

A Visit to Konnersreuth

In Europe there aren't many places, like in India or in America, where the sincere pilgrim can go because his Guru walked there. Very few really, maybe just one ...

Konnersreuth, in South East Germany, is a tiny little village that became relatively well known to spiritual seekers, as it was the birth and dwelling place of Therese Neumann, to whom Yogananda dedicated a powerful chapter in his Autobiography, calling her "the Catholic Stigmatist."

What Yogananda wrote about her may be considered essential in the whole of his teachings for two reasons:

-Yogananda wanted to highlight the authenticity of Jesus' life and mission on earth and the universality of his teachings. After having spoken with Therese he writes: *I realized at once that her strange life is intended by God to reassure all Christians of the historical authenticity of Jesus' life and crucifixion as recorded in the New Testament, and to dramatically display the ever-living bond between the Galilean Master and his devotees.*

-Yogananda, who discovered and introduced the principles of energization to the modern world, possessed the yogic power to perceive the way in which Therese's body was sustained without food:

I see you realize that energy flows to your body from the ether, sun, and air.

A swift smile broke over her face. "I am so happy to know you understand how I live."

"Your sacred life is a daily demonstration of the truth uttered by Christ: 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.'

Again she showed joy at my explanation. "It is indeed so. One of the reasons I am here on earth today is to prove that man can live by God's invisible light, and not by food only."

This is exactly what Yogananda, too, is teaching the modern world through the principles and the practice of the energization exercises. The capacity to feel, understand and control energy in the human body and mind can now be progressively developed by every dedicated practitioner of these exercises.

Gopala and I, on a joyful outreach tour in Germany, felt guided to go out of our planned way to visit this highly magnetic place in the heart of Europe, where a Christian mystic met with an Indian Avatar.

We knew we would have little time, so the day before I called Konnersreuth and spoke with a friendly old man who promised he would open Therese's house for us.

Yogananda visited the saint in the summer of 1935, whilst travelling through Europe in an old Ford. Being some 80 years further into Dwapara Yuga, Gopala and I realized how much easier it was for us to reach the somewhat secluded place in the little time that was at our disposal: our vehicle, named Sanghi, is fast, economical and comfortable and surely the highway, at some 10 minutes distance from the village, hadn't been built yet when the Master came; rural paths, unfit for big cars, must have made their journey far from smooth. But like with all the saints that Yogananda visited, he persevered and practiced the *tapasya* that is, so yoga teaches us, required for all divine attainments, including receiving the darshan of a saint.

His *tapasya* worked for us as well: our visit went smooth. Arriving at the little village square where Therese's house stands peacefully, we tried to imagine where the old Ford had been parked, under the pouring rain, on that crucial day many years ago, with the Master and his two disciples

waiting and praying to be led to Therese, who happened to be in the nearby city of Eichstaett on the day of their coming.

We meditated for a while in the village church, whose tower is quaintly adorned with a cross that American soldiers, upon special request of the saint, put up there. Then it was time to call our guide.

He was an elderly man who had witnessed Therese's trance many times in person. As we went up the stairs to her room we tried to be as interiorized as the conversation with our guide allowed us to be.

Yogananda had climbed these very same stairs! The room of the saint could be seen from behind a glass door: small, simple. An altar was built next to the bed where she had had her visions.

This is what our guide shared with us:

-she didn't just see Jesus, she literally went with him through all her agonies. The spectator could see that.

-She also had visions of the Pentecost, when the disciples received the Holy Ghost and spoke in many languages, like Therese herself did at times. Peter spoke to Therese in perfect German.

-She wrote many letters every night to people in need of help. Some of them were exhibited in the room downstairs.

-her trances started every Thursday night and ended on Friday afternoon leaving Therese's body lifeless on the bed. "An hour later I could meet her in the street as she was going shopping!"

-Hitler was reluctant to arrest or kill her. The Nazis tried to ruin her reputation, but the dictator was said to be afraid of the little lady who spoke openly against the Nazis.

-Only on the very last days of the war the SS came to Konnersreuth and tried to capture her, but she was hiding somewhere in the country

nearby. Konnersreuth was on fire when the allied forces conquered it and the front wall of Therese's house was destroyed.

- Under the Nazi regime Therese guided many disciples on the path of moral vigor. The most powerful one was Fritz Gerlich, mentioned by Yogananda, a protestant journalist who subsequently converted to Catholicism. Therese encouraged him to continue writing against Hitler. "It will not stop him, but you must do it." Gerlich then started a newspaper in Munich, called "the Straight Path," in which he openly denounced the Nazi crimes for what they were. Our guide said Gerlich could have escaped to Switzerland, but he stayed instead when Hitler came to power, was arrested, tortured and killed in the concentration camp Dachau. Our guide said many others were encouraged in similar ways by the simple farmer's woman to be a spiritual and moral example for their fellow Germans.

The political aspects of Therese's life are barely mentioned in

Yogananda's autobiography, yet all these years later maybe a larger

picture is being presented to us: Yogananda's mission was to bring kriya

yoga to many potential saints in Europe and America, perceived by

Babaji. He visited Germany when it was going through a period of great

spiritual regression and of dangerous, aggressive ignorance. He tried to

have an interview with Hitler "hoping to guide the dictator's ambition in a

more spiritual direction," as Swami Kriyananda writes. Yogananda then

wrote a chapter about his visit and included it in one of the most

important spiritual books of the past hundred years. Right after the war

he received many letters from Germans and his comment to Swami Kriyananda was: "They need kriya yoga, not war. Maybe I'll send you there someday."

Ananda Europe, as it turned out, was started in Italy, but some of our best yoga teachers are German and Swami Kriyananda did visit Germany many times. During my first class with him, in his house in Como, Swami spoke a very natural, sweet and musical German. He even said he spoke German before he spoke English.

As Gopala and I travel through Germany and teach classes on various subjects related to the teachings of kriya yoga, we cannot but wonder if not many more people here would be helped by initiation into a spiritual practice that will empower what Yogananda called the altar of God: the human nervous system, spine and brain. We, from Ananda Sangha, are certainly happy to support all German kriyabans who want to share their spiritual inspiration and enthusiasm by creating Satsang. Feel free to write to janlotichius.darshan@gmail.com and we will do everything we can to help you.

May Yogananda continue to bless Germany with the art and science of
kriya yoga.

In His Light,

Darshan