

Key to highlighting:

Gray for Shantananda's remarks about Jesus

Green for Shantananda's remarks about the role of women

Yellow for Shantananda's actual stopping of his heartbeat at University of Michigan

SHANTANANDA, HOLY MAN AND SCIENCE



ong before dawn on a September morning in 1958 I was awakened by a telephone call. When I answered a very cultured, English-accented voice asked, "Laurel?" It sounded the name so that it lilted and sailed upward.

The man said that he was Shantananda from India and was staying with Kumar so the University of Michigan could do some tests on his yogi abilities to control breath and heartbeat.

Previously, Kumar had told me about this man. Kumar had gone to India to find a true yogi to test with the EEG machine. Kumar was a native but he found it very difficult to find a real holy man. "Hundreds pretend but few are," he had told me. "But I did find one. In the caves in the Himalayas. He is educated. He was a civil engineer and lived as a householder until mid-life when he renounced that life and went to the caves for illumination. He is a real One," Kumar concluded with his usual scientific caution. Kumar had done some experiments with his portable machine but he had wished that they could have been done under laboratory control. Apparently, that was being fulfilled.

"Laurel," the voice said again, "I saw your picture here at Kumar's. It is the same face that I saw in meditation in the cave. You must come. Can you arrive on Saturday?"

I thanked him and tried to explain that I had an office and my appointment book was filled for the week.

"You will come," he said, not prophetically but as a quiet command. "I will see you on Saturday. Goodbye."

I stood there for a few moments, with my hand on the phone, wondering if this had happened or was I still asleep and dreaming.

Caryl called in from the bedroom, "Who was that?" I told him, "A man — from India. He wants me to come to Michigan Saturday."

Being practical, Caryl asked, "Are you going?"

I found myself answering with out conviction, "I suppose so." I had no idea how it could be arranged.

Poor Caryl, having a wife who answered a call in the night, from a strange man, and announcing that she is going to meet him in a city half way across the country. But he was not surprised when I explained as much as I knew about it. He turned over and went back to sleep.

That was on Wednesday. By the end of the next day my appointment book was cleared. In the most amazing manner, people canceled appointments for the next week; they postponed them, moved away or something. I made reservations for a Saturday flight to Ann Arbor.

As Tara and Kumar drove me to their home from the airport, they said that Shantananda and one of his devotees, a businessman in India, had arrived unexpectedly to do the tests which Kumar had expressed a wish to do. Kumar was getting the necessary equipment ready at the University hospital for the experimentation.

"Why did he want me to come?" I asked, still baffled.

Tara replied, "When he walked into our living room and saw your picture, he pointed to it and said, "That is the face I saw. She has something special to do. I must see her."

Shantananda was waiting for us. In the doorway he looked like a framed picture of a Biblical prophet. His fine white hair flowing back from a broad forehead, white beard contrasting with golden skin, he seemed to glow from some hidden light. He was not brown as most Indians I had known. His skin was golden; his eyes were amber. He wore the Indian traditional white garments, topped with a modern coral colored sweater. He greeted me warmly, both palms together raised to his forehead, bowing. Then he took both of my hands in his. "I am so glad you have come," he said. With that I slipped into an oasis of timelessness which the Bagchi home provided. For the next 10 days I lived in India without leaving American soil.

The experiments at the University seemed ludicrous. As Shantananda had chided Kumar, “How can you measure spirit with machines?” But he was most cooperative and patiently endured all of the mechanical equipment of wires and attachments that were glued to his head, arms, and chest. His expression was one of amusement and slight mischievousness. He was placed in a room, separated from the operating control panels and machinery by a small vacant room, all having glass windows so he was observed while Kumar, two rooms away, could read the graphs spilling out of the EEG and other registering equipment.

Tara and I watched. Kumar was very busy, very efficient, watching, giving directions. This was his world and he was doing the thing he had set out to do years before when he decided that “Western people will not accept anything mystical. They believe only in machines.” Now he was having an opportunity to prove what once he had accepted without question.

Nurses moved about, responding to Kumar’s orders and an electrical engineer, sitting on a stool near the machines, ignored the entire procedure while he read a copy of Reader’s Digest. Scientific experiments, going on in his presence, never before having been attempted, were meaningless to him. He was absorbed in reading of things which had happened months or years before. I marveled at the capacity of the human to ignore the present, of which it is a part, and accept as important something experienced by strangers in far away places. Was not that a type of “mysticism”?

At one point, after hours of preparation and trying, the needles on the paper slowed and paused. Shantananda had succeeded in controlling his brain waves and his heartbeat. This is what had been hoped for. Kumar became excited and exclaimed to the engineer, “Check the machines! Something must be wrong.”

I couldn’t believe it. This was what he wanted to happen and yet when it had, the scientist in him would not accept it. It doubted. The machines must have failed.

How could science ever come to know *truth* with such

attitudes, I wondered. It seemed determined to destroy evidence rather than explore it. It had preconceived premises which to science were truth and anything disagreeing with those man-made premises had to be denied or it would be uncomfortable; it would have to explore a new unknown and that was always fearful. It was a threat to mans little ego that wanted everything boxed in and controlled by himself.

Kumar called in colleagues and they studied the graph sheets excitedly. They decided that there was some question of the machine's ability to detect a subtle movement of heartbeat and breath. More experiments must be done. More and more and more. Even so, the experiments were startling and newsworthy. *Newsweek* magazine did an article on it.

Shantananda was unconcerned. Like a parent watching children making kites, trying to attach wings to themselves and fly like birds, he watched and smiled.

At home he kept the household in another level of functioning. He was a most joyous person and as he moved through the house — gliding, smiling, he seemed to transform everything along the way. He was very verbal and witty and could slip into samadhi at will so he was either telling stories of traditional religious significance, singing holy songs, or playing mental tennis with Kumar. Often he had us laughing until tears came and by an artful change of voice and attitude bring us to a feeling of deep reverence. What a great actor he would have been, I thought.

In the midst of this Tara and I tried to keep the household operating; Kumar off to the laboratory, children off to school, and getting Shantananda to eat. It was almost forced feeding. He ate very little and forgot to do that unless we coaxed him with spoonsfull of food between songs or stories. Tara sighed, after one of the usual 2 or 3 hour long meals, "I just hope we can keep him alive until he gets on the plane to go home. It is a terrible responsibility to take care of **a holy** man — especially when they won't eat!"

One day, after the laboratory routine, we took him to Detroit. Tara thought he should see a large American store so we went to the largest department store there.

Shantananda found an escalator. He had not seen one before. He got on it and rode it up. What fun! He ran over to the descending one and rode it down, laughing and as unselfconscious as a child, waved to people staring at him. He rode it up and down and up and down, while people stood and stared at this Moses-like figure in flying, draped clothing, laughing and waving. He must be mad — one could see that conviction in their faces as they turned away, wondering. Some stood and laughed with him, enjoying his evident delight. Finally, we persuaded him to go look at something else.

Then we tried to cross a busy street. He did not recognize traffic signals. A street was for crossing. When one came to a curb, one went across to the other side — what else?

White hair and robes flying, he stepped off the sidewalk right into traffic, his eyes fixed on the buildings beyond, quite unaware of cars and trucks screeching to a halt, horns blowing. He bowed, smiled and went gaily on. We held back and dashed by turns. It must have been hilarious to watch — a white-haired prophecy-looking character striding confidently across a busy Detroit street with a dignified Indian professor and two uncertain and dismayed women trying to protect, or pretend they weren't with this madman.

We all arrived, breathless, at the other side of the street. That was the end of sightseeing. Tara took hold of Shantananda's arm and pulled it downward with a jerk. "Now, you stand here. Right here. Don't you move, till I drive by and pick you up!" She hurried off to get her car while Kumar and I held on to the holy man. When we got him inside the car, we all sighed with thankfulness. Shantananda was astonished at our concern. He had no idea the world was not for enjoying. He kept smiling and remembering the fun of the stairs that went up and down and up and down —

Kumar murmured something about "Holy men should never leave their caves." It has been observed by people the world over that when those few reach a stage of higher consciousness they are unequipped to deal with things that we

consider every day living; money, man's laws, danger — what are these? All is God!

In true Indian fashion, Shantananda did not explain to me why he wanted me to be there. In true Indian fashion I did not ask. I waited. Finally, toward the end of my stay, the moment came.

Tara and Kumar were going to town. Shantananda said he wished me to remain. I did not know what to expect; I had no burning questions to be answered but there was an urge that had grown in me to sit quietly in front of this holy man. Just to sit there and be quiet.

As though he knew, he walked through the long living-room to the west end where he drew himself up on the window seat and took the lotus posture. The late afternoon sun shone through the window behind him, making a halo of his white hair. It heightened his golden skin. His smile was radiant always, and his glance gave a benediction.

It seemed so natural to drop to a pillow and sit at his feet. This was the moment I had awaited.

He looked at me, silently for a time. Then he closed his eyes and chanted, an evening chant in Sanskrit. I joined him at times, where words from memories of the Ashrama days came back. The music of his voice floated in and out of the afternoon stillness like incense.

Deep, deep contentment swept over me, overwhelming me, almost to the point of homesickness. I was in India, living in a joyous state. I asked nothing more than to sit there in the holy frequencies which surrounded me. I moved into them, was caught up in them and seemed suspended in another realm.

After a long time of silence, the shadows were coming in so I could no longer discern his features clearly — only his eyes.

Then he spoke. "You are an exile here in Amerikah. You are ancient Indian but you volunteered to come to the West to bring back ideal of womanhood to these people." His voice was very gentle and tender, "You must make them aware of Great Mother — the Mother that gives birth to Lord. A

country is no greater than its women. They are goddesses. They must hold ideals or men become savages. Amerikan women do not know the wonder of being women — they try to be men. They will become slaves if they imitate men. Voltaire, you know Voltaire? He said, 'When women seek equality they lose their superiority.' Wherever you can, help them see that. That is what you came to do."

The sweetness of the hour wrapped around me like a diaphanous mantle. In that short time I had brought up much that I had known of previous spiritual contentment and, as one draws money from a bank to use for building a new home, saw a clearer blueprint for the days ahead.

I knew that I would never go to India — there was no longer any need. As years before, India had come to me. There was work to do here. A very definite work which I had sensed in many vague outlines before. Shantananda had caused me to see it and accept it.

Outside the dogs barked. The sound of a car driving up the gravel road broke the twilight silence. Shantananda closed his eyes and continued to meditate. I saluted him, and with the feeling of having done all this many times before, left him and walked "back into the world," to open the door for Tara and Kumar and turn on the lights.

Shantananda was such a rare experience that I wanted to share him with people I knew and loved. I invited him and his companion to return to Denver with me. I came on ahead to prepare the Hillside cabin for their stay. The mountains were bright with the Persian-carpet coloring of scrub oak, russet, gold, copper, green, scarlet, and the pure gold of aspen leaves, all interlaced with the deep emerald of pine and silver-blue of spruce.

Although I had the recent experience of being with Shantananda in Detroit, I was not quite prepared for the interest he aroused when he arrived in Denver. Traditionally, holy men have no possessions except the clothing they wear and some of them have a leopard or tiger skin upon which they sit when they meditate. Shantananda had a leopard skin. At the Bagchis he carried it about with him and placed it on

any chair he would use. He was a little dejected when he was not permitted to take it into the laboratory when they were testing him. Kumar explained to me that the animal skin is supposed to hold a magnetism from the person when he has reached high states in meditation, something like a storage battery. No one else must ever sit upon it, or handle it. It is, in a way, a holy man's link to the earth and he keeps it as his only treasure as long as he lives. It was a beautiful skin, I have to admit, soft and shiny from hand-tanning.

When Shantananda jumped lightly down from the high train platform (he had not waited for the porter to place the step there) his robes flying beneath the coral sweater, the leopard skin was rolled up under his arm. He had the bounce and vigor of a boy although he was well in his sixties. Again, people paused to stare. Again, he smiled and bowed and waved — like the sun bursting out from a cloudy sky.

He loved the log cabin. He walked about the dried leaves and pine needles and looked up into the deeply blue sky. "This is a sacred place. Like the Himalayas. I have come home, in Amerikah. A holy place, this. Holy."

He and his companion remained there for two wonderful weeks. He was generous with his time, happy to see anyone who wished to come up. One afternoon in meditation, I saw tears flowing down his cheeks. Sensing my presence he spoke to me in an emotion-filled voice, without opening his eyes. "How the people torture Jesus! They cry to Him, they hang on Him, they say they love Him but they do not *do* what He told them to do. They want Him to do everything for them. He is imprisoned, as all of the great Lords are, by the people they tried to help." He paused. He wiped his cheeks with a corner of his cloth and continued, "Like a tender mother who has given birth to a child and has taught it to walk so it could grow into maturity and freedom, and it refuses to walk — it cries to be carried — it clings to her skirts, dragging, holding her back while it refuses to go forward. This is how humanity treats its saviors."

People from our Class, and others I knew, went to the cabin to see him. Each came away with some particular

blessing, and the impression of holy radiance coming through a body of flesh. Often we would leave him in meditation at 9:30 at night and return the next morning, 12 hours later, to find that he had not moved. He was still in a state of samadhi. And the cabin would be filled with the fragrance of fresh roses — when all of the leaves and flowering plants outside had been withered and browned by October frost.

One day he gave us a demonstration of the Kundalini power. He took a lotus posture, pressed his thumbs against the vital areas on each side of his neck and immediately went into what we would term unconsciousness. Then his body began to whip about, still in the cross-legged posture, bouncing up off the porch floor, and around the space like a ball and with the mighty force of a firehose which had been left to thrash unattended. He retained the posture, thumbs pressed against his neck, his elbows extended and time after time, his head seemed to come within a fraction of an inch of pounding into the log railing of the porch — but it never touched. We stood, entranced, unbelieving. Someone had brought a small movie camera and we did capture the action on film.

After a period of 5 minutes or so, the body settled to quiet position, his arms dropped, hands in lap, and he opened his eyes, smiling at us like a small boy who had terrified his elders by walking on a tightrope over a deep canyon or some other frightening feat.

Being in his field so much I took on the Indian-mother image. On the last Sunday that he was with us, I invited people to come up to bid him goodbye. One of my students, who felt as I did, helped and we prepared *hulva* (an Indian dessert made of browned cornmeal, mixed with water, butter, nuts and raisins) and somehow managed to serve bowls of it to a hundred people. Everything moved smoothly as a summer wind blowing, without tension or confusion. Both of us felt we were doing a familiar thing but we knew we were in a “state of grace,” using, or floating on some power far beyond the normal ones of preparing food and feeding people. We knew we were “living on the guru’s field,” and how easy it would be to be captured by it and wish to remain

in it for the rest of our lives. “Everything is so *easy* when you live in harmony,” the girl said.

The next day we took him to the train and sent him and his companion on their way. The men had visited only two places in our country, the Bagchi’s and ours. Mr. Mitel had hoped to enlist American interest in building a school in India, but none of the people they contacted were interested in that — they fell under Shantananda’s spell and desired nothing more.

Our last sight of the holy man was of him standing in the aisle of the train, waving us salutes and blessings as we backed away, into the vestibule and down the steps. He went as he had come, joyous, loving, bestowing blessings. But he left without his cherished leopard skin.

As we were ready to leave the cabin, and Mr. Mitel was gathering up his books and luggage, Shantananda came to me and held out the rolled up skin. “This is for you. You keep it. It will keep you close with me. Meditate upon it.”

I was stunned with surprise but his tone implied this was no ordinary gift and I could neither refuse nor comment. I accepted it and hugged it to me and there were tears in my eyes. I have it still —

He wrote to me regularly after his return to India, urging me to do the work that I had come to do. He wrote beautiful philosophical and spiritual messages. I was always aware of his *darshan*. And it happened that not long after that, events led to the founding of the Fransister Order, a movement to “help women appreciate being women.” Out of that we began work with *Toning*. One day a card came from Jamaica from Christopher Hills who wrote that on a tour of India he had met a holy man who said he must see “Laurel in Denber.” He was to attend a world conference on Peace here and hoped to see me. I felt that if Shantananda had reason to send him, it must have a purpose. It did, of course. The tall imposing Englishman, the remarkable “into tomorrow” scientist, came and heard the Fransisters Tone. He was very impressed and talked of us as he went and perhaps more than any other person, helped make the Fransisters known around the world. So the fine strands wove a strong pattern.