maharshi, he would see to it that the puja of the *Sri Chakra* was performed regularly at the Ashram even after the Maharshi was no longer physically there. The place of this particular form of ritualistic worship in the Maharshi's Advaitic teaching was far from being understood by everybody at the Ashram. Some years later Major Chadwick wrote, 'I do not think that anyone who has written about Bhagavan and the Ashram has remarked on the extraordinary fact that here we have a temple dedicated by a *Jnani*.' I would humbly add that no one has commented either on why a *Jnani* should show special interest in the *Sri Chakra*, and want its puja perpetuated at the Ashram.

The *Sri Chakra* is sixty centimetres square at the base and shaped like a hill of proportionate height. At the top there is a series of triangles which gradually decrease in size and end in a single point forming the apex. The meaning of these symbols is to be found in the Tantra Scriptures where it is said that God, the Supreme Consciousness, combines two aspects: the unmoving static aspect of Consciousness represented by Lord Siva, and the active kinetic aspect of Consciousness represented by his consort, Sakti. As she is in herself, the Goddess is Being-Consciousness-Bliss and is identical with Siva. But when she is in the Universe-creating mode, her Bliss is Love, *Niratisayapremaspadatvam anandarvam*.

The *Sri Chakra puja* consists in evoking the Sakti's energy of creative love that is symbolically contained within the *Sri Chakra*, and in canalizing it for the good of people at large. The practice does not depart from Advaitic non-dual teaching since Consciousness and its active power, Sakti, are basically identical. In fact, the *Sri Chakra puja* is regularly performed in the monasteries founded by Sri Sankaracharya, the great eighth century exponent of *Advaita*.

I believe that the Maharshi had a very important teaching to convey and so as to place it beyond controversy and argument and in the realm of direct experience, he chose to use the symbols of the *Sri Chakra*. For meditation on the *Sri Chakra* causes its truth to be interiorized at the centre of one's being. Then one comes to embody and communicate Consciousness and Love, the two inseparable principles of Reality, in that way realizing oneself as the spiritual Son. This would explain why when the *Sri Chakra* was being carved, the Maharshi specially asked that the *bij* or seed-syllable for the Son be included in it.

The Maharshi mentioned the Son in the instruction he gave Mr Arvind Bose after his son died tragically at the age of eighteen from typhoid fever. Again we are indebted to the devotee Suri Nagamma for the details of his instruction. Inconsolable at the loss of the son he loved dearly, time and time again Mr Bose put questions to the Maharshi in the hope of finding relief from his sorrow. But nothing the Maharshi said seemed to impress him, not even when he told him to enquire and find his Self. Then the Maharshi told him a story from the *Vichara Sagaram* about two young people in a foreign country, one of whom was lost but not reported missing, whilst the other was not lost but reported missing to his grieving parents. 'We too are similarly situated,' said the Maharshi. 'We believe all sorts of things that the mind tells us. It deludes us into thinking that what exists does not exist and that what does not exist exists. If we do not believe the mind, and search within we find the Son. For the Son is not outside, he is inside in the heart.' Thus he pointed the grieving father towards the Son, Reality in its completeness and perfection that is always with us.

In July 1949 the tumour reappeared on the Maharshi's arm and this time tests revealed that he

was suffering from sarcoma. He was subjected to four operations in one year as well as two applications of radium, and when those measures failed, alternative therapies were tried on him, even some home remedies suggested by the devotees, but nothing could arrest the spread of the cancer. His comportment throughout was in keeping with what he taught. Even when the Maharshi suffered excruciating pain he bore it uncomplainingly and was quite detached from it, as if he were the witness of his own suffering. 'There is pain,' he would say, not 'I have pain.' Seeing him so calm, people often did not realize that he was in agony, and some even wondered whether a *Jnani* like him felt physical pain. 'Why not?' the Maharshi asked, 'does a *Jnani* not feel pain when he is pricked by a pin?'

His main concern was not for himself but for those of us who grieved, as did Suzanne and I, because of his impending death. There was so little time left to make us understand that there was no need for grief. He assured us: 'They say that I am dying, but I am not going away. Where could I go? I am always here.' Fifty years on we know how true those words were.

In June 1949 he was moved from the old hall to the big newly constructed audience hall adjoining the temple. He never felt comfortable there. Once I was sitting in the hall when he entered and took his place on the couch. He looked round with aversion at his grandiose surroundings, then withdrew his thoughts to some point within and complete serenity returned to his features.

When he had stayed in the old hall, or even in the big shed made of palm leaves and covered with a thatched roof which was built on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee celebrations in 1946, he had been happy because all kinds of people, as well as birds and animals, had been able to come to him freely. But that was no longer possible here in the new hall. The Maharshi saw for himself that the new edifice, with the polished stone floor, the carved granite couch, the ceiling fans and the stout doors, was off-putting for the poor who did not dare enter, thinking that the place was meant only for the rich. One day he expressed his feeling of solidarity with those humble folk by saying, 'Poor people like me will be reluctant to come in.' He was aware, too, that the groups of villagers, who came usually on feast days, were not welcomed by some concerned with the reputation of the Ashram, because in their shabby clothing they were not an aesthetic sight. But the Maharshi did not want anyone to be excluded from the spiritual community for worldly reasons of prestige.

On 5 January 1950 the Maharshi's seventieth birthday was celebrated by the authorities on a grand scale. People converged on the Ashram in large numbers to receive the Maharshi's blessing knowing that this birthday might be his last. There were speeches by prominent people, song and music recitals, and the recitation of prayers. Throughout the proceedings, as always, he sat in silence, radiating a power that helped and uplifted but did not dominate. His appearance was regal though his trappings were those of extreme simplicity. He had transcended personal sorrow, yet acutely felt people's trouble and grief. Indifference to yourself, care for others; you might have wondered whether it could ever be achieved completely, but the sight of the Maharshi told you that it could be done.

After the Jayanti celebrations his condition began to deteriorate rapidly and he had to be moved to a specially built one-room cottage where nursing was more convenient. However, for several weeks more he gave *darshan* to the devotees, sitting for some hours every day outside the cottage while they sat by the big hall facing him across the narrow drive.

I visited Tiruvannamalai for a couple of weeks in the middle of March 1950. On the morning of my return to Madras I came to take my leave of the Maharshi. It was to be for the last time. By then he could no longer come out, and as he lay in the room of the cottage facing the open doorway, the devotees filed past to get his *darshan*. I had never really understood the importance of *darshan*. But when it was my turn to stand before the doorway to see him, I was startled--his face as he looked at me was transfigured with love. I had often seen him look tender or compassionate during the many years that I had known him, but I had never seen him look as he did now.

In his poor spent body there was this supreme, passionless love. The sight of it was his last gift to me and it is still with me, vivid and vital to this day.

Neither my mother nor I was present on the last day of the Maharshi's physical life, Friday, 14 April 1950. I therefore base my account on what others have said or written. The Maharshi's life was sinking as the sun was sinking in the sky. By nightfall a vast crowd of people had gathered at the Ashram, having come to know that the end was imminent. They sat quietly until a group of devotees spontaneously started to sing 'Arunachala-Siva!', the refrain of the Maharshi's mantra-hymn to Truth Absolute which he had composed for the use of the early devotees. Soon hundreds of voices joined in the singing. Until then the devotees had been separated from the Maharshi, in that he lay out of their sight behind the walls of the cottage. But now they felt they were with him through the hymn that expressed their unity in the Divine Source of all. The doctors and others attending him would say that when the sound reached him, his face lit up with great joy and tears of bliss flowed from his eyes. His breathing which had been very hard and laborious became easier, slower, and after some time, it quietly stopped. It was 8.47 p.m. At that exact moment many saw a big, brightly shining star move slowly in a north-easterly direction towards the peak of Arunachala and seem to merge in it.

Suzanne had gone to Madras to avoid witnessing the final physical degradation of the great Master whom she had first seen in the full splendour of his Realization. A being who, like the sun, radiated power and vitality, who 'lifted you far above the world', as she had written. In her distress, she may have felt the tragic end of his life on earth as a betrayal of the promise of transcendence over the mundane state that he had once given her. After the Maharshi's *Maha Samadhi*, she visited some other Ashrams in South India but returned to Tiruvannamalai. When she came back there was a change in her, she no longer had the desire to find a Master. Instead something new and unsought for had arisen in its place, something which I can best describe as the quality of reconciliation.

I was with her on the morning that she went back to the Sri Ramanashram for the first time in two years. Although she looked composed I knew that it was an emotional occasion for her. The Ashram naturally had a different atmosphere because the Maharshi was no longer physically present. It was a strange and sad feeling that he was not there ready to receive us as he had always been. We went to pay our respects first at the Mother's *samadhi*, then at the Maharshi's *samadhi*, which the Ashram authorities and devotees had wanted located at the exact spot where the Maharshi used to sit when in the early days he came down the Hill from the Skanda Ashram cave to visit the Mother's grave. We also went to see the small room in the cottage where he had spent the last weeks of his earthly life. In the Ashram temple there were images and ornaments of gold and silver, and gems which had been donated by the devotees; but here in the cottage were kept his personal possessions, his ascetic's water pot, staff, loincloth, towel and wooden sandals. We had never seen him wear the sandals, though, because

he preferred to walk barefoot like the poor.

We paused for a while in the Ashram garden where the Maharshi had spent many happy moments with the animals. Lizelle Reymond, who visited the Ashram several times during his lifetime, in a letter that she wrote to me more than forty years later, still recalled the peace that she had felt in that little garden. In the same letter she described to me her first meeting with the Maharshi. What happened on that occasion provides yet another instance of his singular insight and of his way of guiding people according to their particular need. In her case he turned her in the direction of a Guru in the North, knowing that it was his teaching to which she would be best attuned. As she wrote, ‘When I met the Maharshi for the first time he asked, “Why don’t you leave for the Himalayas?” I answered, “Tomorrow if you wish.” That was my place. I stayed there five years with Sri Anirvan.’

We had left going to the old hall till last because it was the scene of so many of our memories of the Maharshi and we wanted to stay there the longest. On the couch they had placed a large photograph of him. Once again our Teacher was before us in his tender spiritual beauty and grandeur. Through the small window at the back of the couch we could see Arunachala rising in calm magnificence to its lofty height. For years he had been here representing its true nature to us, introducing us gently to the awesome mystery of Being. We were immensely privileged to have known him. But I knew that he had not gone, for I could feel his presence still. I glanced at Suzanne. She was in meditation as she had been in the past at moments when she had captured the power of his silent influence. He was here for us as before, and in his living presence time had vanished.

When we came out of the hall, we found the Sarvadhikari very ill and evidently in great pain, lying on a string cot in the open. He was supervising the masons at work on some new edifices for the Ashram complex the construction of which had been his labour of love for his brother. When he saw us he put out his hand towards Suzanne and said, ‘Help me.’ This was the first time that someone in authority at the Ashram had asked for her help as a doctor. She did not answer because she knew that she could not do anything more for him than what was being done already by the Ashram doctors. But he could read in her face her feeling for his suffering and seemed to draw solace from it. That was how more than fifteen years of conflict between them finally came to an end.

Dom Henri Le Saux--Swamsi Abhishiktananda

Suzanne would become reconciled with her original faith, the Roman Catholic religion. First, though, she had to overcome her prejudice against the Church, which she had long believed to be intolerant and arrogant in its attitude towards other religions. The lack of understanding and the righteous superiority generally shown by Christian visitors to the Ashram had done little to mitigate that opinion. Most Christians came there predisposed to negate everything that the Maharshi told them in the course of their talks with him, which they usually kept very brief, as if afraid of being led astray by him into pagan ways of thinking. A friend of mine from Madras, after spending just a short time in the hall came out in a state of some agitation. He admitted to me that he had felt the Maharshi was about to hypnotize him, as that was what he had been told to expect by some members of his Christian community in Madras. Suzanne had only contempt for such an attitude. But then, her own attitude would be transformed after she met, on her return to Tiruvannamalai in 1952, two notable Christian religious, a missionary priest, Father Jules Monchanin, and a Benedictine monk, Dom Henri Le Saux also known as Swami Abhishiktananda. In 1950 they had founded together a Christian contemplative ashram, Shantivanam, on the banks of the Kaveri River near the small town of Kullitalai some 240 kilometres south of Tiruvannamalai.

They had come to India with the permission of the Church authorities because each one had felt, quite independently, that his religious life would find fulfilment in India. They were prepared to learn more about the Hindu spiritual experience and to be receptive to whatever good there was in it. How else could its treasures 'be gathered into the storehouse of the Church?' as one of them wrote. They had not, however, expected to find the experience of the Absolute as pure and profound as they found it embodied in the Maharshi. It was an enigma to them as to how it could occur outside the Christian religion, but they did not try to deny its authenticity. Indeed, when Father Monchanin met my uncle Arindama in Darjeeling and was asked by him who was the most spiritual person he knew, he answered without hesitation, 'Ramana Maharshi'.

Swami Abhishiktananda first visited the Sri Ramanashram in January 1949, when the Maharshi was already ill. He had only two meetings with him and yet through him there occurred his first communion with the spirit of the land he had come to discover. As he would write, 'It was as if the very soul of India penetrated to the very depths of my soul and held mysterious communication with it. It was a call which pierced through everything, rent it in pieces and opened a mighty abyss.'

After the Maharshi had left the body, Swami Abhishiktananda came back to Tiruvannamalai many times, drawn there by Arunachala, which he called the Dawn Hill; Dawn signifying to him the spiritual awakening to Ultimate Truth. He spent weeks, sometimes months, living as an anchorite in its caves. And the hill transformed him as it did all those who came to it with an open mind. He did not cease to be a Christian, but at the same time he could not ignore the powerful new experiences of the Absolute that Arunachala vouchsafed him. In his own words, 'Anyone who is a recipient of this overwhelming Light is at once petrified and shattered; he can say nothing, he cannot think anymore; he just remains there, outside space and time, alone in the very aloneness of the Alone; it is an unbelievable experience, this sudden revelation of Arunachala's infinite pillar of light and fire.'

It was in 1953, after I had just started working in London, that Suzanne first wrote to me about

him, ending her letter with the comment: 'It's wonderful how he understands what Arunachala really is!' She was clearly surprised to find such understanding in a Christian. They became good friends and met often, spending their time discussing religion and philosophy, Christian and Vedantic, and also Zen Buddhism which interested them both since it had its roots in Advaita. She also told him something of the esoteric doctrines she had learnt from the lamas in the Himalayas, especially from Tromo Geshe Rinpoche. Sometimes, though, they did not talk but just sat quietly together communicating more deeply without words.

There was no Catholic church in Tiruvannamalai, and when Jeanne was there she missed being able to receive communion daily. Therefore Swami Abhishiktananda would come down every morning from his abode on the hill to say Mass at our house, at an altar which Suzanne had put up for that purpose in one of the front rooms. In one of his letters to his family, (Stuart J, *Swami Abhishiktananda, his life told through his letters*, Delhi, I.S.P.C.K., 1995) he wrote that after Mass he had breakfast and took back to his cave his food for midday. I do not think that it ever occurred to my mother that she was emulating her namesake, Sujatha, who had offered food to the ascetic Gautama before he attained Enlightenment.

In August 1952, after spending about four and a half months in various retreats on or around Arunachala, Swami Abhishiktananda finally moved to a cave above a spring called 'Arut-pal tirtham' or 'Spring of the Milk of Grace'. He stayed in this cave, which stretched for a considerable distance into the hill, for ten days in unbroken silence and deep recollection, abiding all the while in the innermost recess of his being. When he emerged from his retreat he came down from the Hill and went to visit Suzanne. As he stood at the door, she was surprised to see a brightness like a shining halo around him. At first he did not take her seriously when she told him what she saw, as he was to write in his book, *The Secret of Arunachala*, (Delhi, I.S.P.C.K., 1979,) but in the evening, when he visited another friend, Dr Syed, an old devotee of the Maharshi, he was greeted with the words, 'How radiant you are looking today!'

Swami Abhishiktananda returned to the hill in March 1953, and again at the beginning of November of that year. In a letter which he wrote to Suzanne on 12 December, while she was away in Madras, he expressed the hope of being able to stay on in Tiruvannamalai until Christmas so as to celebrate the holy night in solitude in his 'dear cave', the Arut-pal tirtham. 'Do you not think,' he added, 'that Arunachala, perhaps more than need be, will be consecrated Christianly by the celebration of the Mass in its very heart?' The little phrase 'perhaps more than need be' is significant, for it testifies to his growing perception that the experience of God in the depths of the Spirit is as fundamental to Vedanta as it is to Christianity. It was to form the basis of his firm conviction that the two great faiths would eventually meet, not so much at the level of a religious dialogue aimed at bringing about a synthesis between them, but more at the level of the 'deepest interior of experience'.

In the same letter to Suzanne he offered to send her a copy of the manuscript of his second book, *Guhantara, The Dweller in the Cave*, and added: 'I wish that you too become the dweller of the cave.' The dweller of the cave is he who, penetrating to the innermost depths of his being in the search of himself, finds God, for 'one cannot find oneself without finding God'. He concluded his letter with a short verse, changing for her *Guhantara* to *Guhantari*, its feminine form:

Guhantari
at the spring deep
in the heart of Arunachala.

In her understanding, he was speaking here of Love or Grace that rose from the Source that was hidden. He had previously told her of his intuition of God, as Unique and Unknowable in non-duality and as Communion and Community in the unity of Love.

The mysterious reconciliation in the highest state of Being between Awareness and Love, Suzanne realized, had constituted the 'heart' or inner teachings, some more explicit than others, and variously expressed according to individual experience or religious background, of all the great Masters she had known. And the instructions which she had received from those enlightened beings over the years now came into a complete round for her. On the *pradakshina* of her life she had seen only bits of the road at a time. More than once she had felt alone and in the dark, afraid that she had wandered from the right path. But Who had always been there to show her the way to go? In the certitude of Divine Love and Providence, complete surrender to the Will of the Indwelling Lord at last became possible for her.

After the death of Father Monchanin in 1957, Swami Abhishiktananda went north to live in the Himalayas. He did not remain in Tiruvannamalai, although he always called it his birthplace. As for the Holy Hill, he would never be away from it; Arunachala would be with him wherever he went.

In the North, he went to stay near the source of the Ganges, and eventually built a small hermitage on its banks at Uttarkashi. After 1968 it became his only residence. From there, he travelled often and widely in India when called upon to deliver lectures, or to attend meetings, seminars, and so on. In time he was joined at the hermitage by a few Christian disciples. One of them, Marc Chaduc, a young seminarian from Bourg-en-Bresse who arrived in India in September 1971, was to have extraordinary experiences of initiation whilst he was with him.

The first of these occurred when they were on their way to visit a small forest ashram at Phulchatti, upstream from Rishikesh. In that mountainous region where the mountains have sheltered so many contemplatives who were 'overwhelmed by the interior vision', Swami Abhishiktananda relived the sudden eruption of Arunachala's infinite Column of fire and light that had been his own initiation in Tiruvannamalai. What took place is narrated by Marc: 'For a brief moment, he could only stagger under the excess of the interior drunkenness, and I had to support him. At that very moment there opened within myself an abyss which had been hidden to that point. Later we realized that this experience was the beginning of the *mauna-diksha*, the initiation by silence, which is the work of the Spirit alone.' There was no conscious act of initiation; Swami Abhishiktananda was not aware of himself as the Guru, yet there was a definite transmission of Grace at the most profound levels of experience. This incident helps us to understand why the Maharshi always insisted that he was not a Guru and that he did not bestow initiations. It was with the knowledge of the self-revealing immediacy of Divine Grace that he once said, 'The Supreme Lord is Grace. Therefore, there is really no individual act of bestowing Grace.'

On 30 June 1973, Marc followed in his Guru's footsteps by taking *sannyas* and entering a double monastic tradition. He had no intention of changing either the Christian or the Hindu tradition, and sought instead to be like his Guru, a bridge between them, by realizing at the centre of himself the unique Truth that was interior to both.

Because Swami Abhishiktananda drew a great deal from the teachings of the Vedanta, because he took a Hindu name, because he donned the ochre robes of the *sannyasin* and was seen begging for his food, he has been variously called a Hindu monk, a Christian *sannyasin*, or, as he once called himself, a Hindu-Christian monk, but all such labels became superfluous. For in the end he was not deliberately either this or that. He was just himself, since he had understood that only by simply being could he know his Lord, He Who Is.

Once when asked by a friend who was to address a gathering of Sufis how, if he were in his place, he would present Christ to them, he replied, 'The Christ I might present will simply be the I AM of my—every--deep heart ...'

In the past he had made attempts, attended with great torment, to fit into his previous mental structures without shattering them the new experiences which had resulted from his encounter with Arunachala and the Maharshi. After that, he had gone the other way, and rigorously pursued the ideal of the Hindu *Sadhu* by trying to accomplish, through more and more rigorous asceticism, the complete abnegation of the world. Towards the end of his life--he died on 7 December 1973--he came to see that there was no need for either pursuit, indeed no need for any pursuit, since the Truth for which one sought high and low was right there. One only had to open one's eyes. Now liberated of all constraints and limitations, he could, with the perfect freedom of the Spirit, ascend to the Source Itself. The words he subsequently uttered in blissful joy, 'At every moment of my life, in every circumstance I awake!', reflect the coming of the glorious Dawn in his heart.

The Final Peace

As long as it was physically possible, Suzanne carried on with her medical work in Tiruvannamalai and the surrounding villages, attending the sick 'with devotion and efficiency' in the words of Swami Abhishiktananda. (*Secret*, Page 42) She did not give up her work all at once, but gradually as her health failed her, stopping completely probably in 1960 .She left no institution bearing her name; the only testimony to her work was the well-being of those she was able to help, which was all she wanted.

She had also a beneficial influence on those who knew her well. This was because, without ever preaching or trying to impose her views on others, her life and example inspired them to want greater truth and value in their lives, as I know from what people said or wrote to me after her death. As for me, she not only gave me life, not only once saved my life when other physicians had failed to help me, but also opened the door for me to a kind of life so much more rewarding than one of purely banal interests.

In 1953 she came to London to rejoin Jeanne and myself because her mother had been diagnosed as suffering from a rodent ulcer on her nose. During the consultation at Guy's Hospital one of the specialists expressed the opinion that her nose and one eye should be removed. However, when Suzanne objected to any surgical intervention, it was decided to treat her by radiotherapy alone. After seeing Jeanne start her treatment she returned to India.

It was two years before Jeanne's disease was completely arrested. She lost the right side of her nose but she found a way of concealing it with bandages which she dyed to the colour of her skin. She bore this second disfigurement to befall her in her life with her natural courage heightened by the strength she found in her religion. She was eighty-two at the time and would live an active life for a further twelve years.

In May 1957 we both left England for India. Later that year I married a young film director and editor, Amit Bose. After our marriage we settled in Bombay (now Mumbai), and Jeanne divided her time between Suzanne in South India and me in Bombay. Early in 1965 Jeanne's health began to fail while she was staying with me. As soon as she felt well enough to travel she insisted on going to Suzanne who was then in Madras. I was very reluctant to let her go, knowing that I would probably never see her again, but seeing how determined she was I finally gave in and arranged for someone to accompany her down to Madras.

When she arrived at the small boarding-house where Suzanne was staying, Jeanne found her seriously ill and practically bed-ridden. In her letters, which had become more and more infrequent, my mother had not told us anything about the gravity of her illness. It must have been a terrible shock for Jeanne to find her in that condition. But, one month after her arrival, Jeanne herself fell ill with dysentery. In spite of her own state of health, Suzanne did her best to look after her, but she died peacefully on 22 May 1965. Before her as she lay dying was the crucifix which was always with her, as indeed she had felt her Lord to be always with her on her long pilgrimage on earth.

The twenty-second of May, coincidentally, was my younger daughter's third birthday. Not knowing about the situation in Madras, we celebrated it with a party for her little friends. During the celebration, all of a sudden I was seized with an intense feeling of sadness. I left the party and went into the bedroom. For no special reason, I took out the book in which Suzanne

had pasted the newspaper cuttings of photographs taken of the Maharshi after his death. When I saw them the thought of death filled my mind. It was 4.30 p.m., the exact time of Jeanne's passing as I would learn later.

On receiving a telegram giving me the news, I left at once for Madras, although my elder daughter was not well. When I arrived, it was my turn to be shocked by Suzanne's emaciated condition. Someone in the house had draped her in her Buddhist robe, probably because, carefully preserved over the years, it was in a far better condition than her other clothes. And that was how I found her, lying there in the yellow robe of renunciation that had always been so much a part of her. When I came up to her to embrace her, she put her arms around me with some hesitation, not wanting to frighten or disgust me so skeletal had they become.

I thought that she was suffering from malnutrition and exhaustion due to years of overwork and her ascetic way of life, and I felt guilty that I had not come to see her before because of my preoccupation with my family. But when I brought her back to Bombay and took her to a hospital for an examination, they told me that she was suffering from cancer.

My father, after I had sent him the clinical details, advised that nothing should be done except to make her as comfortable as possible. I still clung to hope, though, and put her through the course of treatment prescribed by the doctors. She herself knew that the disease could not be cured, but submitted to the treatment because that was what I wanted for her and she did not wish to distress me. She was free of all fear of death. There was an inner steadiness about her which I felt nothing would be able to shake anymore. She was in harmony with herself, with others, with life, even with death. It has since struck me that she had entered the stage of actualization, and was living in a quite basic, natural manner what had once been an ideal and an imagined goal.

After undergoing radiotherapy she became physically very weak. My only consolation is that she did not suffer any pain during her illness. I put her in a private nursing home and at first her condition improved slightly, but after a month she developed pneumonia. For four days before the end came she was semi-conscious and in a somewhat agitated state, throwing up her arms occasionally as if she were re-enacting her battle for liberation to which she had given expression in more than one of her dances. On the fifth morning, which was 11 July 1966, when she awoke she was quite calm and lucid. Her Goan nurse, who had become very fond of her, settled her for the day and was leaving the room when she suddenly realized that Suzanne was about to die. She quickly took from the bedside table a statuette of the Madonna which she had brought her as a gift a few days earlier and gave it to her. Suzanne died holding it in her hand.

Her body was taken to the local cemetery for burial. It had been raining throughout the day, but just as the coffin was about to be closed the sun came out and shone, bathing Suzanne in its golden light. All the colours of the scene suddenly became very bright and vivid. She had once feared that death would leave her ugly to see, but for her last appearance she looked beautiful, serene, and strangely happy; a moving sight for all of us who had gathered there at the graveside.

Then the coffin was closed, and Suzanne's body was committed to the earth.