

# LIKE A STRANGER IN PARADISE

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## 1. PASSING THOUGHTS ON A SOLID ROCK

(Written during a night in the reservation of the Veddhas - the aborigines of Sri Lanka)

*"What a lovely surprise to discover how un-lonely being alone can be."* Ellen Burstyn

While tasting again the solitude in open wilderness I'm welcoming it's flavour like the sweetness of the first cherry after three seasons have passed.

The noise of society and the dust of it's hopes, desperations and emptiness had once again covered the fine memory of similar flavours in days too long gone. The fresh wind of the present discloses anew the old known within and without.

Once again the paradox is understood that solitude makes fade away the feeling of loneliness and that relationships nourish the pain of empty loneliness.

Those who had broken my heart long time ago - or was it yesterday? - are bounded now by (other) men and child. I dared to escape this lovely, bitter fetter and now, during such fairy days and light nights, is for me the time to smile alone at solitude . . . which can't be shared.

Even her, who didn't deny that I am still a part of her dreams, I can let go in such a place and embrace, instead, solitude.

People, books and fairy-tales say that my happy mood should not be and cannot be, 'cause having lived the life of a monk I didn't dare touch a woman for many years. What seems to be missing is that what should give fulfilments . . . but looking around, I can't see much of that promised joy in the faces of those who are trying to live their desires. Yes, I do admit that at times phantasies and dreams are transgressing the boundaries which the body has been keeping. And who could say that a life will forever be bounded to and through robes. Yet deep inside I feel that no one - not even the most perfect princess, will ever be able to replace that joy which fills my heart in solitude.

The stressless mood invites me to let go of my efforts for the world; the trials and errors to lighten some of the weight of some fellow humans. It's once again time to see how far I have trodden on my own path and if I have learned to walk calmer and happier than before. It's also time to see and work inside which is more difficult, strange and important than outside action, where we get stuck too many times for too many reasons which will, too soon, be gone and forgotten. No one is here (or anywhere in this world?) who could praise my inner actions, which are visible to no one, blame my laziness, charge my hopes and hesitations, my fears and the will to go beyond them.

In such an environment no walls are needed, no fences desired. The rocks, meadows, forests and the mountains far away in the distance are mirroring the unbounded mood of the heart, formed only in the absence of people and their enclosing creations. The mind can breath freely when no longer caught inside the man-made narrow cages of traditions, conventions and rituals.

No roof is wanted, as the clouds are carrying not more than few drops of rain while floating their way towards unknown and undesired horizons. Trees' leaves and overhanging rocks provide enough protection from the sun, when it's too strong to face.

Could anybody show me a ceiling - may it be one of a fancy hotel or castle - which would equal the sparkling beauty of countless stars, far away from any artificial lights? Who would worry of not falling asleep, when our little eyes are touching a great miracle which soothes our superficial problems and thoughts.

Only crossing of stars through the boundless sphere - called satellits, are a reminder of modern times in which humans are spending fortunes to conquer outer space on accounts of their inner space's wealth.

Is there any bed which can, indeed, make the sleep deeper and the dreams more meaningful? Spending the night on an old solid rock, warmed by the powerful sun, polished by countless rains, cooled by the evening breeze, embedded by the green of grasses and trees, enriched by the sound of animals, my soul is given a chance to touch it's nature - not only when it dreams.

Feeling awareness and safety in wilderness' lap, one can't understand and is amused of those who try to ensure life. Which one would be even worth to get ensured, if it's not even lived and understood in it's most basic depths and potential?

I don't deny that my heart starts beating stronger when in the darkness of the night the sound of a passing elephant is heard. . . . and what about snakes who can kill men, mosquitoes and ticks who love humans' sweet blood, the unfiltered water taken from a muddy creek, where also animals still their thirst, the food of villagers, which the heart accepts with thankfulness, but the body might complain about . . . ? The unmarked paths to the village take time to walk, even if one knows the way, not marked by man, but just by countless steps. They belong to the animals. Humans may walk on them as guests, but who would give them the guarantee that one will reach the desired goal?

That life and health is at risk anywhere at any place is a fact which we like to deny. Should there be a calming exception when getting in touch with romantic wilderness? But that paradox mood may give wisdom the chance to arise and understand the miracle of life, with all it's dark feared sides, beginnings and ends . . . and only then reality is understood, accepted and harmony reached within oneself and one's environment, surrounded by an imperfect society or by perfect seclusion.

## 2. SOME UNCLEAR MOOD OF SOME LITTLE TRUTH

*"When no answer comes from within to the problems and complexities of life, they ultimately mean very little." C.G.Jung*

The mood I feel in solitude is not that great, is not that special. Yet it's a sphere which caught my heart to such an extent, which I can't let go. I love it more than that, what moves me 'round at other times, and what moves others 'round all the time. A feeling from deep inside tells me: "These bits of truths are good enough for me . . ." - For me alone?

This mood, it doesn't flow into beautiful words creating poems which might delight the tired souls of those, who only know the noise of crowdedness. It doesn't try to imitate the wholly atmosphere of those who have gone far; so far that for them human sorrow seem to sound like ridiculous jokes of ignorant fools. But is that so? I hear their wise advices and watch myself, but don't get wiser after all. Confused I drop the others' paths and goals, which are too alien to me . . . or are they just too noble to understand. With humbleness, then, I return to my own solitude - so real for me, and feel some joy about the way I walk - not always right, the points I pass - not always great, the goals I have - not always clear.

In such secluded atmosphere there's no emptiness inside, where thoughts and phantasies, feelings and emotions are left aside or get destroyed. They all come up in different ways, in different colours and different forms. Sometimes more than I expect and more than which is dear to me. I have the time, and take the time, to let them come, to watch them far, close, or just in vain . . . and let them go again, if they so please. I do try hard to keep with them on friendly terms, although they can be annoying, rough, tough and sometimes stronger than my friendly attitude. If I would come to fight with them, this mood would turn to cruel war and soon I would be forced to leave the self-made battlefield, defeated and with bloody wounds. And then illusive thoughts might come and tell me: "I'm too weak! Not strong enough was my will!" or "That's not the place where peace can be gained! Go back and look for it within the crowded world! . . ." Therefore: If angels come, I let them be; if devils come, I let them be, and learn to harmonise with both of them. Do I have another choice? If I do not set my mind on winning, how could I ever lose?

To what extent, I ask myself, can my "will", so strong it may seem at times, well educated since childhood days, covered proudly in monk-robos for years, well familiar with heavenly verses, control my "wishes", coming from the deep, dark, unknown, expressing their naughty thoughts, childish dreams and unbelievable phantasies? To what extent, I dare to think, can "wishes" inspire the "will" to let go of fixed goals, which have lost the spontaneous joy of unbounded life? I watch both play and fight, agree and argue, love and hate, join and depart . . . but just for some time, to gain new strength and meet again to continue that serious, that foolish act all over again.

Here is the right time and the right place that dreams appear and spread their wings and fly across horizons never seen before. They mock the known reality in such a way, that one may see the old worn-out world from a new point. In that way it gives me another chance to realise what went wrong with that what was once believed as absolutely right. What's the reason that some dreams, so vague they may be, have come for a visit from unknown spheres? Quietly they move into consciousness and turn into clearer ideas, become meaningful thoughts and transform themselves into deep reflections, ready to inspire habits to change their course. New hopes, new goals, new strength appear! But then the long pampered, familiar ideas come back once more and crush these new vague dreams . . . and back one sails to the same old goal. Yet intuitive I know that this is the right time and the right place for dreams to come again to bring new life.

What is the strategy when living in the wilderness, without friend's companionship and master's good advice; not just for the sake of surviving but for the sake of getting to know what life means? It may be the art to learn what are the limits by which we are bounded and which potential in us is able to create new space. To accept that what we cannot change, however strong we may be, and to understand these areas which are worthwhile to let go or form anew in a different way.

It takes skill and intuition to know how to combine the needful with that in what ones hearth rejoices. Having escaped sun's heat during day in a narrow, limited cave, the eyes got tired of seeing the same few trees and rocks. Sweat may have covered the body and dullness the mood of the mind. Then, when the evening breeze is felt, what joy to walk into the open space, high above the common ground, the horizon far away; to follow the path to the small muddy creek and take a refreshing bath. In such a manner I learn again how satisfying it is to care for body and soul by simple means.

Not too much time is needed to keep in order my few things which I do need, but I hesitate to clean up that which isn't mine: Why should I sweep a path belonging to the jungle, adorned by it's own leaves? Why should I plaster the floor of a cave or close it up with walls? The way it's now is good enough and soon I will have to leave this place . . . and some time later this earth. But this rock will keep it's form, even if centuries have passed. . . . so why waste my energy on a task that will not last? One who can't understand here nature's will, the way she controls and follows her own rules, he will soon despair and go back home, where he believes that he is the boss.

And fears? Yes, they come up at times when a simple stick is taken for a poisonous snake, when the silent of the night is cut by an animal's shout, or when the foot slips off while climbing a rock. These are few moments and soon the heart will beat again it's calm natural rhythm. They say that there are ghosts and gods, wild beasts and evil minded people here. If I could see their shadows in the darkness of the night and hear their sounds in a clear way, why shouldn't I worry about life and death? But as it is, I don't let them fool my mind, and therefore I fall asleep in a peaceful way. Yes, fears are there, yet less than hate.

If the food is cooked in a way that the stomach can't take, if water wasn't brought or is too muddy to drink, if heat paralyses body and mind, if the sun is too strong to face, if mosquitoes disturb the sitting in peace, than hate will show it's different strengths. But soon will lose it's power and moves on. So hate is there, yet less than lust.

Some say it just needs discipline to keep control when this inner urge comes up, and with some wisdom, added as a force, one will be able to destroy it's roots. But when it shows it's power in unexpected waves which flood the mind and blows within the heart as strong as hurricanes; when it has shaken my arrogant illusion that I've gone quite far beyond the common thoughts of common man; when there is not much left of purity beside the amazement that such unwanted desires can take control in such short time, then I have doubt about such a simple strategy for such a complex phenomenon. When that chaotic urge is showing mastery once again then I tend to agree with what others have said: "We all had been created in that very moment of such ecstasy, so how can we say that it shouldn't be part of us? How can it be ignored, neglected or left behind? One has to accept this natural strength and learn to live with it in proper ways. If you try to suppress such lust, it will come back with double force. The faster you try to run away, the faster it will follow you." But when these thoughts have left the scene and when the mind rejoices in wholesome peace, then once more, hope comes up and the confidence that I have control over such undamed forces . . . but still I know that lust is there, yet less than romantic dreams.

It might be just a fairy tale which I carry around in untold phantasies. At times it seems like a sleeping force which might awake with just one short glance and few sweet words. Then she might stand in front of me and call my name. Or did she already call my name and catch my heart? Does she, by now, know my mind, my longing thoughts for her and her sweet eyes, her mouth, her smile, her voice, her unfulfilled and unfulfilling dreams . . . illusions . . . realities? This love in such romantic form can change the world in a miraculous, demonic way. Could it ever happen to the 'proper' man, who fixed his mind to goodness and reason ? . . . but even he might fall in love, confused within and lost without for few sweet-bitter hours, days, years . . . eternity? What matters time in such a state? All that seems part of human destiny. Why should one doubt that monks are separated and therefore saved from that strange fate? But there is a hidden paradox behind that world-common drama: If it's fulfilments, longed for in countless ways, is reached, this very goal starts to destroy it's source, it's hope, it's wish. The oneness falls apart again and one finds oneself there where all had once started: alone and lost in that vast world where separation is the norm and unification just a dream which will never last. But even if all that sounds so clear to me at times, romantic dreams are there, yet less than love for solitude.

What is behind this lasting mood, though I don't count the days; behind that growth, though I don't measure it's fine strength? Here I feel - at least to some extent - that strangeness has lost it's familiar taste and I'm at home where I belong. Some bondage is gone, which I had ignored and some freedom is gained, which I didn't even know. Life again makes sense in it's unusual way, 'cause useless actions are left aside. I have time to use my time and energy to use my skill without the usual waste. I can grow in new, fresh forms and break the fetters which I myself have put on me; or which others have tied with their strong force - and I have agreed; or they were bounded in a mysterious way, and I just accepted them to be part of life. I can follow my own ideas, do things in the way I like, walk the paths, which seem right to me, but haven't been walked before, and spend time at spots which I just like without having to find reasons. I have learned the art how to sit peacefully on rocks and earth in such a way that the mind finds rest within oneself, and how to sleep at places, where no one else has slept before. I can realise how narrow houses are - and temples I don't exclude; how difficult to keep them clean and to maintain them from falling apart. I wonder what must be so special on them that people find so much delight, but what they seem to forget from the start, that all that must be left behind at the end. I become aware how fast the sky can change it's mood in colourful ways mirroring my own changing mind. The sun's fixed course I use as a daily guide. The change of the moon-shadow's strength reminds me how fast the days pass by. Through the stars' sparkling lights I understand how little all that matters and still how much I do care. I learn in how many different ways the sun can rise, although the spot is each time the same. It's here that I feel, how much I envy the eagle gliding through the air in it's unbounded way across the earth, which I can leave behind just in my dreams, for limited moments. At least my eyes can fly with him to lose and find myself thereby. I feel sorry for some other creatures around, which can't even dream of anything else beside finding food, producing their line and escaping in sleep . . . but aren't we doing the same with our short lives when passing the days and aren't aware what's in fact going on?

Too soon, I feel, the day will come when I will have to go back as a stranger to a human world, less understood than ever before. And at the same time I am aware that people might think the same about me: "How can he live in such a way?" But do I really care about what they say and why should I try to find an answer for them? It is enough what I have found for myself, however vague it may be. I alone know the feedback in my heart, which no one else can see.

This and much more I feel when I'm alone, but what is it then all worth? At the end it's is not much more than just some unclear mood of some little truth . . .

### **3. Riving an Aranya and Letting Go of The World**

A Cave-monastery in the East Visited by a Monk from the West

*"No man will ever unfold the capacity of his own intellect  
who does not at least checker his life in solitude." De Quinley*

It was last March when I decided to escape again for a few weeks from all my duties and business, which I had built around myself and to go on retreat. I left to Ampara, a district in the far East to visit a two thousand year old cave-monastery situated in the East of this Island called 'Samangala'. Coming to a place like this it is at once obvious, how much energy and sensitivity people in ancient days must have activated to creative such a harmony between nature and culture, most suitable for developing harmony in the mind.

It seems to me like a strange paradox, but it is indeed a former General of the Army and mostly soldiers, who are rebuilding what nature had conquered back peacefully for centuries. Smilingly I thought: "How would this world full of conflicts look like, if more people from all opposing parties so directly involved in wars would perform similar wholesome activities?"

Many inhabitation of this tear-shaped Island are scared to visit the East, so close to the area where the war has been going on for years. It is my fourth trip to Ampara and each time I had to get used to of seeing at every corner army, police, and village guards with their life threatening 'equipment'. Nevertheless, the general atmosphere in towns and villages is peaceful. And in a secluded place like 'Samangala' even the symbiosis between inner and outer harmony can be developed successfully.

The basic and natural requisite for such a task are the untouched wilderness the cooling caves and an ever-flowing spring of 'Samangala-Aranya'. It is placed on one of the last 'rock islands' before the landscape stretches itself flat towards the sea, which is slightly visible from the top. 'Rajalena' or 'Kings cave' is the biggest and most excellent of four huge caves. Cut by man into a steep rock wall, it is like a theater, where about 300 people can sit comfortably, which is open towards the surrounding landscape. Into the ceiling of this 20-metres high rock tent holes were carved; probably the leftovers of an enormous wood-construction which had once covered this natural hall. Sitting under this stone-roof I am actually glad that all the wood had rotten away and the open atmosphere had been preserved. Even while raining and storming one feels protected from nature's force by nature, in harmony with it and indeed a part of it.

During these peaceful days in such a peaceful environment the questions arose in my mind: "Why is nobody living under such marvelous conditions? Why seems the building of an Aranya easier than staying there?"

People and monks our days prefer to keep in touch with the world than trying to get in touch with themselves. 'Samanagala' indeed has not much to offer for those who eagerly strive to continue the modern never-ending 'rat-race'.

Another reason why in a country like Sri Lanka meditation-places are often neglected is that those who are too much caught up mentally or physically with the outer war do not realize that the actual war is taking place inside every one of

us. This lack of insight prevents us to look for places where this inner disharmony could be at least to some extent overcome with patience and effort.

Few have the courage our days to risk a step backwards from lazy civilized habits and unnecessary luxury. Living with nature one experiences pleasant and unpleasant phenomena, unknown to the common man imbedded in safety dullness: to walk through the forest to a distant well for a bath in the open; seeing how days and nights exchange each other without electric interference; recognizing the passing of the weeks and months by watching moon's silver-shine increasing and decreasing; knowing the seasons by hearing the rain dropping down the rock and seeing the lake extending its banks; Listening to the sound of nature which is reaching the cave from outside and to the sound of silence which is touching the hearth from within; rejoicing with the peacock the breaking of dawn, with the eagle the secluded freedom below the skies and with the bats the cooling stillness of a tropical night.

Such conditions are conducive to get in touch with our true self: but we are scared to get to know too about our closest enemy and friend within and prefer to lose ourselves in the chaos of an exciting world outside.

*Having spent several satisfying days at 'Samangala' I knew that the former General would appreciate me becoming the 'boss' of this 'institution'! But I said 'appakiccho'. He understood and added with a smile 'sallahukavuti'; a phrase taken from the 'Metta-sutta' which means that one should have few duties and an unburdened why of life. How many monks - and I do not exclude myself - are indeed living according to such spiritual guidelines? Aren't most of us not involved in all kinds of unnecessary and even necessary worldly duties or religious responsibilities, which prevent us from our own spiritual progress?*

The time, energy and material resources which had been mobilized in these recent years on such an auspicious place with such an auspicious name ('Good luck') should not in vain be conquered again by nature. Therefore the natural atmosphere of *dhamma* is inviting anybody to use these vacant caves for a spiritual progress; a progress too often neglected nowadays by householders as well as 'temple'holders.

I myself let time decide when to turn again my back towards society, and if this place will still provide the same undisturbed solitude, I may return to spend the days in this environment so rare on this Island and in this world.

#### 4. CONVERSATIONS WITH THE VEDDHAS

the Native People of Sri Lanka  
by Samanera Pajalo in co-operation with Sunil Abeyrathna  
(Reconstructed talks in July / August 2002)

*"These people seemed so strange. They didn't blend with the wilderness but feared it, holding it at a safe distance, like a man handling a deadly snake. They had no regard for the land, animals, plants or even water. Their lust for comfort, security and safety seemed almost barbaric. Why did they consciously insulate themselves so lavishly from the wilderness and life itself? How restricted their movements were, how square, box-like houses and heavy clothing cut them off from the elements. It seemed they saw nothing of the natural world – eagles soared overhead unnoticed. They lived in a vacuum, separated from everything but themselves and the squalor they'd created."*

*An North-American Indian's first encounter with the "civilized" world. [from "Grandfather" by Tom Brown, Jr.]*

##### Introduction:

My first visit to the Veddhas happened in the year 1998, which was purely out of curiosity. At that time Tissahami, the father of Vanniyala Etho, was still alive. Soon afterwards he passed away. Two years ago one brother monk invited me on a trip to distribute clothes, food, and Buddhist picture books, which I was printing at that time. Now I feel that this kind of help was very superficial and in no way reducing their actual problems, which they are facing in present times. At that time I also met Vanniyala Etho's brother, who passed away few months later – maybe because of cancer. Vasana (which means "luck"), a 12 year old girl contacted me afterwards requesting help for her family. She has four sisters (the two eldest are already married and have also children) and one 5 year old adopted brother, who her mother found one day in the jungle, abandoned by his own mother. Her parents are cultivating some land and own a small shop, but their income is hardly sufficient. In August 2001 we bought them a milk-cow and reactivated the kindergarten nearby, where the eldest daughter and the mother were paid by us for taking care of the children. At the same time I stayed for some days in a cave remote from the village. Offering my help to Vanniyala Etho, he requested to provide basic necessary items for the annual religious meeting of all the Veddhas, called Thoilaya. Although it is their most important gathering this year not enough sponsors could be found and therefore it did not take place. In November I visited the kindergarten and had another meeting with the Veddha-chief. We decided to organise for him, for the welfare and organisation of Dambana and for other villages nearby, a loudspeaker-set. One month later I came again with my mother and met him while he was working on the fields. In August we had the rare chance to accompany Vanniyala Etho and some of the younger Veddhas for three days on a trip into the wilderness and experience the ways they are still connected with nature. Most of the following talks with Vanniyala Etho took place at his hut or during our trip into the wilderness. With Gunapala and Gunawardana we talks were other places around Dambana.

##### Problems and Projects:

Q: What are the biggest problems of your people?

Vanniyala Etho: The new generation are losing interest in their own tradition, culture and language; the hunting is out of control and they are burning down the jungle [for cultivation, for cattle, because of hunting, etc]. I am putting down rules for my people. Even they do not follow them, it is the best that I can do. [Also his own behaviour is a living example for his people.]

Q: You mentioned that the big amount of people who are visiting are sometimes a problem for you. Do you have plans to solve this problem?

VE: I appreciate visits like these [pointing at me], but many visitors just come to look around without any serious interest, and that really bothers me. In future, we are planning to make a barrier and ask people first to fill out some questions about their reason for coming here, etc. and to give them some understanding about basic rules of conduct, like no shouting, loud music, littering, drinking alcohol or disrespect. [I observed visitors, who entered his hut, not even taking off their shoes.]

Q: Why was the kindergarten-project at first a failure? [After working for some months it was closed down, but then reopened again?]

VE: Sometimes my people are very passive and I am not happy about that. I myself and Gunawardana were the ones who had built the kindergarten-hall with our own hands, but then the parents became disinterested. Also other NGOs supported that project, but in the end it was a failure.

I can give another example about the passivity of my people: in a few days [August 9<sup>th</sup> 2002] there is a meeting with the government in Colombo to discuss problems we are facing. I requested some of my people to come with me as representatives and what they asked was, how much they would get payed for it. [While talking like this he is smiling about it and does not make a desperate impression. . . . – they went to Colombo, but none of the higher authorities showed interest in listening to their problems]

VE: It would be excellent if we could co-operate [as I had suggested] to make a small booklet for the young Veddha-generation about our own tradition and background. A similar project I discussed with some authorities in Colombo, but that is a slow process. Therefore I would appreciate your co-operation on the matter. I saw [during an international meeting of native people in Nepal] that they are doing something very similar.

Q: Do you still get invitations for international native people conferences?

VE: Yes sometimes, but they only send the invitation without any tickets [and of course he can't afford that].

Gunawardana (see below): I have been at some of these meetings [Australia, Philippines]. On the one side I have the feeling that talking is going on, but nothing is coming out. On the other hand we native people would appreciate much more a natural environment than fancy hotels for such meetings.

Q: What kind of connection did you feel with the other native people?

Gunawardana: It was not so much on the verbal, but more on the mental plane [smilingly pointing to his head]. The bodies of the Australians seemed similar but bigger. The way they were chewing beetle nuts is very similar to ours. The drum beat of the native Philippines was the same as ours.

Q: Are you proud to be a Veddha?

Gunawardana: Yes, of course. The civilised and educated people are those who destroy the world. We are proud that we are not participating in that. [Seeing how the jungle is being burnt down around Dambana, I would not completely agree with that statement.]

Q: Does any national or international organisation support you?

VE: Besides some support from the “Temple of the Tooth”-Trust [and “Simple Wisdom”] there is actually not much support from anybody; mostly just empty promises. If someone helps it is mostly for showing off and announcing their name. This is why I am tired of asking for help.

I am planing to find a “Vanniyala Etho Fund” with the idea to help the individuals and families who are in difficulties. With that money we can, for example, bail out a man arrested for hunting [which is illegal]. That would save maybe the illegal shooting of another 10 animals, to get the money for the courts [which costs 10.000 Rs]. About every three months one Veddha gets caught because of illegal hunting. [Several encounters with Veddha-hunters and their self-made guns show that this is not uncommon.]

Beliefs:

Q: What is your religion?

VE: I do not call it really religion, but there is a close connection with the spirit of our ancestors, who lived in trees such as that Bodhi Tree over there [about 200 meters from his hut]. That connection I also have with my own father. If I am sick or if I want to be sure to be in another way successful, I get in touch with them and surely it will work out.

Una Kiri Galle [the name of a mountain in that area which means “warm-milk-mountain”] is also a place the spirits of our ancestors are living and in the night one can sometime hear their sounds. The last time that happened to me was few months back when collecting the honey for the Kandyan Perehera [the most important annual religious festival, where the Veddhas are offering honey to the tooth-relict of the Buddha]. When I was young I was scared about that, but not anymore.

Q: What about Buddhism and why do you have a Buddha Statue near the Bodhi Tree?

VE: We are not Buddhists, but we have respect towards the Buddha, because he visited this area 2500 years ago and solved some problems among our people. [There is the traditional belief that Buddha had visited Sri Lanka several times. On one occasion it was Mahiyangana, a town 15 km from the village where most of the Veddhas are living today.]

Besides that respect there is actually not much use for the statue here [one can see that it is neglected and no offerings are being made], but the Buddhists would not like it if we threw it away; and we still we have respect for it..

Gunapala: There are three mountains around this area, where one devil and two female devils are living. At certain times we do prayers and give offerings to them.

During our main annual religious festival, called Thoilaya, we dance, chant and pray to our past ancestors and spirits to keep them happy all year, so that they protect us and don't cause sickness and problems for us. At that time sometimes close relatives who passed away, will enter the body of one person and gives advice, tells the future and requests some offerings. [For example if a male spirit is entering a female body “she” will talk like a man.]

Gunawardana: I, personally, feel no connection with the spirit of my ancestors. The Buddhist influence during my education made a stronger impression on my mind than the traditional belief. I also go sometimes on retreat for meditation.

Q: Last night I dreamt about you. What is your understanding of dreams?

VE: If in that dream there was a good mood, something positive will happen. Usually we dream about friends or people close to us and about happenings which will take place in the future. If I dream about my father being in a happy mood, this is a good sign.

Life and Tradition:

Q: Are you still going off alone to the jungle?

VE: Yes, if things or visitors are getting too much for me or if I need to collect medicine, I go off to the jungle . . . once a month or every two months for several days.

Q: Can you survive there without any problems?

VE: Any Veddha knows how to survive and what to eat in the jungle. The last time I went off one month ago, the only problem were the mosquitoes; but I burned some elephant dung and the smoke chased them away.

A younger Veddha: We can live for two or three days in the jungle without food; but what we need to eat is beetle-nut [Most of the Veddhas chew that in big amounts throughout the day. I suppose it is addictive, but it also keeps away the hunger and gives energy.]

Q: How do you obtain knowledge about the jungle?

VE: Through tradition and experience. I'll give you an example: my father told me not to eat a certain plant, which I never did; but my children tasted it and they realised, it can actually be eaten.

Q: Was your father wrong about that?

VE: [Smiling] There are enough things to learn from my children. [The way he answers is very interesting by pointing out the positive and leaving aside the negative. By the way: he has seven sons and one daughter.]

Q: I heard that your people used not to count the years of their age. How do you know that your father got 110 years old?

VE: They found out through analysing parts of his upper spine [a scientific way of finding out a human's age]. There is no use of counting your years, because you only will get sad by getting older. I, for example still think like a boy. But there is also a story of a Veddha, who married a much older woman. When she showed signs of old age he thought that he must be old too, and from that moment he became old.

Q: Why do you think that your father lived for so long?

VE: Because his life was one in harmony with a health environment.

Q: Do you think your life is more difficult than his used to be?

VE: For sure it is more difficult in modern times, but nevertheless I feel happy about myself.

Q: Do you see yourself as something like a medicine man? [At his place there are many different kinds of self made medicine in bottles or other containers, also to be sold to visitors]

VE: Every Veddha knows the first aid part of our medicine, but the deeper knowledge I learnt from my father which I am passing on to my eldest son.

Q: If you are sick, do you use your own medicine or do you go to a doctor? [After our long trip through the wilderness his foot had a cut which got infected and he put some of his self-made oil on it. Next day I noticed a great improvement with his foot.]

VE: Sometimes if a doctor is sick he needs another doctor. If I can't cure myself I am going to someone else. [Vanniyala Etho initiated a government hospital in Dambana some years ago. I got the feeling that most of the villagers prefer to go to hospital than to use traditional medicine.]

Q: I suppose you do not eat meat to such an extent as the Veddhas used to do.

VE: Food is not a big issue for us: we eat to live and do not live to eat. When I visited Switzerland [to a native people conference in Geneva], I had no problem eating the food there. Here we eat mostly the Singhalese way: rice and curry, although for many years my stomach has been unable to handle spicy food..

Q: Do your children go to school?

VE: They do, but when they come home they just throw the books in one corner and are interested in other things.

Q: Can you speak the Sinhalese language?

VE: Yes, I can understand and could speak, but if I, as the chief, would not speak my own language soon nobody would speak it. Out of the more than 100 families living in Dambana only about 50 are left who care about their language and tradition.

Talks with two other Veddhas:

Q: Where did the Veddhas live before they settled down in Dambana and how did they survive?

Gunapala: They used to live in the forest, some distance from here. The way of surviving was based on hunting animals, like deer, wild boars, porcupines, Iguanas, ant-eater, [but also on plants of the forest and wild honey, which seems to be the their main cash-crop, beside milk and handicrafts.] My father still went hunting, but I never did. I was born in 1954 in the jungle. I know the year, because it was registered in the school. [He doesn't know how to read and write, but at home they speak Sinhalese] As a protection against sun and rain the Veddhas used to build very simple small huts out of bark or stayed in caves [like the one I have used sometimes]. Three or four families were living together. We were 12 brothers and sisters, but two of them died when they were young. The Veddhas get married when they are about 15 or 16 years old. There are no initiation-rituals [common to native people in other parts of the world] for boys when they are coming into puberty. But there is a small celebration when a girl is becoming a woman [through getting her first period]. Elderly women are giving that girl a special bath, using a new pot and selected herbs and flowers. Neighbours and relations are invited and special food is offered.

Q: Did the Veddhas in former times use any drugs, similar to coffee, nicotine or ganja?

A: Nothing like that, but instead of beetle nut they used to take a certain bark, some kind of nut and [instead of lime] the shell of snails.

Q: Why don't you let your hair and beard grow [common for the traditional Veddhas]?

Gunapala: While working sweat and dirt gets in your hair, causing wounds on the skin. In former times husband and wife had a similar hair style and they bound each others hair.

Q: What is your next goal in life?

Gunapala: I have a piece of land where there is water throughout the year. I would like to grow vegetables there, because I could sell them in my shop. [Later we bought him the necessary tools]. There I have also paddy fields, which would provide me with enough rice for my family throughout the year, but half of it I have to give for those who are helping with the cultivation.

Q: What kind of job do your children want to have in future?

Gunapala: My two eldest daughters have already a family [If I am able to provide them with a sewing machine they would start a small tailor-business], but the two next ones, 12 and 15 years old, want to become a teacher and a nurse.

Q: Recently you went to Kandy, did you like that city?

Gunapala: I did not like it at all, the noise is too much.

Gunawardana is the only Veddha who studied at the University of Colombo and holds a B.A.. He wrote two books about his people ; one of them is translated into English: "Hunting Grounds". Presently he is a teacher in another Veddha village nearby.

Q: How old are you and is it common not to be married?

Gunawardana: I am 35 and it is unusual for Veddhas not to marry. I feel that if you have family, you lose your freedom and find worries, which never end. As soon as your children are grown up, the next generation starts [Veddhas life in big families where it is natural that the older people take care for the young ones].

Q: You studied Sinhalese as a subject. Is there any connection to the Veddha-language?

Gunawardana: Parts of our language must have been lost in the past and one can't speak it without using the Sinhalese words.

Q: As a student you stayed in Colombo. How did you like the life in the city and did you choose to come back to Dambana?

Gunawardana: I did not like the city. There are a lot of people, but no friends, therefore I decided to come back to my people.

*Additional unfinished notes:*

Age of VE: 55;

Why he stopped hunting: shot a wild pig pregnant of 12 pigs.

Most impressiv childhood experience: staying hungry for 3 days.

Otheriwse happy days.

What games: very dangerous ones: who can climb the highest on a tree, jumping from branch to branch; swing with vines; Streeing up nests of dangerous bees.

To Gunapala: Are there veddha-families who are not having enough food; yes, sometimes only one meal; once mother came early morning very nervous asking for food, children will starve. Gave some rice and jackfruit

Gunawardana: three steps how their people lose their former way of life:

1. Money: before they could make nearly everything for themselves; the rest they tradet at shops; can't store up many many things; with money one can buy anything and can store up unlimited amount.

2. roads: getting in touch with other ways of life hardly possible, because no roads to citys; now people from the country are exposed to city life without limits.

3. light: before people were used to see even without any artificial light; then came the introduction to oil-lamps, and their capability to live in nature got less; now people have excess to electricity with stronger lights, radios, Tv, computer, etc. and they lose the ability to sense and live in nature even more.

I try to be a example with my simple way of living; just wearing white sarong and have no luxaries; children and other people don't understand that; they are not ready for the deeper meaing in simplicity.

## **5. THE TOP OF A TEARDROP**

A Journey to Jaffna – Sir Lanka

*“It would be much more constructive if people try to understand their supposed enemies. Learning to forgive is much more useful . . . the more so when the provocation is extreme, for it is under the greatest adversity that there exists the greatest potentiality for doing good; both for oneself and others.”* The Dalai Lama

Introduction: This is a report about my first journey to Jaffna, one of the most afflicted places during two decades of war on the tear-shaped island of Sri Lanka. What I have seen, heard and read I have described in my own subjective way. In case some of these statements are not in accordance with actual facts, then this was done without any intention to distort the truth! When writing about war and peace, desperation and hopes which people here have experienced in different degrees, some may wonder, which side do I defend and which one do I condemn. . . . But seeing the world through prejudiced eyes and dividing it between right and left, black and white, good and bad is one of the mistakes we should avoid when dealing with suffering from a human point of view.

When the plane took off, my eyes filled with tears and the melody of a song from childhood-days came to my mind: “Above the clouds, freedom ought to be without barriers . . . “. It was the last day of a trip to Jaffna and by then I knew it will not be my last one. Did my emotions arise because I could experience and share how people start to enjoy life again after years of destruction and terror, like seeing a plant which has grown out of a crack in a stone-wall, or have I been shaken when experiencing how war prevents people from blooming, like a flower without water and proper soil?

Even I have been living for years in Sri Lanka, I mostly got to know about the conflicts from the Sinhalese point of view. During this trip I could round up my picture about this island's past and present. I got deeper insight into another society with it's horrors and hopes, thanks to a close connection and friendship with Jaffna-people and foreigners who have been living and working during these most critical years in Jaffna.

The first surprised after we landed was when seeing the airport in the middle of a huge high-security zone several kilometres north of Jaffna-town. There was actually no proper building; only some dogs were running around greeting the newly arrived plane. They were hardly disturbed by the noise, the soldiers with their MGs and the passengers, who stepped on land which was hardly accessible for more many years. Our luggage was loaded into an air-force-truck and we drove with a bus across a small uneven dirt-road to a temporary shelter: the “waiting hall”. From there we proceeded towards Jaffna-town into a world, which I have never entered before. We drove through uncleared and uncivilized area, where the few buildings not bombed, destroyed and overgrown by plants were used as quarters by the soldiers. Sometimes huge buildings without roof, windows and any trace of human life could be identified as schools and temples. A Tamil, well versed in English, sitting next to me explained what this country used to be like: everywhere temples, schools and palm-trees, the base for religion, culture and nature.

Compared to most places I know, people here are still positive surprised when things are actually working in a proper way and not much disturbed when they do not. Therefore it was not much of a surprise to anyone when our airport-transport broke down. While waiting on the road, someone pointed out smilingly a sticker in the front of the bus: “Taste the difference!” . . . and this is what I, indeed, did in the following days.

The buildings which do *not* show signs of gunshots or bomb-explosions are few, the signs warning about land-mines countless and the rusty barbed wires throughout the country and around army quarters and check-points are endless.

Weapons hanging from the shoulders of policemen and army-soldiers make it obvious that a terrifying chapter is not yet closed; and so do the bright red paintings announcing the Heroes Day<sup>1</sup> sprayed on the few walls which have been recently white-washed: a machine-gun which is stuck up-side down into the earth and a helmet hanging on top of it, symbolising a grave, next to the scary head of a tiger crowned by four letters, which are feared and condemned by some, and yet longed for and respected by others: LTTE, Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

*. . . and still, I could feel a new breeze of life breathing through the ruins of this area and the souls of these people. Worldly noisy excitements are rapidly replacing the recent moods of terror, fear and survival-instinct. Modern technical achievements, life-styles and misbehaviours are overtaking old views on religion and tradition. The noise of gun-shootings and bomb-explosions on the streets are being exchanged for the sounds of violent video- and TV-films in the homes. Former unwritten rules and taboos about relationship, marriage and family-life are now challenged openly by romantic Hindi films, or secretly by pornographic videos or web-pages accessible in newly opened internet-cafes. Recently the police had arrested four women for prostitution (which is illegal in Sri Lanka) and the LTTE has burned in public a big amount of blue-film-videos. A young Tamil woman complaint about certain misbehaviour of youngsters towards girls and women: "Nobody dared to do that when LTTE was in power!" "But do you really think that through fear such 'modern phenomena' are really getting solved and not just suppressed," I asked her.*

*During the day the market is as busy and crowded with people as in any other bigger town in Sri Lanka, yet the fact of being closer to India than the rest of the country is very obvious. The noise of the cars, buses and motorbikes, is mixed with music coming from loudspeakers. Most signs and commercials are written in Tamil sometimes in English, but Sinhalese letters are hardly seen anywhere. Also the amount of bicycles and pedestrians, which cause the traffic on the dusty and damaged road to slow down to a more human scale, mirrors more the street-life in India. Yet this more relaxed way of moving through town is obviously getting faster day per day . . . and more dangerous.*

*Even without the once so common power cuts, it is sometimes still spooky and unsafe to be on the road after dawn, when few street lights are functioning and many people are moving around per foot or on bikes without any light and unconcerned with traffic rules. Sometimes one can only guess in the dark where the road is going along and hope that no holes are in the way. Nevertheless for these people it must be a great and unusual feeling of freedom. Not too long ago nobody dared to even move one step out of their homes, during the night.*

Being used that women in Asia are much more reluctant to move around by themselves, I was impressed to see how many girls and women are riding bikes, or even scoopers, through town. Most of them wear Western-style base-ball caps, which is not seen with their Sinhalese sisters. But there dresses are typical Indian. Blue Jeans, which has become a fashion among city-girls in other parts of the island, is (still) an unknown here. I can't say if this is the influence of tradition or the pressure of the LTTE, who is against such modern trends. Yet it is strange that their notorious female cadre is wearing pants with a big belt and a different hair style.<sup>2</sup>

One day we were looking for a way to visit the beautiful and now calm beaches on one of the neighbour-island connected with the peninsula with a road. An old taxi-driver offered us a ride with his equally old, small and fragile 'Morris' built in the Fifties (representing very well certain aspects of Jaffna!). On the way we had to stop at a checkpoint to show our I.D.s With some surprise and a smile we were asked if we can manage to go in that overcrowded fragile car. "Of course!" we said. "Then I will also come with you," was a lady-soldier's funny feedback while checking our identities.

Another time we took our borrowed bicycles to ride along the flat coast. Endless rusty barbed wire-fences and countless empty army-hiding places were disturbing the otherwise pictures landscape with it's many birds. How many palm trees had to be cut down to become part of that deadly war game. On the other side recently erected huge sign-boards are showing a cut tree in form of a beheaded human, encouraging the people to protect trees and to plant new ones. In those large areas in the country-side, which are neither occupied by nor inaccessible because of landmines, rice, vegetables and bananas are cultivated intensively in modern ways with tractors and chemicals. Displaced families are now hoping that the high security zones are getting removed so that they can go back to their former homes and also start from anew the cultivation of land. For too many years it has been left to the deadly war and the natural cycle of life.

Such scenes remind me about the Biblical saying: "Let's turn swords into ploughs" and in modern terms "tanks into tractors". I actually saw only once in the night a monstrous army-tank being moved through the narrow streets of Jaffna-town. During the day one often encounters soldiers on tractors moving around and even the LTTE used to transform literally tractors into tanks when undertaking an stradegical offensive.

For the first time I got a feeling what Europe must have been like after World War II. And yet, the situation during a civil-war may even be more confusing, where people often hardly can make out, which of the fighting parties is actually the one who is on their side. "The violence in these years in Sri Lanka did not always reach the intensity of a conventional battle. Rather it was the character of a chronic, periodic, low-intensity conflict, punctuated with guerilla type of attacks, followed by

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<sup>1</sup> One Tamil complaint to me about such ceremonies: ". . . they keep repairing and decorating the cemeteries and the reason they give is that they have to respect the soldiers who died for their country. But is this very important? I would say that they confess for all their mistakes by renovating and feeding the parents of the soldiers."

<sup>2</sup> One young Tamil lady's feedback on that subject is: "It is not because of the pressure of LTTE that women here don't wear jeans ... but it is a question of being an initiative to start the revolution. Well, it doesn't mean that there are none wearing it, there are a very few and they are pleased only with jeans. Choosing your garments also depends on your own feelings. If several women start wearing it then there would be a big revolution in our dress world. For LTTE cadre it's different, because they say it's comfy during fights & easy for casual wear (as far as I know). I don't agree in saying that LTTE is against such modern things, because the wife of Mr Anton Balasingam (one of the leading LTTE men) wears jeans and at the same time she's been accepted as a family member of LTTE."

*reprisals against civilians.*"<sup>3</sup> For example sometimes Tamils were forced by the LTTE to support them, and afterwards punished – even tortured or killed - by the army as a revenge for something which they never wanted to do in the first place.

*An old man invited me to see the leftovers of his house. Neither could he speak English nor can I speak Tamil, but it did not need much explanations what he wanted to tell me when showing me around the rooms without roof, doors, windows and broken down walls, where chickens and goats were looking for some left over food. Very few families are still living in their old homes. Most of them had to leave their houses either by force or when the fights and terror were getting too intense.*

There were times when most of the population on Jaffna Peninsula were refugees. Before the army took over the town, LTTE forced the people to leave so that no one would be there to capitulate. As a result a ghost-town was left behind, with only few hundred inhabitants. A Tamil friend of mine was one of them. He was forced to stay in in an empty school where the army provided food for him.

In the past people, who were not allowed to enter or leave the town, crossed the shallow waters illegally. Some of them, who just wanted to see or find their family, or in search for a safer place, drowned during that dangerous trip undertaken in despair. Even today refugees around Jaffna as well as in other parts of the country are still living in camps. The hopeless situation there is adding to their suffering due to the loss of their homes and members of their families. In that way for many (Tamils in the North as well as Sinhalese in the East) the chapter of looking for a safe home, one of the most basic human requisites, is still not closed.

One day we entered the narrow roads and paths of a slum-area on the coastal side of town. Most of the population there are Christian fisher-families, who have a hard time to make a living. Places where they could enter the sea in former times are now cut off by the barricades of an army camp. Such difficult conditions are an "ideal" preading ground for the young generation to join the guerrilla movement. As long as both sides ignore the actually root-causes of the problem (which are for sure many sided and not simple at all), violence will continue to build up and pollute the minds with feelings of revenge and the earth with unnecessary blood.

Even the LTTE has several official offices now in Jaffna, their presence is hardly obvious for a foreigner like me. Yet I got told that the pressure on their own people is strong and ever-present: taxes have to be paid, goods from outside are taxed and for the Heroes Day every government worker had to pay them a huge amount of their sallery. I asked Tamils if they ever complain openly about such unfair politics. But nobody would dare to open their mouths, because their lives would be at risk.<sup>4</sup>

"If the army withdraws from this area, the LTTE will even have more power," I mentioned to one former NGO-worker who used to live in Jaffna. Her answer was that it is harder to be suppressed by two forces then just by one, and that the LTTE is using the restriction through the army as an argument for them to gain more power and to convince people to join the movement. I actually never met one Tamil in Jaffna who would approve of the harsh methods of the LTTE nor the equally annoying presence of the army. A young lady, whose father is working in one of the LTTE offices told me that she doesn't like what her father is doing, although they stopped arguing about it at home.

In the past few professors on the university of Jaffna dared to criticise the inhuman treatment of civilians by the army and in the same way did not keep quiet about the terror caused by the LTTE. They tried to keep the university an independent place for art and education. . . . but *"the LTTE does not tolerate dissent. It's goal is to create a homogenous Tamil society, a land where everybody thinks along Tiger lines."*<sup>5</sup> For that brave act of disagreement with any violence they had to pay with their lives or had to go into hiding.<sup>6</sup> Such people I personally would call the real heroes of that war. It is their

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<sup>3</sup> Note for the publisher: I still could not trace the source of that statement

<sup>4</sup> One Tamil wrote to me: "It is not hundred percent right saying that Tamils are forced to support; but they brainwash them to get their support. Those who are aware of it are afraid of showing their feelings, because they know they'd be slaughtered. and who dared to awake people from it were shot down. A former anatomy professor of medical faculty of the university of Jaffna, was the example for this: She was a strong supporter of LTTE, untill she realized what was going on when she became closer to them. – So their message is clear, because they know, if they let these intellectuals alive they might spread like mushrooms and one day the whole nation would be opposing them. Now a few of them are residing in a place where LTTE has no access (they believe so). LTT is such a party which would never be able to give you "freedom" for which they are fighting they say; you can't live like this and it is not a proper "freedom" when you have to live under their control, you know. Yes, they can fool people but all Tamils are not fools. Now I can remember the theme of George Orwell's Animal Farm – that is "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely". There's no doubt when I found myself attracted to them; and imagined Prabakaran as if he's a God! See how I was. But when I began to read a lot I realized that it's not all alike as I was thinking; I understood that they would never going to let us to live as we want to. Yet, I have to appreciate the nicer things they perform sometimes. Controlling women abusers, drug dealers, arrack producers (who do it illegally), power corrupters etc. Their way is certainly not the one to win our hearts.

<sup>5</sup> Anita Pratap, „Island of Blood“, Vijithi Yapa Publication, Sri Lanka 2002

<sup>6</sup> A Tamile wrote to me: „*LTTE is such a party which would never be able to give you the 'freedom' for which they say they are fighting. It is not a proper freedom when you have to live under their control. Yes, they can fool people, but all Tamils are not fools. I can remember the theme of George Orwell's Animal Farm, that "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely". There's no doubt that there was a time when I found myself attracted to them and imagined Prabakaran as if he's a God! But when I began to read a lot, I realized that it's not at all as I had thought. I realized that they would never let us to live the way we want to. Yet, I have to appreciate the nice things they perform sometimes: controlling women abusers, drug dealers, arrack producers (who do it illegally), power corrupters etc. But their way is certainly not the one to win our hearts.*"

deeds and death we should remember and pass on to the next generation as an encouragement to act against any suppression by any movement at any time.

I also got to know of a circle of intellectuals and artists in Jaffna, whose members were very scared of being suspected and caught by one or the other military force. One of them was hiding for two years underground, without ever seeing daylight. During that insecure time he was reading through many pages of religious books. In what hard, but effective way life is sometimes leading us to deeper spiritual secrets.

Often I have seen pictures of army-generals in Singhalese homes or even in temples. I was surprised that I did not see one photo anywhere of the leader of the LTTE. Someone mentioned to me that her mother asked her to burn all photos of him before the army was taking over the peninsula. In fact the only time I saw of Tigers in uniform was on posters displaced around the peninsula: young men who were killed and in that way made to “heroes”, very similar to dead army soldiers in other parts of the island. One of the differences may be that many of the Singhalese who decided to become soldiers due to poverty. For most of them it is just a job to get somehow on in life. On the other side many of the Tigers were actually forced to join their movement. I heard that even while the present peace talks are going on, propaganda-programs are still being held for children in schools to start a deadly-dangerous career as liberation fighters for a new “motherland” called Eelam.

Anyone who is undertaking the training is “educated”, brainwashed and traumatized in such a way that any free-will is crushed and the only purpose of life is to fight and die for their movement and their leader. *“Once recruited, cadres have to renounce their friends, their family, their home. They are not allowed to smoke, drink or have sex. Their prized possession is their weapon and they are taught to worship it. [A cyanid-capsule hanging around their neck shows their dead-serious commitment.] “More than one thousand Tigers have consumed cyanid on capture – to avoid torture and more importantly to ensure that they carried the secrets of their organisation to the grave.”*, wrote Anita Pratap, a brave journalist who had the chance to interview some Black Tigers, the specially selected elite among the guerilla fighters: *“They are more reticent [than the ordinary Tigers], more disciplined, more motivated, and utterly emotionless. I tried to get at least a flicker of emotion out of them – nostalgia, homesickness, regret. I talked about childhood memories, missing their mother, giving up life’s pleasure, fear of imminent death. But I got nothing. No reaction at all.”*<sup>7</sup>

*Leaving alive this movement is a hard, a life-endangering or even impossible task: For years one will be punished by having to do hard labour work before one is maybe physically released, yet some of the mental scares will never heal again.*

*During the time when I was often visiting Sri Lanka’s biggest female prison I also had some encounters with Tamils who have been suspected to be part of the LTTE female-cadre or have even been caught as potential suicide bombers. Some of them touched me through their lively and gentle character. Among them were also young mothers whose children were born in jail and whose husband were kept in another LTTE-prison. Another person’s encounter with imprisoned LTTE-boys sounded to me very similar. They are still alive, because they were captured before they could swallow the deadly capsule, or because the poison was not strong enough to kill them. Even they had gone through harsh training and brutal warfare some of them have not lost their human emotions and others are on the way of recovering from their mentally: “Sometimes it takes time to get them to smile again.”*

*We tend to charge individuals or so called enemies, according to rumours, propaganda and what we want to believe, but often not by actually encounters with them. History has proved often enough that this is the very basic and necessary precondition that racism can spread as fast and dangerous as fire.*

The stories of one Tamil about the events which he experienced in Colombo in July 1983 sounded like an unbelievable nightmare. Just by a hair’s breath he could escape death and flee to Jaffna. It is maybe one of the most violent and saddest events in recent history of Sri Lanka. As a revenge for the cruel killing of 13 soldiers by the LTTE, massive violence in the capital and at other places against Tamils broke out (and thereafter in the North and East against the Singhalese): people were burnt alive, properties were taken away without any interference by police and those who could escape alive and had to hide in refugee-camps under most inhuman conditions till their exodus began to another country or to the North. *“It was this violence and the complicity of the forces of the state with the crowds made up by Singhalese thugs that convinced many Tamils of the legitimacy of militant action.”*<sup>8</sup>

It seems so paradox that religious arguments are often used to justify military actions. It might be for some readers (i.e. those who see Buddhism in Sri Lanka as a “trademark” of the Singhalese) astonishing or confusing that one of the oldest texts in Tamil “*Manimekalai*”, is about a Tamil Buddhist nun in Jaffna. Considering that most people in India were Buddhists until the 8<sup>th</sup> century, that is actually not surprising at all.

One afternoon we were allowed to enter the nearly finished library on the outskirts of town. It has taken four years to rebuild that which got burned down in 1981 - the beginning of the end of a peaceful life in town and all over the island. Most likely one MP was behind the destruction of this centre and symbol of education, one of the outstanding features of Tamil society in Jaffna. He, like so many other higher authorities in the government, was later blown up by a suicide bomber. But the actually roots of the present conflict goes back to Fifties, when the government decided to replace English through Singhalese as official language. Looking at all these historical actions and reactions one can see the logic and the deep meaning behind Buddha’s saying: “Only through non-hatred can hate be overcome!”

From the upper floors of that palace-like library one can see the ruins of a Dutch Ford. Although it is an ancient war-relict from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the peaceful mood with its greenish overgrowth is misleading. Mines are hidden not only here but also around the left-overs of “modern” war-ruins close by, which are pointing to the blue sky, like the bones of huge skeletons. Plants are growing and animals are living unaware and unconcerned of deadly explosives hidden in the ground and undisturbed by human interference.

Next to this paradoxical scene of life and death is the Central College, where the new generation is striving for better opportunities in life. It is difficult to imagine how much of their childhood was spoilt by the useless war-games of adults. Their future depends on the progress of the peace-process; and in the same way the future of this island will depend on them and their abilities how to cope with the violence of the past and the dissatisfactions and hopes of the presence.

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<sup>7</sup> See footnote 5

<sup>8</sup> Note for the publisher: I still could not trace the source of that statement.

The gravity of the present situation is holding them still back from a freedom which they never could enjoy. It was on my flight back when I was reading on the cover-page of a newspaper that the LTTE prevented 1000 school-children to go to Colombo where they were invited by the government to take part in the Independence Day celebrations. This news was not a surprise to me, because a Tamil friend mentioned that incidence already the day before with dissatisfaction.

*Few hundred meters from the library is the stadium where once children happened to find some unidentified human bodies. The earth can bear and swallow a lot of sorrow, but sometimes she discloses unexpectedly signs of a bloody conflict where humans act and are treated like animals - or even worse. Countless graves and mass-graves are suspected around Jaffna. Few of them, like the top of an iceberg, will ever come to the surface. And even then the investigations are progressing often in a very slow way, get delayed (maybe even by bribed officers) or are not undertaken at all. In least of the cases the responsible people are found guilty and are actually punished.*

*Some international organizations, are employing young Tamils to take up the risky job of clearing the vast areas from landmines. Mines belong to one of the most inhuman and long-lasting chapters in modern warfare. Neither the LTTE nor the Army kept track where they had once layed these deadly tools. The cheap self-made ones of the guerrillas might not function anymore after some time, but the professional ones used by the army can still explode even after years have passed. The victims are mostly innocent children. How tragic when one cannot even enter ones own garden or let ones kids play in the neighbourhood without the uneasy feeling that one wrong movement might cause a cripple or end a human life?*

The fancy vehicles of countless international INGOs<sup>9</sup> are rushing through the narrow streets. Their huge antennas and flags make one feel that right now a historical turning-point is happening and that the place is one of these flashpoints that is broadcasted as an evening news to comfortable and safe living rooms throughout the world. At the entrances of their offices, sign-boards which I have never seen anywhere before are displayed: a crossed out machine-gun: "No entry with weapons". Now after the worst happenings are over foreign aid-groups are coming up everywhere like mushrooms after the rain and make the inhabitants feel that their lives are not anymore subject to legal or illegal harassment and violence. But how many of them would still be around and protect the people when the situation would again get out of control.

Some people who know this foreign-scene for years mentioned to me that most of these NGOs are actually not as serious and efficient in their work as they make themselves to appear. Some of these workers just want to feel important, others are running away from their own unsolved problems at home and only few of them are really working with their whole heart for a genuine humanitarian goal.<sup>10</sup> But even with all the money which is wasted in unnecessary ways and with all the misunderstandings which are bound to happen between different cultures, traditions and languages, there are surely benefits which are deeply appreciated by the civilians.

The more such "peace warriors" are moving into the scene, the more no fightings are going on, the less the armed soldiers seem to fit into the day to day life of an increasingly blooming city. Even now most of the checkpoints, erected at cross-roads or other tragical important points, are already vacant. Others are still inhabited by young bored soldiers watching the people just passing by without any interference. Not too long ago these spots were feared by all Tamils; and some of them disappeared from there for ever. In Tamil, Singhalese and English a sign says: "Minimum force will be used when passing without permission!" In the present mood of peace, it sounds like a ridiculous harmless statement. Earlier during curfew (sometimes 22 or 23 hours a day!), people were shot, even if they were just drunk, or too old to understand why they were not allowed to move around in their home-town as they please.

*In spite of all these bloody and heart-breaking tragedies in the past two decades, human and humorous gestures increasingly surface on every-day life, now more concerned with business and enjoyment than with fear and surviving. I happened to be present when a motorcycle had an accident in front of a checkpoint. The first person running out and giving help to the Tamil driver was a Singhalese officer in uniform.*

*On the way back to the airport, while waiting before we were allowed to enter the high security zone I was touched when seeing our native bus driver holding hands and exchanging jokes with a soldier. At the end, both of them are actually sitting in the same fragile boat; or in other words: They are living on the same beautiful island and just want to feel at home and live a life in peace.*

*During these few days I have found in Jaffna another place which I love and look forward to return to. Maybe, because I could "taste the difference" as the sticker on the broken-down bus at the beginning of my journey had promised!*

## 6. CELEBRATING LIFE

*„Become again like the child you once had been and like the master you will be one day: with clear thoughts, open emotions, and with a relaxed, flexible and sensible body – innocent, vulnerable and real.“<sup>11</sup> Dan Millman*

Introduction: The reason for this essay is not to provoke those minds fixed on a certain opinion and also not necessarily to defend my way of life, but to provide food for thought to those who are open to it, and for the challenge and joy of addressing issues which we like to ignore, although they are around us all the time.

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<sup>9</sup> International Non-Government Organisations

<sup>10</sup> One Tamil who has been working for years with INGOs mentioned to me: "A few INGOs are really doing a good job. But with the others I don't know and wonder why they are here. Maybe some of their staff are using this opportunity to get a good fame and add some experience to their lives. The other thing volunteers complain here is that Jaffna-people stare at them when they are in the bikinis at the beach! Jaffna is a place where people do not expose themselves in public places and never wear bikinis, so it is spectacular for them. You can't find fault with my fellow citizens in this issue. They should be aware of this 'bikini-thing' before they land here! . . . but they ignore that being half naked here is strictly impossible. So why do they complain then about the looks of people?"

<sup>11</sup> Re-translated from „Die Goldenen Regeln des Friedvollen Kriegers“

About one third of a century has passed since this so strange, yet time familiar phenomena “I” is trying to make some sense out of life on this planet; and also about one third of my life has passed since I’ve moved around as a monk trying to make some sense of a spiritual track.

Is that a time to celebrate or to mourn about the moons and seasons which have passed? Did I live up to my standard, to my intuitive knowing which path to chose and which one to avoid, or did I fail miserably and only lived up (or better “down”) to the expectation of others? Have I become more alive, more spontaneous, more sensitive towards the small silent wonders of life next to the noisy, fast moving main-stream, or am I already half dead and gone with the stream? Did I come to the point where I can smile at life and myself, or is that what passes my body and touches my mind still making a fool out of me?

I like the idea of the Australian aborigines that they do not celebrate birthdays, but only celebrate when they know for themselves (and who else could know better) that they have become wiser. According to their standards birthday would then - for most of us - be more a time of mourning than of celebrating, I guess. What I notice with my birthday, that I do not care much anymore, how many I have left behind and how many years might be still awaiting me. If the right figures and letters show on the calendar that this special day is *today*, for sure: it is a special day, but not because it is called “birthday” but because every “today” is a special day, and – believe it or not – the only one which we can really experience and be alive. All the other yesterdays and tomorrows which we are heavily and restlessly carrying in our head are just illusions, life’s foolish joke on reality.

The Swiss writer Max Frisch asks the reader in one of his books<sup>12</sup> the embarrassing question: “When did you give up to think that you are becoming wiser, or are you still believing that this is happening? Give the age.” No doubt, a straightforward answer to that statement is for most of us not an easy one..

Life to me seems a growing happy and joyful phenomena and this earth less and less a place of just sitting around and “doing time.” This celebrating mood might be for some not expected from a monk . . . and even I myself never dared to think that this will ever “happen”. Being able to smile or joke again like a child is, at least in my eyes, a great progress and a clear sign that an inner transformation has been taken place. Not taking things too seriously anymore and therefore being more often admonished by ‘real’ grown ups, is for me another milestone demonstrating that I have jumped beyond the narrow, grey walls of conventions, tradition, restrictions and rules. But it is also understandable that the good citizen and the religious man, living straight up to the given standards, without ever asking “why” (a question loved by the fresh mind of a child and often hated by us “grown ups”), will come right away with their argument: “What if everybody . . . ?” This is the usual approach to hold oneself back of crossing one’s limitations and discovering new ground beyond imagination.

It is said that “ships are safe in the harbour, but this is not what ships are built for”! As much as I can’t follow anymore the well trodden tracks around me, to that extent I also feel that it’s not a chaotic or anarchistic way crossing the colourful and changing planes of life without even knowing where the journey will end one day. Some might warn me saying that today’s joy will be tomorrow’s pain. Maybe that’s true; but is there any sorrow from which one cannot learn something?

Sometimes even people who have known me since childhood become confused by my unpredictable way of following my intuitions and changing my priorities. Here is an extraction from such a person who has been walking an exceptional strong spiritual path for the last 10 years although she is already in her sixties and her upbringing was – as with most humans – in no way an inspiration to grow up to real maturity:

*„I simply have to remind myself, that you were still very young when you decided to live as independently as possible. I, on the other side, could never free myself from the endeavour, to try to please everybody: As a child towards my [Catholic and aristocratic] parents and as a female. (Yet that is for sure not only a Christian phenomena, but it is also happening in Buddhist Asia.) I got conditioned through the ethical and religious education of our culture. I took it for granted that I had spent my life to be completely available for my parents, children, husband and his relatives and patients. You were the first person till now who had told me once: “Now it’s time that you do something for yourself!” And at that time I even didn’t understand what you had meant. I want to thank you now again for this life-transforming sentence! Again and again you mentioned in your letters that you are conscious and very thankful for your freedom and exceptional situation. It was only in your last letter that I realised that one part of this freedom includes the opportunity to live the essence of life. Surely you can imagine how difficult that is for people in the West. [ . . . and not only for people in the West!] Even I have to switch from the theoretical side to the practical – which you are living – to be able to understand your decisions.”*

It’s, indeed, not an easy task to cast aside all that we were filled with since childhood from people whose only concern was to adjust themselves and others into their narrow understanding and environment. It’s difficult to recreate the sensitivity and quietness within ourselves, to be able to listen to our intuitions while letting go of the outer world and our own past. On the other side, I feel a certain joy of not wanting to adjust, maybe even to feel like a naughty boy enjoying something (like ‘life’) which others blame and deny, for whatever reason. Nevertheless, I am - most of the time - *not* forgetting that I am a monk carrying around other people’s projection of behaviour and mental attitude, and therefore I adjust myself as well as I can. Unfortunately - or maybe even fortunately - I cannot do that all the time under all circumstances. We all play a role (in Buddhism it is called “conventional truth”) with whatever we do: we may call ourselves, or are seen by others, as a mother, a doctor, a beggar, a professor, or a monk. But just close your eyes for a second and do not think anything (which might feel like holding one’s breath): at that moment we and the world are becoming nothing and there is just the present “here and now”, even if we are having ten children at home, have been spending ten years studying hard at the university, have been living in very remote caves or have giving sermons to hundreds of lay-people. For a split-second – before the thought-flood is returning again - we might catch a taste of “being nobody, going nowhere”. Understanding this role-game makes life very easy-going and light-hearted. At the same time the gear we are carrying around will make us feel more restricted and misunderstood than ever before. Nevertheless, most of you will agree that running around naked (not necessarily in the literal sense) is not a solution. What I know for myself is that I do not fit - and do not want to fit - into any category “properly”; yet I’m sure that I have chosen for the time being the best of all the available “boxes”, called “monkhood”.

Although I feel that my personal track through life seems to be a lonely but right one, the wish that others should follow me is not there. I am not sure if that is due to my understanding that each life is actually meant to be an individual expression of one’s own inner abilities and quest; or is it because I am so used to navigate myself through life by using the

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<sup>12</sup> Translated from „Fragebogen“ Suhrkamp Taschenbuch, 1998

common and fixed living-standards of others as an orientation, so that I would get confused if all others around me would also live in such a strange way?

One of my "little survival philosophies" on an everyday level is that it is much easier to get used to a few mosquitoes and their bites than to try defend my living place against theirs. In a similar way it's much easier to accept that there will be always people around me who will disagree with my behaviour for one or the other reason (mostly the root of the "problem" can be found within them), than trying to adjust my life to someone else's expectations on account of being truthful to my individual path.

Joseph Campbell, an American professor and writer, who had studied myths, cultures and religions all around the world, puts it in following words:

*"The way to find out about your happiness is to keep your mind on those moments when you feel most happy, when you really are happy – not excited, not just thrilled, but deeply happy. Stay with it, no matter what people tell you. This is what I call "following your bliss". The religious people tell us we really won't experience bliss until we die and go to heaven. But I believe in having as much as you can of this experience while you are still alive."*<sup>13</sup>

And the more I get to know my own character when being surrounded by nature or by fellow beings, the more I believe in this approach to celebrate life.

Not long ago two very faithful Buddhists, as they claimed themselves to be, got extremely upset about a certain "conventional wrong behaviour" of mine. (What I mean by such kind of "sin" is, that it is just subject to time and place without actually hurting oneself or others.) I listened to what they had to say without reacting much. What impressed me most was that the way they were scolding me must have been similar to the blame you get when having killed somebody. As a feedback I wrote following e-mail to one of them:

*"First of all I want to thank you and your friend for the "on spot" feedback day before yesterday. Afterwards it got very clear to me that it was really wrong what I was doing.*

*It is interesting to mention that I am getting feedbacks also the other way round: when I am going off to very remote caves in the jungle some people blame me that I am running away from the world! Again, others might not be "happy" that I live for example in a cave 6 km away from the next forest monastery (Kudumbigala) where I also have to cook for myself (which I am actually allowed to do as a Samanera). It is and will be always difficult to please everybody on this earth at the same time.*

*My personal experience is that both aspects, living in seclusion and living in society, is necessary for my spiritual development. (I completely agree that this should be also done in "proper" ways, and what "proper" means, I sometimes have to be more sensitive).*

*Where I disagree with your friend is that monks and lay-people should not live a completely separate life. I even think (but I might be wrong) that one of the reasons why Buddhism is losing ground in Sri Lanka - not in the West, maybe because there Buddhists can be more flexible without having to carry a history of 2500 years with them - is that monks and lay-people are living so far apart that they don't understand each others worlds, concerns and problems. I also have to say that some of my most inspiring Dhamma talks and discussions came up in a very spontaneous way when the so common hierarchical structure had been left aside.*

*Having lived for so long in very remote places but also in society I have experienced that these so different ways of approaching life are actually supporting each other and not - as generally believed - blocking each other: being in seclusion, the value of being with human beings gets stronger and the satisfaction to help others; on the other side, by being among people, the value of solitude grows more and the desire to work on oneself stronger. [Maybe the art behind all this is to live a spiritual life without losing ones touch with the world and to live in the world without losing ones spiritual endeavour. The Greek philosopher Socrates was once asked why he is still going to the market, when he lives such a life in simplicity. He said that it is so nice to see all these things which he is happy without.]*

*There is another point which I think is important: As soon as one gets caught up and emotional about something, it seems to me a sign that something is not in balance and in accordance with the Dhamma. Lord Buddha gave the example of the boat which one should not carry around after having crossed the river. Clinging so emotional to a teaching whose core is the "letting go" seems a paradox. It is also a sign that someone has not yet transformed the Dhamma within oneself, but is still caught up in conventions by looking for the truth outside. I want to mention here again that one should not purposful act in a way which make other people upset!*

*Making mistakes (even for monks) is an important part of life; and learning from them is even more important, if we want to get on spiritually in any way. As soon as we get scared of making mistakes we are not anymore really alive and will miss a lot of beautiful experiences and opportunities which only pop up when facing life in a very open, flexible and spontaneous way!*

*I am not sure if you really understand all the points I am trying to make here, but at least it gives you some ideas which are important in my spiritual quest. This journey is for sure not a perfect one and also not a road which is always going smooth and upwards. But at the end of the day I feel very happy and lucky to be able to live such a life on such an island among such people!"*

Yes, I am aware that some people think that I am laughing too loud as a monk; smiling too often, being too easy going with some of the rules (i.e. for years I used to eat only at "proper" times - meaning before noon, until my stomach got seriously messed up and I realised that the right understanding of "proper" or "unproper" is essential for ones well-being); caring too much for physical alignment (seeing a properly tuned body as a powerful requisite for ones mental balance is hardly emphasized among religious people in this country); talking too friendly to others without making a big point about the "status"; finding pleasure in writing too critically about my experience as a monk in a Buddhist country and as a human on this planet; getting too much, or too little, involved in social activities, and some people think that my hobbies, like photography, are too strange for a monk, because they see them as a serious distraction for my spiritual progress.

Doing some things which others don't do, not doing things which others do, or just doing things in a different way from others, and standing out with my brown robe and white skin, it's unavoidable to become subject to all kind of talks and rumours. A good Singhalese friend of mine and a spiritual (not necessarily religious) Buddhist gave me following feedback on that matter: *"People here love to look towards monks as symbols and images of perfection and think any one who gets in that costume must be perfect!!! And people love to judge and criticize because that gives them a perfect opportunity to distract themselves from their own shortcomings and weaknesses . . . and they also like to put some figures up on a pedestal*

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<sup>13</sup> „Myths to Live By“, Sovenir Press, 1973

so that they can excuse themselves, when they are not living such a 'good' life as they should, and say, "we are regular people but those are special ones". It goes both ways and basically its all crap at the end of the day! People just love to gossip. (The nice part about living in a small town/country: When you don't know what you're doing, someone else always does.)"

Dhiravamsa, a former monk from Thailand who is now a Buddhist Meditation Master and writer in the West goes even deeper than that: "People think that the holy man should be dressed in a certain way, and they link holiness with form. This is contrary to reality, because in reality the holy is very ordinary, very simple. When we overlook simplicity we shall not find the holy, but instead just find the idea of holiness and worship this, in a religious way."<sup>14</sup>

Spending my time in unusual ways, some tell me that I should better give up my robes and become "normal" again, or they predict that it is just a matter of time till I will return to the common way of life and share with them their common problems. They do not realise that it is only through such a bird-like life (yet still far away from the elegance of the eagle's flight) free from all kinds of serious duties, time-pressures, money-problems, family-traumas, job-competitions and whatever makes people feel like having approached the end of living and the beginning of surviving, that my very individual way of celebrating life has the chance to express itself so differently and colourful. . . . And also for the next third of a century I will try my best not measure my spiritual progress in how much I have been able to blend into society or adjust to others expectation, but in how much I have been able to follow my intuition and express my abilities truthfully with wisdom and joy.

## 7. EMBEDDING LIFE IN WILDERNESS

A stay in Kudumbigala, one of the most remote and ancient cave-monasteries in Sri Lanka

*"Without the interruptions, nourishing and maddening, this life would become arid.*

*Yet I taste it fully only when I am alone."* May Sarton

For some time I have been attracted to visit the remote south-east corner of this island. Yet during the times of unpredictable conflict, it was more advisable to prolong that wish. Peace came, and after more than seven years of being familiar with the west-coast, I first glimpsed of the other side. The small road towards Pothuvil, the biggest town on that strip of coast, leads through wide areas of thick forests till paddy-fields let the horizon spread afar. The mixture of races and religions gives life there a different flair. Countless checkpoints of the past, strongly secured police- and army-camps give a hint of what this area must have been like not too long ago.

Going further South seems like approaching world's end. Most of the transport of people and goods are shifted on small lorries. Driving along Arungam Bay it is obvious that this is the best known surf-area in Sri Lanka, and - with the outlook for lasting peace - preparations are taking place everywhere in that "beach-paradise" for a new tourist-boom. Further along that road one encounters often slow and heavy bull-carts with their huge wooden pair of wheels unchanged in their design for hundreds or even thousand of years. They seem to set the present backwards, when time was still available and hardship not taken over by machines and restlessness. The road ends at a village called Panama, the last "human stronghold" towards nature before the endless green carpet-like jungle, next to the vast ocean, is spread out.

*Each time it is a great joy for me to walk the last 10 kilometers through the forest towards my destination and leave behind my barefoot imprints on the sand-road, among countless others in all different shapes and sizes. To experience the full change from darkness to light, or the other way round, I used to start the trip either early morning or late afternoon. It has been also a great chance to challenge the mind while walking in the dark, with a torch as the only "weapon" - just in case a shadow along the way turns out to be a more aggressively minded 'brother or sister' from the animal kingdom. It's my way to say for some weeks good-bye to the civilized world with it's self-imposed problems and to welcome and surrender to nature in a humble, but also courageous way.*

Halfway through the forest is on the left a small temple, where some stop and worship, who hope that at least the gods will be on their side in times of danger. Further along the road one unexpectedly comes across several vacant houses, where for years nature was given time to overgrow with its green garlands their cement walls. Was it war or something else which had made these ten families leave their well-built homes? When the road comes for the third time to a huge opening where the trees have given way to the waters of a lagoon and exotic birds and water-buffalos are enjoying themselves, some unusually formed and exposed rocks catch the eye. On the highest one a pagoda in an unusual cylinder-form can be seen:<sup>15</sup> Kudumbigala, which means 'nobe-like rocks, is reached. Several years back I read a marvellous and miraculous account<sup>16</sup> of that auspicious place; and now, like a miracle, printed matter has transformed into reality out of stone, wood, water and wide space beyond this wonderful piece of earth.

It is one of the most remote 'living' araniyas, forest-monasteries, on this island. It is also one of the most ancient ones, probably created even before the Christian area. Who knows how long it had been vacant until a monk revived it again half a century ago. During the time when Sri Lanka became known as the "Island of Blood", its former abbot was killed<sup>17</sup> and all the other inhabitants had to leave to avoid a similar fate. It was only after the peace-process showed fruits that a few monks came back from their "exile-monastery" in Hulanoga, some 20 kilometres north. Some months later, when I was turning up for the first time, I found a well established place with four monks and one *kapa-kariya*, the necessary helper for a monastery. On the bottom of the premises is big hall for lay-people, who come about once a week, stay over night, prepare early morning *dhana* for the monks and provide them with items, necessary for life so far away from the nearest village. From there it is a 15-minutes walk between and up the rocks to the centre of the araniya.

Half way is a well renovated cave-vihara, where the Buddha-statue, made out of white stone, had an exotic black head. Several signatures in Tamil and English on the walls and the letters 'LTTE' gave the impression that the Tamil terrorists left behind these marks during the time when they used Kudumbigala as a hide out. But I was told that some other

<sup>14</sup> Anne Bancroft, „Twentieth-Century Mystics and Saints“ Arkana Books, 1989

<sup>15</sup> This is in Sri Lanka the only pagoda built in that form, which is a duplication of the one in Benares, Isipathana in India.

<sup>16</sup> Venerable Anandasiri-Thero, "25 Years of Life in the Jungle" (Dayawansa Jayakody & Co, 1985)

<sup>17</sup> It is interesting to note that I have asked several people about the reason for his premature death (which had happened somewhere else) and that I got the same amount of different answers.

people were behind such an disrespectful action. Anyhow, the monks wrote a complaining letter to the leading LTTE-man in charge of the Eastern Province. He took the blame seriously and sent a delegation of four men, including the second in charge. Without informing the monks they tried to white-wash the head of the Buddha. By coincidence they came across the abbot, and after had some friendly conversation with language difficulties left again back wherever they had come from.

Passing below a huge rock-wall which looks amazingly like a 150 meter long and 50 meter high statue of a declining Buddha, one comes to the plateau which is the heart of the *maha tapo-vaniya*, a 'great place for striving'. Here is the also second rebuild ancient Pagoda. Once the monks left the araniya for few days, and during that time, this place of worship and the one on the top of the highest rock had been broken open and their relict-treasures removed. Some months later the holy contents had been placed in a bag at the entrance of the nunnery in Panama, obviously the feeling of remorse has pressed the robbers to return what was taken in a shameless way.

Nearby is the *dhana-sala*, the eating hall. It's simplicity is very well fitting for such a place: the roof is made out of metal sheets, which keeps away most, but not all, of the rainwater; two sides are open, another one is covered by old robes and the forth adjoins the rock and a cave, inhabited by one of the monks. In one corner is a small 'museum' showing left over parts and pieces of culture - i.e. potteries – and nature: horns and skulls of bears, deer, wild boars, monkeys, etc. A calendar and a watch seems like a reminder that also here one is still part of the big world somewhere outside, where the flow of time and season are cut down into figures and names and daily rhythm between light and dark split into seconds and dictated by hours.

The reason why this spot in the vast forest-area was selected must have been the natural pond one hundred metres away, where even after six months without rain, when all the wells around are dried up, some greenish muddy water remains. The drought last time was so intense, that soldiers from the army camp in Panama had to provide drinking-water from outside. Daily the left-over food is thrown into that central pond to feed the fish and turtles, which in turn might become food to another less obvious creator: Looking from afar one can see sometimes the head of a watchful crocodile descending underneath the surface as soon as it becomes aware of the observer. Not seldom 'Raja'<sup>18</sup>, a wild elephant enters the 'stage' of the monastery-centre, knowing that his presence is welcome, even if he messes up the carefully swept paths.

The kitchen-cave, a couple hundred feet away, seems to be a preferred spot for wild animals; maybe they know that lay-people are more easily scared than their brothers in brown robes. One night Raja, not only left his huge footprints in the small vegetable garden but also a huge pile of dung in front of the kitchen-door. Another day I was called there to see a 2 ½ metre python, who during the heat of the dry season calmly enjoyed the little bit of cool water left in a small cement-basin. Once also the rumour was going around that a leopard and her two cubs were living in a small deep cave a few metres below the kitchen. The cook could hear her scary growls throughout night. I only noticed her angry voice once, which made me feel glad to be in my safe cave this night. There is also a tree where this huge wild cat left the impressive imprints of its long claws in the bark, when climbing up for an ideal outlook. After the monsoon-rains the banks of a pond are extended right up to its roots, where animals will come to still their thirst without knowing that it might be their last. At the end the monks decided to cut off the branch, from where the leopard used to perform its deadly jump.

What seems for me most inspiring around this spiritual centre are neither these encounters with wild animals nor with the kind-hearted humans, but a verse written on the cave-wall: "Being alone is like living in the Brahma-world, being with another is like the Deva-world<sup>19</sup>, where more than three people are together it is like living in a village and creating a lot of trouble."

After having enjoyed enough of company in society I feel that time is ripe to withdraw in search of seclusion and my inner true self . . . and then no distant place seems too far away, as long as the conditions are ideal for such an undertaking. I have been very fortunate that the *bhikkus* there understood, respected and supported from the very first day my longing for privacy, even beyond the general regulated life of a typical forest-monastery. After having spent so many years in similar well established araniyas, I feel that I have passed the point for a spiritual need of a *sangha* besides the necessary material support. In an area with such wide horizons embedded in vast and unpredictable wilderness my heart gets heavy and my body tired, when having to restrict my movements and thoughts too much according rules, regulations and expectations of others. Just being surrounded by the company of plants and animals is like entering a door into another world and at the same time this is for me the entrance to my inner unknown areas.

For this the cave which was given to me has been an ideal trespass to 'pure' wilderness. Ten minutes walking distance from the main hall through forest and upward rocks to my temporary stone-shelter is an ideal distance. Nobody would just happen to pass by per chance or out of boredom, yet it is also not too inconvenient that one helper would find the time to bring along breakfast or lunch. At other times I have walk down with my alms-bowl and having taken my share returned happily back into seclusion, where even simple food can become a feast and the actionless surrounding like a movie-show. 'My' stone-shelter must have seen countless sunsets in all colour-variations since the time it had been cut into the rock some two thousand years back. Three decades ago the present brick-walls have been erected to keep uninvited visitors outside and to protect one from the natural forces rain, sun and wind. Two doors on opposite sides, a window in the middle, few air-holes and a low stone ceiling keeps it well ventilated and cool. In nights when I did not decide to sleep outside, a cement-platform inside has been my resting place.

I was amused when I heard the story about a Western esoteric hippy couple who had some months before settled down there for several weeks, without the monks' knowledge and approval. There is on both sides a similar liking for natural and spiritual life away from the common batons of society. But their world-views and behaviour seemed so different that it must have been like a comedy when they happened to meet each other for the first time. The clergy would have been still able to accept the presence of the guy with his dread-locks and beard in that holy cave, but having a young woman and even a huge dog staying there, was just too much. The argument of the 'peaceful impostors' was that they are living like brother and sister together, not using any drugs and were on a serious spiritual quest without harming anybody. I actually liked some of the exotic behaviour and views of these back to nature rainbow-couple: he was an outstanding character, a musician who loved to dance, preferred to walk around naked (I told him that if he would do that here, he would have to leave on spot), never used slippers and artificial lights and was used to fasting for days. He was also sure that within the next few years our planet will change to such an extent that only those who know how to live in nature could survive; and for that, he had been

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<sup>18</sup> This is the Sinhalese term for 'king'

<sup>19</sup> Brahma- and Deva-worlds are heavenly blissful spheres in Buddhist cosmology

preparing himself. He was also a little bit off the ground because he told me once that he had to go three times all the way to Panama and back to get some nail-clippers: the first two times he simply returned, having forgotten the actual reason for his long journey. The monks came to the agreement that they could use a room at the hall close to the entrance, sweep as a duty the area around and keep it clean. At the end the presence of the girl created problems, when some drunken village-boys with bad intentions showed up. In addition it became known that their visa had run out some time back. The abbot-monk still offered them the ordination for becoming a monk and a nun. But at the end both parties realised that this would have gone far beyond the spirit of their opposite approaches to life. And so they left one day and never returned.

When I think about the few items which surround me in the cave or when having settled down somewhere underneath the sky, I am reminded in what way usually people fill their surroundings with clutter, i.e. things they neither *really* need nor love. This is a general phenomena of *homo sapiens* from the past to the present, which can be observed anywhere in world independent of religion, status and wealth. How many of us would start changing this habit, inherited from our ancestors, if we realise in what way it influences directly our mind, body and the direction in which our life flows or where it got stuck. Karen Kingston points out that old, superfluous and messy belongings make us tired, depressive, confused, unbalanced and hesitating; reduce our sensibility and joy for life, constipate the body and influence the way people treat us<sup>20</sup>.

The cemented floor inside the cave has been also an ideal base for my daily yoga-practice. This ancient way of bending and stretching the body has become for me a strong well for bodily well-being and mental balance. It is a way to re-learn what our modern and too often crippled way of living has slowly and steadily eradicated since our childhood. Most of our bodies are too spoiled and our backs too weak to even keep for some time simple postures like sitting on the ground the way children love to do and the way Buddha and sages of all times preferred to settle down in the moment. Awakening the spine through such delicate exercise the body becomes again a centred stronghold for a balanced mind. Long hours and days spent in seclusion, and not only then, some unpredictable negative moods may come up, yet 'sitting through them' may sometimes make one feel like running in circles. At such times I could find again a positive grounding by working the body in harmonious, strong but without strain way. When observing how 'uncivilized' animals move and stretch their bodies intuitively I am not surprised that the usual stiffness coming from old age and depression is hardly known amongst these fellow beings.

One time I sat few metres away from my cave and while eating my breakfast I noticed a huge black bear, which must have entered from the other door, coming outside my cave<sup>21</sup>. When he was again on the way to re-enter the place, I gave it a warning and clapped my hands. Then the hairy fellow stopped and looked around. When he decided to walk towards me, although he still did not notice me, I got scared: not only was it my closest encounter with such a forest-dweller with his huge pranks and crawls, but I had the full almsbowl in my hand, and did not know how hungry he was. Only after clapping another time the creature seized my unusual presence and vanished quickly down the stone steps into the forest. The next day while doing yoga in the morning, I heard a loud breathing noise. Looking outside I saw him again, but this time our positions were the other way round: It was me who came out of the cave and it was him, who was standing up the rock until he moved on. I followed a few metres, then we looked at each other for some moments, had a short, but friendly conversation and we moved our ways: he further up the rocks and I back to my cave. When I told the abbot about this encounter, he said that I should call him '*kallu putha*', which means black son. But the way he knows the skills of surviving in wilderness, it would be more appropriate to call him 'black grandfather'. Venerable Anandasiri-Thero mentioned that "*whatever views one may hold about beasts in the jungle, the beasts that gets friendly quite soon is the bear.*"<sup>22</sup> It is interesting to mention that the wildlife described in his book compared with the one I had come across three decades later seems much less. The reason for that is not known to me.

One night when I intended to leave the cave to urinate, something fell in front of me on the ground while opening the door. I took a closer look with my torch and saw that a kraite, one of the deadly poisonous snakes in Sri Lanka, had decided to pay my cave a visit. It slipped into a crack at the door and was never seen again thereafter.

During the first nights my eagerness to be outside of walls and roofs made me decide to sleep on the east-side of a huge rock with a marvellous view on the lagoon a few kilometers below and the immense ocean behind. While lying there one evening an unusual noise from the other side of the rock upset my mind. I took the torch and walked up to the top: an elephant had decided to still his thirst in a pond, about fifty metres away. That happened during the end of the dry season, when water is rare all over the place. After seeing the light, he also became scared and left back to the jungle.

This pond, not far from my cave, was the ideal size for a natural swimming pool: ten meters long and five meters wide. After some feeling of uneasiness - because the water was too muddy to see the ground and the creatures, hidden below the surface - I took up the courage to transfer it into my bathing resource. Having taken my bowl with food and before vanishing into deeper areas of the jungle, I enjoyed the coolness of the water with the frogs and other insects. Close to the surface dragon flies were dancing through the air alone or in couples, some flowers were blooming next to it and high up in the blue sky white clouds moved with sea-wind land inwards. These are the brilliant moments in life, when the mind just is without wanting something else at another place on earth.

But, as fate wanted it to happen, one morning, on the way to greet the sun, I saw a huge long creature and heard a loud splash into the water . . . and with that my luxury 'swimming pool' collapsed again into an ordinary unknown pond: a two meter long crocodile had just disappeared in the water. Some bubbles could be still seen, but few moments later nothing at all. My mind was puzzled: was this an exceptional visit or had this dragon-like beast been all the time dwelling there, without me being aware of it? . . . In any case, going for a swim that day would have been not very advisable. In addition to that someone had told me, that not long ago a man was bitten by one near Panama. I approached the monk, who is very

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<sup>20</sup> To those interested to leave behind spiritual, mental and material waste I recommend her book "Clear Your Clutter With Feng Shui" (Judy Piatkus Publisher, 1998).

<sup>21</sup> „It interested me to find the requirements of monks and bears so nearly identical; and just as the earliest monks showed preference for converting the dens of bears into hermit's cells, so do bears today prefer the sites of ruined monasteries, thus offering a very sincere tribute in retrospective to men who had professed to exchange the temptation of an over-luxurious world for a life of bodily simplicity and rigorous contemplation." John Still, „Jungle Tide" (Tisara Prakaskayo LTD., 1993)

<sup>22</sup> See footnote 2

familiar with the wild-life around this place and it took only few explaining words to dispel my doubts and re-establish 'my pool': "Don't be scared about these crocodiles; they are actually scared from us. They just move around from one pond to another to catch small animals, but would not dare to attack you. The crocodiles in lagoons or around villages are used to bite even bigger animals, like cattle, but not these which are around here." After these words I felt confident enough to throw myself again into the water and I felt like a hero who had just conquered a dragon.

The encounters with smaller, less dangerous creatures might be not so impressive to the mind, but happen more often and need therefore also more consideration if one has the inclination to turn wild nature into a cosy place where one feels at home. Somehow I have been lucky with not encountering too often places shared by many unbearable mosquitoes. We actually have come to an unwritten agreement that few bites are allowed, if they find somewhere a spot on my body, where a sting doesn't hurt. Killing on both sides is strictly prohibited, although it might sometimes happen by my careless way of brushing them aside.

Ticks are another species, who have a great liking for our blood. In these jungles one regularly gets to feel the harmless bites of small ones and their bigger brothers and sisters nearly the size of the small fingernail. Few times I encounter in a natural cave some of their far more cunning and fat relatives, the size of an inch. Only after they have sucked their share of blood unnoticed, a dark blue spot the size of a coin is left behind, which might still give an itching pain even after one week.

How dangerous is life in wilderness, or to what extent are we just making up things in our mind, which prevent us from a peaceful heart and great opportunities for special experiences beyond what is usually encountered in our waking hours? Only when we understand in what way we are imprisoning ourselves by useless fears and worries, taken over by our parents and society, coming along since childhood days in all different forms and from all different angles, we can take up some courage and walk new paths with uncommon lightness. But too often we are getting lost in our old same mind-games. Before we have even tried a new way, we have handed over the tools for forming our destiny to irrational forces deep within ourselves. And instead of starting to explore this psychological theatre behind and underneath the stage, we are using the very same unconscious baton and pray for help from higher sources outside ourselves. We even make promises to them, without realizing "*the gods as psychic factors, that is, as archetypes of the unconscious,*" as C.G. Jung pointed out.

Of course there could be a poisonous snake underneath each stone we are passing, a man-eating crocodile in each creek we are crossing and a shark right at the beach where we are swimming. But how many people do we actually know, who had a dangerous encounter with one of these creatures. The proper counter-question to the common man and his common way of moving around in the present world is, if he or she ever got to know about someone who had been involved in a traffic-accident. . . . and what surprise!: he or she is still continuing daily, without the slightest hesitation, to drive in fast vehicles or walk along busy roads where seconds and or centimetres may decide *any* moment between life and death.

*My personal approach in finding my way through unknown areas and experiences is to leave aside most of the common views, and to consider what I observe through my own senses; or I listen to the advice of someone who has gone beyond the usual hysteria about unusual encounters. I also believe that a calm, happy mind has a great input in the way things are happening to us. Yet even this positive recipe is not a guarantee for eternal safety and luck. Learning to be open for anything, may we call it 'good luck' or 'bad luck' from our limited point of view, are the right steps towards a wider universal view. From there onwards everything is embraced and welcome, but at the same time nothing really matters.*

*"From the perspective of the source, the world is in majestic harmony of forms pouring into being, exploding, and dissolving. But what the swiftly passing creatures experience is a terrible cacophony of battle cries and pain",* writes Joseph Campbell<sup>23</sup>.

It needs some experience to get skilled in finding the right spots in nature without getting too much annoyed by its forces: where the shades of trees and a breeze from the ocean are keeping the heat in tolerable limits, where a rock has the right angle to sit comfortable for hours or which is flat enough for the midday or a night's rest, where not too many insects get attracted to the body, and where the eye is refreshed by the scenery around. Sometimes it seems that places have been designed by nature in such a way as if my coming into the scenery was already prepared long time ago. Even a suitable area for walking up and down, has been most of the time wonderfully available.

The sun's power during the day and also its way of beautifying the landscape in the early morning and late afternoon, made me move from one spot to another. Beside that the knocking of the wooden bell or my alarm clock, the regular yoga session before sunrise and after sunset, the time when the food has to be picked up, hunger, tiredness, and other actions necessary for life and survival, give the day a certain rhythm and harmony, embedded in nature and its own time-circle. And sometimes it is only the crossing of an aeroplane through the sky or a ship through the ocean, that has reminded me somewhere out there of another distant world where I had come from.

My greatest adventure into seclusion started on the morning when I and Sunil, a friend of mine from Kandy, started to move to a place five kilometres from Kudumbigala called Bambaragasdalawa<sup>24</sup>. It was the second time that we were heading towards that destination in the east. The first time we were a group of three monks and three lay-people undertaking an unsuccessful search for a Buddha statue. Only later during my stay I re-discovered by chance<sup>25</sup> that 10 meter long passage away Buddha, which was actually built into a cave of a huge rock, visible even from Kudumbigala. Villagers from Panama used to come here for pilgrimage, but within one generation it was forgotten where it was situated. Also robbers had cut open the stomach and removed half of the head in a search for relict-treasures.

Several weeks later, after enough rains had filled the natural ponds, we arrived there again with all the items necessary to survive for at least one week. Sunil took over the cooking in the cave-kitchen where countless names were written on the stone ceiling by those who had the courage to challenge nature: hunters, pilgrims, other adventurers . . . and now it was our turn! One of the first things we did was constructing a cupboard out of stone and mud for our food-items, so that no other beings, namely bears and mice will take a share.

<sup>23</sup> "The Hero with a Thousand Faces" (Fontana Press 1993)

<sup>24</sup> 'Bambara' is the name of a big bee-species, who is building huge nests on the rock some thirty metres above the ground. "The Sinhalese say that seven hornet stings equal in venom the bite of one cobra, but I have never heard of anyone being killed by them, though it is no very uncommon for people to be licked by *bambara* bees." John Still, „Jungle Tide“ (Tisara Prakaskayo LTD., 1993)

<sup>25</sup> Such coincidences remind me of a saying by Pablo Picasso: „I am not searching, I am finding!“

Without much effort I soon found the most amazing cave since I am looking for natural dwellings, with the suitable name *akaslena*, sky-cave. Few have come up to that west-side of that outstanding vertical rock, overlooking one hundred metres above the ground the jungle spreading up to the ocean in the south, to the mountains around Kataragama and further north of Monaragalla some fifty or more kilometres away. The cave is about forty metres long, three metres wide and just high enough to walk around comfortably. The bottom is either rock or sand, comfortable enough for a good night's rest. The first light which can be seen in the evenings flashes unexpectedly from a light-house far out in the ocean. The rest of the 'night-show' is kept exclusively for the stars, the moon or sometimes for lightening. Many monsoon-seasons have passed since the rock has been cut in such a way that rainwater running down along the rock moisten the inside of the cave. Therefore it is actually a great pleasure that the walls had been demolished by nature long time ago, because such openness creates an atmosphere which no architect can design in any artificial living room. The disadvantage is that the cracks which enter deep into the mountain are not closed up and therefore also used as a dwelling-place by some beings not necessarily welcomed. Old bear shit made it clear that this fellow had found another home. Yet sometimes I could hear in the night unknown noises and once I got a glimpse of a bigger animal which I thought was a porcupine.

After my stay in that cave, Sunil and another monk also visited there and discovered footprints of a leopard right at the spot where I used to sleep. In that connection I also read in Venerable Annandasiri's book an interesting story: Not too long ago, Veddhas used to live in this area, until a specially aggressive and 12 feet long species of leopards killed and ate up the whole clan<sup>26</sup>. But it is also fair to mention here what this monk writes in another chapter: "*There is no animal so timid as the leopard. However hungry it is, it would not jump at its prey unless it is in a vantage point and a place of hiding is at hand.*"<sup>27</sup> I personally never came across a leopard, but I trust a statement from such an experience person much more than the general village talk.

When our try-portions were getting towards the end, we decided that Sunil would go back to Kudumbigala, fill his rucksack with more food and return after two or three days. The next morning I accompanied him to the edge of the forest where unexpected challenges were awaiting him. He courageously dived alone into the green ocean, and I stayed back, so far away from any human soul as never before. I soon got used to it without any feeling of loneliness. The longer I stayed by myself, the more I enjoyed it. How many experience life exactly the opposite way: being cramped closely together in places with thousands or even millions of fellow beings – in human terminology that is called 'city' – and yet carrying continuously around ones own loneliness and encountering that of others!

In the late morning, after having finished cooking my simple meal in simple manners, I enjoyed to jump for a swim into the stone-pool. Who would worry in such a remote place to wear anything at such an occasion! But after coming out of the water one day I heard some human voices nearby and rushed to cover myself with the robe. Close by a group of hunters had come out of the jungle and only after they saw me, they stopped, turned around and vanished again.

These incidents of living in seclusion and encountering others naked, reminds me on one of my most favourite Taoist stories: "*A group of Confucian scholars [they seem to me like the well-versed pious traditionalist believers in each religion] had a problem and wanted to know the solution from a Taoist hermit, known to be very wise . . . . But what a shock when they arrived at his remote cave and saw him naked. "How can you be like this?," they asked confused. He smiled and said: "What is wrong? The world is my cave, this cave are my underpants . . . what I actually wanted to know from you: What are you doing in my underpants?"*

Years back, when I was still a young monk without much self-confidence and depending most of my decisions on the opinions of others, I stayed in a huge natural cave far up the mountains in Northeast Thailand together with another old monk. One day I thought if there would be anything wrong when taking my bath without any robe. Being not sure I asked the other monk. He told me seriously that I should not do that: "Although there are no humans around, but what about the gods who are watching you!"

Looking at such a statement from the psychological point of view where gods are nothing else but our own projections of unconscious,<sup>28</sup> it is quite obvious to what extent certain things are still suppressed in such a mind. It is indeed amazing and at the same time sad, how difficult it is for most of us to face ourselves the way we actually are; not only our thoughts and emotions, but also our bodies. That should not be confused with exhibitionistic tendencies for erotic reasons, which is the other and more modern unbalance of society today. The longer I stay in very remote places, the more I understand why native people do not have the habit of 'sealing off' their body from the environment.

Our unnatural way of life is well described by an North-American Indian's first encounter with the 'civilized' world: "*They didn't blend with the wilderness but feared it, holding it at a safe distance, like a man handling a deadly snake. Why did they wear heavy clothes against the reality of nature? Why did they cloister themselves in sterile houses, rush about aimlessly, or take such great time and care with simple processes of survival? Why did they consciously insulate themselves so lavishly from the wilderness and life itself? How restricted there movements were, how square, box-like houses and heavy clothing cut them off from the elements. It seemed they saw nothing of the natural world – eagles soared overhead unnoticed. They lived in a vacuum, separated from everything but themselves and the squalor they'd created.*"<sup>29</sup>

Only on the fourth morning, after having taken my swim in my 'natural outfit' in the natural pool, I saw Sunil stumbling slowly towards the kitchen-cave. I knew right away that something was wrong. He was completely exhausted, obviously under shock and with bloody wounds on his bare feet. Beside the clothes on his body, he only had a bush-knife in his hand, a compass and few other items in his pocket. I made him rest in the shadow, and while he was eating a share of my food, he started telling me his story: After he left Bambaragasdalawa behind, it was extremely hard to find somehow a way towards the direction of Kudumbigala. At the end he arrived there successfully. After one day rest and having filled his rucksack with the necessary food items and other lesser important things, he left on the third late morning. From the very beginning on he hardly found the tracks of paths leading onwards, the sun was soon getting hotter, the drinking water less and the weight of the heavy backbag was becoming a great burden. At one point he left these things and the slippers behind to climb up a rock

<sup>26</sup> Wanniyala Etho, the present chief of the Veddhas does not believe that this had actually happened.

<sup>27</sup> See footnote 2

<sup>28</sup> „ . . . gods are interpreted by psychoanalysis as symbols of the unconscious. The key to modern systems of psychological interpretations therefore is this: the metaphysical realm = the unconscious." See footnote 8

<sup>29</sup> Tom Brown, Jr., "Grandfather" (The Berkley Publishing Group, 1993)

in search for some water. A noise of an animal scared him so much that he lost balance and fell several feet down and hit his head on a rock. After having lost consciousness for a short time he started to look for his items. But the more he was looking around the less he could remember where he had left them and from where he had come. Everything seemed to have been swallowed up by the vast green ocean. - People who had never approached such a wilderness may not be able to imagine how a thick forest can become a labyrinth, fooling the mind in ways we otherwise encounter only in dreams or fairy tales. The more so when the mind is under shock, fear or panic. – Neither could he make up Kudumbigala, nor was there any sign of Bambaragasdalawa. Only the compass and the sun gave him some hint in what direction to move on, till darkness forced him to take rest on a rock. During the night he hardly could find sleep and thoughts about dying came to his mind. The next morning he continued his struggle for survival until he could see the landmarks of the other 'shore'. Only then he knew that he had won the battle against wilderness, which many others have lost before him.

Soon his mind could let go of the trauma and we joked, that the animals would have a great party with our food and especially with his radio. Two days were left for him to recover, because then all the dry portions would be finished. To reduce Sunil's pain, I gave him my slippers and helped him fix a crutch. After the last preparations for the adventure we left at dawn of the tenth day since my arrival. Walking without a proper path towards a destination which can't be seen and the direction only guessed, is similar to going through life. That what seems the right way soon might be leading nowhere, and where one is convinced that a track can't lead one any further, might soon turn out to be like a highway straight to the goal . . . but moments later one might be again so confused that one even doubts the needle of the compass! After some time it started raining, which also didn't make the journey easier. More than three hours had passed before we could recognise some of the rock peaks in front of us. Only then the mind and body relaxed. What a joy it was when seeing the first cave and when walking on a path that surely leads to a known destination. The first thing I did when arriving at the main hall was to take out the thorns, which got stuck in my bare feet and felt like walking on broken glass. But it took not long until I felt ready to get swollen up again by the not less dangerous, yet more corrupted flood of a civilized world.

Even to such remote places like Kudumbigala there is a tendency in our days of mobility and longing for unusual sights that tourists come along to just take a look around, disturb the silence, leave behind their garbage and move on in their distractive and disrespectful way. At such special places nature has a recipe against those unwelcome interferences. During the rainy season parts of the road which connect the forest hermitage with the rest of the world are washed away and hardly accessible. Therefore only people who are willing to take upon themselves some discomfort are able to come close to the premises which has become my trespass into a place where I left as a different person.