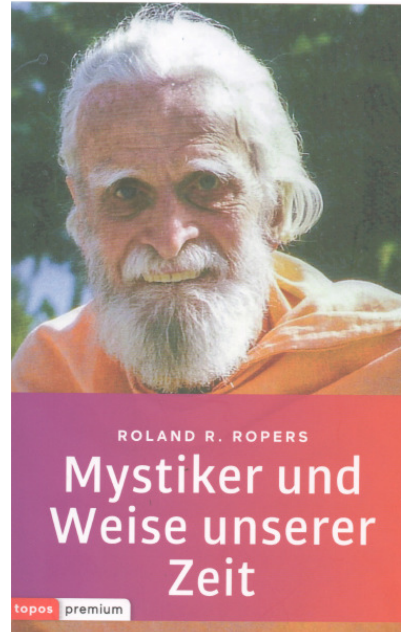
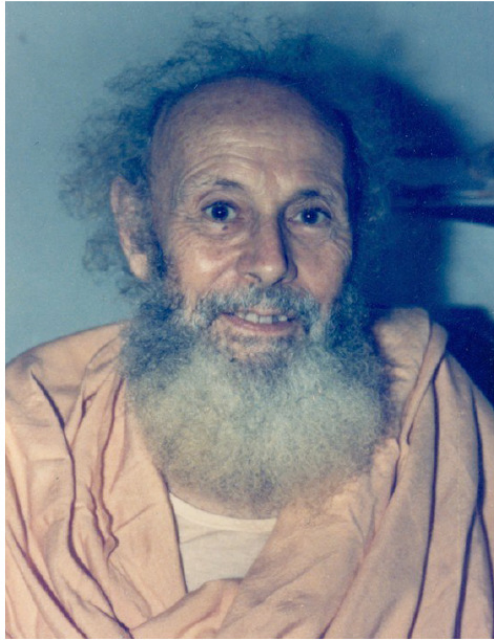


ROLAND R. ROPERS



Benedictine monks and mystics

Henri Le Saux „Swami Abhishiktananda“ (1910 - 1973)

Bede Griffiths „Swami Dayananda“ (1906 - 1993)

Both mystics and sages are portrayed in my recent book (July 2019)

On **29th August 2019** I met the Indian Jesuit and ZEN-Master **Ama Samy** (born 21st May 1936 in Burma). He met both **Bede Griffiths** and **Henri Le Saux** on various occasions.

The French Benedictine monk **Henri Le Saux** visited **Sri Ramana Maharshi** (1879 - 1950) several times and was the co-founder of the **Sat-Chit-Ananda Ashram Shantivanam** on **21st March 1950** in **Tannirpalli/Tamil Nadu**, three weeks before the **Mahasamadhi** of **Ramana Maharshi** on **14th April 1950** in **Tiruvannamalai** - 160km north of Shantivanam.

“My body and soul will die, but not my spirit!”

In the late seventies I repeatedly read **Abhishiktananda's** book „*The Secret of Arunachala - A Christian Hermit on Shiva's Holy Mountain*“.



Henri Le Saux and **Raimon Pannikar** (1918 - 2010) were very close friends and celebrated Eucharist together on **Arunachala Mountain**. Raimon was the co-founder of the „*Abhishiktananda Society*“, today „*The Abhishiktananda Centre for Interreligious Dialogue*“ in New Delhi.

In Spring 1968 Henri Le Saux „escaped“ from Shantivanam and began a restless pilgrimage; he eventually died on

7th December 1973 in **Indore** in the north-western part of India. In September 1968 **Bede Griffiths** became the head of Shantivanam until his death in May 1993.

Exactly two years later **Raimon Panikkar** wrote on **7th December 1975** from **Benares (Varanasi)** a long “post-death-letter” to his friend - I like to quote the most interesting passages:

- *My Dear Abhishiktananda, an hour awaited for 15 years, you wrote to your family when, on the morning of August 15, 1948, you reached the port of Colombo and went straight to Madras, entering your Promised Land, which you were never to abandon. Throughout the years you remained faithful to your calling, overcoming all the trials that India held in store for you.*
- *Dear Swamiji, this is not a fictitious letter I am writing to you; it is real and genuine, a continuation of our long correspondence. You wanted to spend at least a month with me in Varanasi. How I regret that we later had to cancel our plans because you were very tired and still very weak with no strength to undertake the journey.*

- *Two months later you had passed beyond all earthly limitations, and my last letter to you arrived too late. We had planned to speak at length about so many concerns – the Church, Christianity, Hinduism, the new generation of theologians etc., and there were so many problems that you wanted to share with some of your friends here, in the Holy City of Varanasi, this side of the River. Now you have crossed to the other shore, but precisely because we both know the same River, I can write you a real letter, not a literary fiction.*
- *I am greatly moved by your personal journals and only regret that those after 8 November 1966 were destroyed. What remains of your private writings, however, is rich enough to constitute a book – a task for later and certainly not the subject of this letter. I write to you simply as a loving friend, who was privileged to share and partake of your lifelong search.*
- *You were one of the most authentic Western spirits ever to expose himself to the genuine Indian experience.*
- *Your entire life, Abhishikta, was a desperate effort to cross this samsaric river, which for you carried not so much the monsoon mud of matter, but the cold wintry waters of the mind.*
- *Many people were put off by your sweeping statements, oversimplifications and your judgment of others. They dissociated your words from the man you were and interpreted your utterances within a learned framework, which was not in fact your context. I well understand your dismay and irritation.*
- *Do you remember, dear Brother, what happened on the morning of 31 July 1955 when you had already been to Arunachala and experienced the impact of Advaita?*
- *What really worried you was orthodoxy and its proper formulation. You wanted to make the logos subservient to the pneuma, unlike most Westerners, who attempt to encapsulate the spirit in the intellect. Deep was your distrust of ideas and words, your suspicion of Christological statements, though you yourself were a man of christospiritual depth as well as remarkably talented in writing, both in English and French.*
- *Once at Shantivanam, your Ashram, when Jules Monchanin was still there, I vaguely recall feeling, but not daring to say, that the Sat-Chit-Ananda-Ashram was not only named after the Holy Trinity in*

heaven, but also represented here on earth, Monchanin being the logos and you the pneuma – both springing from the same mysterious source.

- Your most vulnerable point, it seems to me, was in the field of the logos, doctrine, formulation, expression, word, language. Your manuscripts were negatively criticized and probably misunderstood by those considered to be great authorities on the matter. How could they understand your writings without standing under your own experiences? Most of your writings did not see the light of day until late in your pilgrimage.*
- All that you wrote and said was validated by your being.*
- A year before your death you wrote, that Christianity is first upanishad, non-direct teaching.*
- Your search for the Uktimate, for Truth without form, beyond thought, was not that of so many Westerners who, dissatisfied with their Western heritage and enthusiastic about Eastern glimmerings, swallow anything exotic and believe themselves to have arrived when they have scarcely started.*
- You knew that your chosen way would demand of you a real death. If we die with the hope of rising, this is not a real death. Without dereliction there is no real death.*
- Your greatness, Swamiji, lay in your purity of heart, which led you to an uncompromising position.*
- You had two loves: those loves for the Christian marga (way) and the Hindu dharma (religion) struggled within you during the entire 25 years of your life in India. Only at the very end, after you heart attack, which you called the Adventure of the Great Week, did the two seem to come into harmony.*
- Do you know, Swamiji, that the dream that C.G. Jung had during his only stay in India was of the Grail, the myth that Jung himself called a “primordial European dream” (ur-europäischer Traum)?*
- If Advaita is true, you thought your entire life, all efforts and achievements of twenty centuries of Christian tradition to have been nothing but a bad, even pernicious dream.*

- *Your quest was for life and death on a cosmic level. Those who do not understand that the struggle is an ultimate one have no idea what the contemplative life means, what the fight against the devil means in the old monastic tradition.*
- *It took years to incorporate into yourself the Advaitic experience. The fascinating aspect of your growth is that it was not an academic or intellectual process, but a vital one. Your cherished example was Ramana Maharshi.*
- *You considered that as long as you wanted to get rid of Christian cultic practices, you were not liberated from them and hence should not give them up. The Christian Eucharist was for you the fulfilment of the universe in God.*
- *May I venture, dear Abhishikta, a comment on your inner struggle? Please do not misunderstand me. This is neither psychological analysis nor philosophical investigation. It is the tentative reflection of a friend. Your struggle was not on the mental plane; it was not primarily intellectual. You used to say that you could not care less about philosophy. You wanted to live the evangelical myth without theologizing. Certainly your suffering did not spring from merely intellectual anxiety. I believe your struggle was a monastic struggle, specifically a Christian monastic combat.*
- *Do you remember our long discussions on the way up and down to Gangotri? You described our conversations beautifully in your book "The Mountain of the Lord", but did not mention their ultimate consequences. I argued, taken to its ultimate conclusions, absolute monasticism was not human and certainly not Christian. Monasticism seeks to break all boundaries, the limitations of the body, matter and mind, as well as of the spirit. It aspires to transcend the human condition and become angelic under the guise of divinisation in Christianity, realization in Hinduism and nirvana in Buddhism.*
- *You did not question the nature of the Advaitic Absolute, which leaves no room for the world, nor did we discuss in detail the cosmotheandric intuition. You knew, of course, that I was not against the monastic dimension in human life, but only against a certain absolutistic interpretation of monasticism.*
- *When discussing with Hindus or Christians at a theoretical level, you could defend, and brilliantly, both Advaita and the acosmic ideal of*

the monk. When alone and faced with realizing it in your own life, you felt the pain of being unable to live up to your ideal. This inability made you unhappy, humble and distressed by the thought you were not heroic enough to take the last step.

- What people could not understand, what you yourself could not grasp, was the inner struggle between the "Ahmankara", the "old Man", and the "Aham", the "new Man".
- Until and unless your visions were substantiated by your life, you could not rest at peace, with the joy you had felt at Arunachala.
- What made you suffer was the radical existential dualism of the Advaitic distinction between "Vyavaharika" (the level of illusion and appearance) and "Paramarthika" (the level of reality and truth). On that latter level nothing of the first could enter.
- I think that the centre of your life was your monastic vocation, your being a monk. You were tortured by the apparent incompatibility between Christianity and Advaita. Experientially and existentially committed to both, you could not solve the tension between the two, except perhaps at the very end of your life. You doubted whether, out of loyalty to yourself, you should quit the Church; you hesitated to give yourself fully to Advaita, but you never for a moment questioned your monastic consecration, your way of life.

