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Hidaya

No Name Nomad

Autobiographical Novel

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Verily all praise belongs to Allah. We praise Him, seek help from Him, ask His forgiveness and ask His guidance. And we ask Allah's protection against the evil of ourselves and the evil of our deeds. Whosoever Allah guides, there will be no misguidance for him, and whosoever He leads astray, there is no guidance for him.

To my father, who always supported me,
although he often could not understand
my intentions and decisions.

Prologue

Until the age of about 21, I had nothing to do with religion. But I realised that something was wrong in society, and therefore also in my own life. Terribly wrong! But what was it?

While parents and society expected me to start an education, telling me I was "free" to choose, I thought about why humanity was destroying what it came from, Mother Earth. It didn't seem to be a purely technical problem like "let's put in some filters and it will be okay". It went much deeper than that!

I became quite depressed at the time and suffered from eczema, an illness that has many causes but is often psychosomatic. A doctor prescribed me corticosteroids and cortisone and the eczema disappeared for a while, only to reappear after a short while. I began to understand that we humans are not just a biological machine, but have a soul, and that if you really want to heal someone, you have to be a doctor, a psychiatrist and a priest all in one.

A friend of mine gave me the book 'Illness as a Path', which said that an illness is not an enemy that we have to fight, but on the contrary a friend that shows us the way. We would be like stars on an orbit and have lessons to learn. If we left the orbit and did not want to learn our lessons voluntarily, we would experience friction in the form of illness and other strokes of fate that would force us to learn the lessons anyway and return to our orbit.

The book was very inspiring, and after that I devoured several books on esotericism and religion. I started to believe in God again after I had given up my faith at the age of seven. During this time of my "spiritual awakening", I started various training programmes, only to abandon them shortly afterwards. While I waited for the next semester or the next course, I travelled to places such as Asia, Australia and Africa, which were also spiritual journeys for me.

Of course, my parents were anything but pleased and made this very clear: "This is the last education we're funding for you! If you drop out again, that's it! Then you'll have to find your own way!"

Natural medicine was the last thing I tried. But I felt like I was in a straitjacket with this training. So after three months I dropped out again and from then on I made a living doing odd jobs, such as sticking labels on products in a department store warehouse.

Eventually I started laying crane rails in high-bay warehouses. These were the darkest hours of my life. For me, doing this work was almost like prostitution! A slave to money! I did this job because I was a coward. What would happen if I no longer wanted to be a slave and no longer participate in this system? What would I do without money?

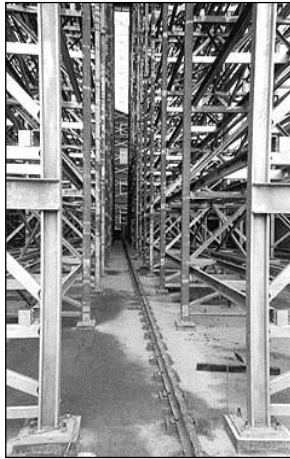
The darkest hours

It was December 1990. The ugliest weather one can think of, cold and wet! A gray sky greeted us in Frankfurt where we went for assembly. Other installation teams were already on site, and there was the noise of hammering and drilling. The telescope-arm of a giant construction crane lifted parts of the 40m high shelves to the men who in lofty heights mounted the iron bars. Other workers were installing sprinkler systems, and others were busy with the mighty special cranes that would later fill computer controlled the shelves with products such as dog food, televisions or shaving cream. Between the shelves there were eight lanes, and in each of them there was such a monster of a crane, for which we assembled the rails. The lanes were about a hundred meters long. Rain water collected in puddles on the concrete floor, which we measured now and where we marked the points where the drilling would take place.

"Do you take the drill?" asked Peter.

"Okay," I replied and headed to the van to get the pneumatic drill. Then I connected the thick hoses to the compressor, turned it on and began hammering. Every 70cm two holes had to be drilled. Concrete and dust splashed around. A hell of a noise echoed through the building. As long as the drill met concrete only, it dug into the ground like into butter. But as soon as it met the iron of the reinforced concrete, it began to bounce and jump. Sometimes it got stuck between iron and concrete, so I had to use all my strength to get it out again. After

twenty minutes the fingers were already tense and I started to sweat despite the cold in December. Eventually I was replaced by one of my colleagues, and assembled now the iron plates on which later the rails would be mounted.



I stared into nothingness. Behind this nothingness was the white ceiling of my hotel room where I was resting on my bed and entertained dark thoughts. A cold wind howled outside which made the already not particularly friendly atmosphere of the sparsely furnished room even more melancholic. I rolled to the side and picked up the Bible, which the Gideons had put on the little table for the hotel guests. Fitting my mood I was reading the Book of Revelation and read of the shells filled with the wrath of God, which the angels poured on the Earth. I read about the sea and the rivers that got poisoned; about the sun, which was given power to scorch mankind with great heat and the ulcers that the

people got. I had inevitably to think about tanker accidents, ozone layer depletion and cancer and realized the fact that the Apocalypse was already in full swing, while I diligently assembled my rails! I heard one of my colleagues laughing next door and looked briefly out of the window. But there was only darkest night, so I kept reading.

Blood they have shed and blood you have given them to drink, they are worth it ... to destroy those who destroyed the Earth ... but the cowards and the infidels and all liars shall have their part in the lake of fire, and this is the second death.

I closed my eyes. I saw a path. Its edges were pillars of fire, the ground was covered with glowing coals, and no heaven existed. This path I had to go. All alone, until its last end, where I would be received by an angel with cooling water, and all the pain would end forever. Should I refuse to go this path, or shy away from the pain, the flames would beat me forever and even my cry would turn as a flame against me.

I suddenly felt a fear that was far greater than the fear standing as a beggar starving on the streets! It was the fear of being guilty and to be held accountable! Mankind was about to destroy the planet! Humanity headed for the abyss! And I ran with the lemmings towards self-destruction! I could not save the earth, but I could do one thing: no longer participating! Repenting and no longer bowing in front of the golden calf! Sooner or later, with all the money there would be nothing to buy anyway! If I kept participating in the general insanity,

God would judge me one day! And any lame excuse would not be accepted!

I opened the Bible and read again as if to confirm:

And they did not repent and desisted from the work of their hands, that they had given God the glory! ... If anyone wants to go with me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me! For whosoever will save his life shall lose it. ... Go forth out of her, my people. That you may not participate in her sins and partake of her plagues...

In that moment I realized that I had nothing to lose! But that I had to confront my fears and let go of all false securities! And that I had to surrender and entrust myself to a guide that led me even after my death!

The sun does rise

One night I pondered on my decision. The next morning I told my astonished foreman goodbye, took the rest of my money and my small backpack, and made my way to the train station. The key to my apartment I sent a friend and asked him to help me cancel the rental contract. In return he could have all my belongings.

My money was only enough for a ticket to Lyon, but my goal was Spain. In my mind I saw myself already as a beggar on the streets of Barcelona and as a penitent monk in a desert-like area.

It was night when I got to Lyon, and it was cold. I went south and soon crossed the Rhône in which the glittering lights of houses and refineries were reflected. When my legs became increasingly tired, the question arose where I could spend the night protected from the cold. When I finally saw the sign of a hospital, I remembered my days as a male nurse and knew the answer. Unnoticed I made it into a staff locker room where I spent an uncomfortable but warm night. I was awakened by the noise of the morning shift.

The sky looked like lead, and a sharp wind was blowing. But it felt good to walk! It made me feel free! And because it was too cold for longer breaks, I made that day over fifty kilometers. At night I found shelter in a factory and plastic wrap, with which I covered myself. It was a cold night and I did not rest well. At dawn it became even colder.

And then the unimaginable happened: It was the South of France at beginning of December and it started snowing! As soon as my shoes were soaked, my mood had dropped below zero. I spent hours with wet feet trudging through the slush. Finally I had enough of this walking and tried my luck at the nearby highway with hitch-hiking, where I caught a lift after just five minutes. The car took me to Avignon. Here was no more snow, but I got already a permanent shivering and I was not sure if it was more physical or more mental related. The uncertainty and the cold into which I headed made the world appear bleaker than ever. Life became a huge burden and I dragged myself along under the heavy load, although my backpack was only small.

Shortly after the Pont d'Avignon a small van stopped even though I did not hitchhike. In the rusty rattletrap sat a Gypsy and a monster of a dog, and on the dashboard a little plastic statue of the Virgin Mary were spreading her arms invitingly. The Gypsy just waved and I got in without a word. We drove on lonely country roads. At sunset, I saw a mountain range in the Southwest and mistakenly assumed it would be the Pyrenees.

"Do you want to come to my family," asked the Gypsy, while putting a Gauloise in his mouth, and offering me one too.

"Yeah, maybe," I croaked out from behind the cigarette smoke, "where does your family live?"

There was no clear answer, but in the evening an invitation for dinner and the offer of a blanket. In a

parking lot the Gypsy prepared for the night. But I did not feel comfortable: The narrowness of the car, the big dog and the feeling the man was gay! And so I told him I preferred to continue my journey, hoping not to offend the Gypsy in his honor who had invited me to his family. The Gypsy seemed a little offended indeed and just nodded. I waited for an awkward minute, hoping that the man would remember his offer about the blanket. But he kept silent, and only the cold encouraged me to ask again.

The night I spent in a stairwell, sitting on the front edge of a step, and despite the blanket repeatedly waking up because of the cold. It probably would have been better to stay. It has not been a lonely parking lot, and did Maria not welcome me?

It then turned out that I was off course and the mountains were not the Pyrenees. But to Montpellier hitchhiking went quite well and I found again a hospital, this time with a bath. For almost an hour I lay in the tub and filled it up over and over again with hot water until finally an impatient knock at the door reminded me that I was not the only person who wanted to take a bath.

After waiting for a longer while at the highway, I was finally picked up by a British guitarist who was on the way to Toulouse with his wife and child, where they wanted to meet his band.

"Where you heading to?" he asked while offering me cigarettes and biscuits.

"To Spain," I replied while chewing hungrily the biscuits.

"You've money?"

"No."

"You speak some Spanish?"

"No."

Good music blared out of the speakers, and I was finally in a good mood again. Spain was already in sight! When I climbed out of the van, the woman gave me the half-empty cookie box with a good-natured smile. "Good luck!" A few minutes later I realized that the woman had smuggled unnoticed 200 francs into the package!

I felt, I was on an ascending branch again, and the fear gradually gave way to confidence in destiny. There was a hand holding and protecting me!

The area and the weather had become friendly, though the nights were still very cold and my legs sorely strained by the unaccustomed exertion. Slowly it went to Barcelona. Hitchhiking and walking, I continued my journey to the south and eventually reached a small village where I made myself comfortable on the porch of an inhabited house. I was already a bit run down and had rash on the neck and dirty clothes. Suddenly a Moroccan came along the beach, looked at me and asked, in French, the whence and the whither.

"Come with me to my friends," he said after a minute, "it's too cold here."

A few blocks away there was a half finished house under construction but apparently no longer worked on. A small room was made rainproof with cardboard and

plastic sheets, three Moroccans were sitting there and welcomed me. They were day laborers who sometimes found work on the nearby orange groves and had received a temporary visa. I felt immediately at home. Crowded we slept on two adjacent mattresses, and I was ashamed of my rash and my clothes. I was moved that a cruddy tramp like me was met with so much warmth, where many people felt disturbed in their privacy already in a large apartment when they had to house a guest, let alone a dirty stranger!

Two days later I arrived in Valencia, and then finally it happened: My money was finished! From my last pesetas I bought a little white bread. A scanty ration! But one hope remained: I had told my parents that I would be on the way to Valencia and was hoping now fervently that they would send me a promised Christmas present.

Just before my exodus from Frankfurt I had some arguments with them. In addition to my gloomy predictions about the apocalypse I had accused them to finance my brother years of study, but would not support me in my quest to find alternative ways. This talk about education and secure existence in the face of the global disaster I would find ridiculous. They should give me the same opportunities like my brother and let me freely dispose of the funds rather than trying to force me (!) to get an education. My pent-up anger at the general situation (probably in reality more a wrath over my own incompetence to find another way) erupted in our discussions so emotional that my parents were starting to fear about my sanity! So they said they would pay me

a holiday at the beach, in order "that the sea breeze can blow your sad thoughts out of your head."

Well, now I was at the beach! Hopefully they would remember their promise!

But the post office was closed for a holiday, and so I had to wait hungry for one day. Actually I knew that the money would not be good for me in my situation and just postpone something vital and inevitable unnecessarily. But trust in money was still superior than trust in God!

Alternative education

As I trudged in the morning through a pedestrian passage, a beggar wrapped in a long leather coat addressed me in English: "You have some change for an old man?"

"Sorry, I have nothing myself! But I'm on the way to the post office. If I get something there, I invite you to breakfast."

The beggar nodded and saluted.

At the post office a telegram was waiting for me: "Letters need 9 days stop come home stop your apartment is still waiting for you stop your parents."

I went back the same way and met the beggar again. I sat down next to him and did not need to say a word. The old man asked if I was hungry, and when I said yes, he beckoned me to come along. We went to the nearest cafe, and how surprised was I when the beggar served me croissants and latte!

Half the day I spent with my host observing his 'job'. He really knew whom to ask and what to say! A real artist! The people smiled and were generous. However, most of the money was used up for *Vino Tinto*, and the old man started roaring and snarling, which was not exactly beneficial for operating his business.

In the afternoon a mate of his brought me to a handsome-looking flute player, a Portuguese named Alberto, who spoke passable English. He asked me to collect money while he continued to play flute.

And so I asked for the first time in my life strangers for money! Later on I even tried my skills on the flute, but produced merely annoying noise. Still, it was enough to draw attention to ourselves. In the pre-Christmas rush hardly anyone noticed it anyway.

In the evening we wandered around the picturesque old town of Valencia with its many churches, romantic squares and narrow streets, sat in a cheap pint and ordered beer and tapas. Alberto then dragged off a foam mattress from a dump and eventually stopped in front of an old huge tenement. He took a quick look to the right and left, and then opened the heavy door. We arrived in a dark stairwell, and I immediately recognized from the smell that this house was obviously not been inhabited for quite some time. We entered a ground floor apartment and joined two Spaniards who were sitting in a small room illumined by candlelight and just smoked a joint. Alberto put the mattress into a corner: "Make yourself at home." He did not need to tell me twice!

And so my live 'on the road' began and my alternative education!

The house had about twenty apartments on four floors and was, as so many homes in Valencia, empty: too dilapidated to be inhabited, too expensive to be renovated. It was attracting like a magnet more and more motley people.

The next day I chose a room on the third floor, with marble floors and huge windows, and built myself a bed and a desk with the help of bulky waste. Soon I got a Canadian as neighbor, who was running out of money

and brought by Alberto like myself. Alberto showed us the Comedor 'Casa Grande', a charitable food place, where over 400 people were fed daily, all of which were held by the feisty nuns to speak their prayer before the food was served. A unique meeting place of drunkards, vagabonds, homeless, lazy heads, penniless foreigners, drug addicts and other social problem cases; a lot of nice, but unfortunately mostly broken, blunt or demented faces! My family table for the next two months!

I practiced as a mendicant! It had taken me a lot of courage the first time to sit myself on the floor of a pedestrian passage with a shoe box in front of me and bear the shame. But it took only ten seconds for a 1000 peseta bill to fly into the box and I made out only the back of a man who hastily disappeared in the crowd. The spontaneous idea came up of having been rewarded that I had humiliated me in front of others!

After a few days however, the uncomfortable feeling to be stared at, despised and ignored, to be pitied or even hated was gone. First I could only watch in shame to the ground, but then my eyes slowly opened! Just standing there quietly and to look at all the bustle; being a rock in midst of the stream of people flowing by! There were the old ladies who needed five minutes to fumble for 5 pesetas; the fine yuppie, who in his rush had still the time to spend a coin; young girls giving bashfully or slightly smiling; housewives on their way to shopping; serious gentlemen who threw strict gazes at me ... and the feeling of compassion turned around!

I mourned the people who seemed so alien to themselves and passed by each other, being each other

so close and yet so distant, and seemed as caught in a slumber, alive as wound-up toy! Before, I had often felt hatred for this mass of humanity, which in its busyness trampled down the planet. But now that I myself no longer joined them and set aside the hatred against myself, I was able to see the individual faces again and the illness that had befallen them! And I had the strange feeling of doing something good with my idleness! Because there were people who stopped, saw something else than themselves and their own interests, and brought their machinery temporarily to a halt!

At a flea market, where Alberto also sold junk on Saturdays, I found colours, brushes and old boots in my size, which I could negotiate the good-natured old man down to 300 pesetas. I bought large sheets of paper, then sat down on the road and started to paint. Besides me I put a pot with some change to make the people understand: Donations welcome! That brought less money than begging, but I sat on a little square next to the cathedral, the Plaza de la Virgen, where hundreds of white doves were flying around.



Sometimes a police patrol came by that prompted me then usually with a glance to disappear. Or a friend showed up with a joint, a beer or with Calimucho, a mix of wine and lemonade.

One day a woman appeared and tried to talk to me. But for a real conversation my Spanish was not sufficient yet. After all, I understood that she was painting herself and that she liked my pictures. And suddenly 5000 pesetas were in my pot! Now I could buy myself special colors one had to mix oneself with glue and water and which gave brilliant effects. Soon my room had become a small studio.

The house was half filled within a week! People from all over Europe, the US, Morocco, Algeria and other African countries ... after a month I lost count. In the evening a bonfire was kindled in the courtyard and we cooked together. Joints and beer bottles were wandering around, and thanks to the different nationalities a wild mix of languages reflected at the walls of the old building. I felt at home! I felt free! The fear and the cold were forgotten!

One day it happened. On the first floor someone was found with his throat cut-up. The whole room was covered in blood. It remained unclear whether it was suicide or murder. Oddly enough, no police actions took place, no interrogations, the house remained untouched. The general mood was depressed for a short time, but no one seemed to even have known the man.

When I stood again on the road with a shoe box in my hand, three young people, probably students, passed by

and looked at me. One of them asked how much I would earn with the begging. I dodged and said that would be difficult to say.

"What languages do you speak?"

"German, English and French!"

"Do you want to work in a gallery and sell pictures? You earn monthly 150,000 Pts!"

I did not know exactly why I refused this fantastic offer. Maybe because I felt a bit like on a slave market, where shoppers looked at me as a commodity! Or because I instinctively felt: "This is a temptation that will divert you from the right path!" Anyway, I told them as shot out of a gun, "I am a painter myself, and if I sell pictures, then my own!"

Exodus

The atmosphere in the house changed! It gradually became more chaotic and things got stolen. I never lacked anything, but that was no surprise as I had nothing except paints and brushes! My door was always open!

The police started finally with raids and a few people went in custody. The police officers also broke my door (although it was not locked!) and intruded. However, when they saw my pretty studio and my German ID-card, they disappeared without a comment.

The heroin dealers from Ghana had moved the fireplace to the second floor, where they set up a metal barrel in the middle of a room. But the place had a few downsides: the room was soon too small for all the people, who suffocated in the smoke that blew freely through the windows, giving the passers-by and neighbors the feeling the house would be on fire. So we finally moved onto the roof top, where we had more space and where also some combustible rubbish were lying around.

One cozy evening, when I just stared thoughtfully into the fire, I heard that there would be habitable caves close to Granada in which Hippies were living, and the old vision of the monk in the cave appeared again. Because the atmosphere here lost its appeal for me, I grabbed my little backpack already the next day and decided to go to Granada without using money!

I wanted to learn to let go and saw my journey now symbolically as the biblical exodus from Egypt. If I did not want to remain a slave of the money, I had to cross the desert like Moses did; the place where there was nothing, and where with all my strength and intelligence I could not do anything but where I was fully dependent on the grace and guidance of God! The place, where the Golden Calf could not help me!

The outskirts of Valencia stretched endlessly with their unsightly architecture. At noon I found a sandwich on the road, wrapped in aluminum foil and totally okay. A little later, I asked in a restaurant for water and got iced lemonade instead. In the evening I found a plantation and stuffed me full with oranges until all the skin began to itch. In a bakery I asked ashamed for yesterday's bread and got a bag full of fresh mixed confectionery instead! There it was again, the reward for following the right inspiration!

Eventually I reached Benidorm, which reminded me with its skyline of Las Vegas in a nutshell. I walked along the streets, looking at plump tourist faces and one feeding stall next to another. But in those I asked to no avail, they wanted to see money. So I collected leftover food from the tables and earned angry looks. They preferred throwing the stuff in the trash rather than giving it to a poor wretch!

The worst experience I had once on a hot day when I asked in a bar for water and the lady only shook her head with a cold smile. When I stood on the street again, the tears came into my eyes. How could anyone deny a thirsty one water if he himself has enough of it?

I began to empty my backpack, which was quite small already anyway. In Valencia I had seen a man who was dressed like an Indian Guru. He was wearing only a white cloth and a white blanket over his shoulders. He had a white beard and long white hair and no shoes on his feet. He reminded me of Jesus' teaching: *Do not take gold nor silver nor copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes nor staff, for the laborer is worthy of his meal.* I also wanted to learn to live like a bird in order to gain the confidence that one can find everything one needs on one's way, if God wills!

It was relatively easy to let go of the pocket knife and a pair of socks, just with the blanket I hesitated because the nights were still cold, and the experience not being able to sleep because of cold was not forgotten yet. And if I wanted to separate myself from everything and rely on nothing but on God, what was with my ID-card?

Shortly before Almeria I just came out of a tomato plantation where I had committed petty theft, when a police car stopped. The policeman smiled at me when he saw that he had caught me: "Documentacione!" He glanced at the card, gave it back again, slightly raised his index finger, and the car rolled on.

After a few kilometers, I passed a ruin, where somebody had sprayed with red paint: "Porque no han tenido documentacione ... Muerto in Christo...Guardia Civil ... Dios lo sabe que hacies" ('Because they had no identity card ... died in Christ ...Guardia Civil ... God knows what you are doing')

That was it! The ID card was the mark of which the Apocalypse was talking about! That all people would accept with the exception of the chosen few, and without which one could not buy or sell! All who would not take it would be killed. But those who took it would end up in eternal fire! The image and the name of the beast, and the number of his name: 666! A human number, the number of my own reflection!

Cavemen

After six weeks of hiking, Granada was lying in front of me. Huge buildings stood out of a brownish haze layer. In the background stood the majestic Alhambra, the Moorish palace, dominated by the mountains of the Sierra Nevada. I actually had imagined Granada smaller and cozier. Disappointed I decided already to keep going towards Morocco because I was now in good shape and the continuous walking had become addictive. But I wanted to jump quickly into the post office because I had written my parents they could send me letters to Granada.

The city welcomed me with heat and crowds of people. I went to the post office and found a friendly letter from my parents. And also some money, because the rental contract of my apartment had been finally cancelled, and from the deposit was still some money left. The letter showed me that my decision to leave Germany and regular life was gradually accepted.

What a feeling holding again 300,- DM in my hands! What power radiated from the money! All sparkling and delicious things I saw in the shop windows had become accessible to me! I had become powerful again and did not need to wait anymore humbly for what fate offered me!

I took a little walk through the city center. Eventually, I sat in a bar, eating happily, drinking a beer and looking dreamily out of the window. Suddenly I recognized in the passing crowd Davide, an Italian who I had met in

Valencia. I rushed out of the bar, so that the barkeeper already thought I wanted to cheat the bill, and ran and shouted. Great welcome, there was much to talk about, among other things, how the house in Valencia was vacated shortly after my departure in a massive police action.

We strolled through the city, met at the Plaza Bibrambla a few 'hippies', bought beer, and went on to Plaza Nueva, where again a horde of 'hippies' squatted. After six weeks of being the lonely tramp I was now in a frisky mood. The sun shone from a cloudless sky, and my initial antipathy towards the city changed to the opposite. The town center with its picturesque corners and squares, its many churches and fountains, its bars and cafes, dominated by the mighty fortress and the palace, had a very welcoming atmosphere indeed. One could see a wall and a couple of cave entrances on a hill overlooking the city: Sacromonte¹.

¹ The first caves were dug around 800 years ago, providing housing for the workers building the Alcazaba and later the Alhambra, the Moorish masterpiece that had never been conquered by force and was considered impregnable. The castle is crisscrossed with subterranean passages and vaults. The palace itself looks like a fairytale castle from 1001 nights and rises protectively over the ancient district of the Albayzin, which consists of a maze of narrow streets and red tiled white houses. From the 15th century on, the caves were inhabited by gypsies and further expanded. Most of the lower caves got houses built in front of them, and in those are some of the most famous flamenco venues in Spain. Up to 40,000 gypsies are said to have lived on the Sacromonte close to the city center, which was a thorn in the flesh for the Spaniards. When heavy rains let several caves collapsed, it was used as a pretext to declare the caves uninhabitable, and the gypsies were put in the Poligono, a

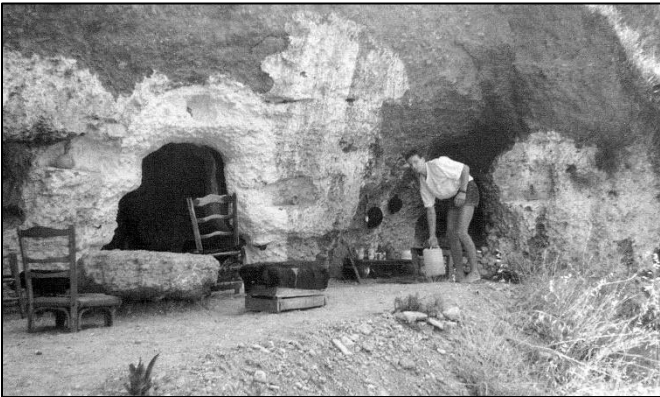
Daive brought me later to the caves, a walk of half an hour from the center of Granada. Steep hills, this time of the year still green with flowers, were covered with cave entrances. One day I spent in Davides cave that had two rooms. The walls were whitewashed, and the cave was decorated quite cozy with furniture, rugs and paintings.



Daive recommended me Alberto's old cave as a shelter, because it was clean and had a cement floor. A little small though! At night, I had the feeling of lying in a tomb.

sterile high-rise estate outside Granada, where the culture of the Gitanos was doomed to extinction. Some few years later the caves were discovered and occupied by hippies, partially nicely maintained and restored, but partially only filled with garbage and feces. It became busy. Sometimes more than one hundred people lived here, who stayed on average two or three months. They came from all over Europe, but also from overseas, and earned their living mainly with music, begging, juggling, street painting, street theater or with the manufacture of cheap jewelery or leather goods.

I moved then into a small canyon where there was only one habitable cave. Much debris was lying in front of it, but it formed a pretty kidney-shaped space and its walls were still intact, that is, the sandstone was coated with a mixture of cement and lime. Two weeks I needed to build a patio and to repair the floor. Furniture and tableware I got from the dump. The effort was worthwhile! I had the most romantic place of all Granada!



One would have never thought to be only a half hour away from the center of a big city. At dawn, the birds began with a concert, a small pine forest stretched from the cave up the canyon, the hills were covered with bushes, cacti and agaves, and one could still see outlines of the oldest caves.

Granada had two Comedores and I used again the method with the shoe box, normally for an hour a day. In addition one could look on the market for fruit and vegetables. I got used to mocking looks when I searched

in the trash for food. I found the best stuff and wondered how people could throw such things away. For me it was once again a great exercise in humility and I consoled myself by telling me that the last ones would be the first ones. Amazing how quickly the view was sharpened and one got the eyes of an animal looking for food! That was certainly an innate instinct and only slightly neglected!



Every day I came to know new people and their fates, saw other caves that were as different as the people and seemed to have their own life. There was always

something going on, a meeting, a dinner or a party, and I felt as good as never before in my life freed from a heavy burden and treadmill. Even though it was of course not a solution for the long term to beg and to live off the remains of the throwaway society, for the moment it was okay to play the mendicant. It was my own private education!

In the Albayzin there lived an elderly tall German guy with red hairs and a thick moustache. He believed in the coming New Age and thought he could observe how the ambiances began to change, and how people who did not prepare themselves for it would get more and more problems: "The new era will be characterized by spontaneity. People will be able to see God's will and act accordingly spontaneously. We are currently in a kind of preparatory phase, in which we have to train it."

"How much spontaneity is possible in this world, where all is planned through," I asked. "And how can I distinguish between the divine inspiration and my own ideas?"

"Yes, it's difficult! But God knows that and has patience. Only those who cling stubbornly to the old structures will not see the New Age."

He told me about the philosophy of the Gypsies, who represented the spiritual process as a maze. Reached man after many twists and different stages its center, he became aware of the self and God. The old ways of the Gypsies in Europe would follow this maze on a different level, and the center of the labyrinth would be the

cathedral in Chartres where one could discover many of its symbols.

One day I saw close to my cave the Guru, whom I had seen briefly in Valencia already, the one with the white Hindu clothes. I invited him to tea and admired his long white beard. The Guru spoke German and of himself in the first person plural, which shortly irritated me at the beginning. We philosophized about this and that and I asked him if he had no other clothes to change.

"No," said the Guru, "we wash at night! Sometimes it's too much hassle already having to carry a blanket with us."

That impressed me, and I asked the Guru the relatively redundant question whether he possessed a passport.

"It is not enough to have no more ID; one must also have been exposed to the rain for a few years, so that the identity flushes out!"

Later I heard some strange stories about him. Bertrand would have not been able to get him out of his cave. The Guru had advised him and his girlfriend, rather than practicing Yoga in the morning, to have intercourse, which would be healthier. And he asked if 'we' could watch them because 'we' could certainly give them some good advice.

In the city I met a former legionnaire who intended to go to South America because he thought that in the event of a global catastrophe one could find shelter in the rain forest.

"The rain forest gets chopped down and burned," I gave my two cents. "I'd rather go into the Hoggar Mountains, which lie in the middle of the Sahara and are as large as the whole of Germany. Nothing can be destroyed there. It is far removed from any political and economic interests, and I have heard that underneath of the Sahara there is a huge freshwater reservoir. When it comes to the supposed disasters like earthquakes and nuclear war, this water might bubble up, because it is prophesied in the Bible that the barren land would become green again."

From one day to another it seemed, all grass on the hills became withered and I was no longer woken up by the concert of the birds. During the day, the temperatures climbed to over 40 degrees, and during siesta time one could see only sweaty tourists in the streets. Most of the cave dwellers were now traveling to the seaside or to cooler climes, and my only visit consisted of a starving fox. Attracted by food rests, he came closer and closer and lost his shyness until he finally was eating out of my hand.

Crossing the sea

The time had come to move on, to the Hoggar Mountains! This time without luggage, without money, without ID-card, just with a small Bible! I had roasted my ID in a ceremony over the fire, and wrote my parents, that I believed something bad would be at work and the net would already been weaved tightly. If I managed to slip through the net, I would disappear from the screen. I meant with the net the total surveillance, identification and definition of life. I was looking for the imageless, undefined being: God!

I tried to avoid major roads for fear of the Guardia Civil, and came through endless olive groves and small villages in which I begged for food as usual. Finally I reached the sea.

In Malaga I met in a park a couple of dudes and was invited to a joint. But it was swarming with police and so I moved on quickly and reached one week later Algeciras. Soon I was facing Morocco. From here I had a fantastic view over the strait and saw in the soft evening light the mountains of Africa. A mysterious world was waiting for me!

The only question was how to get there! To use the ferries, which one could see tiny as model boats on the water, one probably needed a passport, but latest then at the border. The idea emerged that it would be perhaps possible to get a small discarded boat back into shape. It was about 25km across the strait. One should be able to make it in ten hours at night! Well, that

certainly would be exciting! But that was all a part of the exodus from Egypt! Moses also had to cross the water!

So I went to Tarifa in search of a paddle boat. The harbor was guarded, and at the beach I found only a half rotten wreck. I watched the windsurfers as they whizzed across the water, and I thought that was the right means. They could cross the strait in two hours.

When I once strolled along the streets of Tarifa, I saw a hippie sitting on some stairs. He was wearing a long red beard and a colorful turban. He waved at me I should sit down with him, and he asked me where I was going.

"I'm looking for something to eat."

The stranger offered me bread and cheese, "I am Jan and I'm from Sweden."

"My name is Nadie (Span.: Nobody) and I have no nationality," I smacked out.

"How is this possible?"

"I do not have a passport and therefore no nationality, but earlier I used to live in Germany."

Jan dragged me to a beach 15km afar of Tarifa with a small village of huts and a few naked hippies. Jan lit a fire, and while he started cooking I told him my plan to take a boat and cross over to Morocco and to head for the Hoggar.

"Funny idea," said Jan. "I have been there. There is a place where Christian hermits live. I saw a man, sitting all day on the same rock and staring out into the desert.

Good brothers who live there! But you need a camel to reach them from Tamanrasset."

My heart started beating faster. I had the right inspiration!

A helicopter of the Guardia Civil hunted along the shore and interrupted the conversation with its droning. Obviously, it was in search of illegal immigrants or smugglers who came here by speedboat.

The next day I found a seemingly intact blue boat that was half buried in sand. I started digging it out, but realized soon that it was much too large and could accommodate at least ten people.

"Such boats you find many!" Jan later said. "They arrive here fully packed with Moroccans. Some get driven off and disappear forever into the Atlantic."

I went further along the coast towards Cagiz. In the harbor of a major fishing town I discovered a small boat which was half-filled with sand and rubbish. "Nobody needs this any longer," I thought, and began to empty it. I found old paint and a brush and painted the boat in order to seal the small cracks. No one cared for the stranger. Who would ever have thought that someone in broad daylight would paint a boat that did not belong to him?

I left unnoticed the harbor and paddled along the coast to Tarifa. The boat leaked a little, and with the planks that I had taken as a substitute for paddle I was making slow progress. But still it was a great feeling to be the new owner of a boat!

However, suddenly a jeep of the Guardia Civil appeared at the shore. Two men in uniform and a civilian hopped around on the beach and waved with their hands. Of escape one could not think of, I would not have gotten far with the planks as paddle, so I rowed to the beach where the men were waiting for me.

"Is that your boat" they asked not unkindly.

"No, I found it filled with trash and sand in the harbor."

They took me to the car and requested that I show them my ID. They got the strange answer, my name would be Nadie and I would come out of nowhere. They found my German Bible and one of the men said, "Aha, an Englishman!" I dared to remark that the man could probably not read English. The police seemed to have no desire to fuss around with this half-mad saint. They took me only to the highway where they let me go and gave me the advice to hitchhike. I reached Cadiz next day.



The center of Cadiz had the picturesque atmosphere of an old port city. I learned that people on the ferry to Ceuta do not have to provide their ID, and got the idea to swim at night from Ceuta across the border. So I 'collected' some money, took a bus back to Algeciras and really had no problems with boarding. During the crossing I looked at the waves. When they got higher and raised foam, and I was suddenly struck by a strong wind, I was glad that it did not work out with paddling across the straits! That would almost certainly have ended badly!

Ceuta was an ugly city full of annoying traders, and I hurried to get on Mount Hacho, where an old fort stood from which one could peek far into Africa. One could see the road following the coast and the barracks of the border police. I got a sinking feeling in my stomach. By nightfall I went off then, armed with a plastic bag in which I wanted to put my clothes while swimming. When I was not far from the customs, I found a place at the beach which the bright orange of the street lights did not illuminate, and made me ready. The dark water was terribly cold, but there was no turning back now. Just when I started swimming, people became aware of me and began to shout and to wave.

I swam towards the open sea into the darkness as quickly as possible in order not to indicate the onlookers at the beach my direction. But I saw no one who set out for the customs house, and when the gathering slowly dissolved and I was seemingly out of sight, I headed for Morocco.

I gradually got used to the temperature, but the plastic bag with my clothes was now running full of water and acted as an anchor. I also got cramps, and I thought to be an eternity in the water already, when I finally reached the rocky shore of Morocco. I wrung out my clothes and put them on again, hoping they would dry quickly on my body, and walked down the street to the nearest village. Because of the cold and the swimming I got ravenous, and I succumbed to the temptation to get me something edible for the Dirham I had changed in Ceuta, although an inner voice warned me to take the risk just because of the food.

In the village I found small food stalls and got happily a packet of biscuits. On the way back however, someone addressed me from across the street and beckoned me to come over. Instead of just ignoring him and moving on, I asked in French what he wanted. As I looked at the man, I noticed that he was standing in front of a police station. A cop!

He wanted to see my passport, and when I just shrugged my shoulders, he asked me with a gesture to enter the building as if he asked a lady for a dance. The policemen were quite amused when I told them I would have no nationality. Nothing happened. They seemed to have time and to wait for the night shift, obviously having little desire to take a log and to risk overtime. I asked for permission to go to the toilet and a policeman nodded in the direction. In the staircase I passed a half-open window, and when I looked out, I saw the yard and a wall over which one could easily climb over. My heart began to beat faster, but I hesitated.

It became empty at the police station. There was only one guard standing at the door, watching the bustle on the street. I had caught a slight tremor that originated partly from the still wet clothes but also from my exciting thoughts of escape. Finally, I got up and went into the hall and towards the staircase. But just at that very moment the guard came and asked me where I was heading for.

"Au toilet!"

"Encore une fois?" The policeman looked suspiciously, saw the open window, went and locked it and told me I should not get any bad ideas. I had missed the chance! I did not act spontaneously and allowed my fear to keep me too long under control!

Then, when the night shift appeared, I was locked in the dungeon, where I found a blanket and a bag of bread, probably a leftover from my predecessor. It was the first time I saw a prison cell from within. This one at least had classic style! The German prisons resembled more hotel rooms, but this one was dirty, with straw on the blackened stones and with a rusty steel door. I was alone.

The next morning there was a small interrogation, and I told them I had entered Morocco swimming and would come out of nowhere. Amused but also a little perplexed faces were looking at me: "What do we do with such a guy?" They put me back into the hole. After a few hours two policemen appeared with batons and unyielding faces. One dropped the baton and lashed it

down on his hand. He asked me to come out with the truth. Otherwise I would get trouble now.

That was what I had expected! Eventually I would have to witness! Like my brothers, who were killed by the Guardia Civil because they did not have a passport! Like the Guru I met in Granada, whom they extinguished a cigarette on his penis! Fear clouded my thinking. I bowed my head and said softly that I had told the truth. The two officers looked at each other, started to smile and, to my huge relief, left again the cell.

In the evening I was brought back upstairs. An old truck with olive green canvas stood outside the building and I had to climb into the back. The truck went over bumpy roads towards the border. We stopped at a military camp, and I was taken to an officer. The officer waved a few men and gave them some orders. Then he pointed with a gesture that I had to follow them. The soldiers took me along narrow paths to a hill from which one could see the lights of the Ceuta border. I now understood what they were up to. They wanted to deport me illegally across the border in order to avoid unnecessary work and frustration with this strange fellow!

One of the soldiers pointed to a path. "Go straight and follow the path, and do not turn back!" I went and after a quarter of a mile I saw before me jeeps of the Guardia Civil. I would run directly into their arms and jump out of the fire into the frying pan! In the shade of a bush I stopped, and after some consideration I came to the conclusion that I wanted to try again to enter Morocco.

I ducked sideways through the bushes and turned slowly in a wide arc to the south. Where I found no coverage I crawled along the ground. When I was finally over the first hill chain, I took the risk to run along a wider path that led me to the height of a second ridge. Tired from the exertion and excitement I sat down behind a bush. But just as I sat, the beam of a flashlight shone over the hill and onto the bush where I was hiding behind. I did not dare to move, and the light went out again after some time. Nevertheless, I remained sitting over an hour, then crept cautiously around the bush and peered into the shadows. There was nothing to hear and to see. With my heart beating, I followed slowly a narrow path leading down into a valley, as I suddenly heard voices from above and got struck by the light of a torch. Without hesitation I sprinted as fast as my feet carried me while behind me heavy boots rumbled down the slope. But I was already out of the cone of light and my anxiety seemed to arouse the instincts. Despite the darkness I just flew down the narrow path. When I saw bushes at my left side, I squeezed into the bushes and waited motionless on the ground.

Footsteps and voices were approaching. But they went past and it seemed they were not even in a big hurry. I crept further and further down the valley until I found a comfortable place where I went to sleep. When I woke up again, the sun was already high in the sky.

The specter of the night was as blown away. I was in a bushy area with lots of flowers. Birds were chirping and insects were buzzing. I went up the next hill and followed a path that led me past a house and a surprised

Moroccan. I greeted him kindly, as if it were the most natural thing in the world that a European passed by. But the man was too stunned to return the greeting and stared at me with open mouth. After a few meters I heard his footsteps behind me and was asked in French if I'd already had breakfast. The man had an upright face, and so I accepted the invitation.

From the terrace of the house one could see Ceuta lying in the morning sun. A donkey was tied to a tree and chickens were clucking and excitedly running around. We made ourselves comfortable on a bench, and the man let his wife know that there was a guest who soon came out with bread, butter and the famous Moroccan mint tea, while the man was gently trying to start a conversation.

"Where do you come from just now?" he soon wanted to know. An inner voice told me that I did not need to be afraid of denunciation, and I told the story of how I had slipped to Morocco.

"You have been lucky," said the man, "the border is closed off quite well." And in order to return my trust in him he told me: "I am a smuggler and know the way and who I have to bribe!" Later he showed me the way to get out of the border area without walking past any check point: "Bonne chance!"

On narrow paths and roads on it went. When it was noon, I decided to sleep in the shelter of a bush. Soon however, I was woken up by voices, and I realized to my horror that I was surrounded by peasants armed with sticks. But when they saw that they were dealing with a

European, they waved; I would need to be afraid and could continue my journey. An old man even ran after me and handed me a bag with bread.

After another day I reached the sandy beach of the Mediterranean Sea. I was hoping to be able to move forward a little faster here than in the hill area.

After a little while I passed by three men about my age who were looking out to sea. One of them waved at me, and I accepted the invitation and sat down beside them. They had friendly faces and were apparently heavily stoned. They were amazed when they heard my story and invited me to their camp, a village of huts, which was located right at the highway Ceuta – Tetouan. They prepared and served tajine and tea and then pulled out their hashish pipes. Good stuff they had and pleasant to smoke in the elongated clay pipes.

"Nous sommes grands fumeurs d'hashish, Monsieur," they said, and I learned that they were workers who were widening the main road. They shared a cabin with ten people. One of them was only responsible for shopping and cooking and got a share from the wages of the others. We became friends quickly, and when they saw that I felt comfortable in their small shack, they told me I could stay for longer. They gave me a piece of fine hashish and looked satisfied when I made joints for everybody. "Oui, oui, monsieur; nous partageons!"

What kind of people! Gave me a present so that I could share with them!

I learned the first morsel Arabic, among other things the Shahada and the 112th Surah. Although they all were

not praying, they eagerly wanted to teach me Islam, especially when they saw that I was very interested.

Then the time came to say goodbye. Because of the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad there was a holiday and most of the workers went to their families. My friends insisted to leave me some of their sour-earned money and I was forced to take it, after I had first tried in vain to reject it.

"Sometimes it's a long way until one becomes a Muslim!" my friend Umar said before he raised his hand a last time and got into the taxi.

Crossing the desert

I made my way to Tetouan, which was full of annoying conmen, and from there to Tleta de Oued Laou, a little town beautifully situated at the Mediterranean not far away from the Rif Mountains. There I got a very nice brown Djellabah² made out of sheep wool. Soon I realized that the Djellabah was worth gold, because even when it was very cold at night and nearly freezing I still could bear it. When it was hot during the day however, it also isolated from the heat. In addition I could use the hood as camouflage and nobody saw that I was European.



I turned to Chechaouen always trying to use donkey paths, until the road passed through the deep valley of the Oued-Laou. There was not much traffic. I rarely passed by at shops where one could buy something to eat. But I soon learned that I could ask basically anybody

² Hooded coat, usually made from sheep wool.

where to find bread, and was usually invited immediately. It was considered improper for a Muslim to ask someone else for anything. But that way one asked only for some information, and it was the duty of a Muslim to treat a traveler hospitable.

Mandatory was the tea that was always cooked in a small ceremony, and this honor was usually left to the elders. Then there was bread with olive oil, tajine³, couscous, grilled fish or soup. As a dessert usually one got offered hashish, at least as long as I was close to the Rif.

I was actually glad not to have learned so much Arabic because in that manner I had more rest of suspicious questioning. Since the mind did not have enough information, the people had to rely on their instinct, which told them that I was okay. But if I met French speaking people, generally a little bull fight started. I tried to hold a red cloth out and fend off the questioning.

"What country are you from?"

"I used to live in Germany."

"Do you have a passport?"

"How can I enter into Morocco without one?"

"I don't know, but do you have one?"

"Why do you care?"

One had to fend off enough questions until it became improper to ask any further. But I was surprised that so

³ Stew with vegetables, meat or fish.

many people asked me for my papers, where in Germany no one ever asked. They hardly could think I would be a thief or a spy?

I bypassed Chechaouen and found abundant small paths that took me to the south. When I came to larger settlements, I hid under my hood and walked leisurely, as if I were an old man. Only at the more remote farms I was not walking incognito, hoping to get invited once again. A European the people had not every day as a guest!

I passed through areas where the cannabis grew as a weed along the way and where people showed me hashish in the kilos because they thought that's why I would be here for. In some villages the time seemed to have stood still and I felt like I was in a forgotten epoch. I was losing the connection to my past, plunged into a strange world, although in some inexplicable way it was very familiar. Perhaps because this simple lifestyle had accompanied man since ancient times! I went through large oak forests and was surprised because such woods I had not expected in Morocco!

Once two large angry dogs suddenly came running towards me and bit me in the heel, which was luckily protected by the shoe. I bent down quickly to pick up a stone, when it suddenly with a loud noise tore my pants in two. No sooner had I bent down, the dogs had already taken flight and just were barking at me from a respectful distance and I shouted back angrily. Luckily my butt was still covered with the Djellabah!

The forest got replaced by an agricultural hill area with scattered small villages and farms. Unbelievable with how much warmth I was met here! In Spain a lot of good had been done to me, but compared with that it has been a charity. There I was the beggar; the one whom one donated a charitable gift. Here I was a guest to whom proudly the Arabian stallion was shown. Here the people sat together with me and shared brotherly! This friendliness seemed so natural that I could not believe that it was shown to me only because I was European. What a contrast to the chauvinism in my own country!

First I held south towards Fez but then at some point turned to the east. Many times I observed roadblocks at intersections but on the narrow paths I felt safe. When people asked me where I was going, I told them that I would be on the way to Oujda, which lay at the Algerian border.

"What, so far? And walking everything?"

"InshaAllah! That way I get to know the country!"

I often talked with the people about religion, and they were amazed that I knew all the stories about Abraham, Noah and Moses, and were very pleased when I said the Shahada and recited the 112th Surah. They probably thought I was on the verge of becoming a Muslim.

For three days I stopped talking and just kept silent in order to try out if I was still dependent on speech. I was given a welcome that was hard to imagine! They put me the food into my mouth and I almost betrayed myself when I wanted to say: slowly, slowly! I was hugged and

patted! It was inconceivable! In a way I felt miserable because I could not give back this affection to this extent. I felt unworthy of this love and felt crippled, as if a part of my heart had died already!

Slowly the area became increasingly bleak. I found myself more and more often in desert-like areas where one could hear only the wind. How far did the hermits advanced into the wasteland? What a confidence had Moses that he was able to lead a whole nation through the nothingness of the desert? Surely today he would have been locked up as crazy if he would announce his intention to go with thousands of people through the desert trusting that God sends manna from heaven!

Finally I stood in the desert myself! But I moved further without hesitation and major concerns. This was not the Sahara yet. It was winter and did not become that hot during the day. A couple of days I certainly had credit.

No life could be seen here. As far as one could perceive only brown, gray or beige-colored hills and stony plains! I felt like I was in a vast ocean where the horizon stretched endlessly. It was ruled by eternity! An indescribable joy and sense of freedom rose up in me. Here I understood why all the monotheistic religions came from the desert! I walked all day in a kind of trance; the magic of the desert had caught me! I felt no fatigue, nor hunger nor thirst. Over a year I had been on a journey to confront the void! Over a year to lose the fear of nothingness! It was no longer a threat to me, it was freedom! What might have been a nightmare for others to stand without luggage, money and passport in the

desert, I enjoyed it! Breathing became light yet deep and peace seemed to flow through all my veins.

The next day I reached an oasis. The populace was greatly astonished when they saw me arriving on foot. Initially there was a bit of suspicious questioning, but I was able to convince them, and distrust soon made way to the usual Moroccan hospitality.

Interrogation

Later I was taken a good deal on a horse-drawn cart and arrived in the afternoon in a rugged valley. Ugly buildings were spread out as if a giant had played with dice. A few men were sitting in front of a house busy with playing a board game. They hissed at me, even though they could not see that I was European. I wondered for a moment whether I should respond, because on whistling and hissing one should not respond. One whistles for dogs! But the hope of being invited to a tea or perhaps a meal let me turn back.

When the men saw that I was a European immediately a cross-examination in French started. I tried to talk my way out in the usual manner but more and more people gathered including the district chief, who ordered me to show my papers. When I admitted not to have any, they decided that I had to spend the night here and that the issue would be discussed later.

They took me to a building consisting only of one big room which served as a meeting place. Tea was prepared and the room filled with more and more colorful and curious individuals, most of whom wore white turbans and woolly Djellabahs. The district chief asked me about my origin and to where I would be heading, and I said that I would be on the way to Oujda, would be about a month on the road, would have covered 600 kilometers on foot and would not have a passport because of religious reasons. All this was hard to believe of course, but probably the men might think, if it were not the

truth, I could have come up with a better excuse. At the end I hoped that they decided on their feeling and not their suspicious minds.

The men discussed my case about an hour, of course in Arabic, of which I understood almost nothing. At least I caught on so much that I had a few advocates who argued that there were many Moroccans in Europe without a passport too.

Finally, large bowls full of couscous and chicken were served and later tea. They told me that I was basically free and could go tomorrow wherever I wanted, but it would be very dangerous to follow the road towards, because many people had been killed there by robbers. It would be better to take a truck in the morning to Taourirt and travel from there towards Oujda. I nodded satisfied.

Of course I took the truck. Would have been impolite and would have made them suspicious if I had rejected their offer, wouldn't it? The men gave me a bag full of bread and wished a safe journey. Together with a companion it went over dusty bumpy roads until we were captured by the noise of a city. The truck stopped and they told me to get out. What did I see to my great dismay? The truck was standing in the courtyard of a police station!

A shiver ran down my spine. This fear! Was my faith strong enough?

I threw the bread into my companion's arms: "Traitor!" He caught it and smiled slyly. He apparently did not feel guilty at all! What would have been

treacherous for others he considered as cunning and clever!

The well-known procedure began: "My name Nadie and have no nationality!"

The police started to make jokes about this funny European. Eventually they took note of my ID: "Nobody from nowhere". When the officers just were doing so, a woman came in and asked about her missing husband or brother. The policeman showed her a few photos of persons died at a recent car accident. When the woman recognized one of them she burst into tears. The policemen tried to calm her down, there was a little confusion, she was taken to another room and I was left alone. To my shame I had to admit that at the moment I felt no pity but was only occupied with thoughts of escape. I left the room and walked down the hall towards the exit, which apparently was not guarded. But instead of acting immediately I hesitated again and discovered an open door leading to the courtyard. But here was a dead end! In the hallway a policeman noticed me and asked me where I would go.

"Au toilet!"

The policeman showed it to me, and I was angry with myself because of the missed opportunity! Again not acted spontaneously!

"There is always a way out," had once told me a truck driver who gave me a lift while I was hitchhiking near Bordeaux. He possessed a black belt in karate. "But you have to be completely quiet and empty your mind so

that you can react in a split of a second. Because you usually have only one chance! "

In the late afternoon I was driven over a hundred kilometers to a back of beyond city called Berkane, where the Bureau de transmission was located. I shuddered when we drove into the ugly city and I saw the menacing gray police building.

I was handed over to an inspector who started to interrogate me in a friendly manner. When he received my inadequate answers and saw no improvement after insisting, he stood up, held his face close to mine and grumbled: "We can talk also in a different manner!" It rained a couple of slaps but I remained silent.

"Then we have to talk to the captain!"

I was led into a big room. Behind a desk sat a giant of a man, whose pockmarked face was adorned with a thick black mustache. The wall at the rear was adorned with the image of King Hassan II. The eyes of the captain sparkled humorless.

"What is it?"

The inspector described the case.

"You have no passport? May I ask why not?"

"I reject it because of religious conviction!"

"Then perhaps you would be kind enough to still provide your personal details."

"But surely! My name is Nadie and I come out of nowhere!"

The captain and the inspector looked at each other.

"Listen carefully, my friend! I am not a priest or imam and not the Pope," he thundered. "This is the police! And you go now with the inspector and tell him the truth, otherwise ..." he smiled at me, that I felt shivers running down my spine, and said gleefully: "I cut you in ten pieces."

I immediately thought of the corresponding biblical quotation: "*... others they have sawed in pieces because of their testimony.*"

It went back to the room of the inspector and I came out with the truth.

"I come out of nowhere ..."

"All right, boy. If that's what you want."

In the captain's room stood already the torturer, a stupid, clumsy, brutal face, and held an about 1.20 m long stick wrapped in leather in his hand.

The fear came in waves. Hard to say what I feared more: the pain of torture or becoming a traitor of God, a Judas whom awaited a burning punishment.

"Open your left hand!"

The pain shot through my body like electric shocks. I realized that I was not able to withstand it for long.

"The other hand!"

Ten minutes passed like an eternity. The hands were already stained and swollen, the skin was about to burst.

"We can do this all night long!"

Was it a lie if I said...?

"My Self comes from nowhere, but my body is born in Germany!"

"Aha! Then please write down the name of your body and where it lives!" The captain tapped his finger on a piece of paper and held out a pen. I wrote with my swollen hand in vast quaking letters my details and I felt sick like a dog. Judas!

"Now go with the inspector! And tomorrow we will speak us again," he said calmly, without a threat in his voice, but I thought of stick and carrot. He probably would doubt the fact that I wanted to head for Tamanrasset without any possessions.

"You were kind to us, now we are kind to you," said the inspector when he led me down to the basement where the ordinary gendarmes had their offices, "I'll get you something to eat. Have a special request? "

That was probably a little too kind!

"Could you bring me some milk?"

I sat quietly in a corner of an office. The gendarmes were busy with logs and other things. In the next room a radio was playing and I heard "Losing my religion" by REM which made me so sad that tears ran down my cheeks.

The gendarmes were talking friendly to me. They did not seem to know exactly why I was here; they only knew the passport was gone, but why? In any case, the inspector had treated the boy courteous! And so it

happened that I got served couscous and later, when they closed the offices, I was given a mattress in a room and was not locked in the hole behind bars. The inspector arrived with the milk and sandwiches, wished a good night, and was gone, just like all other policemen but one who stayed as guard in the next room, watching me and the entrance of the building.

Something woke me up. It was perhaps three o'clock at night. The door to the next room stood partly open. One could hear decent snoring: the watchman was asleep! In my room a desk leaned against a wall in front of a door. Should I try if it was open? It was so cozy on the mattress, and next to me was still a sandwich.

"Get up!" commanded an inner voice. I moved carefully the desk to the side and listened with a beating heart to the breaths of the Guardian. The door was open! I came into a hallway, found the way into the staircase and half a floor lower an iron door which was locked from inside. The lock creaked horribly! "The guard must hear this!" But nothing happened, and shortly afterwards I was in the yard where a few police cars were parked, and where a wide open gate welcomed me! After passing the outskirts of the city I got into orange groves where surely nobody would find me anymore! I was free!

I hit a detour around Oujda that one could locate quite well because huge power lines went through the desolate landscape. After almost a week I reached the border and waited for nightfall to sneak into Algeria.

It was a moonless but clear night. The eastern horizon glowed brightly, and when I came over a hill, floodlights threw their light on a camp and military vehicles. I stumbled across fields, down a valley and reached a stream. Then I ran uphill, passed by at a sleeping village and marched until the floodlights were far behind me.

An hour's rest I allowed myself, but I better did not linger too long here near the border and went on. After a few miles I passed a house. A man was surprised to meet me and asked if I knew where I would be here.

"In Algeria!"

"Yes, right! In Algeria! Wait, I get a coffee."

He came back with milk coffee, bread and butter, and I told him chewing, I wanted to Tamanrasset.

"On foot?"

"Of course not all the way! Only as far as possible, the rest with car. It is a kind of pilgrimage. "

"A pilgrimage. Mmmh!"

He offered to accompany me to the street where one could hitchhike very well towards Tamanrasset.

"That's very nice, but I want to walk as far as possible as said already."

Nevertheless the man brought me to the street, where he said goodbye. I hiked further. When I looked back after a 150 yards, I saw how the man just stopped a car and while talking to the driver, pointed in my direction. The car moved on at full throttle.

Soon I found myself in a bushy area with scanty pine vegetation and came to the conclusion it would be better to hide in the bushes and continue at night, because in this otherwise desolate region one could see me in a far distance. In addition I was exhausted from the night tour and longed for rest.

After a short sleep voices woke me up. When I carefully looked out of my shrub, I saw soldiers with machine guns searching the bushes.

"There he is" it roared.

I lifted humbly up my hands and introduced myself as completely harmless tourists. They handcuffed me and took me to the border post, which I had avoided at night. The usual game started, but since I had no desire to repeat my past experience, I immediately said that my body was from Germany. They were not rude and paid me some recognition that I had made it across the border. To my delight, they did not bring me back to the captain in Morocco, but to the gendarmerie in Tlemcen, where they noted my details, and I was locked in a cell. I did not know why exactly, but I decided to stop speaking again.

A guard came over and asked me my name and where I was from. I pointed with the finger at my mouth and made it clear with gestures that I did not speak.

"You cannot talk, you're dumb?"

Even the guard now began to gesticulate, and we talked for a while in sign language, which we well understood, perhaps better than we would have done

with normal language. The guard unlocked the cell, grabbed me by the shoulders, smiled in my face and rubbed his nose against mine. Then he made a gesture that I should go to sleep and disappeared. When I woke up I found a sandwich next to the door.

The next day I was taken to the official prison. My companion gave the guards the paper with my personal data and saluted. One of them picked up a book and asked for my identity. I indicated again that I did not speak, and that my name would be on the paper.

"No, no, I want to hear the name from you!"

Again I pointed on my lips and shook my head.

"We have electricity for people who do not want to talk."

But when I insisted, he wrote the name from the paper, and told someone the number of the cell in which he was to bring the prisoner. I was led through a yard and into a cell where already about twenty people were detained. There was only an empty space near the toilet, which was not worth the name: a hole in a corner, surrounded by a waist high wall. After I greeted my colleagues shortly, I spread the two blankets, which the keeper had given me. But someone waved at me and said that would be a nasty place, I should come over. And he moved a bit to the side as did his neighbor.

Twice a day we went out into the yard where the prisoners went to and fro, did gymnastics or just simply gawked into the sun. I got my hair cut and my beard shaved. Only my mustache they spared. Twice a day

there was a hot meal and chewy white bread as much as one wanted. What a rest for me! I had nice cellmates, regular meals and a warm place to sleep! Just what I needed after my weeks of walking! But what really had tired me out was not the physical effort but the constant fear and hiding. Now finally I had some peace! I slept most of the time.

On the third day, four of my roommates and myself were brought to court. The courtroom was full of people. Other cases were judged until after three hours the first of us were called. The man had been caught in an extramarital rendezvous and got off with a fine. Two were judged for theft, and the fourth for rioting under the influence of alcohol. I was probably as European delicacies kept until the end but I had to disappoint everybody because I did not speak. A policeman explained the judge the case, and I was convicted of illegal immigration and vagrancy to two months probation. Also, I should be brought to Algiers and deported to Germany.

First it went to a police station where another man was waiting for his transport to Algiers. Said was his name, and I learned that he tried to leave Algeria with his entire fortune to Morocco and France to escape the civil unrest, but that he was intercepted at the border. We both were taken to a 70km distant backwater where we got stuck for two days. I was lucky to have Said as 'partner' because he paid me the food that usually was not given in pre-trial detention without money. Then it went on to Oran.

The villages consisted of rather ugly, square buildings that looked like large building blocks; a vegetation-free concrete desert where one saw many men in uniform and women wearing chador walking hastily through the streets. Here in Oran one recognized the state of emergency. Riot police in dark green uniforms with bullet-proof vests, helmets and shields, and powerful barricade-breakers that looked like snow plows, cordoned off some streets. The approximately 10 m² big cell was filled with 16 people, exclusively Islamic fundamentalists except Said and me.



While I had been in Morocco I had heard that in an election the fundamentalists had indeed got the majority, but the election was annulled by the government and the FIS was banned, and that it had come to unrests thereafter. They all wore long beards and had to pray five times daily, which under these circumstances was no small matter. Right next door was the toilet, and it was broke! The water came flowing

underneath our door, carrying ill smelling particles with it. There was only one 3m² large concrete increase where four of them were able to pray at once. In the night we were sleeping in shifts, everybody for two to three hours and closely huddled together until one had to stand for the same time in 'the soup'. I got a deep respect for these people who endured this situation so peacefully and who shared fraternally the little food they could buy from the guards or which relatives from outside were able to smuggle inside.

At the dawn of the second night, Said and I were taken out of the cell, because eight more fundamentalists were put in the cell! Instead, we were locked into the neighboring cell, which to my great surprise was, except for a lonely drunkard, completely empty! I began to realize what a hate the police harbored against the fundamentalists though they also were Muslims.

The next day we continued our jail tourism, again around 80km to the next police district and the next prison, where we again had to wait three days. Said was a nice guy but a bit annoying. He walked nervously in the cell up and down and was talking non-stop hardly without any interruption, half to me, half to himself. Appeared a guard, he immediately tried to instigate a conversation and kept asking why the transport took so long.

"For you this is an adventure, right?" He asked me. "You have time; do not talk and just observe everything silently. But you can talk if you want, right?"

I smiled at him and shrugged.

"Yeah, but when you come home you need to talk! You have to tell the people what's happening here!"

It went on to the next jail. Here seemed to be something going on. Riot police with rifles and bulletproof vests were guarding the prison. A man sat with a pale face on the cell floor and suffered apparently severe pain.

"What happened to him?"

"They interrogated him for over two hours, water torture ..."

The rumor spread there would be set up large detention facilities in the desert because the prisons were no longer sufficient.

In another prison I met someone whom they had caught with a few kilos of hashish at the border.

"A friend asked me to get a car from Morocco. I knew nothing about the hashish but the judge will surely not believe me!" He asked me to pray for him, and I was astonished that the man asked a non-Muslim.⁴

Finally, I was separated from Said and brought together with some fundamentalists into the center of Algiers. The police wore again bulletproof vests and helmets, and the fundamentalist had to crouch on the

⁴ Muslims believe that prayers of the oppressed are especially swiftly answered, also the prayers of the parents for the children, and in general all prayers for others.

ground while driving. Apparently the police was afraid of attacks.

The prison was located close to the port and well filled, but not as dirty as almost I had stuck in, perhaps because here in the capital were international observers. A fairly large cell was filled with approximately thirty people, almost all fundamentalists. They wanted to know where I came from and why I was here in prison, and I made it clear to them with gestures that I did not have a passport. They were disappointed that I did not speak but tried nonetheless to build up some kind of conversation. They tried so hard that I finally broke my silence because before getting deported, I wanted to have spoken with these people. Most were fairly educated people; even the mayor of Algiers was among them, still a very young man who had studied in the United States.

I found it at first difficult to speak because my throat was a bit corroded after two weeks of silence. But it did incredibly well to philosophize with these warm-hearted people. I was amazed that the fundamentalists put forth so many esoteric viewpoints as I had always had the impression that Islam is a quite dogmatic and old-fashioned affair. So said the mayor for example, this world would not exist without the devil: "If we had nothing to do with him, we would not even be here! God has given him his task like everybody else too. Destiny is a teacher, and it is our duty to learn to understand ourselves."

They could talk for hours, especially when they realized what a thankful listener they had. They

recounted the joys of Paradise and got bright eyes. The time was nigh on, there were more and more signs becoming fulfilled. One would not need to be afraid but had to prepare oneself. Apart from wars and earthquakes would appear Dajjal, the one-eyed Antichrist; the Mahdi would prepare the coming of the Messiah, and the sun would be rising in the West.

In the silence of the night they were reciting the Koran with affection. Many of the men stood tears in their eyes while reciting or listening. I too was deeply moved by the sound of the recitation, even though I could not understand the meaning. I envied the community of these people and that they could testify together, while I was alone. They could strengthen each other, while I did not even know what exactly was asked of me. I could only trust my intuition and was on a constant balancing act, with one leg always dangerously close to madness. But I had the strong feeling that God wanted me to be here and that I made this experience. I saw that others too were persecuted for their faith and suffered anguish. Although they had a different path, this united us! This experience was probably more important than to reach Tamanrasset!

The German embassy in Algier had to issue a temporary passport, and on the plane I was! I stared out the window and saw below Algiers getting smaller.

What could I tell the people in Germany? That the fundamentalists had been much more sympathetic than this "democratic" system supported by France? That they were like brothers to me and not fanatical bomb throwers as lied in the press?

My father and my brother picked me up from the airport and were a little surprised about my appearance. I had left the Djellabah in jail and was wearing now clothes from the seventies, which the embassy had procured for me. We were gliding over the highway and I began to tell my story and I also a bit of my philosophy in order that they could understand my decisions. But of course it just sounded crazy and was not perceptible! It was hoped for that I would get reasonable again before long: "The summer semester starts soon ..."

Pilgrimage

Culture Shock! It was still winter. The streets seemed deserted, only cars, hardly any humans. Nothing had changed with my old buddies. Everything languished in its old habit, drinking beer, smoking dope and listening music. And after a short time the old discussions with my parents began again. It was obvious; I could not stay for long here!

But where should I head this time? I was looking for signs.

'By chance', I saw a report on television about pilgrims who went to Santiago de Compostela, which is lying in the north-west of Spain, and friends told to me that they wanted to buy an old water mill in Portugal and try a self-sufficient life-style. Whether I would be interested to come along?

Yes, that fits into the puzzle!

"Just go ahead, I follow you ... walking!"

It was a cold, windy and cloudy April day when I set off, again without luggage, money and passport. I was barely a couple of kilometers on the road when I started feeling free again. The forests of the Eifel began, and in the evening I reached the moors of the High Fens. It was bitterly cold up here, humid and uncomfortable. I reached a lonely forest house, but the doors were locked. I felt a bit guilty when I smashed a small window to reach the latch of the door, hoping that God would pass this as an emergency. My bed was a heavy oak table

and a plastic sheet, which I found in a corner, served as blanket, although I knew from experience that the body heat would condense. But it also insulated a bit against the cold.

In the morning the trees were covered with a white snow splendor, and deep silence lay over the forest. But then it started to storm. Icy needles flew into my face, and I was soon completely frozen that I considered turning back. But wasn't it always like that? Wasn't there always an initial obstacle one had to overcome? It was like I was being tested, and only if I was serious enough I would pass the initial stage.

For the first time I asked in German shops for something to eat, but the balance was extremely lean. In Spain one asked three times and got two times something. But here I asked seven times and only got a small cake in a bakery. Probably that was not enough for a representative survey, but I did not continue further and fled across the border into Belgium instead. Here the statistics was better again: two to three!

As ideal sleeping places I discovered barns, and I had now come up with the idea of disguising myself as a devout pilgrim on his way to Santiago, which was not necessarily a lie although I was not a Catholic. I made good experiences here in Belgium. A pastor welcomed me to stay the night in his house and served me bunches of food. He also wanted me to call my parents, who would probably already be worried.

After this warm reception it became almost a habit to ask the priest of the respective village for food or

accommodation. I have never been particularly sympathetic towards the Catholic Church but many of the priests were quite decent to me.

Some areas of the Ardennes looked devastating. Depending on the altitude, the forest was merely rubble of fallen trees and three-meter high root slices. But it improved when I approached Luxembourg and came close to France. I went through endless forests and walked the whole day without reaching an end.



The weather was getting better and spring began. I got used now to the walking and was pleased that such a large distance lie ahead of me. I took the sun for orientation or the moss on the trunks of trees, although that was a bit deceptive. But walking a couple of kilometers more or less was not important as long as avoided major roads and stuffy cities. Two hundred kilometers I managed comfortably in a week although I introduced Sunday as a day of rest.

I reached l'Epine and met the priest, who told me that I really was now on the ancient pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela. In the church he showed me a statue of St. James on his way to Spain, with a stick in his hand on which dangled a small gourd, and an angel who walked in front of him and showed him the way.

The church I still could see for almost a whole day in the distance as it was on a hill. I was in a vast plain now, an agriculture desert, in which the fields were miles long. Small plants stretched out already their fresh green in the spring sun, and the air had a sweet smell of artificial pesticides.

In a small village, which did not quite match the dimensions of the fields, I rang the bell at house No. 1, which lay directly opposite the church. A young man opened the door, and I inquired after the pastor.

"A priest no longer lives here. What do you need from him?"

"I'm going to Compostela and was going to ask the pastor for something to eat."

"And probably for a place to sleep too, huh? Come on in!"

In the hallway we met a black woman who told me "hello" and then disappeared into the kitchen, from which came forth a pleasant smell. We sat in the cozy living room, and while the man was making a joint, I told him about myself and how I came up with the idea to walk to Galicia.

"And why do you not want to use any money?"

"With money you will not get as far as with faith in God. Without money one perceives things differently and lives more in the moment! Behold the birds; they do not sow nor reap! A bird does not know where it finds a grain, and when he finds it. And if it does not immediately peck it up, two minutes later the grain perhaps is already gone. But the likes of us know that there is a bakery down the road. And because I have money, I can buy the bread now or in three hours, the bread will still be there. We rely on our supposed knowledge and no longer follow our instincts. We follow the images and fixed ideas in our heads, and that might prove to be fatal one day because life is not a static entity but a steady flow."

I reached Gien. The pastor I asked pretended to have nothing to eat. Walking further and being almost out of town, I saw an Intermarché supermarket and found in a container at the back loads of cheese, bread, yogurt, tomatoes, apples, pudding and much else. Everything still completely edible but maybe one or two days past the expiration date, or in a six-pack one of the apples was moldy. I filled a whole box with stuff, dragged it back to the priest and put a note on top: "A donation to the poor priest who has nothing to eat. Just look in the trash cans of your community if you get hungry!"

Most churches on my way were closed unfortunately. Even though I was not Catholic, they were for me a special prayer place. Especially the old churches and chapels radiated a unique atmosphere, as if they had been charged over the centuries with a special spiritual energy. But many of them had a dark and cold ambiance,

which made me shiver, so that I was relieved to get back into the sunlight. Strange that such building should proclaim a good news and not death sentences.

I came into the swampy area of the thousand lakes and got wet feet, a beautiful area with small paradise-like places and ponds. At a reedy bank a heron rose from the morning mist and flew towards the sunrise. The flight of birds had always been a symbol of freedom for me! I came a bit close to that freedom already especially because I did not carry a bundle on my back and my legs carried me forward now without complaint. I was glad not to be forced to speak and thus destroy the sacred silence, which made me feel like gliding on wings. I had a strong dislike for streets and large towns which always pulled me out of my trance again.

Towards Arcachon I followed a never-ending rail road, but finally I met the long sandy beach which I had been longing for. Endless miles along the spray of waves rolling in brought me closer to Spain. I reached Biarritz and Bayonne and managed to cross the border unchecked. The housekeeper of the first priest in Spain I spoke to invited me to fried chicken and other delicacies. A nice welcome!

In San Sebastian I met a crazy Spaniard who listened from a broken tape recorder Ozzy Osborne at full volume but horrible sound quality. He constantly tried to persuade the recorder by tapping and shaking to keep running. And a Portuguese, who went through the most extreme mood swings, especially when he had just downed bottles of wine. Sometimes he made jokes one after the other just to start talking suddenly in a pitying

tone with himself, "I am a poor guy that has to beg and I've become the shame of my mother! Poor Mama, when will I finally cause you no more sorrow?" He raised his hands to the sky: "Dios, ayudame! Por favor, por favor!" I told him that he should better put his chewed cigarette butt out of his fingers while praying, which he did. But unfortunately the spontaneous devotion had already come to an end.

During the two weeks I stayed in San Sebastian it rained most of the time whereas on my tour through France I was extremely lucky with the weather. When it ceased to rain again, I moved on through the Basque Country, to Cantabria and Asturias. It was a rough coastal area, very green and with the wild panorama of a mountain range to the south. Sadly, the atmosphere was completely destroyed by the new highway to La Coruña. So I went most of the time on train tracks, but this had the disadvantage that I had to go through countless tunnels, some of which were more than a kilometer long. On 450 kilometers of rail track to El Ferrol there were about 250 tunnels! But I had only this alternative to the highway, because there was no beach, just rocks, and no smaller roads.

It was always an adventure to go through a tunnel, especially if it was long and winding and one could no longer see one's hand before one's eyes. Often water was dripping from the ceiling and on my neck. Or I slipped on oily ground and stumbled on the old wooden sleepers into the darkness. Luckily, on this route went not much traffic, only about four or five trains a day. But when one came and I just stuck in the dark, it was time

to panic! Every thirty meters were small niches one could duck in, but they were alternately on one side of the track and then on the other, so that normally I did not have time to grope along the wall until the next niche. I could then just duck myself into a low pushup position hovering just above the ground next to the track in order not to become totally dirty because the floor and the walls were black from the diesel smoke. What a feeling a train passing just 30cm besides one's head and the whole tunnel trembling!

I met now the official pilgrims' route to Santiago. The food here was excellent because at many places meals was given to the pilgrims. The road itself was nicely laid out, mostly paved, led over small bridges, along chapels and through lovely woods and fields. It was marked with a shell, the symbol of St. James.

Then, after almost exactly three months on foot, I finally reached Santiago de Compostela, just right for the celebration with which the apostle was honored each year. A gigantic firework scorched the mighty cathedral and blazing fire streams rushed down from it into the depths.

The whole big square in front of the cathedral was filled with at least forty thousand people, and also the old town was overflowing with joyous crowds, musicians, folk groups, entertainers and beggars. There were daily open-air concerts, most of which were free. Dozens of souvenir shops were selling pilgrim stuff, and flocks of tourists milled about with hiking poles, where the famous gourd was dangling, or with a large plastic shell around their neck. There was a hotel for pilgrims

free of charge, but one had to accomplish a certain distance and got that documented in order to get the three days full board. I heard of a group from Poland, which had covered 7000 km across Europe.



The time had come when I could no longer pretend to be a pilgrim. And I did not want to use the old rhyme again "Tengo hambre, no tengo dinero!" Harvest time had begun, the fruit trees were full of pears and apples, the corn stood high, and sometimes I 'borrowed' some potatoes from the next field for a campfire. Sometimes I found on the road wrapped cakes, cookies or chips, everything still perfectly edible.

To Portugal led a bridge over the border river and thereafter was the customs. So, I decided to swim across the river. Later it went on endless sandy beach towards Porto.

Coimbra was nice. Folklore groups played and I was invited to dinner by happy people. I felt very comfortable here, and the Portuguese seemed to be more open and welcoming than the Spaniards, perhaps because they were poorer.

Someone invited me to his home. In his apartment hung the most beautiful picture of Jesus that I had ever seen: Jesus as he sat at night in the garden of Gethsemane and looked down on Jerusalem. But, as I so looked at the picture, I got a few ideas. If Jesus was really one with the Father, as claimed, why did he pray to God and said: "Thy will be done"? Quite illogical! It appeared more plausible what the Muslims said, namely, that Jesus was a Prophet.

"Now, if everybody like you would wander through the land," my host, who spoke good English, asked me, as we stood together in the kitchen and prepared the meal, "then where could one find something to eat, if nobody would work on the fields anymore?"

"But not everybody does that! Behold the birds, they do not sow, nor reap, and God feeds them! Do you not believe that? Lao Tzu says exactly the same: The Raven does not need to paint himself black! Full gets empty, empty gets full! I am, and because I am, I have the means to be. All things were made out of nothing, the whole universe! Why should not a piece of bread or a shoe appear out of nothing if I believe in it? Jesus multiplied bread and fish!"

"God gave you two hands and you should use them! God helps those who help themselves!"

I shrugged my shoulders and thought, "I'll do something when I have crossed the desert and have reached Israel. But then as a free man and no longer as a slave ...!"

In Figuero dos Vinhos I had to search for a half a day until I had finally reached my destination after twenty weeks and 3500 kilometers of walking: the old water mill!

But not a soul was to be seen! Only the remains of the failed self-sufficiency project: some cabbage, a few tomatoes, dried-corn, an onion of a centimeter in diameter, and a few other dried up veggies and rotten stumps! Fortunately also some healthy cannabis plants, the only crop which had been successful.

I did not stay long. Granada wanted to have me back!

Back to Granada

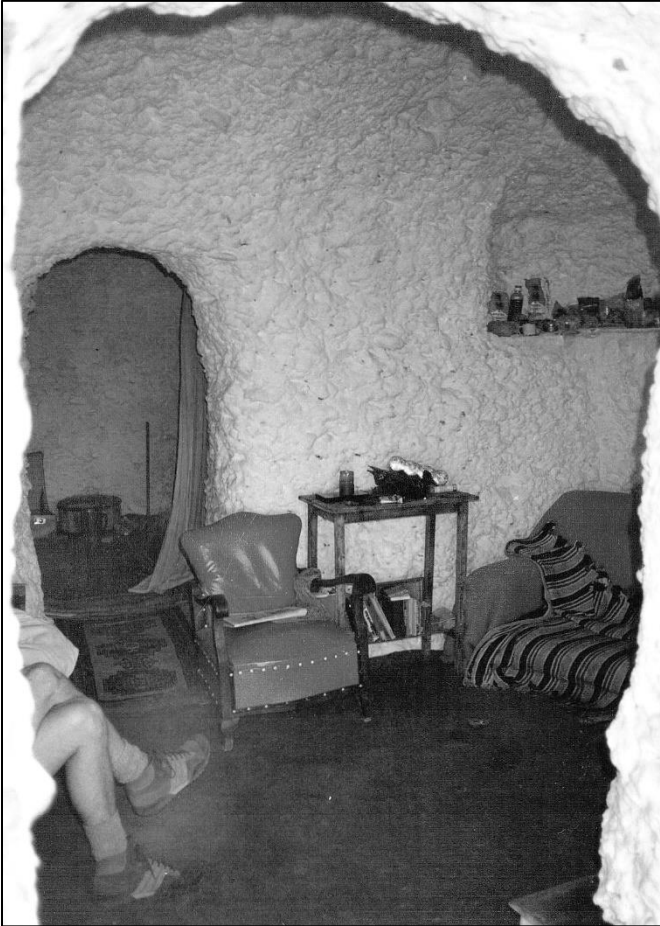
In Granada the sun was shining. During the hot siesta I rushed through the maze of the Albayzin and up the hills of Sacromonte. Nellie, Laura, Ross, Terry and the Portuguese George were the first I met when I reached the caves, which were located in front of the old city wall looking down to the city. It was like coming home!

It was busy on the hills. My old cave was occupied by the long-haired José, who had adorned it with black magic symbols. But the old cave of Katja was apparently uninhabited. An iron door tried to prevent entrance though. “No, you cannot claim the cave as your private property and just leave, blocking it to others,” I thought as I pulled the door including frame and anchors out of the sandstone wall and threw it down the crag.

The cave had three rooms and a fireplace, a terrace and a panoramic view on the Generalife and the Palace of the Alhambra. In the coming weeks I was busy whitewashing the cave, clearing away rubbish, repairing the floor with cement, organizing carpets and furniture from the dump and building a sunroof of wood and reed for the terrace. A small room became an Arabian bedroom with Persian carpet, cushions and a small table. The room with the fireplace got equipped with a sofa, and the third room with a guest bed. On the terrace, I built a fire place and a small kitchen with a large seating area and armchairs.

A small kitten which I named Penny Penelopé became soon my cave mate. Her favorite sleeping place was in

my sleeping bag, and sometimes she got the funny idea to bite into my toe.



As soon as an eco niche was created, it filled itself with life. I spent most of my time sitting on my patio and waiting for something to happen. Instead of going

downtown almost daily like during my last stay in Granada, I just waited that everything needed came by itself. Everything comes to the one who can wait! Full becomes empty, empty becomes full! Day and night, happiness and unhappiness ... the eternal change of the opposites yin and yang!

First I was hosting a Moroccan; then two broken convicts on the run; then a girl from Argentine; old friends from Germany and other figures: my cave was always fully booked! But it was really tremendously busy this winter. Well over a hundred people were living at that time on Sacromonte, and the inhabitants of Granada were already annoyed by too many beggars, musicians, acrobats and other artists. One could hardly walk through downtown without being waylaid at least three times for a Duro. In addition to the hippies living in the caves, in downtown were at least two houses occupied by pseudo-punks where often parties and concerts were held.

But waiting in the cave until everything came by itself was not the only spiritual exercise. It was logical: If this world was an illusion, a mirror, then one should not look into the mirror any longer if one would like to reach reality. Yogis and Buddhists therefore tried to stop even thinking to reach Samadhi / Nirvana. But, as Hindus would put it, we were living in the time of Kali now, the time of turmoil and destruction, and all yoga-systems except of bakhti-yoga would not work anymore because one would not find the calmness anymore necessary to stop thinking. Bakhti was worship, whereby one transcended one's deeds by doing everything for God

and thus freed oneself from the law of Karma. In principal, the western monotheist religions fell into the category of bakhti-yoga. Even the word yoga meant the same as religion, from Latin: 're-ligere' - binding back! Getting again the connection with the Reality which was the ultimate cause of everything!

However, there was a booster: pain! Whereas the beauty of the world (foremost women and good food) attracts and draws one into the mirror, pain does the opposite! It repels one from this world!

For a long time therefore I already tried to assist my detachment from the world by castigating myself with the iron buckle of my belt until the blood flowed down my back, and I burned holes in my flesh with iron heated up in the fire. I fasted for two weeks day and night and allowed myself only Sunday tea with sugar. My astonished Spanish neighbors asked me, "Will you come eat with us? Not? You still eat nothing?" Barely three weeks thereafter, I began a forty-day Ramadan, and ate only when the first star appeared in the sky.

But one day a Frenchman, who stayed at that time in my cave and so witnessed my exercise, told me: "This Theater you just play for yourself! The hero! The ascet! You only strengthen your ego and you reach exactly the opposite!"

And I felt caught!

Holger was still in Granada and I helped him again to renovate the house. He told me again about his New Age theories: "The new era is characterized by transparent structures. One will not be able to hide from another and

there will be no more fraud and conceit. The divine motivation will become transparent and there is no more disobedience. But only those are going to make it who already integrate the new element and who are already trying to follow the will of God."

What amazed me was that Holger seemed to get such clear signs while I experienced these things much more subtle. I could never really tell if I followed my own ideas or divine inspiration. But one thing was certain; there were these signs of the divine will and this guide. In Christianity, the symbol of the divine guidance was Jesus rearing the lambs: *"they shall hear the voice of the shepherd and will follow him"*. In Hinduism it was symbolized as Krishna, the charioteer. If one has Krishna as the charioteer, i.e. as driver of the self, like Arjuna, the archer, the victory is certain. Lao Tzu called it the leader of the universe; in Buddhism it was the yidam or bodhisattva who gave guidance. And in Islam, the divine guidance was called Hidaya.

In a cave at the Almond Tree Place in front of my cave nested Dominique, a Belgian of African descent. He was a kind of highwaymen and asked anyone who passed by his cave for a cigarette or something else. He used to tell wild stories how he had been in the Foreign Legion and other nonsense. Almost every day he showed up at my cave, but because he was a nice guy and quite entertaining, I endured it.

"Hey, you still got sugar?"

"Good morning, do you invite me to a coffee?"

"Man, I am starving! Got something to eat?"

"Aw, I have no cigarettes anymore ..."

One day he was brewing a tea from henbane, which grew plentiful here. I met him in the evening with huge pupils and haggard face.

"Dominique, everything ok with you?"

"Grrrblafmmtgagbsss ..." Dominique replied and staggered around disoriented.

During the next week, Dominique was very introverted and had completely changed. He was not begging anymore and babbled no more nonsens.

"Dominique, coffee is ready!"

"Oh no, thank you! I am sorry that I was so blatant lately and want to change that now!"

"Come on, do not exaggerate! You can still drink a cup of coffee here!"

"And the story with the Foreign Legion was also a lie. I've just told it to make myself interesting."

"Dominique, are you sick? I do not recognize you anymore!"

A few days later a spontaneous party took place at my cave, and suddenly the cave and the terrace were full of people. In high spirits, I had a lot of Vino Tinto, and deemed it a funny idea when Dominique brewed an unusual tea.

"Here's something special!" praised Dominique his mixture, and I did not think twice, rinsed a full glass down my throat and then lay down comfortably on the couch.

Suddenly a huge wave came towards me and swallowed me.

After maybe two hours I woke up again. The party seemed to be in full swing, but I just wanted to pee. I was very shaky, and for fear of falling off the slope in front of the cave, I crawled almost along the path. An electric fence gave me electric shocks and I was stunned, because I could not remember this fence. Surprisingly everywhere were sitting people, so it was difficult to find an unobserved place. I lurched away and deemed it not to be worthwhile to pull up my already left down pants. I shuffled nearly half an hour with my hanging pants around until I finally managed to do my business unobserved.

Then I noticed a lot of delightful objects lying on the ground, but every time I picked them up, they turned to my great disappointment into ordinary stones. At dawn I visited the neighbouring cave that served me as incineration space. On the garbage was sitting a man with horribly disfigured and deliquescent face. I greeted him but the man did not answer.

"An AIDS patient in the final stage," I thought, and made the resolution to bring him something to eat at the next occasion. Strangely, I also was not surprised when I discovered a couple of people in the reeds, who looked with petrified faces towards sunrise.

On my terrace was pure chaos. Two chairs were smashed, someone apparently had fallen into the fireplace, and in general it looked as if a whirlwind has passed by. In the cave, many people were criss-cross

scattered on the floor, unfortunately also many of those AIDS-patients, so I felt no desire to lay myself beside them, even though I was very tired. I cleaned out the terrace and then sat down in one of the armchairs instead. Two of the patients were sitting in front of me and were wrapped in blankets, in order that no one had to endure the sight of their terrible faces. I chattered merrily to cheer them up although I did not receive any answers. But they were in the final stage, ready to leave the world, what should they say?

After two hours, the first party guests came creeping out of the cave. I wanted to know what happened that night but no one seemed to be able to remember accurately. Only Astrid recalled that it was the Frenchman Stephan, who had devastated the hearth.

Suddenly I noticed small beings, shimmering in rainbow colors, which were moving in a flowing motion over my chair.

"Look at that!" I exclaimed enthusiastically.

"What?" asked Astrid and looked at the chair.

"These little critters here!"

"I see nothing!"

"Are you blind? These creatures here," I nearly touched them with my finger.

"Yes, I see them too!" interfered Udo and retained a serious face.

"Are you both crazy?" asked Astrid annoyed, but looked again more closely and was disappointed that she could not discover these fabulous creatures.



Like every morning I began sweeping out the cave and was delighted to discover more of these creatures flowing around. I crawled around on the floor and tapped them gently with my finger: "Hello, you little cuties!" But as soon as I touched them, they gave off a

slight electronic pulse and threw a thin thread in my direction, on which a part of their body was shot towards me in obvious intention of attacking me. I intercepted them and they were crushed in my hand to dust. But now I discovered vast colonies of these creatures on the cave wall, and more and more threads were fired at me. Until I finally realized that this was completely impossible and that I was hallucinating and had just talked two hours with blankets.

The other tea sippers made similar experiences. One had gone naked downtown and had seen tanks driving through the streets, whose gun barrels had deformed like wax. A compassionate soul gave him some clothes and took him to the hospital. There he luckily came down in time, realizing, that they wanted to lock him away as insane, and barely managed to escape. Others had been caught, when they tried to open a car lock with a 100 pesetas-piece, and although almost everybody had similar negative experiences with the old witch herb, most of those who had not participated in the legendary party wanted to try it themselves. One could now often observe confused figures picking up stones and drop them again disappointed. A naked guy took refuge in my cave and said anxiously he got persecuted by trees.

"Hey man, how are you? I come up for a coffee!" shouted a voice in the early morning. Dominique was his old self again! Like someone who lost his memory by a stroke, and got it back again by another stroke! The timid self-critical nature had not fitted him anyway.

One evening I heard a beautiful song from India that Daniela had learned in the Alpujarras, in a village where

the people lived in tepees. That appeared interesting, as more and more cavemen disappeared now, and I got the desire to move on too. Penny Penelopé meanwhile had raised three sweet lively kittens. So one cat generation I was already in the cave, and I felt that it was time to go. So I disappeared the night after my birthday party and marched towards the moon and the mountains. Penny accompanied me a good deal, until I took her one last time in my arm and gave her a goodbye kiss.

Rainbow Tribe

The mountains shimmered in the moonlight. The cold night wind blew down the valleys in front of me. The days were hot, but there were many clear streams to drink from, and the first fruits were already hanging on the trees. At higher altitudes I saw ibexes on the slopes. After three days of walking I saw in the distance the Mediterranean Sea between two mountains, and after another few hours I reached the town of Orgiva, which lay in the wide valley of the Alpujarras.

I had only a vague description of where the tepee village was located, but when I randomly explored the first valley close to Orgiva and followed a small stream uphill, the path led me through a shady eucalyptus grove and suddenly an almost five meters high tepee stood in front of me. A horse was leaning bored against a tree, kids played outside the tent in which I perceived the silhouette of a woman who tampered with a fire and a pot. The inhabitant of another tepee I passed seemed to be still sleeping though the sun was already high in the sky. I went through a grove and reached a small waterfall under which I took a refreshing shower. Under the spray of the falling water a double rainbow was formed in the morning sun, which seemingly was telling me that I was here in a special place.

The sleeper had awakened, had red hair and his name was Lee. He was English and invited me to breakfast. For the first time in my life I entered a real tepee! What an atmosphere! The interior was well over four meters tall,

the soil covered with reeds and woven blankets, and in the middle a cheerful fire was blazing over which hung a rustic coffee pot and exuded seductive scent.

"Where are you from?" Lee wanted to know, as he began to roll a joint.

"I spent the last eight months in Granada in the caves," I replied cheerfully and asked how long Lee was living here already.

"Three weeks," he replied, "I am just visiting, and that's unfortunately also not my tepee."

"Yes, that's something different, a tepee! A cave is also nice! One feels save in Mother Earth. But here one feels lighter."

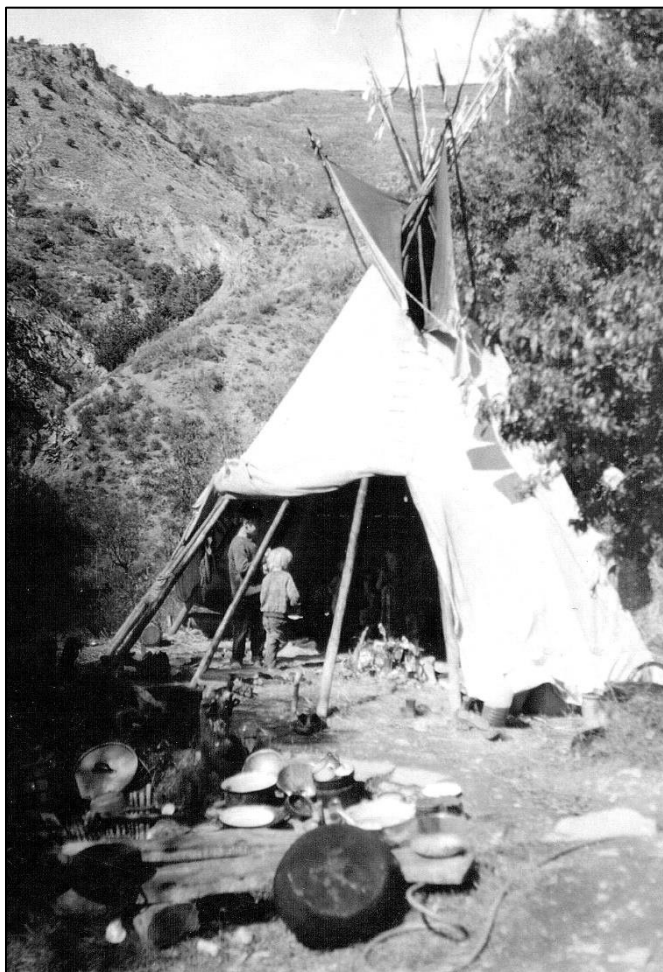
"Come on, I'll show you the place."

A path led us past a pond shaded by trees, which was fed by a clear spring. Then the path zigzagged up the hill, through tunnels of reeds and brambles, and we arrived at a few larger terraces.

"There is not much going on at the moment. Many went to a Rainbow Festival in Ireland," explained Lee and led me further up the path, along which now ran a small channel with water. I was amazed that there was so much water in this dry Andalusia! That was fantastic!

"This is the food place," Lee said, as we stood on a grassy terrace, which was overshadowed by old olive trees, from which sounded the silver tones of a wind chime. From a tube gurgled water into a basin, where clean pots and pans lined up, and on the edge of the

meadow little pictures of Hindu deities, shells, painted stones, incense and all kinds of other useless stuff were spread on a small altar.



A man with a full beard and long hair dressed in white flowing robes appeared and welcomed me. "I'm Jaimy," he introduced himself, and picked up a drum, of which some were scattered around the altar. Not hesitating I grabbed one too while Lee said goodbye. Jaimy began to sing, and I knocked satisfied on my drum. Fate had led me again to a wonderful place!

In the evening, the blowing sound of a conch shell was heard across the valley. Ten people had gathered around the fire. I sat down with them in the circle, while under chanting the food was distributed. Then we took us all by the hand and remained in silence for about a minute, eyes closed, before starting to eat. That pleased me well: thanking for the food and feeling the community rather than greedily munch the stuff away! Most of the people came from England or Wales, but there were also three Germans and a Spaniard.

Jaimy explained me a few things. "There hangs the magic hat," he pointed to a colorful cloth bag dangling from a tree branch, "where everyone can put in as much money as he thinks is appropriate. If someone wants to buy something for the Community, he can take the necessary money out of it. Cooking, washing, collecting wood and other works are all voluntary. Who wants to do something for his karma, does it, if not, he leaves it."

'Fair enough', I thought and asked: "You never got anything stolen?"

"Normally Beneficio does not attract bad people. It is up to us to make the vibration of this place positive! One of the few rules that exist here are that dogs and alcohol

are forbidden. We eat no meat and want to refrain from animal products entirely. Blowing of the conch horn once means, there is a tea or a snack; twice is for food; thrice for collective meditation; and more often for fire or other dangers."

One of the Germans, who had long blond hair and wore a Peruvian vest, filled a chillum and handed it to me: "Bumm Shiva!"

"Is it you who owns the VW Van?" I asked him while the smoke still got out of my nose. "I have noticed it already in Granada. You did always park it in front of the old cave disco, right?"

"Yeah, right! My name is Werner but call me Francisco. That's how I call myself here in Spain because people are then able to remember my name more easily."

We shook hands and I learned that Francisco made a medical practitioner training, like I had started it before myself.

"My focus is Chinese herbal medicine, acupuncture and massage. I have to study for another year and then I want to continue studying in China, therefore I must soon return to Germany."

The way back to my sleeping place at the bottom of the hills proved to be quite difficult in the dark and being stoned. It took me almost half an hour and I got lost in the brambles. It was cool during the day in the woods and nice to have the waterfall close by, but every evening scramble down the slope was not very

appealing. So I decided to explore the location the next day and to search for alternatives.

There were several terraces with places for tepees, strange stone circles, small ponds, a meditation space, gardens, an old Andalusian house, a hidden fountain that was decorated with all sorts of stuff, and a hut made of reeds, apparently unhabited.

"Does anyone live actually in the bamboo hut," I asked Jaimy.

"No, not at the moment! A Norwegian druid had built it once, but he's gone already for a while. We always wanted to make a healing place of it, but you can move in there for the time being if you want."

Since I had no money and still did not want to use it, but also did not stay here as scrounger, I thought about how I could make myself useful. I went looking for fire wood, prepared the meals and took excursions into the plantations down the hills, and when I saw that the fruits were rotten and obviously did not get harvested, I picked oranges and almonds.

I cleaned the ditches and started cutting the brambles. Every morning I got up at dawn and worked for three or four hours, tearing down the up to five meters high blackberries. Beneficio suffocated underneath the brambles! It had been once an olive orchard with fruit trees. But today neither the almond trees nor the wine were cut, and the olive trees could hardly be harvested any longer.

I heard the amusing story that the people did not use the common way of harvesting because they did not want to beat the trees with the long sticks, having pity for them. Instead, they had begun to pluck the olives individually, which of course was a terrible endeavor and given up pretty soon. A lot of people were of the opinion, nature should be left in peace and weeding would be superfluous.

The pruned vines I dried and burned them in heaps. After six weeks, I had done a fair bit and freed several trees. They looked as if they stood naked and were ashamed. They had developed distorted branches to somehow come out of the thicket unto the light, but against the fast-growing berries they had no chance. I cut them back and was sure that they would recover soon.

Richie was the most active in Beneficio. He made a beautiful garden around the house and renovated at the time the old Andalusian house. I helped him build a new roof, a traditional construction of wood and soil. We did not talk much, but that was not necessary because the joint work was also a form of communication. We were both of the type who like to withdraw and avoid useless chatter.

The counterpart to the industrious Richie was fat Tony from Wales. It was quite impossible to get him motivated for dish washing or other work. Mostly he was busy with Gorilla Yoga, as he called it, which was finishing in a relaxed position as many peanuts, bananas and other edible stuff as available, only to be interrupted by smoking an occasional joint in order to gain new appetite.

I also took part often in this kind of meditation to have a balance. The truth was that I never had been in my heart a friend of asceticism, even though it often appeared to me as a shining ideal. I loved to sing the Indian songs, although I had no inner connection with Kali, Shiva and all the other deities. It was a very homey feeling to sit here in a tepee around the fire, to eat together, to drum and sing, and to converse with always new and interesting people. Many of them dealt with naturopathy, and I got twice a Reiki and a Shiatsu massage, which worked very well. I learned about different massage techniques and developed something like a personal style.

At new and full moon usually an Indian sweat lodge was held. After nightfall, a large fire was lit and stones heated up until they were glowing, while the people were standing in a circle around the fire and were singing Indian chants or other spiritual songs. Many hippies had returned from the Rainbow Festival in Ireland and often some visitors came from El-Moreon, another hippie settlement located six kilometers from Beneficio at the foot of the big mountain that separated the Alpujarras from the Mediterranean. So every time around thirty or more hippies gathered.

„Earth my body, water my blood, air my breath and fire my spirit...“

„We all come from the garden. And to her we shall return, like a drop of rain flowing to the ocean.“

When the stones turned red, they were carried with a singsong and a shovel into the Inipi⁵ and stacked there as a heap in the middle of it. Once the first ones entered the Inipi, they began to chant the Indian syllable Om⁶. Were all in the tent and had acclimatized a bit to the heat, water mixed with herbs was poured onto the stones. It immediately became tremendously hot. For people not used to it, it was tough! One felt then exactly whether one had treated one's body well or did eat or smoke too much.

But after a while one felt that the worst was over and one was able to fully indulge in the cleaning process. One could feel how the body got detoxified and the slag exuded. Approximately twenty minutes later all left the hut and went steaming to the nearest pond to cool off in the clear mountain water. Depending on mood, one could go sweating again or get dried by the fire. Later in the large tepee, the "Big-Lodge," people had food and played some music together.

The big difference to a common sauna was the spiritual component of the sweat lodge, which was completely dark except for the gentle glow of the stones. The chanting and rituals performed gave it a mystical dimension. Above all, the temperatures eventually

⁵ A flat tent in shape of an igloo, the sweat lodge.

⁶ Isvara (the Supreme Ruler) is a special purusa (Onlooker), untouched by suffering, acts and their effects, and of desires. In Him that omniscience becomes infinite which is only seed in others. He was the teacher even of the teachers of antiquity, since He is not limited by time. The word which reveals Him is Om. The repetition of Om and meditating on its meaning is the way. (Yoga Sutras)

reached peak values over 100°C, where one really died a small death. The only recourse, if one did not want to leave the Inipi, was the inner middle of oneself then in which one remained as calm as possible.

Hanuman, an elderly and unique character, who often stayed as a guest in Beneficio, created often a kind of tense atmosphere, for example, when at sunrise he loudly shouted "Give me the morning llllllght!" in order to clean his chakras⁷. Angry protests were the result, and once there were even fisticuffs. Well, I had never sympathy for late risers, and breakfast at ten or eleven o'clock was fitting more for a holiday camp than for a spiritual community that spent the most energetic part of the day in sweet slumber.

⁷ The female force Shakti is resident at the end of the spine in the form of the sleeping serpent Kundalini. There she is in a kind of exile, separated from her Lord, the highest cosmic principle, who expects her return anxiously, and has its seat in the head. Man must awaken the sleeping snake and conduct her through the vertical channel, the Susumna, into the head. This channel runs through the chakras, subtle energy centers symbolizing various forms of consciousness, which are activated by the snake.

El-Moreon

I met Juan, an old friend from Granada, in El-Moreon, where he lived in a small house. Juan told me that he would soon travel to northern Spain and that I could take over the house then. That suited me just fine, because although it was nice in Beneficio, after three months I could no longer hear the Indian chants. Moreover, it became already full and difficult to find a quiet place.



The old house was situated a bit out of the settlement, and consisted of one room only with a fireplace in one corner. In front of the house there were a fig tree, which at this time had tasty fruits, a few pomegranate trees and an overgrown terrace with delicious grapes. The whole area was also covered with orange, lemon and almond trees. So I would not easily starve here! Behind a small eucalyptus forest was the river Guadelfeo, my icy bath.

On the opposite side of the river I saw one day some ibexes in a steep wall. When they saw me, they climbed the next ridge, disappeared behind the crest and left me seriously impressed by their climbing skills and their powerful appearance. Once I encountered even a wild boar when I just took a bath and stood naked in the middle of the river. I got afraid, when the big fat animal came running towards me, but it just seemed to be afraid of something itself and hardly noticed me when roaring past me.

The settlement consisted of several houses mainly inhabited by hippies and only a few Spaniards. Some tepees were scattered around and many people, mainly British, arrived with converted trucks or buses. A small circus tent was set up in which parties were held nearly on a daily basis. The tent was lit with candles and torches, and drums resounded through the night.

My job seemed to be bringing the garden back into good shape, which was obviously left deserted for quite some time already. The necessary tools I found in the house. It took a while until I had removed the flourishing weeds and cleaned up the trash. Then I started digging.

But before starting sowing, I had to do something else: building a fence around the entire property. Just yesterday, a donkey had walked into the garden and headed straight towards the fig tree, trampling flat my freshly prepared veggie bed. Also a herd of goats came for an unannounced visit.

My neighbor invited me for breakfast. His name was Bernd, and his friend Christian happened to be there as well. Both were from Bavaria which made the conversation quite amusing for me because of their dialect.

Bernd had done a lot of work at his house, it was really cozy. There were a few instruments and Christian, who wore long felted Rasta hair together with a Bavarian waistcoat, grabbed a guitar and played a song of Bob Marley: "... when we came to understand, a Mighty God is a living man. You can fool some people sometimes, but you can't fool all the people all the time ..." I grabbed one of the many drums while Bernd served coffee, dried figs and almonds. Later I asked Christian what I could sow at this time of the year.

"Right now, you can plant beans. You simply go in a store and buy a packet of the big ones. If you come to my place, I can give you all kind of other seeds too." He accompanied me to my house. "First, you have to get horse manure. And a fence you need! I am glad someone does the work, your predecessors did not care about the garden. Have you found the irrigation canal already? Before, Marko had all full of flowers here. I will ask him, where the canal runs exactly. Because when it gets hot later in the year, you cannot carry all the water with

buckets from the river. In addition, the river water is not the best, because of all the effluent from Orgiva."



Carlos and José passed by on their horses; manure could be found enough here! I set to work at once and collected a few bags full. Then I carved myself a handle for the ax and started with the fence. An old Spaniard came over and looked at my work for a while. "Muy bien, hombre," he muttered, seemingly pleased that somebody took care of the land. In Spain too, rural exodus was common, and increased droughts and mismanagement did the rest. More and more land became deserted. At the time of the Moors the Alpujarras had been a thriving area, a huge garden. But the Spaniards were not always very kind to their land. The yellow plane from Orgiva sprayed the olive trees over a large area and under the trees the weeds were wiped out with poison too, in a manner that close to my house an entire hillside had turned brown because of superfluous poison. The weeds interfered later in the

harvest of the olives, which were pressed to oil in one of the many mills around.

Holger, who came to know by chance where I was hanging out, came for a visit. He brought tools and began to work on the surrounding trees. He cut dead branches and gave the trees a new form.

"Have you learned this somewhere?" I asked him.

"No, my instincts tell me what I have to do. The aesthetic in nature is normally also the expedient. Just look here," he pointed to a fig tree with withered branches, "without the help of man it wastes away. Man has deserted nature!"

"But nature exists much longer than man and is getting along best when left alone."

"I have to show you something," he said and drove me a few kilometers to an uninhibited finca. Everything looked bepraved. Weeds were growing everywhere and the trees made a pitiful impression. Silence of a graveyard lay over this land that was apparently abandoned.

"Okay, that looks bad. But that's also not a natural growth here, but an orphaned monoculture. "

Holger took me to a neighboring plot. Blooming life awaited us. The soil around the trees was plowed neatly, the branches looked succulent; magnificent bushes, flowers and other plants prospered here, insects buzzed around and the birds were chirping.

"You can feel it," said Holger, "happy people are living here. It's not just that the plants are well watered. Nature is met with love here, and she is grateful for that. Rampant nature does not put forth the beauty of a garden. Man has forgotten his duty!"

Somehow I had to agree. The symbol of paradise was a garden and not wild growing nature!

The fence got completed and the beans came crawling out of the earth. Also, the garlic, the lettuce, the cabbage and a few herbs watched curious out into the world. Since it was pretty cold at night, I had to gently cover them in the evening with mulch: "Sweet Dreams, my dear veggies!" Also otherwise I had to strive for their physical well-being, keep away the many weeds and spend them drinks by carrying water from the river, which became my morning exercise. I also built a patio with a large fireplace in the middle, cut back the wine and pomegranate and fought as usual blackberries.

Manuel, an old friend from Granada, stayed for two days. He said he wanted to go to the carnival on Tenerife, the second largest carnival in the world. A great longing for the sea overcame me, as I was already more than a year in the mountains. I also remembered some people telling me once that from the Canaries sailboats left to South America and took people without charge. But it was dangerous at the coast, and to get to the Canary Islands one probably needed a passport besides money. The joy of growing vegetables however and the house, which became more and more homely, made forget me the sea again.

My father came visiting me again. This time he had brought an elderly couple from southern Germany, with whom he wanted to take a tour around Andalucía, and I should play the tour guide. We drove into the mountains for a walk. But it became too cold for the couple, and so we were looking for a hotel.

"You still have money," my father told me in the evening.

"Really? Of which I know nothing! "

"Well, we did not donate it to a good cause, as you have ordered us, because we thought that you might need it again."

"Maybe you were right," I said, thinking of the sea and waves. One and a half year I had not used money anymore!

Surfing

The next day we drove to Granada and visited the Alhambra. In Seville parted our ways and I went to the bus station, still not sure where to go now. With the money I could buy a horse, a long dream of mine, and soon there was harvest time. But I was remembering the waves and the yachts. Perhaps this would be an opportunity to leave Europe after all.

"Cadiz" stood over the first counter I saw. The bus was already waiting, and soon I drove towards a fiery sunset, happy that fate was leading me out of the mountains again, where I had recently felt a bit cramped.

When the bus arrived in Cadiz the next morning, there was already a large ferry at the quay, as if it had just been waiting for me.

"Where does the ferry go, please," I asked a guard at the harbor.

"To Tenerife," he replied good-natured.

"And when?"

"Tomorrow night!"

"Like ordered," I thought.

The next morning I went back to the harbor. Other passengers already bought their tickets, cars were lined up, and trucks and containers had already been loaded. But each of the passengers had to show his ID when buying tickets, so I went first to the stern of the ship where officers monitored the loading of the containers.

Whether it was possible to travel as a stowaway? Just walk past the officers and then hide among the trucks?

A traffic light inside the ship lit up green.

My signal! Come on!

But I hesitated and went in a waterfront bar for a coffee and into the bathroom to change my pants. All in blue, so I might give the impression that I was part of the crew. Then I bought a newspaper and went back to the rear hatch. Half engrossed in my newspaper, I walked past the officer and felt already relieved, when suddenly a bear of a man stood in front of me.

"Where are you going?" He asked harshly.

"Well, on board, of course!"

"Show me your ticket!"

"Why? Can I not buy the ticket on board?"

"Nah, that's sold only at the counter," he grunted.

"Is that so? Well then, thanks for the information," I said and left quickly, past the disinterested officer.

I was angry at myself! I had once again hesitated for too long and missed the opportunity! If one does not act spontaneously, one lost the game!

I went back into town and decided already to go back to El-Moreon, when suddenly I saw an old friend along with a couple of dudes sitting on the steps of the cathedral.

"Well, what a coincidence!"

"Hey," she greeted me and gave me a kiss, which her friend, who looked half like Jimi Hendrix and half like a Corsican Pirate, did not seem to take as offense. "Where are you going?"

"The plan was to the Canary Islands!"

"Yes? We too! But we want to celebrate the carnival here in Cadiz, and then to Tenerife because the carnival starts a little later there."

"I just have the problem that I do not get a ticket without ID."

"Oh, Bruno also has no passport," she patted her friend on the shoulder, "I'll buy the ticket for him and yours too, if you like!"

"That would be great!"

We went to the harbor and she asked for the price: "Nearly 28,000 Pts each, quite expensive! But we'll get it together in a week! "

"Do you mind buying my ticket now already?" I asked, afraid of missing another opportunity!

I gave her the money, and she soon came back with ticket and the boarding card.

"Thank you, nice of you!"

"You're welcome! So then, have a good trip."

An officer gathered sections of the boarding cards. "Oh, a woman," he said and smiled at me. "Please wait a little while!" Only now I noticed that there were red and orange boarding cards. Mine was red and for a woman!

I got hot ears and became nervous. But other passengers appeared and had to wait too, until a minibus came and brought us into the core of the vessel. At the reception we all got a punch card, which was probably used as a key for the cabin. But I went on deck and waited until finally Cadiz was far behind, and the ship, accompanied by seagulls, sailed into the fading light of sunset. Then I knocked at my cabin door, whereupon a woman opened.

"Yes?" Two other women looked curiously over her shoulder.

"Oh, sorry, wrong cabin!"

The restaurant had cushioned benches and I prepared for the night. A steward passed by and wondered.

"Well, you know, it's too narrow in the cabin. With so many unknown people, I get claustrophobic. If possible, I would prefer to sleep here."

"As you wish, Sir! Sleep well!"

Nothing but the vast ocean could be seen. The first early birds came on deck, and a few of them started with gymnastics. The sky in the east was always bright and golden, and everyone waited for the sun finally to appear over the horizon.

At eight o'clock there was breakfast buffet, and a man of my age with long curly hair asked, "Esta libre aqui?"

"Please, sit down! You can speak German! "

He smiled and made himself comfortable.

"Did I not see you in a red VW bus, packed with surfboards?" I asked him while beheading my egg.

"Maybe! I'm a surf instructor and heading for Fuerteventura. And you, where are you going?"

"I do not really know, let's see what happens!"

"You do not look as if you were on vacation!" munched the instructor from behind his bread and jam and I told him that I would be traveling for quite some time now.

"Right you are! Whenever I come to Germany, and my old friends prate of their job and their career, I tell them to spare me with their chatter, I would not care how much money they earn. Then they ask me how I would imagine my future life, when I would not be surf instructor anymore, and such crap. What about my pension then! They think they can insure themselves against everything! In reality, they are only afraid of life!"

"Say, are you also surfing?"

"Of course, that's the best! In the beginning it's pretty frustrating, but one you get the hang of it ...!"

"And the Canaries are good for surfing?"

"Yeah! Tenerife has a few good places, Gran Canarias and Fuerteventura too! But the highest waves are on Lanzarote. At least in wintertime. Fuerteventura has the advantage to have almost always waves. But I can only make money with windsurfing."

"Do you think I'm too old to learn it? I once heard one should start not later than at the age of thirteen or fourteen."

"Nonsense! You seem to be quite fit! Sure, you will not become world champion anymore, but after a year you can certainly curve quite well along the waves!"

"Like to get on deck and smoke a joint?"

"Of course!"

We went on deck and lay down in the sun on two deck chairs. A gentle breeze blew and soon we became pretty stoned. Suddenly, it went through my head, I was in a Bardo⁸!

The void around me. There is no firm hold anymore, only blue: the light of Vairocana! ... Surfing! My dream! Perhaps it becomes now a reality, finally!

Surfing ... that's it! The ingenious symbolism! When the lights in the ship turned green, a wave just came which I could have taken. But I was waiting too long, so I missed it. When my father came to pick me up in El-Moreon, that also has been a wave. I had caught it and

⁸ At this time you should not be afraid of the light blue, clear and radiant light, for it is the light of the sublime wisdom! Do not fear it! It is called the light of the Tathagata, and it is the ancient wisdom of the sphere of being-in-itself, therefore meet it with faith and devotion. Remember, this is the light of compassion of the Tathagata Vairocana! So be devote! Thus the Tathagata Vairocana has come to receive you at the abysmal path of the intermediate state. (The Tibetan Book of the Dead)

surfing until here. One only had to wait patiently for a wave and then react spontaneously. Sometimes some big ones came one after the other, then sometimes for long none, and a few small ones in between! Yes, that's it! All is energy, everything is pulsation. As above so below⁹! I had learned swimming, and if God wanted, I would not drown even in the desert without money and luggage! But now I had to learn surfing!

"Hey, man, I just developed a new philosophy!"

"Yes, the dope is really good, where did you get it from?"

He listened intently and was impressed: "And the surfing suit is the protection against the cold! The thick skin, with which you can patiently wait for the next wave!"

"I see that you understand! Let's have another smoke!"

The next morning we docked at Santa Cruz de Tenerife. The Civil Guard examined a couple of cars with dogs, but they were not interested in me. It was busy in the city because the carnival had begun. In the shopping promenade stood merchant beside merchant. A couple of dudes were making music with drums, guitars and vocals. I recognized an old friend from Granada, an Italian woman who had once given me a book written by Salman Rushdie, which I never read.

"Hello Francesca, how are you?"

⁹ Philosopher's stone

"What a surprise! How did you get here?"

We were talking for almost an hour. She told me, she had met Astrid and Daniela on Gomera. They would live in a cave on a hippie beach. Unfortunately she had forgotten the name of the place.

"Are you coming tomorrow with me to La Caleta," she asked, and lit a cigarette. "There is a small village and I live there."

"Why not? I am not keen on large crowds and party anyway!"

I was slightly shocked the next day when the bus reached the dry and craggy south of Tenerife. Huge ugly hotels ruined the seaside at Playa de las Americas. The Canaries I had imagined different!

"Listen, Francesca, where do you take me?"

"Stay calm! We have not arrived yet! "

From the bus stop we walked about three kilometers along the coast, passing the small fishing village of La Caleta, and finally stood on the edge of a ravine. In the hinterland there was a bizarre volcanic landscape and a high plateau that reminded of the Grand Canyon. The ravine had a barren, primeval-looking vegetation. Palmleaf-canopied huts were scattered, the sea tossed its waves on white sandstone rocks, and there was a small pebbled beach.

After a few meters down the gorge, the nightmare of Playa de las Americas had been forgotten, and we

plunged into a different world. The poorest had the most romantic place! That was divine justice!



The next morning I walked around the cliffs and into the next bay where there was a little sandy beach. I threw myself into the waves and was splashing around

in the cold water for almost half an hour, not getting enough of the body surfing.

After the bath, I took a walk up the hill and reached a banana plantation, where I got the idea to snarf some fruit for breakfast. But it turned out that it was not so easy to discover ripe bananas, as they always were harvested green.

A worker with a machete hacked down useless perennials. I wished him a good morning and told him bluntly that I was looking for a breakfast. The man nodded and led me to a suitable location and where he cut a whole bunch of ripe bananas.

"Oh, thank you, that's enough! I hardly can carry all of that!"

"You're still young and strong," the man laughed and went back to work while I went away panting. When I finally arrived sweating with my booty at the first huts, Manuel suddenly stepped out of one of them.

"Manuel, you are here too," I asked baffled and seized the opportunity. "You surely like to have some bananas!"

"Man, I can see no bananas anymore! Come in, coffee is ready."

The hut belonged to Edison, a Brazilian, who greeted me kindly: "Do you like something Gofio for your bananas?"

"Gofio? Qu'est-ce que c'est?"

Edison handed me a bag with a kind of flour: "Just simply mix it with the bananas. Here, have some more milk too!"

"Mmm! Not bad!"

We had coffee, and I lay back comfortably and enjoyed the view of the waves. Finally back to the sea! But somehow I felt uneasy about the place, and a few days later, when I went again for a walk, I saw two police officers of the Guardia Civil observing the hippie village with field glasses. I reckoned that one got easily trapped in the canyon, and if the police did surveillance already, there probably would be a raid soon.

In La Caleta, there was a bar where many of the hippies gathered for drinking beer or playing billiards. There I met a Bavarian named Mark who claimed to be able to surf: "In the north, there is a good beach, Playa del Socorro, near Puerta de la Cruz."

"And how much does a used board cost?"

"Maybe around 300,-DM, if it should not be scrap. But you need a suit too if you're not used to the water. That costs another 250,-DM."

For the board I still had enough money, but not for the suit. Quite expensive the whole affair, and also quite impractical, carrying always a board around!

I told Mark about Nias, an island lying west of Sumatra, where the guys were surfing with over fifty miles per hour along seven-meter-high waves at the coral reef.

"Yeah, the best sport there is!" Mark exclaimed, and told me a few things I had to observe: "Look, you hold the board like that." He held the sides of table with both hands. "And when you realize that you have enough speed, and just before the wave breaks, then you hop on!" He jumped at once on the table, so that beers and glasses tumbled and spilled. "And then off you go, man!" he yelled, and everyone stared at him. "That is more than just a sport, it's a philosophy!"

That's what I thought, too!

I left before dawn. A bus went to Puerto de la Cruz, and I got the first sight of Mount Teide, Spain's highest mountain. The differences in altitude, which the road had to overcome, was enormous, and once the bus drove over the pass to the north side of the island, it was enveloped in fog, and the sparse vegetation changed into lush green. This side of the island had a completely different character and looked almost like a large garden, because the trade winds rained off here and the volcanic soil seemed to be fertile.

From the bus stop, where the bus driver let me out, a narrow road led steeply down towards the coast, revealing eventually a beach covered with black pebble: Playa del Socorro! A rough surf hit the shore, and although I was a good swimmer, I was frightened at that sight. A red flag was fluttering in the wind, and the only person who could be seen on the beach was a muscle-bound athlete who did nore than fifty push-ups in a fast rhythm, followed by sit-ups and some sprints along the beach to finally plunge into the waves. But even he did not dare to swim more than a few meters away from the

shore, and one could see how the current was tugging at him. I realized that I definitely was not yet fit enough for this beach.

The next days I slept in a nearby plantation, fed myself with fruits and started with my fitness training. It turned out that it was rougher than usual on the first day, because the sea had calmed down a bit and a few surfers showed up. I was watching them for hours and could not wait to get my own board.

One morning, when I just had washed my clothes and spread them on the rocks for drying, a large Mitsubishi SUV came down the beach. Two men got out and began to inspect the black stones. The older of the two pointed to a few of the larger ones, which the other man then put in the car. Since I had nothing else to do, so time to do something for my karma, I asked if I could help.

"You speak Spanish, but you are not Spanish," assessed the elder man. He was about sixty years old and had a sympathetic face.

"I used to live in Germany," I replied.

"Then we can speak German," said the man, and asked what I would be looking for.

"I want to learn surfing and inspect already the beach."

"And where do you sleep? There are no hotels around."

"Oh, anywhere! That is not so important! "

"Indeed," the man looked a little while out to sea and seemed to reflect. "I live in La Orotava, which is not very far from here. If you like, you can join me."

"Yes, why not? Thanks for the offer!" I packed up my things and got in the back of the car. "A wave ...," I thought.

The car stopped in front of a large old town house, and we started to unload the stones. We entered a small hallway, where I spotted a sculpture of the Archangel Michael in a niche, went downstairs and came to a sunlit garden. A little dog greeted us excitedly, a fountain was splashing and a catalpa spread sweet fragrance. The stones were used to make a boundary around the flower beds, where it was growing in abundance: strelitzia, rubber trees, avocado, orange and lemon trees, and beautiful bougainvilleas, which were writhing to the gallery of the first floor and the roof of the house.

"Now I get us a drink," the man said, and led me to the first floor and into the rather German-looking kitchen, which extended to a white-tiled terrace from which one could see part of the old town, the sea and the cloud-covered Mount Teide.

"My name is Borkman," he introduced himself, "and this is Alejandro. He helps me in the house and garden."

"Nice place," I had to notice. "In such a large estate there is definitely always something to do."

"So what do you? Studying?"

"So to speak. But I do not go to college. Life is my school!"

"Indeed! And what do your parents say about that?"

"They are of course not particularly enthusiastic. But I am now already more than three years on the road, and they see I'm not starving and that I usually stay at quite pretty places."

"If you like, you can stay a while and help Alejandro a bit. In three weeks I have to go Namibia doing a reportage for the BBC and want to get the garden and a few other things in order before leaving."

"Are you not afraid, I could steal from you? You do not know me yet!"

"I think I have a pretty good understanding of human nature! I once studied psychology."

"You're a psychologist, producer, and what else?"

"Brain surgeon! That is my real profession. In addition, I write books."

"Well, Mr. Borkman, I accept your offer gladly and gratefully."

"Call me Klaus, here in Spain we are not so formal!"

Buena tabla

Klaus showed me my room, which was under the roof and could be reached by a steep ladder. It was very cozy and had its own bathroom, a window overlooking the garden, sea and volcano, and inlaid entirely with wood.

After spending some time in the house, Klaus said at last: "You could do me a favor when I have to leave for the seven weeks to Namibia. You could take care of the house, the garden and watch Tibor. You've got a library and colors for painting, so hopefully you will not get bored."

"Uh, basically I would like to do that, but I must confess that I do not have a passport."

"You have no ID? Why not in heavens name?"

"Because of religious and philosophical reasons!"

"Can you please explain that to me?"

"This is a bit difficult. Let's say, everything has two sides. A passport gives you great freedom. You can travel anywhere, work legally, one has no trouble with the police ... With so many advantages, are there absolutely no drawbacks? "

"I can not see any!"

"I believe that I am not this person who is defined on the ID card. My true self is beyond all definitions and limitations! For me it's a lie!"

"Well, so you have no passport! But you can still watch the house. In Orotava nothing can happen because I have very good relations with the local police. But then I guess you have no driver's license, too?"

"I made it once, but it has fallen victim to the flames too!"

"Then please do not exaggerate driving the Mitsubishi!"

So here I was! No money, no passport, but living in a huge house with three cars at my disposal! And then my parents even sent me the rest of grandma's inheritance, and I could finally afford the coveted surfboard and the suit!

The first experiments were, however, quite frustrating. I did not even manage to come through the surf with the board. I did not yet figure out the technique to dive beneath the waves, and within twenty minutes I was already completely out of breath.

A few guys from the neighborhood took a look at the board. "Buena tabla," they said, but it would be difficult for a beginner at this time, the waves were still too high.

"You were recently on La Gomera, how was it?"

"Very good! In Valle Gran Rey there were about three meter high waves!"

Maybe later on to La Gomera! Astrid and Daniela should be there now, and it was Columbus' last stop before he discovered America.

When Klaus returned, I took my surfboard and drove directly to Los Cristianos, where the ferry took off to Gomera. In the evening I reached San Sebastian.

The island had a completely different character than Tenerife, not so scourged by the "progress" and more calm. The ride went through the rain forest, and finally, down endless serpentines into the deep valley of Valle Gran Rey.

I took my surfboard and went from the small village, which was called simply Playa, to the beach Playa Del Inglés, sat down in the sand and studied the waves.



It was not a particularly good place for surfing. The waves were high enough, but they fell very steep, so that little time remained to surf along them. Moreover, it would perhaps be difficult to find a good spot for sleeping here, where one also could leave the surfboard unattended, because not too far from the beach rose a

mighty cliff. But a feeling told me that I was right here, and that Valle Gran Rey was a good place.

For now I just slept on the beach, and in the early morning at low tide I jumped into the water. It took a while until I found the right position on the board and was able to develop enough speed to get well along with the wave. If I was lying too far back on the board, the wave just lifted me up and if I was too far forward, the nose of the board turned into the water, and I somersaulted. A few days passed before I could at least easily ride on my belly in front of the wave, which was already a lot of fun, because I got with my body out of the maelstrom of the wave and thus had already a bit the feeling of flying.

When I went a little further along the coast, I got into another bay, which had only gravel beach. At the rock face at the back of the beach was an overhang, which had been extended with a low stone wall to a little shelter. There were still the remains of palm leaves and bamboo scattered around, and I immediately thought that this was a nice place for a hut. I built a roughly 1.50 m high platform in front of the cave, collected some sticks and palm fronds and designed a roof. Then I covered the ground with abandoned beach mats: ready was the surf hermitage!

From the village of Playa a dusty track led along the coast, past a small shallow beach, which was called Baby Beach because children could swim safely here. Then one came to Vueltas, a small town where there was a harbor. A few yachts bobbed up and down, and my heart beat faster. With such a boat sailing to South America!

But only one yacht looked hippie enough that one could imagine to get a lift: An old wooden boat, a little smaller than the others. It seemed as if it would come from yet another time.

From the port went a dusty dirt road around the cliffs and I reached a bay with dark sandy beach, which was arched by an imposing rock wall in which there were several tiny caves extended with momentary palm constructions providing protection from the sun. A few long-haired nudes could be seen, children were playing in the sand, and inside one of the caves echoed the dull beat of a Pita. I took a swim first and then sat down to dry in the hot sand. Somebody was shouting behind me and when I turned around, Daniela stood suddenly in front of me.

"Astrid is at the moment in Germany arranging a few matters," she told me after the first excitement.

"And you want to sail to South America? That's pretty brave of you!"

"Maybe we can even sail together or meet somewhere in South America. Most yachts are still coming, because the best time to sail across the Atlantic is from October to January, so still four months until the season starts."

"I have to find a cool guy who takes me without passport. That is certainly not easy. But if it's supposed to be ..."

When I got out of the water with my surfboard the next morning, someone with long curly hair was sitting

on the beach, who apparently had just finished his meditation. Spontaneously, I asked him if he would like to share breakfast with me.

"Yes, very much," he replied politely. "I've seen you already several times and was wondering where you always go with your board." His name was Vicente and he owned a bar in El Medano. "Before I was surfing too, mostly in Playa de las Americas, before it became so busy there."

"And now you are not surfing anymore?"

"Unfortunately, only rarely. Once I got in big waves and nearly drowned. Since then I hardly surf, I got scared."

"You can surely give me a few tips."

"Sure," he said, showing me first an exercise how to jump onto the board. "Do this a hundred times a day, because there is only one short moment you have to use to get onto the board. If there are no waves, swim the bay always up and down with your board so that you are fit enough once they come. If you need to dive through a wave, push the board underwater and hold it firmly with your legs. As soon as you can push forward with your arms in order not to be drawn back."

He looked at the bottom of the board and showed me critical spots.

"It's a good board, perhaps a little too small for you as a beginner. Here you got already small dents in it, but fortunately, there is no water penetrated yet. If you push on it and water comes out, you have to let it dry out first,

otherwise the foam dissolves. My sister is coming over in two days. I'll call her and tell her to bring resin and hardener from my workshop so that we can repair these spots. It's like a bicycle repair kit," he grinned.

Do not worry about what you shall eat, life is more than food! Now I even got a surf instructor and special resin for my board!

When Vicente spoke about surfing, he got bright eyes. "I love it very much, you know, but I don't surf in big waves anymore. The sea can be deceiving!"



That night, there was a party at the beach and a large campfire lightened. Several people brought drums and additional musical instruments, and also cakes and other edibles. A few faces I knew already, and quickly came the familiar feeling of being one big family. There was much drumming and noise until late at night suddenly a girl started to sing with a loud, clear voice, and the murmur of the crowd was silenced. A lot of people, most of them

already half stoned half drunk, looked absent-mindedly into the fire, or were watching the moon, which appeared bright above the cliffs. Most of the songs I knew. They were Indian chants or other hippie songs that I had sung in Beneficio. However, the texts were not completely identical, so I had to abandon the company many times to eventually pick up the thread again. Also, my croaking could not challenge her beautiful voice. But when she realized that I knew it differently, she too lowered her voice and tried to adapt.

"Fly like an eagle, fly so high! Circling the Universe, on wings of pure light ..."

"Have you been long in India," she asked me later, as by chance we sat next to each other.

"I've never been to India. I've learned the songs in southern Spain, in a village where the people live in tepees." She had a pleasant face, even though she was not particularly attractive to me as a woman. "And you?"

"I have lived there almost two years."

"That's a long time for a European! Is it not pretty hard?"

"Yes, sometimes! Especially if one has to make a long bus ride and has diarrhea again!"

My attention was diverted abruptly when I recognized the owner of the wooden yacht who was just preparing a joint. "Excuse me, please!" I sat down beside him, but the joint went unfortunately in the other direction.

"Is that your old boat in the harbor," I asked quite directly.

"Yes, that's mine," he answered, and introduced himself as John.

"And where are you going, if I may ask?"

"Maybe to the Caribbean. But I have to go to England first and get some money. And what do you do?"

"I have a surfboard and make the first clumsy attempts."

"Surfing? I once surfed with my boat when I was caught in a storm, on thirty foot waves!"

I got a shiver: "No yarn?" But John did not seem the type of person who tells tales.

Gofio

A man, whom I had noticed for some time already sleeping on the beach, did clean up the place of last night's party.

"You are doing a good job!" I had to admit.

"Yes, must do something for my karma," he replied with an unmistakable Dutch accent. "When I'm good to the beach, it is also good to me." He smiled and held a half-filled cookie box into the air.

"If you have nothing to eat, just come for a visit. I stay a little further up the coast. "

"Thanks for the offer, maybe later!"

He appeared in the afternoon, when Vicente was just there for a visit as well, and introduced himself with Hans.

"Wow, great place here," he said, shaking the roof structure of the hut, "I need to build something like this myself."

We went along the coast, and Hans pointed to a place where he would like to build his hut. But Vicente and I aired our opinion that this would be sheer madness because he could get easily washed away by a bigger wave at night, and he also would have a good chance of eventually getting a stone from the overhanging cliff on his head. We showed him a different place, and I told him what would be best according to my opinion: "You

build a 30-40cm high stone wall this big on, then tie sticks like tent poles, on which you put palm fronds."

"But is it not a little small? I like your hut because one can stand upright in it. If one has to crawl all the time, that's annoying!"

"My place is well protected from the wind and has these overhanging rocks, therefore I need less material. But do what you want, is your hut!"

In good cheer, Hans began to mark a huge floor plan with stones, and was three days alone busy trying to build his little wall. Industrious like an ant, he started dragging building materials, first only in the early mornings and in the evenings in order that not many people took notice of the building activities, but after a week he was already too annoyed to be considerate and just wanted to get finished.

"How long did you need to build your hut?"

"Three days!"

"Oh, man! And I am busy already for two weeks now!"

"But it's becoming quite a beautiful cottage, I am getting jealous," I lied, and this seemingly gave him new energy because soon his efforts were crowned with success. The hut was finally finished!

The meals we often took together, because I had a sheltered fire pit and some dishes. We had some interesting talks.

"There is a thing called crazy wisdom," Hans once said, "People who have this wisdom are called the fools of God. They follow God's will, no matter how crazy and unreasonable they appear to other people."

I told him about the book I was reading. In the story the hero found finally, after countless detours and adventures, the woman, of whom he had many visions before in his dreams. But tragically, he could not stay together with her, as he could not leave the shelter of the forest, and she could not live without the open sky. So they lived for a time at the edge of the forest, but eventually broke up because it was an untenable situation, and the woman married somebody else.

"She is his Shekinah¹⁰," said Hans, "but why can they not live together?"

¹⁰ Hebrew: Inherent. Kabbalistically: The bride of God. There are various interpretations: It is God's inherent female pole, similar to the Buddhist mythology of Vimarsa. At the moment, in which the female principle became active in direction of creative manifestation, the male part experienced itself as I (Eva, who gave Adam the fruit of knowledge to eat). In another interpretation, the Shekinah is the emanation of God's invisible glory, which as a flame encircles God and which is the reason for the creation of the angels, the Throne of God and the human soul. The Shekinah is also a symbol of the soul, which is suffering in this world due to its limited nature, became vulnerable to sin, and eventually must return to God. A further interpretation assumes, that when the world was created and original unity crumbled into polarity, the female half was separated from her male counterpart. Consequently, every soul has a dual soul. Both souls are interdependent in their development and rejoin at the end of time.

"Maybe because in this world the polarities can not unite, it never can be both day and night at the same time ..."

While we still were philosophizing, suddenly a policeman climbed around the cliffs, and I was dazed: Did he want to see my ID?

"Building huts is prohibited here. You have ten minutes to throw all this rubbish into the sea," the policeman said curtly and turned to Hans, "the hut down there, is that your's?"

"That's mine" admitted Hans, who had just celebrated the inauguration three days ago, grudgingly and angrily exclaimed: "You earn nothing from us, right? We should rather stay in these lovely new apartments!"

The policeman replied nothing and just made an impatient gesture: "I'm back in half an hour. Until then, you are gone!"

"How did they found out," asked Hans.

"Who cares? Maybe a fisherman told them, or someone has seen you carrying your stuff around. They know what's happening on their land. Luckily, he did not want to see my ID!"

I packed my few things and thought that I had to end my stay here with a fireworks display. I lit my hut and watched as the flames quickly spread and engulfed the palm roof in a roar.

"Why are you doing this?"

"Before the cops do it! At least we get some little spectacle!"

Hans also burned his hut, and one could see how it hurt him.

"It's only a hut, Hans!"

"Maybe we should not have done that. They should burn the huts themselves, maybe they realize then what they're doing."

"Forget it! As long as they do not burn us at the stake ..."

For me that was a sign to leave. Before looking once again for a new place, better looking directly for a better surf spot.

On the way to the bus, I passed by a couple of kids. "Una tabla," I heard someone say reverently, and: "Puedo ver la table?"

"Porqué no?" I said, grabbing it out of the silver-colored bag.

They took a professional look: "Buena tabla!"

"Yes, the board is good! But not myself surfing!"

"Where are you going?"

"Looking for a place where one can practice well. Do you know one?"

"Now in summer Fuerteventura, Corralejo for example."

I called Klaus and told him that I was on the way to Fuerteventura and could visit him on the way.

"With which ferry do you come?"

"Uh, no idea!"

"Take the first one in the morning. I'll wait at Los Cristianos."

I saw him at the wharf waiting for me, dressed in white. He invited me to a small fishing village for lunch, and I told him the story about the hut.

"Previously, there was a hippie commune on Playa del Inglés, with over 50 people. They did behave like pigs, stealing fruit from the plantations and wine from the shops, and developed more and more into a real menace. When finally the police came to tell them that they had to disappear, they refused. The locals came with pitchforks and other tools, put the hippies on the next ferry and set fire to the whole place. Now they are naturally anxious that this might happen again and take precautions."

When he heard about my plan to sail to South America, he said: "They have now imposed internationally heavy fines for carrying people without ID. Hardly anybody will like to take you!"

"Somebody entrusted me once his house and his car, even though I did not have a passport!"

Fuerteventura was at first glance a rather bleak impression: gray and brown hills devoid of vegetation and plains where ugly square houses were scattered.

The first bus to Corralejo did not even bother to stop because the driver seemed to be too lazy to stow my surfboard and pretended it would not fit in.

White sandy beaches stretched for miles to the north. Two huge hotels stood as monumental foreign objects in the landscape, and in Corralejo everything was prepared for the tourists from abroad: English Pub, German Bratwurst and casinos! I found a surf shop and asked the guy, where one could find a good spot.

"If you have a car, there are several bays in the north ..."

"I don't!"

"Then maybe glass-beach, close to the two big hotels."

I bought a piece of wax for better grip on the board and walked the few kilometers to the hotels which I had seen already on my way here. In their vicinity there were small round stone castles at the beach which served the tourists apparently as a windbreak. I picked one of them as a temporary hostel and was quite happy with it. One could see the whole beach, but was not seen oneself.

The colour of the water was turquoise here and changed into azure further away from the beach, a sharp contrast to the reddish soil of Lanzarote and the Isla de Lobos, which one deemed very close in the clear air. In the hinterland there were large sand dunes and wasteland devoid of vegetation, cut through by power lines and dotted with few houses and ruins. The surfing

in this water was fantastic, even though the waves were not very high and fell not very ideal.

And then finally came the day when I stood on the board for the first time and glided in a short ecstasy towards the beach. What a brief moment! But the memory of it made me fly all day!



My friend Gerret finally managed to solve his issues in Germany and told me, he would prepare his travel to the Canaries now. I told him where he could find me, and that I wanted to wait three weeks for him.

I was constantly busy now sealing lick spots at my surfboard and had the lousy feeling, that whenever the waves were particularly high, the resin just had to dry again.

With horror, I noticed on one of the next days that at one spot of my surfboard water had encroached and a big part of the foam was soaked already. I cut the outer

skin and pulled out the wet foam. Then I brought it to a repair shop in Corralejo.

"That looks terrible!" The guy said at the store. "You should have rather let dry it out!"

"I had been told that wet foam dissolves itself, and before the moisture spreads ..."

"Yeah, there is foam that dissolves. But not this one!"

"And how much would it cost to repair?"

"I need lots of foam for it. The foam must be sent by ship. Due to the risk of explosion it is not allowed on the plane. And the spot is pretty big, I've never done this before ..."

I was getting impatient. "How much?"

"15,000 Pts."

"For this amount I get already a second hand board!"

"Well, think about it ..."

I walked down the streets of Corralejo and came past a wild dump, as often found in Spain. Styrofoam was lying around and I got an idea! I took some, bought glue and started in my castle a complex puzzle game.

It was the evening before my birthday, and suddenly I saw in the distance a large black individual striding through the mass of tourists, and knew that it could only be Gerret.

"Sorry, it took a little longer!"

Gerret had brought a bottle of fine OBAN, and at sunset gradually our blood alcohol levels increased.

"What a fresh air on the Canaries! You realize that when you come out of stuffy Germany!"

Gerret observed amused during the next few days how I was fiddling around with my sticky fingers tainted with Styrofoam remains, trying to fix my board.

"I just need a good book to be satisfied," he said and continued to read his William Burroughs.

"Unfortunate that people always need something to keep them happy, right?" I replied and continued. Finally it was done! The board was varnished and painted.

"Looks good!" Gerret had to admit. I jumped into the water, but quickly realized that something was terribly wrong. The tail of the board was too heavy, and the wave did not lift me up.

Quiet ... quiet ... just do not get upset!

"Is something wrong?" Gerret asked innocently when he saw my face. Instead of replying something, I took a knife and cut until the board was freed from the homemade botch.

"Can you imagine, Gerret? A can of glue, and the board is already too heavy! "

"Well, wonderful world of high tech!"

I hauled the thing back to Corralejo and laid it on the table in the workshop. The Dutchman nodded: "In five days, you can pick it up!"

I practiced the art of 'silent stalking' and often went in one of the hotels for a fresh water shower or a swimming pool visit. Also for breakfast I invelged myself, and got coffee served by the waiter in respectful manner. I felt like in Cockaigne, such a rich buffet I had not seen for a long time.

One morning I persuaded Gerret to accompany me for breakfast to the 5-star hotel, though I felt a little uncomfortable, because for the art of 'silent stalking' Gerret was probably too conspicuous. "My beard is not disturbing, right? Everybody sees that I grow a beard," he said while rubbing over his chin and entering his rugged mountaineer boots that looked in this desert landscape like moon boots.

We went, and I took shortly a swim in the pool before we approached the seducing buffet.

Gerret apparently pursued the tactics exploiting the space of his plate as well as possible in order not to have to go twice to the buffet, and piled it full with several slices of bread, cheese, cakes and sardines. Some people already skewed around to look at him and I wondered briefly if I should rather take a different table. The waiter came, wished us a good morning and poured coffee into our cups. He looked at Gerret's plate, then at Gerret himself, increasingly suspicious, then he pried into my eyes, still lobster-red because of the chlorinated pool water, and asked, "Excuse me, Señores, but do you actually stay in this hotel?"

"Room 305," I replied like shot out of a gun.

"Gerret, I'm gone ..." I said, already standing up, as the waiter was just out of sight and in unmistakable intention heading to the reception. I went out at the back and through the garden, down to the beach, and waited impatiently for Gerret. But five minutes passed, ten minutes, twenty minutes...

Finally, after half an hour Gerret came, and one could tell by his gait that he was quite angry.

"You owe me 1500 Pts," he grunted, sat down in his castle and did not talk for quite some time.

"But that was not necessarily my fault," I said later, when I gave him the money.

"You could have at least tell me what's going on! I sit there like stupid and hope that you come back, instead the headwaiter came and explained to me in a subdued voice, so the other guests did not notice, that I would have to pay for the breakfast 3000 Pts. or he would call the police now."

"I thought you had understood what I said to the waiter!"

"I don't know what you have told him ... well, never mind! I still enjoyed the food in any case. I just have enough now of this place and all these faces around me. Maybe I'm going to visit George on La Palma..."

When I returned from Corralejo later on with my newly repaired surfboard, Gerret had disappeared. No message, no goodbye, just gone! But that's how he was, after all!

On Gomera, Daniela often had sold small balls made out of gofio at the beach, and because I was running out of money, I copied the business plan. Dressed with a nice white shirt and peddling the goods on a plate, I went along the beach.

"Gofio" I bellowed. "Fresh gofio!"

"Do you like to try gofio?"

"Do you know gofio already?"

"Gofio, what's that?"

Once the question was asked, the ball was as good as sold. "Gofio is a Canarian specialty," I was reeling off then, "grains are roasted and ground, and then mixed with other ingredients. You can take olive oil, fish broth, or just water and salt. But this one is sweet, from wheat and corn, with banana, honey, nuts and coconut. And costs only 100 Pts."

"Mmmh..."

"That used to be the staple food of the Guanches, the Canary aborigines. You should definitely have tried it!"

"Well, then, give us two, please."

Business was pretty good. I had no problem selling more than 30 balls per day and it only took an hour. I just resented later that I had been so humble and had offered the balls so cheap. Firstly the tourists did not need to count each penny, and then most did not even know how much 100 Pts. were. Some pretended to be very clever and said it would be too expensive.

"You have no idea, man! In the store you get for 100 Pts. just a small white bread." But now that I had fixed the price, I was shy to raise it afterwards, because pretty fast a certain patronage had formed which was always eagerly waiting for my gofio. With some I started a bit of a chat and discovered the human side of this otherwise anonymous mass of tourists.

One morning, a messy looking guy passed at my castle, who seemed to be a Guanche. He dragged a strange box behind him, which sides were covered with nets.

"No tienes algo para comer" he asked shyly.

"Come on in, we can have breakfast together," I invited him. The guy introduced himself with Alfonso, pointing to a white ruin in a kilometer distance, where he lived.

"And what are you doing with that thing," I asked, aiming at the box.

"Catch fish!" Alfonso replied confidently, and explained the system of the box, which should be a kind of trap.

"Fish like potato skins," I asked in astonishment.

"Well, better are fish leftovers. But I do not have any at the moment."

When he wanted to leave, I asked if I could accompany him, because that would interest me. We went to the vicinity of the hotel where there was rocky shore and Alfonso tried to find a convenient location for

the box, which seemed to be not so easy. Finally, he tied it with a rope to a rock and was satisfied and confident.

In the afternoon, I went again to the box, curious, if it succeeded already in catching some fish, but it was empty except for a few flies, and lying on the dry rock, because it was low tide. Alfonso seemed not to be a professional yet!

Shortly before sunset he came and brought a sticky and sooty pot full of chocolate pudding.

"Delicious!" I smacked my lips. "You got a fish already?"

"No, not yet," said Alfonso, and hastened to add: "Here on the shore is a bad place! I need a boat!"

Next day I brought him back his pot and took a look at his booth, which was just at the edge of the great wilderness. Remains of goat dirt, a car wreck and some rubbish was lying around. On a dilapidated wall Alfonso had chalked in the writing of a first-grader: "The coming of Christ: the end of all evil thoughts" He was cooking again chocolate pudding and hardly looked up when I came. We sat silently by the fire for a while. Suddenly Alfonso jumped up and vomited with white mucus. Then he began to lament that he had pain in the back and that somebody would have bewitched him. I could hardly believe it and noted cautiously that he maybe should see a doctor.

"No, no! The doctor can't do anything," said Alfonso, "there is a lot of black magic on the island, and I

have to see that I get away here soon. I'll build a boat. Then I can go fishing and get out of here."

"Do you know how to build one?"

"That's not so hard," he assured.

The next day he began his work, and brought tirelessly wood parts. As a ship's bottom, he took two pallets and tied them well with ropes and electric cables.

"Don't you have any tools?" I asked when I just admired his work.

"One does not need any necessarily," he said and kept fixing beams and boards according to an inscrutable plan. Tourists were amazed about this construction and discussed what it might be.

"And with this you want to leave the island?"

"Of course!"

I tried to explain diplomatically that out of sea waves were higher than close to the shore, and that one could be blown out easily into the open Atlantic with this bunch of boards.

"I'll make a suggestion. Since I soon want to leave, you could take over the gofio business. You've seen how it works. Then you can save the money for the ferry. "

"I don't know," he hesitated, "I do not speak English or German."

"You just hold a 100 Peseta coin in the air and say it in Spanish, they will understand! And you should look a bit preppy, your brown shirt would be okay."

When I left the next morning, I left all kinds of things for Alfonso and some change, even I did not know whether Alfonso wanted to specialize on dealing gofio. If so, he would probably quit soon. But no worries, people like Alfonso were fed by God!

My destination was La Palma. At first, because I had heard a lot good about this island, which could be seen at the horizon from Gomera on a clear day. And because Gerret wanted to go there.

The ferry stopped at Gran Canaria and then at Tenerife for nearly four hours each. On Tenerife I used the time to inquire in a surf shop, where on La Palma were good places for surfing. The three guys in the shop looked at each other and then unisonous agreed that on La Palma there wouldn't be any suitable place. I decided then not to go to La Palma, but rather back to Valle Gran Rey. Because after all, there the yachts were leaving to America. I fetched my surfboard from the ferry and still got just the last bus to Los Cristianos.

I went directly to the Playa del Inglés, and whom did I saw just hopping out of the water?

"Hello Gerret!"

Gerret came running, shouting "Yippee" or something similar and embraced me, wet as he was. "On the ferry I met two women who were on their way here, and I just joined them."

Hans also happened to be there and asked: "Did you hear already? They have burnished the hippie beach. We are not the only ones whose hut is gone. There are only

blackened rock walls left and a few small items that escaped the flames!"

By chance I met Karsten at the port, and he told me where I could meet Daniela. She would live now together with Christa and Moni in a nearby house.

The door was open, but a curtain hung in front of the entrance. "Just come in everybody," somebody called when I knocked.

"Oh, look at this! We were just talking about you," Daniela said, when I entered the apartment, which consisted of a small kitchen, a table with three chairs, a sofa and another room at the back, where one could see a baby lying on a bed. Two women sat at the table, obviously Christa and Moni. One of her I just saw briefly before, the other was the girl who had been singing the Indian chants at the campfire.

"You have spoken about me? How comes?" I asked and sat down on the sofa in lack of other alternatives.

"Moni told about the evening when she met someone who knew all the Indian songs and I thought that would be the one with whom I have lived together in the caves of Granada."

She kept on chatting merrily, while serving me gofio porridge, and was telling the story of how the Civil Guard had cleared the hippie beach. Christa went into the other room and calmed the baby that had started crying. Moni grabbed the guitar and started plucking softly. Strange, she seemed so different here than at the fire, so tender. What beautiful and fine hands she had!

"But best of all," I got interrupted by Daniela from my observations, "we have found a yacht!"

"Who is we?"

"Moni and I! We cast off in a week!"

Moni looked up and smiled, "Yes, Danny, the wide world calls us!"

"Looks like there is a new team then," I said and wondered, what happened to Astrid. Daniela replied, Astrid would be still in Germany and she would have written her about the scheduled departure. Meanwhile Moni began to play louder and sang, "We are the wild women, running with the wolf ..."

Christa and Daniel tuned in, and I would have enjoyed to sing along because I liked the melody, but this song was undoubtedly reserved for wild women only. As Moni started to sing the next song, in which the foibles and atrocities of man were being targeted, who seemed to be the dream and nightmare of woman at the same time, and I already started to feel uncomfortable, a blond, long-haired, bearded, aging hippy stepped into the house and asked if he could use the stove now.

"Sure Phil, help yourself!"

He pushed two baking sheets with dough in the oven, rolled a cigarette and winked at me while sitting down beside me. "Wild women, ey?" He grinned. "Just who are the wolves? Not us, are we?"

I learned that Moni had composed the songs herself, and that Phil had owned his own boat on the Shetland Islands.

"Do you know the boat the girls wanna take?"

"Yes, it is the best that is currently in the harbor!"

"Is not it too early? I heard, the first season begins at the end of September. "

"Maybe they will be still caught in a storm. But the boat is virtually unsinkable. If the weather is too severe, one just closes the hatches and awaits calmer weather. Even if the boat should capsize, it revolves again because of the lead keel. The trip to England is much more dangerous, because there the coast is near and one must maneuver. The west wind can push one then into the Bay of Biscay or the cliffs of Brittany."

"And you also want to go to South America?"

"Maybe! Or the Caribbean! Or anywhere else!"

Also the skipper appeared, a former pharmacist named Kai, who sold his shop to purchase the boat.

"Tomorrow I fill the water tank," he said, "450 liters! Then I get more extra canister, so that we have approximately 550 liters. That should do! Washing and bathing we must of course with salt water."

Sailing

In the next days I went to the house several times, because I fevered with the two girls and would obviously have joined them immediately. The day before departure, I met Moni alone in the house and accompanied her on a few errands. She wanted to call somebody Germany, but it took a while until she came through. As we sat and waited for a connection, I suddenly felt very strange, as if I was standing in front of a large loss, and was sad, even though I did not know why.

I helped the girls carrying their stuff to the boat and for the first time in my life I saw the interior of a yacht. I got bright eyes, climbed around on deck, felt the canvas, stared up the mast, put me here and there and was longing for setting sails.

Besides the girls and Kai, there was also Phil on board, and the skipper of a neighboring yacht. We all sat outside in the rear lounge, listening to the lapping of the water and watching the stars reflecting on the sea.

"There comes Astrid!" Daniela suddenly exclaimed, jumping up, "Yay!"

It sounded back like an echo: "Yay!"

Astrid had, after she had received the letter from Daniela, immediately booked the first flight and had arrived on Gomera in the morning. Of course, the two old friends wanted to go together, however Kai seemed not particularly enthusiastic about it. But good-natured

as he was, he already seemed to surrender to the pleading of the girls, when the other skipper suddenly intervened: "You'd be pretty crazy, Kai, when you do that! Four people are already too much for the boat! Besides that you have to ration the water from the start, it is much too narrow! You're travelling for over a month, maybe longer! For a short trip that would be okay, but to South America? That would be quite a carelessness! "

Kai, who had made the crossing never himself before, was inclined to agree with him, even if it seemed to hurt him, that he could not take Astrid. But Daniela still gave no rest and kept on debating.

"Kai, you are the captain," chimed the Skipper once more, "you're in charge and you should not get involved in debates on your boat."

"I will follow with Astrid," I said, "we can meet then somewhere in South America."

"Oh yes," said Moni, "at the end of November there is a gathering at Machu Picchu. We could try to meet us there." As she said this, she looked at me, and I felt at once so strange. And while the matter was still discussed further, we looked into each other's eyes, until I finally stood up, sat down beside her and took her in my arms.

"Make yourself a passport and then follow with Astrid," she said.

Running after a woman and even accepting a passport? Why did I had to fall in love with her today, when she left me again tomorrow? Maybe I never saw her again!

"Are you very sad that I leave?"

"Well ... I am glad for you, because I believe it will bring you further a good deal. It is an experience I still would like to make."

"That's why I came from India, you know, just because of this trip."

I wanted to say no more, but just feel her presence.

Astrid found a place in a ravine nearby Argaval, while I have been sleeping in the bushes at the baby beach, where there were many hidden bush caves accessible by tunnels. At Playa del Inglés they started recently checks, and the police confiscated passports of people who had just slept on the beach. Now one could not even sleep anymore on God's earth! Every fruit tree was already in private hands! From the rivers one could not drink because they were poisoned! And without money and passport one had less rights than a dog and had to hide in the bushes! But patience! Eventually there would be nothing to buy anymore with all that lovely money!

I often went to visit Phil, now staying on the wooden boat of John, who had gone to England as planned. The neighbouring boat was the "ZigZag," which belonged to a Frenchman, who was traveling too. Julio, an Italian, did 'take care' of the yacht. There was always some music playing and some "drunken sailors" on board. Astrid and other people often came for a visit too, and the two boats became a popular meeting spot, not much to the liking of the harbor guards and the Guardia Civil, who observed us suspiciously.

"They understand nothing," joked Phil, "they burn the huts, and suddenly they have all the hippies sitting just in front of their nose, and there is nothing they can do about it."

Me and Astrid borrowed a dinghy and paddled out to sea for fishing. But since we were absolute beginners, we waited an hour in vain.

"Astrid, I cannot stop thinking about Moni, what can I do?"

"Wait and see!"

"It may be difficult to meet the two in Peru!"

"Do you not want to make a passport? Is that really so important?"

I stared into the water and was quite confused. I wondered why I was so enchanted after being only a short time together with Moni. There were prettier women. I remembered the conversation with Hans, and slowly got the idea, Moni could be my Shekinah.

For three days I went into the rain forest of La Gomera in order to make up my mind what I wanted to do now. The chance that I managed to get to Machu Picchu without a passport and with little money was small enough, let alone with Astrid. I argued with myself and prayed to God that he showed me the way. Finally I threw a coin to decide, and shortly afterwards I jumped in good mood down the slopes: America, here I come!

I worked for Werner, a former doctor from Berlin, and earned the ticket to Tenerife. Because in Tenerife was a

German consulate, where I could get a new passport. But if I already had a new passport, I could also visit my parents and old friends. For more than two years I have not been to Germany!

"Hello, it's me! ... How are you? ... Yeah, me too. I want to get a passport and even come to visit you in your new home. ... Yes, that is exactly the problem! ... 500, -DM should be enough. ... Great! Thank you! ... To post office in Santa Cruz! ... All right, I'm writing again. Bye!" I hung up the phone and told Astrid.

"If you go to Germany, maybe you will not come back. If one is there, everything looks different, and one starts to make other plans."

Astrid was right.

"But Moni is waiting for me!"

When I went to visit Phil, Amie and Purva were on board, two girls from London. Purva had grown up in India, thence her name and exotic appeal.

"We also want to Tenerife," she said, "but with Brad's sailboat. Will not you join us? Brad wanted 10,000 Pts. for a ride, and if you join, it will be cheaper for us too."

Brad was a South African, whose boat was right next door. He had two cats on board, of whom one had jumped twice already on John's boat and had crapped unabashedly on Phil's berth, after which Phil had thrown her overboard in a high arc. But when he saw her spluttering in the water, he felt pity and saved her on a rubber raft, to which the poor animal was clinging out of panic and almost made it sink.

Phil blew a farewell on the old fog horn the next morning, when we chugged out of the harbor and then slowly went along the coast. Here was no wind, but once we got past Playa de Santiago and Tenerife was already visible, the wind freshened, and in the not too far distance one could see white foam on the waves.

"Let's ride the white horses," said Brad and shortened the sail. He dressed in a raincoat and advised us, to do the same. But I thought, a few drops would not hurt much. But as soon we were out of the lee side of La Gomera, the boat went into a 45° angle and plowed in large prances over the water. Huge waves came from luv and seemed threatening to bury the boat beneath them. But miraculously it climbed yet again over the crest. Sometimes, however, broke the top of the wave and hit the boat almost broadside and made it shudder. In a short while I had no more dry rag on the body and got from the cold and the excitement a slight shivering. I had not imagined sailing being so exciting and I wondered how it was when one gets into a storm. This was just a strong wind!

Some whales appeared, and the sea became a little calmer. Brad let me sometimes take the helm and I was thrilled: This was exactly what I needed, a mobile home! Europe contaminated? Civil war in Africa? Inflation in America? Bye folks, I go surfing in Oceania!

In the evening we reached Los Cristianos, and I caught the last bus to Santa Cruz. The very next day I was at the consulate that issued me a passport within a day.

A strange feeling being back in Germany. It was my home and it was not. An old book full of memories, of which some were still alive. It was nice to see the parents and old friends, but also a touch unreal. What could I tell them to understand my life? I gave them a couple of fragments from which they put together a scanty puzzle. Understanding was something else! But could one really understand somebody else? One always imagined a lot, but did one really know someone?

Klaus, who was currently at his home in Hamburg, learned that I was back in the country and asked if I would not like to travel with him to Tunisia. Nice offer, but I had nothing to do in Tunisia! Astrid and Moni were waiting!

Nonetheless I immediately agreed, even though I did not know why. Did I consider it a wave, which I should take, or could it be that I wanted to boast in front of my old mates and parents? "Look, I just got invited by a millionaire to Tunisia! Bye, I'm off again!"

We traveled in a, for desert tours converted, Mitsubishi to Genoa. "Habib" was the ferry that brought us first class to Tunis. We spent the evening near the ancient Carthage and Klaus, who knew the locality well, showed me a few sights, was telling entertaining stories and invited me for tea in an old Tunisian café. On the way back to the hotel his toupee kept hanging at a tree, and he got red ears as he hurried to re-adjust it quickly. I pretended as if I had not noticed it, even if I could hardly control myself. Well, the vanity! One should thank God if He ridiculed it only in such a humorous manner. It could be punished much differently!

In one day, Klaus raced on dusty roads to the island of Djerba, where he spent most of his vacation each year. The peninsular consisted mostly of sand and palm trees, and I was surprised once again how adaptable people were. Klaus had rented a house near the beach. Everywhere new buildings were erected, and as far as one could see, cottages and hotels were lining up side by side along the beach. I was very disappointed because I had imagined it completely different and more romantic.

There was not much to do. We made a few trips, one into the Sahara, otherwise I read books, played on my newly acquired Tunisian drum, and when I found two books with crossword puzzles, I started to solve them cause of sheer boredom. This, however, made Klaus upset, and it started again a rather one-sided discussion about possessions: "These are my crossword puzzles! And you have to ask me, before you use them! If you think your belongings should serve the public, that is up to you, but do not use my belongings in the same way!" It was followed by a monologue, in which he explained what he did not like about my attitude, and I was once again the not particularly repentant listener. Yeah, he was right! His crossword puzzles! How did it come that I occupied myself with such stuff anyway? Astrid and Moni were waiting, and I sat here and filled out crossword puzzles! Moni was probably already in South America.

I glanced over my finances: 350,-DM, the rest of the money, which should have been used for a return flight to the Canary Islands. Hopefully I got with it to Genoa.

Klaus drove me to the travel agency, and I was lucky, it was enough for bus and boat. The bus was stopped on the way to Tunis and controlled by sinister-looking policemen. I got this well known feeling in my stomach, though this time, after nearly three years of austerity, I had a passport again. I almost felt guilty that I had nothing to fear now from these henchmen!

The "Habib" brought me back to Genoa, and I managed to get to the Swiss border as fare dodger in crowded trains. Then I went to the highway for hitchhiking and was lucky: in a day I was back in Aachen.

Wolfram was back from Egypt and told me about the dive course at the Red Sea and about his plan to purchase the license for dive instructor. I listened enthusiastically, because that was a cool idea! Offering diving cruises on a yacht with a few surfboards onboard! For my gypsy lifestyle just the right thing! And should I have a family, surely the children would have a good life!

Wait a moment! Why did I suddenly think about having a family?

A few days later, I realized it. Moni was the first woman I had met, I would have wished for a child! A little surfer...

I worked in a mail-order business and taped addresses on packets. A monotonous job, but in my mind I was already somewhere else. The more I worked though, the more remorse I felt. Did I not betray now all my ideals? Did God not liberate me from the risers and the slavery? Did I not serve again the filthy mammon?

Then I went with a friend on a truck down to Madrid. My main job was to keep my mate awake and make the mixture for the hash pipe. He had black rings under his eyes, because he made this job already a long time. He drove well, but I felt not comfortable at all.

And then I assembled rails again! I did exactly the job I hated so much four years ago and which I never wanted to do again! For long time it was the symbol of slavery per se! Now I went to Rostock and was shocked by the ugliness of this city, with its square architecture. The industrial area looked as if there would have been a war just recently. We worked in rain and snow and mounted the irons in freezing temperatures with bare hands. Either I had become a vile traitor now, or I had to face the very thing again I had fled before. Maybe I was allowed to do this job now, because I no longer believed to be dependent on it, because I did not do it as a slave?

Wolfram told me the prices of the dive course and I booked a flight to Cairo for mid-January. But where was Moni?

I had written to Gerret on Gomera and had asked him if he got news of her, or if he could find out the address of her parents, because I foolishly did not even know her family name. But I waited in vain for a response. I had to work for another week and had saved enough in the five weeks to do a few classes and see if I liked the diving at all. But actually I had even enough money to go shortly to Gomera to get Moni's address before the track got cold. At least I had to catch on her parents' address, and there were certainly still a few of her friends around who knew. I booked a flight for the first of January.

A day later I received a letter from Moni!

"You've probably already heard of Danny's and my odyssey," she wrote, adding: "I am currently here on Gomera, without money and plan, and when Gerret gave me your address, I thought I must write you immediately!"

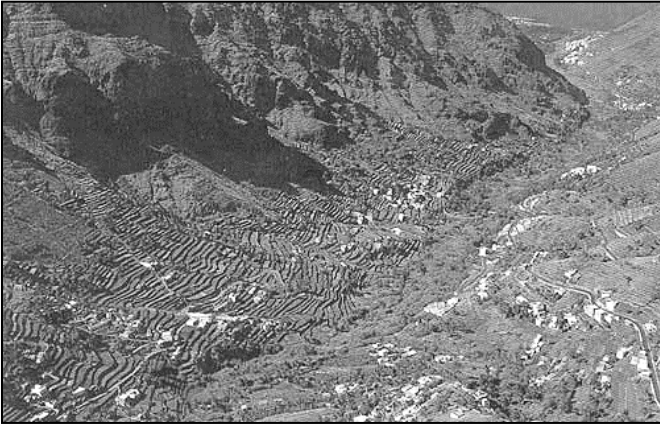
I got hot and cold at the same time and did not know where my head was. A gift of fate! Perhaps a reward for being so persistent and going to Gomera just for her address! If I just would have been there already!

The last working week passed agonizingly slow. We worked in a high-bay warehouse with eighteen lanes of 150m length each, the shelves were about 40m high. A worker fell down from that height, and at the end of the alley colleagues put up a wreath and candles. The working team which erected the shelves, was mainly from Hungary, and although I could not communicate with them, we had a warm relationship. Work under such conditions welded one together!

Finally the day of departure had come.

Lovelorn

The bus broke down just before the valley of Valle Gran Rey. Instead of waiting for a replacement bus like the other passengers, I went off on foot, because I was too nervous to sit around doing nothing and waiting. Deep below at the coast one could see white foam edges, which meant high waves.



A red BMW passed by, and I put my thumb in the air for hitch-hiking, but the car seemed to be already full and did not stop. Somebody looked at me through the rear window, but the glass reflected, and I could not clearly perceive the face. Wasn't that Moni?

A bit later a tourist couple took me to Vueltas. High waves hit the shore, and I could already imagine how it must look like at the Playa del Inglés now, where the waves were always slightly higher than at this spot of the coast.

Phil met me with an empty bread basket and fell into my arms. "Hello, old fellow," he said, pulling me into the next bar. We had one, two or three beers, and Phil told me that Moni went with Martin to Vallehermoso.

"Who is Martin?"

"A Swiss, whom she met about three days ago, and who lives in Vallehermoso."

"Her new friend?" I asked trembling.

"Don't worry, son. I don't think it's serious!"

I rushed to the hippie beach, looking for Astrid and Daniela, eager to hear more news. They sat among the rocks with some others and were delighted to see me.

"Tell me about your odyssey then," I asked Daniela, as the initial welcome hubbub was over. And Daniela recounted how, soon after the departure, Kai tried to pull them and then the atmosphere turned sour because they did not commit. And how they both had got hepatitis and had finally gone ashore on Cape Verde, quite sick, and ended up in Germany, where they did not stay for long.

"And Moni has fallen in love with Martin now?" I asked, shaking inwardly.

"Don't really know," said Astrid, "we all love each other, right?" She looked at me and noticed a reddish rash on my neck.

"Must come from the unaccustomed sunlight." I blagged.

"Yeah, try to relax! You just come from Germany and have to get used again to a slower pace."

She was absolutely right! In Germany, everything went too fast and too hectic!

I jumped into the water and played with Janni, the eight year old son of Karen, throwing him around in the air while holding his ankles. The boy was just like his mother with long blonde hair. A pretty bright lad, who could not get enough of the pastime.

The waves at Playa del Inglés were nearly ten feet tall, and one could not even swim in them because such strong undertow and eddies were created. But a few of the local kids surfed now at the beach of Playa, where during my last stay the waves were not even three feet high. I watched them excited and thought I would get my surfboard tomorrow, which I had left at Werner's place, no matter what happened now with Moni. A stupid surfer saying went through my head, which I had read in a bar in Corralejo: "My girlfriend said, she would leave me, if I do not give up surfing. I will miss her!"

Early in the morning I went up the valley and looking for the house, in which Daniela, Astrid, Phil, Karen, Janni, the Italian Julio and Moni would stay now, and which was called by everybody "the temple". I knocked at the door of a house which fitted the description and heard Astrid yelling, the door would be open. With a trembling heart, I walked in and stood in a large living room, from which a door led into the kitchen, where one could see Astrid apparently busy with breakfast preparations. Two mattresses on the floor were arranged around a low

table, which was decorated with ashtrays and empty or half full glasses and bottles.

There she was! With still sleepy eyes! Beside her sat a guy with short dark blond hair.

"Hello," said Moni not particularly loud. I went up to her without saying a word and gave her a hug. I couldn't have said much more than a croak with my constricted throat, so I better shut up!

But it was only a ritual, more or less a lie! For her the situation was somehow embarrassing in front of Martin. She felt watched and probably wondered how much warmth she could grant me at this moment, and how she could comfort me.

More painful this encounter could hardly have been! To feel her closeness and warmth while sensing this distance at the same time! How often I had dreamed of this moment! In what beautiful colors I had imagined it! And now this caricature! I felt so stupid that I had to smile for a tiny moment and even managed to shake hands with Martin.

The atmosphere was slightly tense and we started smoking cigarettes. Fortunately, the other inhabitants appeared, and there was no need for silly small talk to fill the sacred silence. I was kindly ignored and could devote myself to self-pity and quarrelling with my fate. After a while, Moni took her coffee and disappeared in a neighboring room. When after five minutes she still did not reappear, I got up and went looking for her. A quick glance at Martin showed me that apparently he did not mind.

She sat on a bed in the neighbouring room and laid out some kind of Native American Tarot, the Medicine Wheel.

"What do the cards say?" I wanted to know and sat beside her.

"Ooch ..." she said and looked at me appraisingly, somehow mimicking a guilty conscience.

She seemed to be impressed that, after such a long time and our brief encounter, I still had such feelings for her, and she ran with her fingers through my hair soothingly. I shuddered inwardly at her touch, and could not bear it any longer, being so close to her but not close enough. Like in the world of hungry ghosts as described in the Tibetan Book of death, who have spread all kinds of delicious food in front of them, but whose mouth is too small and the neck too thin, so they can't swallow and suffer horrible tortures of hunger and thirst!

I slipped off her hand softly, stood up and left the house, happy to be back in the fresh air and sun.

Completely deaf, I stumbled all the way down to the beach. I had a lump in my stomach and the view was blurred by tears. I'd never imagined that I could suffer like this because of a girl, and was angry with the entire female gender, which could do such harm to the male! How many drunks I had met in the last years who had ended up on the streets because of a woman!

During the next days I was busy with my spleen. At times, suddenly tears ran down my cheeks, or I got into a spontaneous rage and I kicked against the next

defenseless trash can. For three days, I hardly ate or slept and was good for nothing. I even did not get my surfboard, but mostly I just sat apathetically at the beach, was staring at the sea and watching the waves. "Why?"

Finally I was so exhausted that I just wanted to sleep but that turned out to be extremely difficult. More than three or four hours were impossible.

The desire to see Moni again and the hope, the situation might change to my favour, pulled me finally back to the temple. In the current mood however, I could not change anything to my favour! While the others played music cheerfully and prepared a three-day festival kind of event, which should take place in about two weeks at Playa del Inglés, I sat quietly in my corner. Even Astrid began to tease me, and I did not know what to answer except gibberish. Embarrassed I grabbed a drum to at least occupy my hands, but produced not more than a dull knocking, tense and without any feeling. From time to time, when I incautiously had looked at Moni for too long, my whole body felt miserably. And while the others dined together joyfully, I sat in my corner with no appetite, staring uncommunicative into the void.

Becoming tired of myself and not knowing what else to do, I got finally my surfboard. Playing around in the waves brought back somehow my spirits. I met Janni, and he and two of his friends played with the board. While watching the children I realized that there was still something else than me and my self-pity.

When I came back to the house with Janni, everyone was busy again with preparations for the coming festival. Janni told Karen enthusiastically about his first attempts on the surfboard, and Karen thanked that I had taken care of him. Then she leaned over to me, put her hand gently on my knee and said in a low voice and with a smile: "If you cannot be with the people you love, love the people you're with"

I grinned back, but had inevitably to look at Moni. It was true, Moni and Martin appeared to be a nice couple. They were studying an act where Martin managed to entangle his legs behind his head and to play guitar while Moni was standing on her head and was singing.

While I was thinking and fluctuating between jealousy and goodwill, Moni suddenly started to sing:

*I dance the rainbow up to the heaven,
Dance with you around the world.
I want to say how much I miss you,
Want to say I let you go.
Gonna set you free, set you free.*

All of a sudden I became fully aware of all my selfishness. I suffered not because I loved her but because I wanted to own her! What did hinder me from loving her? Why was I not happy for her, that she was together with a nice guy who probably was fitting better than myself? The hell I'd been through, I had created myself! And then I acted up like an idiot in front of everybody!

I became ashamed.

What I felt for Moni, was no true love! An egoist like myself was not capable of love! I should thank God for this lesson, maybe there was still hope for an idiot like me!

A burden fell off my shoulders and the black clouds were blown away, well, most of them. And when dinner was served, I had an appetite once again.

"Seems you're getting better," noticed Daniela, when she saw my face. She was really a good friend!

"Yes, thanks! At last!"

"We could make a sweat lodge at the festival," someone proposed.

"I can do that," I said.

"You? I thought you wanted to go diving in Egypt," asked Astrid.

"I've changed my mind. Am glad to be here, and your festival I do not like to miss!"

A day before the festival, I started looking for suitable rods and building the basic design of the Inipi while others were cleaning up the place and made further preparations. Sabine later brought blankets with her car, which I used as a tarpaulin to cover the rods, and wood for the big fire, in which the stones would be heated. Karsten showed me those who were most suitable for this because they would not explode due to any air or water pockets: burned-out lava.

I had a lot of fun and was very pleased when in the evening, while a full moon was rising, three to four

meters high flames heated the stones bright red and the whole action became a complete success, largely because of the British shaman Vito, who conducted the ritual in the sweat lodge, by which the sweating became a mystical journey. And also because of the subsequent full moon bath in the cold surf of the Atlantic. The twinkling stars shone above us, a gentle breeze blew across the sea, the dark cliffs of La Gomera were rising in the background, a saxophone and a variety of other instruments appeared, and the atmosphere was just awesome!

Hey Joe

One day I was sitting with a few people and my surfboard on the Playa del Inglés. The waves, however, were more than 10 feet high and it was impossible to surf. They were crashing down furiously, creating enormous undertows and eddies. I was talking to Peter about UFOs, which he believed did exist and which he supposedly had seen hovering above Hierro, the neighbouring island. On this side of the shore, the sandy beach gradually turned into rocks.

Suddenly, I saw to my surprise one of the tourist bathers, who had the gumption to swim a little further towards the waves, floating past in front of us. Peter also saw him and immediately jumped up.

"Get out of the water, you are drifting towards the rocks," he shouted.

The man turned around and saw with horror that behind him was already rocky shore where the sea spray clapped angrily against. Desperately he tried to swim against the current and began to call for help. Half the beach now became aware of the man, and a woman began to yell hysterically. "My husband, my husband" She ran into the water, but was immediately pulled off her legs by the spray and had to be held by someone because she completely got carried away.

The man had realized now that no one could help him and remained calm after his initial panic. He seemed to be a good swimmer and figured out that he had no chance of getting safely through the rocks, although

some idiots were shouting, he should try it. He probably was waiting for an opportune moment to dive through the waves, but one giant wave after another broke in front of him and up to three meters high mountains of spray were gushing over him.

I could no longer stand idly and just watching. With my board I was probably the only one who could help him. There was no point in trying to reach him, but maybe I could manage to get through the waves, and when the man did the same, I could offer him my surfboard as lifebuoy.

"If you drown, God will reward you," I thought and jumped into my suit, strapped the leash of the board to my foot, and went as far as possible to the other side of the beach, in order to have time before the current drove me in front of the rocks. I started paddling, but managed only to get close to the roaring mouth of the crusher. The spray swept me off the board, and because one does not rise within the foam due its high air content, it took too long each time to get my board back under me and to continue paddling. In addition I was turned upside down so violently, that I could barely feel where top and bottom was. Soon I realized that it was impossible to get through with the board and turned back.

Meanwhile, however, there were already the first rocks between me and the beach. I clung to the board with difficulty and shot with the spray towards the shore. A rock appeared before me. I closed my eyes and thought of God. Miraculously I missed it and finally reached the beach, puffing and exhausted.

But the man had managed to reach the open sea, and was lucky enough that a fishing boat passed by and pulled him out of the water, pale as he was.

"Glad you came out!" I heard Gerret.

"The first time that I've been afraid of the sea," I said while lying down on the warm sand. It took a while to digest the experience. One thing did make me really happy: that I was thinking of God at the crucial moment!

I started a dive course in Playa de Santiago. The first four trials took place in the pool of the only large hotel that existed on Gomera, where they taught us several basic techniques. Then we had the first open water dive. We went down to 14m depth, and initially it was an adventurous feeling to immerse so deeply in this foreign element.

But soon I got annoyed about the whole stuff around me, the glasses, the suit, the weight belt, the jacket, the tank, the plastic piece in my mouth and the bubbling. The idea to run this as a job, with a couple of tourists in tow, was not very appealing. It was too costly and did not meet my philosophy of "less is more!"

Then I realized that I actually had come to Gomera only because of Moni. When I first came to Gomera, a different atmosphere had prevailed. The festival had been prepared, and there had been a good community. But that fell apart now.

A wave smashed at the rocky shore and gave the necessary stimulus.

I had a passport now! And I had some money!

"I'm leaving," I told myself, "I'm going to Nias! I still have four months for training until the season starts and the ten-meter waves show up!"

Cheerfully I went back to the temple.

Somebody called Habu taught me, "Hey Joe" on the guitar and I tried for an hour until Karen suddenly started to sing: "Hey, hey, Klaus, where you go with that surfboard in your hand? Hey, hey, Klaus, where you go with that surfboard in your hand?"

„I'm goin' down to Nias, Karen, I wanna ride on big big waves," I sang back, however got out of the rhythm and Janni began to scream: "I also wanna go to Nias, mummy. Let's go together!"

It turned out that Moni was pregnant, and somehow I was glad that I made the decision to leave already before I knew about that. I remembered my conversation with Hans, and how the protagonist could not live together with his beloved one. Somehow I felt like being him and Moni being my Shekinah.

My plan was to work for a while in Germany in order to have a small financial cushion with which I was able to conduct some kind of trade in Southeast Asia. A new lesson in the school of life, I thought! Phil had told me how he had bought batik shirts on Bali and then sold them again on Ko Samui in Thailand. I thought I could do something similar although I could still recall a failed deal with blue sapphires, which I had bought in Bangkok and tried to sell in Australia. I had never been a good businessman, but what else one could do down there to make ends meet? The tourist visa for Indonesia was only

valid for two months and then one had to leave the country again. I needed money for the travel expenses!

Again I started assembling rails because there was no job else with which I could earn so much money. This time I worked in a juice factory. But soon it started to snow and the whole site was under water. My colleague got so mad about it that he stopped construction after four days. "Next week we continue," he growled, and I began to reflect and got a guilty conscience. A dirty job that was! Seeing these huge high-bay storages ruining the landscape, that was exactly quite the opposite of what I wanted to do!

By chance, I saw in a travel agency offers for one-way tickets, and I got an idea. My passport was going to expire in about six months. Very soon they would not allow me to enter Indonesia anymore. So I had two choices: go to work and participate in the general madness and get a new passport, or else leave right now, with little money, an expiring passport and no return flight, but with a good conscience!

I opted for the good conscience!

No Name bookshop

The aircraft prepared for landing and I saw palm trees, houses and the dome of a giant mosque down below. The bus took me in sticky heat to Kuala Lumpur, where things were pretty hectic, so I hurried to catch the first bus to Penang. I arrived in the middle of the night. The streets were deserted save for a lonely vendor where I got coke with ice in a plastic bag and pastries. The covered parking area of an office building offered me and three Malays protection from a torrential tropical downpour.

I began to write letters, including one to Moni, almost as a farewell. How I missed her and wished, fate would have decided otherwise, while at the same time I knew, everything happened for a reason and it was surely the best for everyone. Sometimes it is just hard to accept God's decisions! It all felt so unreal under this roof, the rain pooring down, the Malays peacefully asleep - myself just coming from Germany, thinking about Moni on Gomerra - was life a dream?

I wrote a few more letters to a couple of people I still had to say anything, because when going to Indonesia tomorrow, I did not want to look back anymore. I did not plan to return.

It took a few hours by speedboat to Medan. Upon entry a customs officer noticed, that I was actually a day too late, because the passport would be no longer valid for six months now. She wanted to know whether I possess a return ticket.

"No, but enough money to buy one," I replied. One thing was evident, I would not be allowed to enter Indonesia a second time with this passport!

In the evening, I caught the bus to Prapat and wondered how quickly I arrived at Lake Toba. Previously the trip had been nearly three times that long, but nine years ago these well-paved roads did not exist yet. And in this bus I had even enough space for my long legs.

The boat took me to Tomok on Samosir Island in the middle of the lake. It had become busy and noisy here, so I left quickly and followed the road north along the shore. The scenery was as beautiful as before, except on the banks, where there were now many more bungalows. The lush vegetation and the bright green of the rice terraces were still the same, but the peace and the mysterious atmosphere of the past were gone.

A young man with decrepit motorbike stopped beside me and asked in English, where I would be heading to.

"To Tuk-Tuk Timbul," I replied.

"You have walked too far. Here is already Ambarita!"

"Really? Never mind! I enjoy walking around the lake."

"Do you like to come with me? I have a small house for rent."

"Okay, why not? I can take a look!"

We sped noisily down the road, past curious water buffalos and screaming children, and arrived at the "No Name Bookshop," a newly built house in a western

design. But behind it, at the lake shore, there was a big old Batak house with traditional roof. The palm leaves however had been replaced by corrugated sheet iron. The house was quite cozy and the shore had sandy beach. No tourists here!

When my host noticed that I liked the place, he asked me how much I wanted to pay for the hut. I named a price, and he was satisfied.



The Batak house had a kind of veranda on the first floor from which one could look into the green hinterland and the mountains of Samosir. After a bath and a delicious meal we sat there, and my host, who had introduced himself as Hendri, took out from hiding place below the roof nice smelling marihuana and prepared a big joint.

"My wife may not find out," he explained, when I wondered about this secrecy.

"Don't you think it would be better to tell her? If you like, I'll talk with her and tell her that there is nothing wrong with it in my opinion. Eventually she will find out anyway, and then she does not trust you anymore. Then she may think you are concealing other things as well." But Hendri seemed not to like the idea very much.

The meals I usually had in the house with Hendri, his young wife and the two boys, who lived there and helped with the house work. One of them went still to school, and when I made friends with him, the boy told me that his father was dead and his mother very poor. Shyly he asked me whether I would like to go with him to his school and pay the fees for two months.

"How much is that?"

"3000 rupiah a month."

"Well, of course!"

So I went the next morning to Ambarita, but Eppy was still in his classroom. While waiting for him, I had a conversation with some friendly teachers and learned that an Indonesian teacher earned about 50, - dollars a month and had to feed a whole family therewith.

"Couldn't you pay the school fees for six months," asked the English teacher. "Eppy's mother is very poor indeed and has to sustain even more children."

Of course I did! It was not even \$ 4.00! If they'd known what I had earned in just four days assembling rails! The same they earned in a year! If everything was so cheap for me, for how much did the developed countries buy their raw materials in the third world

then? That colonialism was abolished appeared to be a fairy-tale!

Eppy was incredibly happy about the news and invited me to the village of his mother. Together we went to the mountains of Samosir. The rainforest was no more, just bushy vegetation was left. Only in some deep valleys, one could still see some of the ancient giant trees, which conveyed a rough idea how it formerly had looked like.

The last ten miles we had to walk, and the farther we moved away from the road, the more we seemed to go back in time. When we finally reached the village, the houses had no longer TV antennas but the traditional palm leaves covered roofs. The village street was a dirty sludge. Pigs and chickens roamed freely, and children came running and surrounded us curiously. Obviously I was one of the few white men they ever had seen.

A skinny old man waved and kindly invited us to his house. The news of our arrival spread quickly, and soon the room was filled with people and the entrance blocked by an excited crowd of children. Coffee was served, and I introduced myself to the villagers with the few words of Indonesian I had learned so far. There was much laughter, and the men smoked one cigarette after another. About fifty people were watching my every move. My nose was admired and the color of my skin. Their skin would be dirty, they said, and rubbed at their arms. Eppy had to translate, I'd like brown skin, which they noted happily. They listened like spellbound, when I told them, in Winter there would be ice and snow in Germany, and the trees would have no leaves then. They

wanted to know if there would be a technique that prevented the nose from growing in breadth. I was pleased that my big nose finally got its well earned admiration and told them, God had arranged it that way, no special measures would be necessary. When the meal was served, the little house emptied and most of the children were chased away. Everyone was glad to see that the guest liked the food and that he seemed to feel at home here.

I met Eppys mother in her old Batak house where we spent the night. Before dawn I woke up. A couple of pigs and a rooster were already busy underneath the house. In the next room, I heard the mother sobbing while reciting her prayers. The good woman! She was so happy when she heard the school fees would have been paid! A bit strange and slightly embarrassing for me that someone got so excited about my few dollars!

Once in a while, tourists came to the bookstore and bought or borrowed books. One day three Germans showed up, and Hendri asked them if they would not like to try magic mushrooms. But the Germans were reluctant and timid, so I interfered and tried to encourage them.

"A real specialty you have to try," I said, like selling Gofio balls. Little business for Hendri and perhaps a good experience for them because the mushrooms were really magical! "I'm going to join you," I convinced them and so we ordered four mushroom omelets for the next day.

The omelets were tasty but had little effect. Disappointed, we took a walk at the lake and finally ended in my hut. Hendri was sorry for the bad effect and apologized himself by rolling one joint after another.

"He surely did not want to take advantage but was just careful with people who do not know the effect," I said in German, in order that Hendri could not understand.

"It's okay, I'm stoned enough," answered one of the three while gazing with tiny little eyes on the calm waters of the lake.

Two days later, I accompanied the other boy, who stayed in Hendri's house, looking for mushrooms. I had told him that I wanted to buy an omelet but that the boy should show me where he got the mushrooms from and how much he would take for preparing one. It turned out that the mushrooms were quite easy to find if you knew the good places where there was enough moisture and buffalo dirt. We gathered two handfuls, while being watched by the snooping buffalos.

I ordered the omelet for lunch the next day, reminding the boy once again that I would like to watch the preparation. But the boy replied soothingly: "When the mushrooms do not work properly, you need not to pay the omelet!"

The next day he called me: "Omelet is ready!"

"Did not I tell you I wanted to watch the preparation," I queried sourly. The boy looked hurt, and I felt sorry for

the manner I had spoken to him, which he apparently was not used to.

"How much did you take?" I asked somewhat softer.

"A handful," said the boy and made a vague gesture with his hand.

"Well, enjoy your meal! May God bless you with knowledge," I said to myself.

After ten minutes already, I felt the first effects, and figured out that would become a rough ride, as it normally takes more than half an hour before one feels anything. I went off at once to look for a quiet and nice place somewhere in nature where I was unobserved. It was very hot and humid, and the effect of the mushrooms made it even worse. As if the ozone hole would have been directly above me!

I took a rest in the shade of a tree, but people were staring at me and I continued to follow the road along the lake. The effect became stronger and I got panic: an overdose! The boy wanted to make sure that the mushrooms were strong enough and that he gets the money, but had no idea of the dosage!

I had to get out of the sun and find a place without people, because I was already completely incapable of communication and did not want to be considered crazy. The whole environment had become like a giant esophagus, ready to devour me. With difficulty I saw a path that led up a hill and managed to reach some terraces with fruit trees. Underneath one of the trees I dropped cross-legged, trying to calm myself. I would

have loved to take off my heavy boots but was not able anymore. I heard a voice from afar: "Ticket paid?" Another voice replied with a slight echo: "Yes, he may pass!"

*"Each ordination one receives; the deity itself it is, which gives it to the initiate, the soul of the mystic being the female half. The sacred marriage is a mystical conversion ... which man will only experience in a state of extreme pathic, a state that appears to the normal conscience as its destruction and therefore as death ..."*¹¹

Let go of everything ... do not try to understand anything and do not hold on anything ... let it go ... endure the pain, do not try to escape! There is no escape! Look it in the eye! Focus on the voice that urges you to trust and to stay calm ... the abyss ... the hungry one ... a merciless horror deep beneath you ... do not look at it ... stay calm ... do not be afraid ... hold on to nothing ... if you try to hold on anything, you will fall ... trust ... now you feel it, you get the balance ... you could balance on the top of a needle ... but be careful, you're not yet in safety ... the pure realm appears in front of you in clear light ... not yet accessible ... the last gate is still closed ... the last veil is not lifted ... it is the Shekinah ... it is Moni's voice: "So long we have been waiting! So far we have gone!"... you are not dead yet, the souls will not unite yet, you shall return ... the waiting begins ... a long waiting ... God burdens no one beyond his scope ... wait, it's almost over ...

¹¹ Ludwig Klages, *Der kosmogonische Eros*

With outstretched wings I performed a soft landing, but the eyes I still kept closed for a while because I knew instinctively that when I opened them, it would be similarly unpleasant for me like for a newborn that has to leave the warm womb of its mother.

I heard voices saying "Hello". Must be a few kids wondering about this European who was sitting underneath this tree for hours, and did not even get up in the pouring rain. Exhausted, I opened my eyes and was shocked about the ugliness of this world. Back in Samsara, back in the world of change!

"Hello" again! When I untied my legs, I managed to turn my head slowly, even though I was still dizzy, and saw three small children and a woman, who observed me curiously from a distance. I smiled at them and raised my arm gently for greeting, as if I had to get accustomed again to using body parts. They waved back, and the smallest child cried again hello and then started to talk to me in Indonesian while the woman went away. I thanked God that I did not fall! I knew now, the depths of madness were deeper than those of death!

I slowly got up from the mud, and the kids laughed at me. I grinned back and they told me some important things. I had to nod approvingly. I walked back to the road, neither looking right nor left. My wet clothes were steaming in the tropical heat. I was ashamed because of my shorts and felt naked.

"Here is your money for the omelet."

"Were strong enough, right?"

"Listen well! Leave the mushrooms to people familiar with the dosage. If you had given such an omelet to a tourist who has no experience, he surely would have gone mad!"

I gave him my white shirt, which the boy apparently desired: "Please listen to me!"

"Yeah, okay!"

Did not sound as if he was very serious. After all, it was a lot of money for him. But at least he might be more cautious in the future with the dosage. Such drugs should actually remain subject to the shaman who knows the necessary rituals and can give guidance.

Sorake-Beach

The trip to Sibolga went amazingly fast. No dramatic drive along tiny serpentine roads like the last time, no vomiting inside the bus because the passengers having too much GadoGado¹² at the last stop, and no children urinating in the aisle. A pleasant ride on well paved roads.

There was a daily boat to Telukdalam. I was happy to get back to the place that I remembered so often during the past, and which had been the most amazing place I could imagine.

Not long ago, there had been still human sacrifices on this island, and when I was walking along the beach nine years ago, I sometimes had the feeling there could burst cannibals out of the palm forest at any time. The atmosphere was mysterious and almost as if not from this world. A certain magic had covered everything and one was stunned when seeing the giant, thirty-foot waves. One had felt like in a dream, the surfers chasing through the huge wave pipes like in a trance.

But as expected, the dream was gone, the bright rationalist disenchantment had destroyed the dark mysticism. A road ran all the way around the bay. There were numbered entrances to the beach, "Gate 19" one could read on a sign board for example. Guest houses lined up one after the other. In comparison to European standards of course one could still call it heavenly. Only

¹² Vegetable salad with peanut sauce

the foundations of the houses were made of concrete. Otherwise they were still built with palm trunks and rough planks.

The bungalow was almost at the end of the road. Sorake was called this part of the beach, which was interesting only for surfers because there was no sandy beach here, but the coral reef extended for about a hundred meters towards the sea, during low tide almost dry with some razor sharp tips. At the end of the reef, the waves hit the shore, and because the coast made a curve here towards the Bay of Lagundri, the waves broke on the right side first, and one could surf along them at this fantastic place for more than 100 meters!

My host showed me his broken surfboard and the scar from the wound he had got when it was broken into two pieces.

"If you pay for the repair, you can use it as often as you like," he suggested.

"But can it be fixed at all? I have heard that when the wooden bar in the middle is broken, one can throw it away."

"Sure, one can fix that!"

Probably! The Indonesians could not afford the Western throwaway mentality! The big waves, where it would be dangerous with a patched board, I could not surf yet anyway.

"I'll think about it," I said and borrowed first a board at the Losmen "Sea Breeze" for a day. A little monkey

watched me, as I got ready for surfing. It clung with its little cute fingers on to me and enjoined the petting.

The waves were not very high, five feet at most. Too boring for most surfers. Only three other people were in the water. With the very first wave I got along with quite well, but fell over when I tried to stand up on the board. But already the third time I tried it worked, and I rushed right over fifty meters along the wave. I was excited! So long I had already tried in vain, and here it worked on the very first day! What a fantastic place! Here one could learn surfing easily in two or three weeks, while on La Gomera you do not get it in half a year, because the waves were falling too steep!

I surfed until I realized that I was close to a massive sunburn, and I hardly felt my arms. Exhausted, but extremely satisfied, I let myself drift to the shore.

I saw other boards that were also patched up again and which gave actually a pretty solid impression. Certainly not for extreme conditions, but for a beginner like me surely okay.

"Okay, repair the board," I said to my host, and it turned out that the board was useful and fitting.

It had become very touristy here. Countless children and sellers appeared every day at the cottage.

"Coconut Bread!"

"You like bananas?"

"Hello mister, fresh pineapple?"

"Souvenirs? Why not? I give you good price!"

"You are sure, you do not like that nice fish?"

"Hey my friend. Take a look at this lobster! "

A boy was trading with used books, but unfortunately he had not much interesting stuff in his backpack.

"The Odysee of Odysseus, how much does it cost?"

"7000 rupiah!"

"Pretty expensive! Swapping books too?"

"Depends on what you have!"

I showed him "Gulliver's Travels" and the boy was not very enthusiastic: "Not many people read German here!"

"Well, 7000 rupiah are too much!"

"I am selling this book for someone else, and he asked for that price!"

"Then please ask him if he wants to sell for 4000 rupiah."

"Okay!"

"And the Koran, how much does it cost?"

"6000 rupiah!"

"Come back when you have lower prices."

Odysseus would have been interesting, was I not myself on an odysee? But the Koran was certainly not a relaxing bedtime reading, and otherwise he had just junk.

The next day, the boy was back.

"What about Odysseus, has it become cheaper now?"

"The man doesn't want to sell the book anymore."

"Well, bad luck then!"

"Will you not rather buy the Koran?"

"Nope, I think not!"

"5000 and you give me your book!"

"What? My book is worth only a 1000 Rupiahs?"

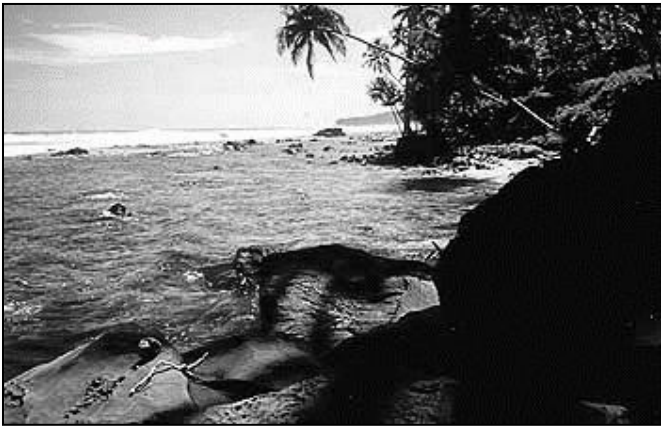
"Nobody reads something like this here. Come on, please."

"You will certainly become a successful businessman," I said when I gave him the book and the money. The boy grinned and left, and I stood there with an English translation of the Koran I actually was not particularly interested in. A traveler must have brought in from India.

Every morning at dawn I went along the coast to a fairly secluded spot where I had marked with coconut shells a circle as meditation place. For over an hour I sat there and concentrated on my breathing, although mosquitoes began to pester me, and the legs starting aching after half an hour. The memory of the "flight" was still very much alive, and meditation was more important to me even than surfing, though I felt the addiction already.

The waves were now often too big for me. The bigger they were, the faster one had to surf along to avoid being caught by the spray. If one fell, one was driven back quite

far and had to fight against the spray of the waves again, a very tiresome action. No wonder, surfers were such athletes! Now, that for most surfers the fun just started, I often had to quit. There were also certain 'traffic rules' in order that only one surfer took a wave at a time, which was the one closest where the wave was breaking. That too made it difficult to catch one because as a beginner one needed more time to get on the board and thus did not like to be too close to where the wave was breaking. Actually the waves were not that big yet. It was April now, the biggest waves showed up from Juli to September.



The younger brother of my host got me some magic mushrooms. They looked magical indeed, being served on a large tropical leaf. Like charged with a special energy! I went to my meditation place, this time with long pants and no shoes, said a prayer and then sat down cross-legged and tried to relax.

The tide rose slowly. The mushrooms were not as strong as the last time. I could have kept myself on the ground, if I had wanted, simply by just keeping my eyes open. But I knew now how to fly, and in fact it did not need a big inducement once one had lost the fear of loosing the ground. One just needed to let go!

“The important for us is that sorcerers and shamans here below and as often as they want can realize the “emergence” from the body, thus realizing death, which alone can transform the rest of mankind in “birds”. Shamans and sorcerers may enjoy the state of “souls,” the state of the “disincarnated,” which the Profane can only reach at the moment of his death.”¹³

Soon you enter the realm where the pain receives you. But you know that this pain is nothing else than your evil deeds you committed, which you encounter in a different form now. Since you have lost the fear and can face it, you realize this indescribable as your ego which dissolves and thereby inflicts this pain: your vanity, your greed, your lack of love and all your wickedness. You have sinned to the extent in which you have followed the image in the mirror, your false self, thereby becoming a traitor to your own true self. You have sinned to the extent in which you have denied the existence of God! It is nothing strange or foreign which threatens and tortures you now. Therefore you do not have to be afraid, and therefore you can not escape it. You have to look at the truth, no matter how bitter it might be. You have to

¹³ Prof. Mircea Eliade, Shamanism and Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy

let go of everything, all that is not God. To the extent you have glorified yourself before, to exactly this extent you will now be humiliated. The more you have served your ego and adorned it with possessions, knowledge, beauty, strength and power, with all that had served not God but selfishness, it will burn! You have to give up now everything and hold on to nothing, even believe in nothing except in God! A merciful God who forgives the mistakes and gives you the strenght to endure the cleaning. Do you believe and repent not, you will consider the pain as something alien and you will try to escape. The more you resist and the more you try to deny, the greater the fear. The greater the fear, the greater the pain, and the more difficult to understand these horrors as projections of your own true self¹⁴!

The necessity of faith! Verily I knew that I would have to face truth and my Creator and that I will be judged! Being judged means: at this crossroads the direction is set, and there are only two alternatives: Escape from your true self and God, or the confession of guilt and your remorse and acceptance of punishment. Depending on your faith you will be drawn to the one area or the other; you are going to recognize the pain as projections of your own self or you want to flee it. Therefore it is important that you have won faith and have been warned before

¹⁴ "A questioner questioned concerning the doom about to fall upon the disbelievers, which none can repel, From Allah, Lord of the Ascending Stairways. [Whereby] the angels and the Spirit ascend unto Him in a Day whereof the span is fifty thousand years. But nay! For lo! It is the fire of hell. Eager to roast. It calleth him who turned and fled [from truth]. (Sure 70.1-4,15-17)

you reach the crossroads! Fear not! Pray to God and focus all your desire on Him! Recognize the evil within yourself and repent! But do not be driven away by the feeling of regret. The pain may only cleanse you, but may not carry you away. The closer you get to the Divine, the hotter the flame that burns away all impurities. God, the truth, the true being, the only true reality, the law, will burn the very last remnants of every lie. And the more you have worshipped your false ego, the more you will have to suffer now! But with the pain grows your purity that makes you stand the pain! You can even enjoy the pain and welcome him, because he brings you freedom!

Once all impurities are burned out, the pain has centered you and led yourself to your midst. You can balance now on the tip of a needle and thus will be able to cross the abyss, the abyss of being. Below you the gorge will open up itself, the hungry one: negation, which remains in existence: hell! Suffering in the spiritual world! Negation of the existence of God! For the souls who denied and wanted to escape from their true self, because they did not recognize it and feared it! For those who clutched to their ego and worshipped it instead of God! The mirror image of God, the reflection of light: the fire! Negation, which remains in existence! This abyss you will see. Just for the notion of this horror deep below you, there exists no real symbolism.

Now you balance on the thin edge of the mirror. At the end of this narrow ridge, the transmutation is complete. The soul enters the realm of true being! The mirror image is destroyed! There will be nothing external, nothing strange, nothing that could cause fear or pain!

All images have been dissolved, and the sphere of pure concord is reached! Returned to the place from where the soul had left because of its disobedience, because it aspired knowledge, because it looked into the mirror. Here now is the answer to all questions: There is no god but God!

Eventually, I heard voices. But I knew, I may not open my eyes. Should I focus my concentration on the mirror, I'd probably lose the balance and fall.

Stay calm! Nothing will happen, as long as you do not move! Do not pay attention! Just do not look! Just ignore it!

The long waiting began ... The long painful descent ... Then it was done, and I slowly opened my eyes. Again, I was startled by the ugliness of this world, even though I was at one of the most beautiful places on Earth. It was disgusting to be back in my body.

My host suddenly appeared.

"How do you feel?" He asked anxiously.

"I'm okay! Why do you ask? "

"People came and told me you were here and you were sick or you'd have a poisoning, because you would not have answered them. And a Japanese had an accident."

"A Japanese?"

"Yes, come on, get up! He is over there."

He pulled me up by the arm, and I followed still slightly dizzy. Not thirty yards away was a surfer, pale with pain, and about a dozen people stood around him. Some had built a stretcher with sticks and lifted him up.

"The hip or the thigh is broken!"

I looked at the sea and I shuddered at the sight of the waves.

How could one surf here? Was he completely insane?

I have had immense luck! A miracle that all those people had left me alone! Otherwise I might have fallen too, and that would have been worse than a broken bone!

It was a stormy day and it was raining. The water was dark green, and an occasional lightning flashed down. The palm trees were groaning under the pressure of the wind, and the waves had white foam. Besides myself, there were only two other surfers out there, two friends of the unfortunate Japanese. It was dreadfully exciting to surf in such weather, and we cheered each time one of us caught a wave. A green mountain, whose summit was covered with foam, pushed me up and I got enough speed to swing me onto the board. What an ecstasy to surf in the rain, while the lightning flashed all around!

The wave was certainly three meters high. Behind me, where the wave broke, was the growling thunder of the impacting water. The wave took me a long way, and suddenly I sensed the water arching above me. A brief moment only, because I was already at the spot where the wave coiled in, and I was thrown together with the

foam onto the coral reef. I was lucky, nothing happened!
Nonetheless I should have get out of the wave earlier.

But I had done it! A brief moment I had dreamed so
long for! I had been in the tube!

Prahu

Finally I got enough of the tourist scene of Lagundri. And when I heard of a group of islands where one could surf too, but where one would have to cook for oneself, my decision was made. The ferry went the next day, and I packed up my things.

At the harbour I met an Australian and a New Zealander, both heavily loaded with two surfboards and food for ten days.

"Is there nothing to buy on Tello," I asked.

"No idea! They told us that we should get provision here already."

Their names were Thomas and Gerry.

"Hundred and one island are awaiting us, just below the equator ..."

Tello was a small town whose significance resulted from the fact that here was the ferry landing place and a trading center with several stores. We hired two becak (bicycle taxis), which took us a couple of kilometers along the coast. The becak driver of the two surfers however, was soon exhausted because of the heavy baggage and the two strong guys, and so Thomas switched seats with the driver while children came running from the huts located at the side of the road and shouting "Hello mister!"

Finally we stopped at a school. Behind the school were canoes at the beach. Some locals were willing to

bring us to the neighboring island, which was about a kilometer away and looked from the distance like almost any coral island: white sandy beach with coconut palm trees, surrounded by coral reef.

There were a few makeshift huts for rent, sharing a kind of kitchen with fireplace, where a few blackened pots hung. An elfin Japanese was the moment the only guest on the island. Gerry and Thomas interviewed him directly about the good surf spots and set off immediately with their boards, but came back disappointed already after just an hour because the waves were too small.

I made myself comfortable on the porch of my cottage and read the translation of the Koran, which began to fascinate me more and more. The style I had to get used to, but the power of the language was really inspiring.

Then We caused Our messengers to follow in their footsteps; and We caused Jesus, son of Mary, to follow, and gave him the Gospel, and placed compassion and mercy in the hearts of those who followed him. But monasticism they invented - We ordained it not for them - only seeking Allah's pleasure, and they observed it not with right observance. So We give those of them who believe their reward, but many of them are evil-livers. O ye who believe! Be mindful of your duty to Allah and put faith in His messenger. He will give you twofold of His mercy and will appoint for you a light wherein ye shall walk, and will forgive you. Allah is Forgiving, Merciful ... Know that the life of the world is only play, and idle talk,

and pageantry, and boasting among you ... a matter of illusion.

Gerry was getting impatient after three days because there were still no waves, while Thomas was able to occupy himself also with other things besides surfing. We philosophized often together and he told me about his time as a Buddhist monk in New Zealand. We borrowed a prahu (dugout canoe) and went fishing at the reef. Thomas was cleverer than me because I caught only one fish, but a beautiful yellow one. I felt sorry, when it lied gasping on the floor of the prahu in a pitiful manner, and I was close to throwing it back into the water. But when it was frying in the pan later on and spread incredibly good fragrance, my pity was gone.

Gerry had a mask and a snorkel, and we were all amazed by the underwater world. What colors and forms nature had designed here was simply indescribable. Shoals of colorful fish twirled through the turquoise water, fantastic coral mountains harbored all sorts of shellfish and strange unknown creatures.

When I once walked around the island, which one could do in an hour, I saw prahus with their colorful sails heading towards the horizon and one of the numerous islands. I remembered that in three weeks my visa would expire. And even here in this nailed together hut they had to register my details and wanted to know when I had come to Indonesia! If I would have a sailing prahu like those ones, I maybe could still reach a far out place where no official would find me. After all, there were over a hundred islands around. I could fish and get coconuts, and collect rain water with a foil...

A couple of guys from a nearby fishing village came for a visit from time to time in order to learn English or just ogle the whites. I asked them if they knew where one could buy a prahu and how much it would cost. A boy named Jono volunteered to go with me together to Tello and to look for a boat. The next day we paddled the ten miles to Tello, where I inspected a few canoes. The first one was repaired and did not look reassuring; the second was too big, so it would be difficult to steer against a strong wind by oneself, and the third seemed a little small, but looked very well made.

"What do you think, Jono?" I asked.

"It looks pretty!"

"Not too small?"

Jono shrugged. I negotiated the price down to 70,000 rupiah and got even paddle included. Which, as it turned out later, was somewhat hasty, because when I got with my eighty kilos into the boat, it almost drowned. I hardly dared to stir, because the water was about to spill over the side, and so I floated helpless further and further away from the shore, while the crowd of Indonesians, who had witnessed the sale, burst out in laughter. Finally, I managed to maneuver the boat back, but had a wet butt already and was not in a particularly good mood. Why did I idiot not try the prahu before buying?

"You take the big prahu, I paddle back with the little one," suggested Jono.

"That doesn't help me! I need to return the boat!"

"The man is certainly gone already."

"Then we have to find him! Or someone else who takes the small one for a larger in payment. "

But Jono made no move to get out of the boat and obviously wanted to disappear soon, because the situation was embarrassing for him in front of his countrymen. "You liked the boat and you bought it!"

"And you wanted to advise me on the purchase and liked it too! But if you want to leave, no problem, I will manage alone then," I said in a not particular kind manner. Jono jumped out of the prahu and went away as looking for the man, but was back after a surprisingly short time. "The man is gone! That's how we do it: You get the big prahu and I take the little one, we swap!"

"If you really want to do that! I can still give you some money on top."

"We'll talk about that later! Let's go now ..."

On the way back I was quite pleased, because the prahu I was sitting in, suited me very well. It even had a device for a mast. After a while Jono said: "I still have to talk to my brother. The boat belongs to both of us", which made me surprise a bit. The brother decided then that I had to pay another 100,000 rupiah in addition, what seemed a bit expensive, but the brother did not want to trade down. Never mind, I liked the boat!

I rowed again to Tello and bought a few things: plastic wrap, yarn and rope for sailing, paint and brushes, water canister, ax, nails, saws, fuel, pot and pan, oil, rice, flour, sugar, tea, fish hooks - and cord, a special soft rope in order to climb the coconut trees, plates and cutlery, a

hat and other odds and ends. While I shopped, I always had many observers and onlookers around me who accompanied me to my prahu, which I had tied to a designated bar like the Cowboys did with their horses. I felt a little uncomfortable because I wanted to avoid many people becoming aware of me and becoming the subject of chatter. When I took off, a few girls stretched their heads out of the windows, waved at me and shouted, "Cinta padamu¹⁵" Then they started to giggle and quickly hid in the house again.

The man, who often got me kelapa muda¹⁶ from the trees, said he could make me a sail, and I ordered two new outrigger as well, because the old ones appeared to be wobbly. Soon the man presented me proudly the 6 sqm large blue plastic sail. The man explained to me how to use it, and I was once again surprised how the Indonesians could improvise so well with simple means. Compared to a proper sailboat of course, it was a bit complicated and above all, a shaky act, to stretch the sail, but it worked.

Meanwhile, leaks were sealed with a special blend of an undefined black powder and gasoline and the boat painted sky blue. The outriggers were finished too, and while the color and the mixture had to dry for two days, I pondered on a name for the boat. At first I wanted to call it "Raiden" but then decided for "Vairocana" after the Buddha, who could guide one over the abyss of the

¹⁵ I love you!

¹⁶ Young Coconut, for drinking.

Bardo and whose color matched the sky blue of the prahu.

In the evening, the Japanese Tomo invited me and two other guests for dinner. Bob and Eric, two South Africans, who had replaced Thomas and Gerry, spread out a map on the table. The whole archipelago with its hundreds of islands was shown in exact details, including water depths. Tomo, who had just returned from India, lightened a big joint, bent over the map and whistled.

"Every reef is shown," he said admiringly.

"A friend of mine works as a geographer," said Eric, while throwing his long black hair over his shoulder. "We should hire a boat for three days and check out the most promising spots!"

At the bottom edge of the map a piece of land was still visible.

"Down here, is that Siberut?" I asked.

"Yes, not that far away," confirmed Eric.

The grand premiere was held the next day. A light breeze was blowing and promised pleasant sailing weather. I rowed away a bit from the shore and then tried to stretch the sail. It was not so easy, but when I had it done, and the sail was mounted correctly, I drifted amazingly fast on the water. When the wind freshened, I had to lean far to one side to keep the boat balanced, and the outriggers over water. Rapid turning maneuvers however were unmanageable because one could not rotate the yard and the tack parrel around the mast like one could on a normal sailing boat, and one had to let

down the sail a bit first and then turn it and pull it up again. Since the dugout had no sword, one experienced also a notable lateral drift. Thus, sailing against the wind was impossible, and one rather let the sail down and paddled against the wind.

There were many little tricks to learn, and it took some time until I felt reasonably confident handling the boat and also learned the necessary knots to tie the sail quickly to the cross bar of the outriggers and quickly untie them again; or to figure out for example how to stay on course, while paddling on one side only, which required a slight rotation of the paddle during the strike.

Finally came the day when I filled the water cans at the well and stored my stuff in the prahu. Tomo and two Indonesians went with me to the beach, gave my boat a little push and wished me farewell.

Vairocana

There was no wind, so I had to paddle the two kilometers to the opposite island. Fishermen showed me a natural channel that led past mangrove-covered shores, and finally culminated in a strait between two large islands. On both sides there arose jungle and exotic bird cries rang through the air. Gradually a light breeze began to blow, and I could spread the sail and passed slowly between the two islands. Eventually, the bank gave way and I saw a few huts where children were playing and a few prahus which anchored in the turquoise waters ahead. Before me, about ten kilometers away, rose a vast island, which stretched as far as the distant horizon. Before it lay several small coral islands covered with coconut trees, and one could see colorful triangular sails scattered at sea.

I steered obliquely towards the big island, heading slightly to the south. Once I got out of the slipstream of the two islands behind me, my prahu started piercing with a leisurely pace through the water. I shouted for joy and felt suddenly very free and was quite ready for another adventure. Had I not wished for a sailboat?

Sometimes swarms of small fish jumped out of the water at the side of my boat, which in turn were chased by some larger ones. At the far horizon one could see several smaller islands and reefs where the waves were breaking with white foam. The color of the water changed into a dark blue while the clouds glowed purple.

A larger fishing boat passed by a hundred yards, but I just covered my face with the straw hat and thus had nearly an equally perfect cover as with my Djellabah in Morocco.

In the evening, I discovered a small island several kilometers away and headed for it. When I finally arrived, there was no wind anymore and the sun had set blood red between giant anvil clouds. On the eastern side of the island I saw smoke rising above the palm trees and considered for a moment, if I was in the mood for company, but decided to go ashore rather on the northern side. Although the waves were not very high, it turned out to be risky to try it here at the reef. I was thrown from a breaking wave onto the three feet deeper water surface of the reef, and the prahu crushed noisily a few coral spikes. But I was lucky, and nothing happened to the boat. I drifted slowly over the shallow water of the reef towards the white beach.

Pretty exhausted from the long day's ride and the strong sunlight, I dragged my luggage under the palm trees, emptied out the water that had seeped into the prahu with the bottom of an old water bucket, and pulled the prahu up the beach as far as I could and tied it to two palm trees. With some plastic wrap and the fabric of a sarong I prepared the sleeping place. The rice that I had cooked the night before and packed in plastic bags, tasted already slightly sour, but because of hunger and lack of alternatives I was not picky.

During the night I woke up. Wind had come up. Waves beat against the boat and pushed it against the palm tree. While I was trying to bring the boat further up

onto the beach, lightnings thundered around me, and finally it started pouring. A look at the ocean told me that I never wanted to be surprised by a storm at sea! Hard to believe that one could survive it in a small prahu!

I crawled under my plastic sheet, although I was already soaked to the bone anyway, and waited impatiently for the morning. But when it became brighter, the wind had increased only in intensity, and all around me coconuts smashed down. According to statistics, about three thousand people each year were killed by coconuts worldwide! Should I be one of the lucky survivors, I would have at least something to eat because lighting a fire and cooking was impossible!

At noon the rain finally ceased. I collected a bunch of nuts and tried to open one with the hatchet, which proved to be more challenging than expected because the fibrous outer shell was hard to dismantle. After the nut meal, I examined my luggage and it turned out that some of the stuff got wet for I had stored it too careless.

Suddenly a young man came walking along the beach and was amazed when he saw me. He invited me to his family, and I followed willingly, hoping for a hot drink. The man introduced himself as Alwin and the island as Samaleke. We reached a palm hut, under whose broad canopy sat a likeable old man and a lean woman, and two younger boys and two girls, apparently the sisters of Alwin. All six were very surprised that a white man had reached here in a prahu, but the mother immediately sent one of his daughters into the kitchen to make coffee. I told them in my broken Indonesian, I would be a tourist and arrived here last night. They listened

curiously and offered me, when the coffee was served, the good smelling kretek¹⁷, while the old man crushed a betel nut, wrapped it in a gambir leave and put in his mouth with a grin.

The family seemed pleased to see me and invited me to stay until the weather got better again and my clothes were dried. They showed me a small room where I could sleep. I accepted the offer gratefully, fetched my luggage, gave a portion of the provisions to the mother and offered to make chapatis for all. Highly interested, they prepared me a small fire pit, and I began to cook. Together with the chapatis I served grinded coconut mixed with sugar, which used to be a side dish with sweet potatoes. Satisfied smacking faces rewarded my efforts, and the mother wanted to remember the recipe for this roti¹⁸.

The family advised me to get the prahu. The old man looked at it professionally, because as it turned out, he was a boat builder. He praised the sail, but the cross bars of the outriggers would not be strong enough. I asked the old man shyly, if he could build me new ones, and how much they would cost.

"We are Christians, you know. You do not have to pay," he said in his soft leisurely way, trudged into the forest with a cleaver and soon returned with two small trees. He took measure and peeled the bark off with a plane. Then he further shaped the rod and put it finally

¹⁷ Indonesian clove cigarettes

¹⁸ bread

over a fallen log, in order that it got a slight bend while drying. I tried to work on the other tree in the same way, but it took me at least five times longer.

The next day I went fishing with Alwin. Alwin drew one fish after another out of the water while I jealously sat idle next to him with the useless fishing line in my hand.

"What am I doing wrong?" I asked eventually.

"You have to let the bait sink to the bottom and then pull it back up a bit. If you feel that a fish nibbles at it, you pull," taught Alwin the greenhorn, and shortly afterwards it worked for me too. Red and black and dark blue fish crowded soon on the bottom of the prahu and suddenly a dolphin school surfaced close to the boat. I invited them to come a little closer, I even would donate them a fish, but they did not care about this tempting offer and moved on their way.

"The mast is also not very good, it can splinter easily," the old man told me and had already made a replacement. In addition, he manufactured a cross connection between the boat walls so that the prahu could not get teared apart in strong wind and with heavy load.

"Is it far to Siberut?" I asked at dinner as if the answer to the question would not be very interesting for me.

"It takes a day and a night," the old man said, "but there are only two favorable months, October and January, otherwise the waves are too high and one has unfavorable winds."

"You do not plan to go to Siberut," asked the mother, who treated me already as her fourth child, and apparently had smelled a rat.

"Jahu!¹⁹" I pretended.

"Ya, jauh sekali! Kamu tidak boleh pergi ke Siberut,"²⁰ said the mother firmly.

With the communication it worked better and better because I had a dictionary and started learning for some time now. Since grammar was almost missing and pronunciation of the letters was like in German, Indonesian was one of the easiest languages in the world. Relying on it, I made rapid progress. And Alwin and I soon became close friends.

"Is there not a construction by which one can fix the paddle, so I can work while sailing," I asked the old man the following morning.

"Ada²¹," replied the dear fellow and searched immediately the necessary wood. I had expected a simple design, but the old man was busy half the day with his art work until I finally had a real rudder. And on top of that I got even a new paddle because, according to the old man, the old one was too short for me. When I looked now at my tuned prahu, I was sure: This was not intended to sail only from one close-by Island to another! It was named Vairocana for a purpose!

¹⁹ Far!

²⁰ Yes, very far! You may not go to Siberut!

²¹ There is!

When parting, I gave the old man my gilded watch, a Christmas gift of my parents, with an image of the Cathedral of Aachen engraved on it. "The church has the size of three palm trees," I told the astonished family and thought that they did appreciate the watch more than I did, because, after having finished reading the Koran, I felt already more being a Muslim than a Christian. Alwin and his brother got me yet kelapa muda from the trees, so I had something to drink on my way, and Mom prepared rice dishes, which she wrapped in banana leaves. "Jangan pergi ke Siberut!" she warned me again.

I had to paddle for an hour, until I reached the strait that separated the two largest islands of the archipelago. First, I was able to use the sail, but later the wind changed, and I had to use the paddle. A dolphin surfaced and swam slowly in front of me. It got hot.

The morning dragged on. To paddle against the wind was ten times worse than cycling against it! I tormented myself forward. The banks were covered on either side with mangroves, which could give me no shade because their spiky, widely rooted trunks did not allow to slip through. It was already evening, when the channel finally started to broaden, and the mangroves made way to sandy beach with palm trees. I rowed ashore and prepared exhausted a place to sleep. But hardly had fallen the night, I was raided by countless small mosquitoes which did not care about my large-mesh mosquito net, and my life became hell. I pulled on my jeans and my sweater, which the mosquitoes could not penetrate, but in which I was sweating like in a sauna. I

put a towel over my head, but the creatures mercilessly did find even the smallest gap.

The next morning I was completely deflated, and the wind was still blowing from the south. Since I had not the slightest desire to paddle, I tried to sail against the wind, but that proved to be hopeless as the lateral drift was too strong. Finally I reached an island that was so small that you could hike around it in three minutes! There was an empty hut, and I was fairly certain that there were no mosquitoes here. I vowed to continue my journey only when the wind were blowing from a favorable direction.

During the night my food bags were attacked by hermit crabs that tore holes into the plastic so that the rice and flour came trickled out. I took my revenge the next day and crushed the shell of several of them and used them as fishing bait because fish liked hermit crab meat.

When I had found the right spot at the reef, I caught a fish in an instant, because there were plenty. I just was drifted quickly away from the good location, because I had not found anything yet that I could have used as an anchor. When someone had asked me in Tello, if there were stones in Germany, I did not understood the question at all! “Do we have stones in Germany?” Until I tried to find a stone which I could use as an anchor, then I suddenly realized: There were really no stones here! Not even one! Because these were coral islands! And dead coral chunks floated on the surface and were useless as anchor!

Minor wounds had become infected, and I suspected that the pathogen was already in the blood. I also had got eczema on Samaleke, probably due to high coffee, sugar and kretek filter consumption. And also perhaps because of the mental strain, because in two days expired my visa.

On a neighboring island, I trained to climb coconut trees, because there were none on my little island. It was quite difficult, but finally I managed to climb almost twelve feet up to the crown of a small tree. I just had not enough strength to pull myself up high enough to reach a nut. At least I succeeded to get me a few new bruises that had nothing better to do than to swiftly get infected.

But I did not want to give up and to abandon the coconuts, so I left my island again the next day. I was so eager to get hold of a nut that not before halfway to the other island I realized that the wind was blowing from the northeast. In wild haste I rowed back, mounted the mast, threw my stuff into the prahu and started going. Three times I had to turn back though because I forgot, among other things, my hat, the money and the rudder. But then it went dreamingly fast along the coast of the big island and farther south. I was surprised, when at late afternoon I already reached the end of the archipelago. On the last of the islands was a lighthouse, and at the horizon in the distance one could see more islands. That had to be Siberut! It was even in sight!

At that time I did not know, that what I considered to be islands, were the mountains of Siberut, which rose above the horizon, and that about sixty kilometers of open sea separated me from the coast. So I decided

confidently to exploit the favorable wind and to sail through the night.

As the sun sank into the sea, I burned as usual my passport. Before I crossed the abyss, I wanted to quickly get rid of my identity. On Siberut then, no one could find out where I came from. No one would suspect that I sailed all the way from Tello across the sea in a dugout! My track would get lost! Welcome to the Void! Welcome to the Undefined!

Siberut

The favorable wind did cease with the nightfall, and the sea was smooth as glass, except for the huge waves, which were so big that they wandered as mountains across the sea and created hundred meter wide valleys, thus were completely harmless to the small boat. For me that was okay! Better no wind, rather than too much or headwind! Then, I just paddled to Siberut!

Faraway lights flashed across the sky and I assumed these were the lighthouses of Sibolga and Padang. It was a clear night, and I had never seen so many stars at once. There were almost more bright spots in the sky than dark ones! Constantly meteors were rushing across the sky, and when I rowed in the dark water, thousands of little neongreen dots illuminated my paddle. Even where my prahu glided through the water, a bright strip of these dots were created. Was this phosphorescent plankton? How magical! What a night!

After three hours of paddling, a gentle breeze started finally to blow, and I was lucky, because it came from northwest, so I was able to stretch my sails. I made myself comfortable on my little rear seat, fixed the rudder and found myself dozing off. But I did not dare to really sleep. The lighthouse behind me was getting smaller, and the beacon that supposedly was shining from Padang, served me as a guide. In addition, I took different star configurations for orientation and tried to calculate their approximate orbit.

Then gradually the wind changed, and finally I had no choice but to take down the sail and to paddle again. Here and there flashes were to be seen over the sea, especially where I suspected Siberut and Sumatra. The wind was gusty, and now I had to struggle against increasing waves. The storm cloud over Siberut seemed to move towards me as the lightning came steadily closer. I got sweaty palms. The idea of getting caught here on the open sea at night by a storm let me shiver. I rowed fervently, but had the feeling that against the wind and these waves I made no progress. This went on for a long time, and gradually my nerves lay exposed. Eventually I sat back dejected and exhausted, but only gave myself a five minute break because I knew, during this time I was already driven far backwards.

I grabbed the paddle again, although doubting that here on the open seas and in this nutshell the paddling was of great use. I was close to giving up.

In desperation, I remembered how Jesus had commanded the lake and the wind to calm down, and asked myself how he would have behaved in such a situation: First he would have stayed calm. Then he would have done what is in his power and leave everything else to God!

I rowed long at the edge of exhaustion, hoping for an early dawn. The crescent moon and the morning star had now risen, but the moon did not have enough light to illuminate Siberut, and I was steering still into the dark. Thanks God, the storm had now dissolved, and the wind got weaker.

Finally, finally, dawn crept over the horizon. There was no more wind, so I took an hour of sleep. When I woke up again, completely stiff, I saw the most beautiful view I had ever seen in my life: before me, only about two miles away, lay Siberut's palm-fringed coast. Dark forest covered the land, which rose gently to the jagged blue shimmering mountains of the hinterland. On my right a rocky coastline was stretching to the south and powerful breakers hit the shore. To my left the sandy beach continued endlessly until there was a bend and got out of sight. The sky lit up in the most fantastic colors, light pink, purple, dark blue, and was decorated with white wispy clouds. The morning sun was still hidden behind the clouds, but shone already through a window in the clouds and where its rays hit other clouds from below, they glowed orange-purple.

As beautiful the sight was, I just had the desire to reach the shore and to sleep. The sun would come out soon and it would become hot! Slowly I labored myself forward.

When I had finally approached the beach, I realized disappointed that the waves crashed down so mercilessly here that I would hardly come ashore safely. Embittered I tried to make myself comfortable as good as possible with my hurting joints. I thought, in an emergency I always could get on land, but now I just wanted to rest for a while. The scorching sun made me soon think otherwise! I drank the last sip of water and I realized, I had to continue along the coast, even though the hands did hardly want to hold the paddle any longer. I had no choice!

I paddled around the bend: endless sandy beach again until the next bend. Eventually I saw a hut at the beach and decided to take the risk. I went as close as possible to the point where the waves were breaking, studied the water for a long time, and when I thought no bigger wave was approaching, I started paddling like crazy. It worked to some extent. A wave lifted me up, and when it broke, I instinctively did exactly the right thing: with the paddle I prevented the boat turning sideways and on the spray I glided towards the beach, while not too much water was spilling into the boat.

No one was in sight. But around the hut were chickens, and the remains of a fire was still glowing. I dragged my things ashore, pulled the boat onto the beach, and then lay down under the porch of the cottage on a few mats. The chicken were clucking and seemed to be upset, but nothing could disturb me now.

In the afternoon an astonished Indonesians showed up, and I apologized for intruding without permission. But that seemed to be no problem, judging by the expression of the man. I tried to explain to him that I would like to use the fireplace. The man nodded, and while I collected wood and started boiling water, he got two young coconuts, cut them open and offered them to me. I gratefully sipped the cool delicious milk and used the soft flesh for my pudding that I cooked with flour and sugar. The man watched interested, but did not want to try the boiled munch but rather said, he would have to continue to work. So I finished the whole pot myself, rolled with my full belly back onto the mats and continued dozing.

After a while, a young guy passed by and started instigating a conversation and to boast with his few words of English. Then he invited me to come to the cottage of his family, but I was not keen on moving myself. Until night fell and it turned out that the area was contaminated by these small blood-sucking critters and that any type of relaxation became absolutely impossible! I accompanied the boy, whose name was John, to the shack of his sister, which was standing on three feet tall poles. It had only one wall, but a big, drawn down and neatly worked palm roof. The area surrounding the cabin was cleared by fire, and in the dark soil all kinds of plants such as cassava, banana and coconut trees were already sprouting. At one spot, a big pile of wood was fuming and was chasing away the pesky bloodsuckers.

The family consisted of John's sister and her husband, six children and the toothless grandmother who was tattooed from head to toe. Only the man and the rather pretty woman could speak Indonesian, the children and the grandmother were chatting in Mentawai.

The family treated me very courteous, served me a rice meal and even borrowed me a mosquito net for the night. I returned the favor in the morning by baking coconut macaroons for everybody.

When John discovered that the white guy was quite generous, he asked if I did not like to buy him a pair of pants, because he would have none to change. So we made our way to a small town about ten kilometers away. It was not easy to follow the nimble John on the slippery and muddy path. Sometimes the path led

through swampy terrain, and one had to balance on tree trunks or slippery bamboo. We encountered three native Mentawais, which only wore a skirt, decorated with colorful feathers, and who were tattooed on the whole body like John's grandmother.

As we entered the village, I shoved my hat deeper into my face trying to avoid being recognized as European, but just alone because of my size that hardly had any effect. It did not take long until we were called by an elderly man with white short cut hairs from his front yard. We should come over. He scowled and told us to enter his house. Since John remained calm and followed the instructions without protest, I also went with them. We were led into a room in which several images of uniformed men were hanging at the wall, including a picture of the man from his younger years in parade uniform with several medals and badges. The faces on the photos reminded me unpleasantly of the Moroccan police chief, and an uneasy feeling rose up in me. The man looked at me with a stern military look and wanted to know what I was looking for.

"I'm a tourist and want to do some shopping."

"Do you have a permit? You need one to travel through this area."

"I did not know that one needs a permit here."

"Show me your passport!"

"I'm sorry, but my luggage is in the hut of my friend."

"Then write down your details," the man said, and I thought feverishly, if I should play the same game as in

Morocco, but took finally the pen the man offered me. Once the name was on the paper, the old man became friendly at once and we had some coffee. "Defined again," I thought resignedly.

When the coffee was emptied, we went to a neighbor's house, which the old man had recommended, because there was a small shop that offered a refreshing fruit salad with pudding. John wanted to leave immediately after the snack but I got appetite for sweets, probably because of the excitement, and wanted to order a second one, although an inner voice urged me to go now. While I enjoyed my second fruit salad, a man came by and talked to the old officer. Then both waved me, I should come over again. The other man was the mayor of the village and greeted me kindly, but ordered me to come back again tomorrow and to show my passport.

In another shop we bought some stuff and John received his desired pants after all.

The next morning, I pretended as if desperately looking for my passport, but finally gave up searching. Even the family got excited now and wondered where the paper might be. We went to the place where I had landed, but of course were searching there in vain too.

"Well, it is not that bad," I reassured the family, "I can go to the embassy and get a new one. But then it is probably better, I go there directly and not back to the village. That only delays matter and creates unnecessary problems." Then I loaded my prahu and said goodbye to the family, while John convinced me to donate him my

ax. I made it well through the surf, but had unfavorable wind and had to pick up the paddle.

I paddled all day to get enough distance from the mayor, but thought that news probably spread quickly and that I would be well advised to leave the island soon. The whole event was circling around in my head, and one thing became clear: During an interrogation, or even under torture, I always would say that on my passport had been this German name. Because it simply was the truth! Why should I hide it and let them beat me up? Sure enough, one day one would have to give up this identity, and that was certainly a painful process! But how could a man live without an identity at all? God certainly did not demand anything that one could not fulfill anyway!

In the evening I reached the northeast side of the island and found a small uninhabited hut. Some boys came over and accompanied me during supper, where I learned that coconut shells burn very well and scare away the mosquitoes. The nice guys went later to a nearby village and got me some cookies, so I had food for the onward journey. They also got some coconuts from the trees and prepared them ready to drink, so I could easily open them with my knife.

When I left the shore the next morning, there was beautiful weather and a steady wind from north. While I set the sails, I wondered what course I should take: further along the coast, or dare crossing the sea to mainland Sumatra? This time, no land was in sight, which meant really to let go of everything!

"So if I need to have an identity," I said to the wind, "I'll call myself Muslim as soon as I reach Sumatra!"

The crossing

The boat dashed at nearly maximum speed across the water, and I had lean myself far to one side in order to maintain balance. Quickly, I was soaked by the spray, but I knew I had to hurry, even though I had no idea that Sumatra was a hundred miles away!

White foam covered the waves, and I prayed to God that the wind would remain so and not get stronger. Flying fish swirled over the water and I was amazed that they could fly curves and considered the ups and downs of the waves, while they were soaring just above the water surface.

In the evening, Siberut was visible on its entire length. But there was no sign of mainland Sumatra except for the huge anvil clouds that formed on mainland. The crescent of the new moon and Venus were visible now, and the sky on the horizon was ornamented with fanciful colors. The waves had increased in height, and I had to ride at the wind as hard as possible and to cut them as obliquely as possible in order that not too much water spilled into the boat. Still, I was busy every ten minutes to empty out the prahu. I reckoned I went too far north, but there was no choice.

Finally after about three hours, the wind and the waves calmed down. Three brighter spots were visible at the horizon: Sibolga, Padang and perhaps Bengkulu, I thought in my naivete and ignorance of the true proportions. Behind me flashed the light of the lighthouse, which I had formerly assigned to Padang, but which in reality stood on the northeast side of Siberut.

Now there was complete calm. I dozed for an hour, but could not get any sleep because of the uncomfortable position and the damp clothes, and therefore finally grabbed the paddle. After some time, the wind freshened and this time from the beneficial western direction. For three to four hours the boat glided quietly through the night. There were hardly any waves, and although the wind blew only gently, the boat seemed to make good speed.

Unfortunately, it did not stay like this. After a brief lull, the wind changed direction and became gusty. Various huge clouds could be seen scattered over the sea. Slowly, one of them drew closer from the North. During lightning, one could recognize its enormous size and the wall of rain it dragged below. I kept sailing undeterred. The wind was still relatively useful and the sea calm. But then it became apparent: This time it would hit me! The wall of rain was only half a kilometer away, and went straight towards me!

I put down the sail and picked up the paddle. After a few minutes I got hit by the gusts, and after a few more moments the rain drops slapped in my face. It soon became impossible to paddle against the storm. The

waves and the wind turned the bow around as soon as I stopped with paddling to empty out the inflowing water.

I had a similar weather now like during the sailing trip from Gomera to Tenerife, only that it was night, rain was pouring, there was lightning all around me, and I was not sitting in a modern yacht, but in a dugout! Helpless, I drifted with the wind and surfed before the waves, ever further away from Sumatra. I was incredibly fortunate that I had forgotten to take off the rudder, which I otherwise normally did while paddling the boat in order to be less hindered. Thus the prahu did surf in front of the waves and did not turn broadside towards them. If I would have to steer with the paddle and therefore would have no hand free to empty out the water, the boat had already been filled up.

There were canoes that were light enough to get emptied out on sea, but my boat was too heavy. It would not have drowned, but it would have become unmanageable, and it would have been impossible to get it afloat again. The forgotten rudder most probably saved my life!

At some point, it seemed like an eternity, the rain finally stopped and the storm had passed me. But the wind and the waves calmed down only a little, and I still went in the wrong direction, further away from Sumatra. An inner voice told me that I would have to set the sails now if I did not want to drift back to Siberut.

"But I can never do this in such weather," I cried.

But the inner voice seemed to be convinced that I could and obviously was amused about this helpless klutz. "Come on," it urged, "let's go!"

I pulled up the yard while staying crouched to keep my balance, but too hesitant, so the boom blew with the rest of the sail into the water. I tried to pull it up again, but the front of the boom had caught on the outriggers.

"What a f***** sh**! I shouted desperately into the night, and pulled like a madman at the sail. But soon I realized that all I would accomplish by doing so is tearing the plastic into pieces. I had no choice! I had to go to the mast at the front of the prahu where the luggage was stowed and free the boom. It was a shaky balancing act, and when I pushed myself past the mast, the boat almost overturned. It also turned already broadside towards the waves, and I gradually was seized by panic while cursing and wailing. But suddenly I realized: This was just a game! A training exercise! I had to train my ego like a horse or a dog got trained! The horse was not allowed to disobey the commands of the rider, neither at the sight of tasty green grass nor during danger!

I became suddenly very calm, and with concentrated movements I untied the boom, balanced back to the rear, got back on course and emptied out the water. And tried it again!

This time I managed to pull up the sail completely, but the yard hung crooked at the mast because it had not been correctly inserted through the ropes connecting the mast to the crossbars of the outriggers. I let the sail down again and then pulled it back up, but again the yard

went the wrong way. The wailing and cursing wanted to start again, but this time I was careful and pulled the reins in time. The instructions were clear and precise, and I followed without hesitation, even though I had to straighten up completely in the rickety boat and was on the verge of losing my balance. I put the boom into the loop of the mast, put the helm windward and slowly pulled the mainsheet. The sail flapped and cracked so much that I thought it would rip at any moment. For an anxious moment the boat lay broadside to the waves until I managed to go hard at the wind and to incise the waves in a sharp angle. Hard to believe that these cheap materials could withstand such conditions!

Now that the situation became stable, I felt the exhaustion, and sometimes my eyelids fell down, though the wind shook the sails and the spray of higher waves swept over the side. The long wait for dawn had begun once again...

Finally, when the twilight set in, the wind ceased blowing, and the waves calmed down slowly. And again I was rewarded for one of the most tiring nights of my life with one of the grandest sights of my life: Sumatra, with its chain of ten thousand feet high volcanoes was stretched out before me in the clear morning light!

Hungrily I stuffed myself with the biscuits and chewed on the sugar cane, from which I had taken a few canes as travel ration. Then I tried to make myself comfortable on the bench, but my butt was so soaked that I hardly knew which side to choose. I started dozing off and was just asleep, when suddenly a gust of wind hit the sail and the prahu turned sideways, regardless of the outriggers so

far that a lot of water swept into the boat. After this experience, it was clear: As long as the sail was set, I had to stay awake!

But soon the sail was not needed anymore. The sea became smooth as glass and I got stewed underneath my straw hat. Oddly, Sumatra was hardly recognizable anylonger and seemed much further away than in the morning.

A larger fishing boat approached, and when the fishers saw the prahu, they headed towards me. The Indonesians seemed not to believe their eyes when they found out that a white man was sitting in a prahu on the open sea. I waved at them, and when they realized that I was not in distress, they drove off, shaking their heads.

To the north, land could be seen now, apparently an island, and I thought I could reach it in a few hours. But after two hours of hard paddling the supposed island had not become any larger. Also Sumatra was still lying in the remotest distance. Hard to believe how one could get fooled here on the sea about the distances, I acknowledged having become wise, and could hardly suppress the cursing. The evening was approaching, and hopes faded to get to land before nightfall. At least some wind started to blow again from the right direction and became stronger at night, so the prahu went fast on a wave-free sea. I sat back and enjoyed the starry night. During such a cruise all tireness disappeared!

After a few hours lights appeared, which I perceived at first for very bright street lights, as they were aligned in a straight contour in front of me. But after another

hour it looked more like illuminated platforms floating on sea. Finally the secret got lifted: the lights were bright lamps mounted on large fishing boats with huge outriggers, which formed a long chain with other boats. With the lamps they probably attracted the fish.

Hardly I had crossed the line of these vessels, another string of lights appeared at the horizon. There was also a lighthouse visible now, to which I headed. Actually I wanted to go on land a little further away from the lighthouse, because I was afraid people might live in its vicinity and ask me stupid questions, but I realized in time that the tower stood on a small coconut island, which I better should not miss.

Logically, on the side which I reached now, should be the reef, but I could see nothing but sandy beach. Suddenly the wind abated, as if he had been commissioned to deliver me here at this island and had done its duty now, and I had to paddle the last few meters.

Suddenly I stuck on the reef. And the water was so shallow that I was trapped between the corals! I cursed inaudibly and tried to pull the boat over the reef, slitting my feet at the corals and sharp-edged shells. Half-way to the beach though I had to give up because I would have damaged the bottom of the boat dragging it further. I staggered ashore and was happy to once again have solid ground under my feet. But the fear of the high tide coming and floating away my boat, let me not fall asleep despite my tiredness. After two hours then, the water had risen so far that I could draw the prahu to the beach.

I took out most of the luggage and tied the boat on to a palm tree before I fell into a deep sleep.

Something woke me up. Higher waves hit the beach and smashed into my boat. The tin plate and the fishing gear just got washed away, and I realized with horror that the rudder was gone already. Electrified, I ran along the beach, but to my huge relief found the rudder after almost three hundred meters.

On the island there lived two men who harvested the copra and whom I met the next day. I spent two days with them to recover from the strain, but the island was so populated by bloodsucking insects, that I left soon. I also needed to get food.

The coast of Sumatra was only one kilometer away, and opposite to the island was a small town. In front of the coast were hundreds of colorful fishing boats which took shelter behind the island. The great fleet felt almost somewhat threatening, and I sailed rather to the south, as the town with so many people seemed too dangerous.

After half a day I passed by a village where I bought food, and in the evening I reached coastal barrier islands, which lay opposite of the port city of Padang.

The following night there was favorable wind, and in the morning I was already far south of Padang. The coast here was rocky, and in the hinterland were mountains. Clouds hung between them, and steaming jungle covered the slopes. On an island I found a decrepit hut where I made a provisional shelter and then went fishing at the reef. At the drop off, I caught the most colorful fish in no time, especially auburn triggerfish, whose skin was

leathery, but the fillet fried in coconut oil served with rice was a delicacy.

Further south, I once again reached a little coconut island on which I sought protection from a looming storm. It measured approximately 300m in diameter and harboured a small hut. In front of the hut a man was busy and only briefly looked at me, not caring much about this exotic stranger. I had to bring unaided the heavy boat and my luggage ashore.

When I reached the hut, I saw the man picking up the copra, which was layed for drying, and dragging it into the hut. He looked quite nice and greeted shortly, but hastened to continue putting the stuff in baskets, because the first drops fell already. I began helping him which made the man a bit embarrassed. Just when we were finished, it started pouring, and we moved into the hut. The man presented himself with Adji, made coffee and offered me kretek cigarettes. I reclined on the mats and felt very comfortable, especially while watching the storm and imagining myself now being at sea!

I learned that the name of the island would be Kosong, which means 'empty', and that there would be not a single mosquito here, hence the name! I immediately thought it would be great to stay for a while and recover from the three weeks torment in the prahu. No mosquitoes! I asked Adji if that would be possible and he did not mind: "Is not my island anyway. The man to whom it belongs will come in three days."

I helped Adji with collecting the copra. The coconuts were first opened with a big ax, the two halves left in the

sun until the copra separated a bit from the shell and already got an unsavory blueish coloring, to be then peeled out with a special knife and layed out for drying on nets. Nice working place here beneath the palm trees! The sea roared all around us and a cooling breeze blew through our hair. At night, giant leatherback turtles came ashore to lay their eggs, which Adji gathered up, because they could be sold for 250 rupiah each. And a turtle layed up to a hundred eggs! Though feeling sorry for the turtles, what could I tell as a European about environmental awareness, while flying halfway around the world and carrying exhaust gases to the highest layers of the atmosphere?

A fishing boat from Padang anchored at the island. Also two men looking for lobster and a retired officer on a fishing trip took shelter before a looming storm so that all of a sudden there were many people on the islet. The officer and two of the fishermen made their five daily prayers, while I myself only now and again sought a quiet place for worship. When the folks heard that I confessed being a Muslim, they asked me why I would be praying so funny then. I replied that to me it was not so important to turn towards Mecca, bow so and so many times or speak Arabic, God would understand me nonetheless. For me, a good heart would be the essential. To which everybody agreed at once, especially those who did not pray anyway.

I went to the coast to buy supplies, but had been warned beforehand of the surf at the shore. And if I wanted to sail further south, I would have a hard time because there were no barrier islands anymore, where

one could land at the wave-protected side, and there would be only such beach with big waves.

When I reached the point at the shore where the waves were breaking, I got tense! It thundered and roared in front of me, that I wondered, how I was supposed to come through that unscathed. But this time I had no luggage that could float away, so I rowed like hell when I thought a favorable moment had come. I was just behind the surf line, when suddenly behind me a nearly three-meter-high wave broke with a loud roar. The approaching spray drove me towards the shore, but also filled my prahu almost completely with water, so I did not know how to get it onto the beach. Fortunately, a few fishermen hurried to come and help me. One thing was certain: I would not sail further along the coast! Maybe I could sell the boat somewhere.

A young man accompanied me over the dunes to a warung where I recovered while having a coffee and biscuits. More and more people gathered around me until about thirty people were staring at me, and I felt like a calf with five legs.

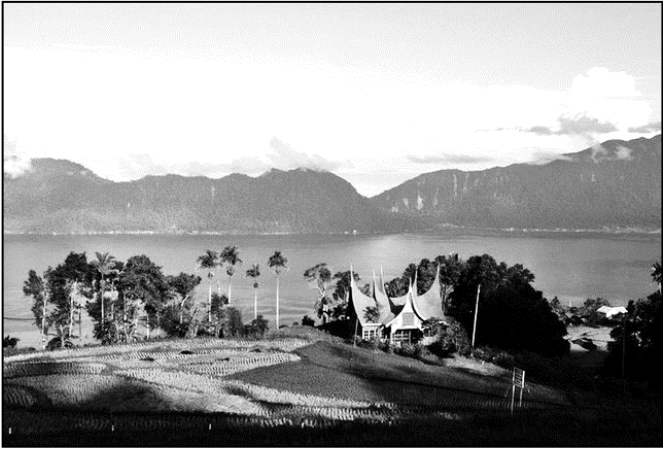
The brother of the young man invited me to stay in his house for the night. He also gave me dry clothes and, when he learned that I recently converted to Islam, a book, in which the practice of prayer was explained with illustrations of each positions and the Arabic texts. I took an interested look at it, but thought that wouldn't be suitable for me but more for pharisees and scribes. I had read nothing in the Qur'an of such practices and believed, that those prayers were an invention of some priests or imams and unfitting for me. I could not

imagine to utter "Allahu akbar" with dedication while not starting to laugh, because it sounded so funny to my European ears. In short, I could not identify with the whole ritual.

When my host learned that I wanted to sell my prahu, he offered me an acceptable price and brought me back to Kosong to collect my stuff. And when finally a boy told of a lake near Bukittinggi, of which I had already previously heard in Germany, I new my next destination. I took my small backpack and went to Padang.

Shalat

From Padang it went to Bukittinggi and then to the lake Maninjau, which offered a wonderful panorama and was a major attraction for foreign tourists on West Sumatra. I walked around the great lake and finally took a rest in a small village.



When I asked in a shop for tea and got engaged in a conversation, I was promptly invited for the night, and when the people heard that I wanted to learn the prayer, they brought me the next morning to the mosque of the village. For I had already learned that prayer was not an invention of some imams, but had been taught by the Prophet Muhammad himself.

At the shore of the lake beside the mosque was an unfinished building, on whose first floor only a single room had four walls and a door, and that was scantily

furnished with mats and a small bed. Here lived the Ustad or religious teacher, a man in his late twenties named Akmal, who was also the Imam of the mosque. He spoke a little "broken English" and immediately agreed to accomodate me for a while and to teach me.

Now began a good time for me because Akmal was a nice guy and really took care of me. I tried my best not to disappoint him and took part in the five daily prayers at the mosque. Soon I was the darling of the village. People brought food, gave me sarongs and shirts, and I even got a marriage proposal, but which I turned down, to the great disappointment of the girl.

A few curious kids frequently came and tried to engage in some kind of conversation. One of them told me that I would need a new name, now that I had become a Muslim. Akmal suggested Habib, Habiburrahman: "Habib is the beloved, Rahman is the Beneficent. This means that you are the beloved of God, but it also means that you are loved by all," he said.

"Yes, I like the name," I said, pleased.

Only slowly I realized that I had taken a major step by becoming a Muslim! I actually got a new identity! One did not become a Muslim randomly! One started maybe because of a whim with Hatha Yoga or with Zen Meditation, but Islam encompassed the whole life, the entire personality! This religion I had not chosen myself, it had chosen me! Only now, the long journey to Andalusia, Morocco and Algeria made sense! What did Umar say to me in Morocco? "Sometimes it's a long way until one becomes a Muslim!"

There were held several feasts. One because of a wedding where the bride and groom were very richly decorated and had to sit for hours on a kind of throne while the many guests had delicious food and afterwards lined up for congratulating them. In front of the house meanwhile, the village boys made a hell of a noise with big drums. On another occasion, the circumcision of several eleven year old boys was celebrated, and the guests went from house to house, until even I could not munch anymore of all the delicacies. Several times I was asked if I would be already circumcised, a question that apparently no one perceived embarrassing.

"Already?" They asked, mimicking with their fingers a pair of scissors, while directing it towards the private parts.

"Already!" I replied, mimicking the pantomime, as I got already circumcised as a small child, fortunately.

Akmal wanted to visit his parents near Bukittinggi and would have liked me to accompany him. After morning prayer we went with a motorboat to the other side of the lake and took a bus. I got a nice room above the shop of Akmal's father with a magnificent view onto the surrounding rice fields, which had protruding hills like small islands, where palm trees, banana or cassava was planted. There was a small mosque not a hundred yards away and many ponds with large-leaved and pink blooming water lilies. Again, God provided well for me!

Neighbors, to whom I was introduced, gave me a sarong and an envelope with 15,000 rupiah, which at first I did not like to take because for me that was only

an hourly wage but for the people here three days of tough work on the rice field. When I noticed, however, they would be offended if I did not take it, I put it away.

I started to gain weight because I was passed from feast to feast and in order to be polite I always had to eat a lot to show that it tasted well. Which was not difficult, because it really tasted well!

I learned that a pilgrimage to Mecca cost around 7,000,000 rupiah, a sum many people were saving for their whole lifetime! Hence, it was the high point of their life, and accordingly respected were the people who had done the Haj already, who got the prefix Haji.

When finally leaving, after being adopted ten days by Akmal's family, I did not know how to thank them. "Take and give," Akmal said to me, "what you have learned here, you need to pass on to people at home!" Mom gave me a big parcel with food for my journey, and Akmal, who accompanied me to the minibus, handed me descently 10,000 rupiah when shaking hands, one tenth of his monthly salary!

I travelled to Banda Aceh, the Northern Province, where Islam entered first Indonesia. The road went along the coast and I often saw large freighters at the horizon, for here was the Straits of Malacca, one of the most important shipping lanes in the world. Suddenly I got the idea of leaving Indonesia as a stowaway, because I thought about what Akmal told me: "What you have learned here, you need to pass on to the people at home!" I felt that my five-year journey had served its purpose! And not only what I had learned from Akmal I

wanted to give to others, but many things I had experienced during my journey.

The idea proved to be persistent, so I finally went to the port of Belawan near Medan. But no international cargo vessels were to be seen. Hope remained though of finding a suitable ship in Jakarta. I was running out of money now, but the bus company, where I bought the ticket to Jakarta, was called Liberty and had a flying eagle as its trademark, which inspired me with courage. 9000 rupiah were left, concisely 7 DM!

But the next morning I found 18,000 rupiah under my seat which I showed first to the bus conductor who did not want to have it but said I should keep it. Then I even was invited by the bus crew for lunch. Despite the stressful trip on the Trans-Sumatran Highway, which was rich in curves and potholes, I was in a very good mood. Actually it was always like this: If there was no money or if I was otherwise in need, I came closer to God!

Jakarta was hot and noisy and the Port Tanjung Priok huge. There were dozens of ships at berth and at anchor. But for three hours I searched unsuccessfully and got twice questioned by security personel, but each time I gave good excuses. I saw vessels from Egypt, Turkey, Korea and other Asian countries, and two ships from Copenhagen, at which sight of my heart beat faster. It turned out, however, that they were chartered and operated in Indonesia only.

A man on a motorbike wanted to know where I was going. I told him I was looking for a ship that would go to Europe. The man pointed to one: Anangel Victory, a

Greek. Warehouse worker loitered in front of the mighty ship and I asked one of them when the ship would leave. A small bespectacled foreman intervened and told me in emotional English: "You better go to the consulate if you have no money for the trip, the ship is too dangerous! There are big waves out there and the crew is also not very nice."

He looked closely at me and then asked suspiciously where I would stay. I answered truthfully that I had no accommodation yet.

"What's your name?"

"Habib!"

"You are a Muslim?"

The man gave me the address of a mosque, where I could sleep, but brought me later there himself.

"Tell the people the truth," he said, because he obviously noticed already that I was hiding something, "maybe they can help you."

The mosque's name was Raya al-Husna and was right next to the smelly and noisy main road that led past Tanjung Priok. The mosque itself however seemed to be a place of peace, had white-tiled floor, and appeared like a lotus flower that grows on mud, its petals nevertheless being clean and white.

When I arrived, evening prayer just started. I told the curious brothers that I would be looking for a ship to Europe. I slept with two other men in the hall of the mosque. With these two I went the next morning to a

house where one could take a bath and wash clothes. Beside the house was one of those smelly canals filled with garbage which traversed the North of Jakarta like a net. Swarms of mosquitoes gathered above the blackish water on which, oddly, plants with purple flowers were blooming.

The next day I went again to the port, but returned in the afternoon unsuccessful. The Turkish ship I wanted to sneak on had left already the night before. But a man told me he would let me know if a suitable cargo vessel would be available. However, I must have patience, because there were not many ships going straight to Europe. Most goods were nowadays loaded into containers. But container ships would be bad for me because typically the transit port for containers would be Singapore where they would be transferred to bigger ships, so I would have to change ships once.

In the evening I was invited to dinner by a naval officer. It turned out that he wanted to raise money for me, but I finally came out with the truth and told him that not money, but the lack of passport and visa would be my problem. I did not have to explain why I did not have a passport. Who would have understood that anyway? While the wife of the officer served up fried chicken, there appeared subtitles on the television screen, reminding the audience that it was now time for the evening prayer. When I left, the officer wanted to at least give me 10,000 Rupiah. But I was coy, so the officer gave the note to the man who accompanied me.

People came to know about this weird new convert stranded at the mosque, and many bequeathed money

and I was constantly invited to dinner. Somehow embarrassing that I enjoyed such a treatment while there were still plenty of others in need in Jakarta and myself coming from a rich country! But they told me I should not be so shy. People who newly entered Islam were often in need and particularly worthy of support. An old man, who had smiled at me for the past days, gave me a gilt watch, so that I always knew when it was time for prayer.

Meanwhile I made a lot of friends, including the muezzin of the mosque named Khumeini who could call the most beautiful Adzan I had ever heard. When I returned from my daily bath at the stinky canal, Khumeini was talking with a uniformed guy and waved at me, I should come. I already got afraid that there was an inquiry about my documents, but it was only an officer who had his office in the port, and wanted me to join him for Friday prayer in the major mosque of the harbour, because he wanted to collect money for me. I thanked him and tried to tell him, that not money, but the passport was the problem. But the soldier, whose name was Yuska, did not respond to that fact but mumbled that one always could use money, and dragged me and Khumeini with him to the officers' mess in the harbor, where we got served plenty of food. When we came back to the mosque, people had just collected money for me, this time more than half an average monthly wage of an Indonesian! Although I tried to tell them that they should give the money better to poor people, I had no chance and had to accept it.

And then it became even worse: It started the next morning, when I got first 10,000 rupiah, then an envelope with 240,000 rupiah, then one with 50,000 rupiah and then another 20,000 rupiah bill! The average daily wage of an ordinary worker in Jakarta at that time: 10,000 rupiah! My attempts to reject the money failed. Then Yuska told me, there would have been a collection in a different mosque for me, and an envelope with 350,000 rupiah would be waiting for me!

After a few days I had a gilded clock, gilded sunglasses, gilded pen, new shoes, new shirts, new pants, various perfumes and the multiple monthly salary of an ordinary worker! All this in a very poor country without a visa or a passport! Perpetual guest of honor in a country that had just celebrated its 50-year independence of bloody European suppression!

Turban

It was two o' clock at night. I got up to pray Tahajjud, a voluntary prayer performed between the night and the Morning Prayer, the best time however being the last third of the night.

Someone was already praying and I joined him. When the man had finished, he sat quietly on a low wall and waited until I had finished praying too. Then he shook my hand and made a friendly gesture, I should sit down with him. He spoke passable English and introduced himself as Samsurijal. Since I actually liked to lie down and sleep again, I asked the man allusive how much he'd usually slept. Samsurijal replied that he would sleep on average of an hour a day only, but there were not many people who could do that. Suddenly I also perked up, because I realized that this was no ordinary man.

The man looked at me with a warm expression in his eyes, put his hand on my chest and asked if I felt something. At first I did not notice anything. Then I felt it: a slight cooling breeze that slipped through my chest. The man smiled when he noticed my surprised face. He initiated me into three exercises, one for deepening of prayer, one for general cleaning, and one for constant concentration.

"Al-hamdulillah" I said, "maybe a gift from God that I got up in the middle of the night!"

Samsurijal smiled at me: "If you are obedient, God gives you additional guidance. If not, he cuts one strand after another!"

Then he got up and we went to the Warungs on the other side of the street to sip some tea. While we sat there, an acquaintance Samsurijals came who told me about the mosque Kebun Jeruk where one could meet a lot of foreigners. We arranged a meeting for Thursday.

There was a completely different atmosphere in the mosque Kebun Sheruk than in the village mosques or Al-Husna. Many people wore Arab dresses and turbans, and I was introduced to Muslims from India and Singapore. A European with a long beard came up to me, shook my hand and introduced himself with Mustafa. After evening prayer and a lecture that an Indian held in English, and which got translated into Indonesian by Mustafa, there was a communal meal, where four or five people were sitting together at one big plate and eating with their hands rather than using spoons because that was Sunnah²². I couldn't remember to ever had food with other people from the same plate except maybe with my mother. Quite an experience! Although it was totally against European table manners, in fact it taught you good manners, because one had to be considerate rather than stuffing thoughtless everything in one's own mouth! It was good manner to give the delicious pieces to one's right neighbor.

Mustafa told me his story: "I used to build surfboards in Australia, lived for some time in Cornwall and then travelled across Europe. When I was in Morocco being in jail because of hashish, I had my first contact with Islam.

²² Something set as example or otherwise encouraged by the Prophet Muhammad.

I came to Indonesia because of surfing. Now I've been living here for four years, am married to an Indonesian and attending a school for Islamic studies. The more I learn, the more I see how little I know! Islam is an ocean!"

I was glad that Mustafa's story had so many parallels to my own, and in no time we had a deep mutual understanding.

At night the mosque was filled with sleeping and praying people, and the Shalat Tahajjud seemed to be obligatory for everyone. Many did not sleep at all and spent the night in prayer or discussing. I was happy to meet Samsurijal again, who had not slept all night and who had nothing for breakfast, because he was fasting. An Indian joined us and told about mosques in Mumbai and Bhopal, where 30,000 worshipers gathered per prayer.

Soon afterwards, there was a large gathering of over 25,000 Muslims for three days in Ancol, close to the harbor Tanjung Priok. Participants came often from far away. After such meetings, groups of around ten people were sent out to all parts of Indonesia and other countries. These groups would then travel from mosque to mosque for four months or forty days, but at least for three days, teaching and learning at the same time, refreshing the knowledge of Islam and seeking to strengthen morality and faith. This was called Da'wah, propagation of Islam. The Prophet had seen Da'wah as the best way to strengthen the faith and gain Hidayah, guidance of God. Who ever spent his property and his life for this work would be rewarded manifold.

Sermons were given, partly in Arabic, English, Indonesian and Urdu, and translated into other languages. In a wing of the mosque, which was reserved for foreigners, I met Muslims from Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Philippines, India, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka and Egypt. In addition, a Frenchman and, alongside Mustafa, another Australian had appeared. I had never seen such a brotherly atmosphere between such different kind of people, and hardly ever so many impressive faces, radiating goodness and dignity. Many had long beards and a mark on the forehead, which originated from the plentiful passionate prayers. A strange feeling, to get invited by a white-haired Sheikh to visit him in Medina, or get tugged at the beard by an old Indian and treated like a son.

The Frenchman came from Paris, wore a long beard and was a teacher for Pencak silat. He wanted to go to Banda Aceh, to get special spiritual training for his martial arts.

"There are people who work with the jinn. They can give you energy bursts over longer distances," he said, obviously pleased to be able to speak French once again and to initiate me into some things. I was intoxicated by this meeting anyway, so much was there to see and to hear. Above all, I felt the group energy that made my prayer much more intense.

Particularly intense it became on the last day of the meeting, when final instructions were given and a Maulana from India spoke a closing prayer. I did not know what was happening, as slowly more and more people shed tears in their raised hands and eventually

began to sob. About 25,000 people incited an impetuous storm, into which the Maulana spoke steadily louder and faster the prayer, of which I did not understand the words, but the message was clear. It was so moving that I suddenly burst into tears myself and I learned something that was impossible to understand rationally: the need of man and his subjection to God's grace!

The groups had come together to salute once more the Maulana and went on their way. In the evening, most of the faithful had already left. A Pakistani group had missed their train and one of the group got sick. He was lying feverishly on his bed in the mosque but got up at every prayer, even though it seemed to cost him much effort. For the proper ablution he was too weak, so he rubbed his hands on the wall and cleaned himself with the dust of the wall. This was called Tayamum.

"A Muslim sojourns only to pray, if he's dead," someone had said to me once, "if he can not move anymore, he performs the prayer in his mind."

Together with a nice Indonesian brother called Edi I set out to join a group in Lombok, as Edi said that in Lombok it would certainly be possible to participate in Da'wah even without a passport. We first went to pay a visit Edy's mother, who lived in a small village near Mataram, a petite friendly woman who was of course happy about the visit. Then we took a walk through a beautiful landscape. Artfully laid rice terraces, whose green dazzled the eye, coconut palms, bamboo groves and jungle thickets, rushing rivers and small irrigation canals, bamboo huts and villages with beautiful mosques, all united into a small Garden of Eden.

We went over dusty tracks and small paths to the mosque where the group should stay right now. When we reached the mosque in the early afternoon, we introduced ourselves to the Amir, the leader of the group, and told him that we would like to join them, but that I had no passport. The Amir considered for a while and said then we could accompany them for ten days. Some of the group were smiling at me as I watched them preparing the food.

I got to know some basic rules of Da'wah: reduce eating, drinking and sleeping; leave the mosque as little as possible; little talking, no discussions about different conceptions of religion; no politics; rank or profession of the individual people did not matter, be moderate and have patience; obey the Amir and the Assembly.



I was assigned to a group of five people who went from house to house in the neighbourhood and invited the people to evening prayer in the mosque. After evening prayer then, one of the group held a sermon whose subject he could choose himself. But always the importance of Da'wah got emphasized and the people invited to join them in their efforts.

On the following days our group moved from village to village, where the process was repeated. I called several times the Adzan and was also asked to hold the sermon. I held them in English, and Edi translated. I quickly lost my shyness and soon rumbled powerfully straight on, especially when I realized that I found receptive listeners.

I tried to explain them that they should beware of innovations and new globalized lifestyle. They should not covet all the colorful things of the West and should not believe, because they do not have all these glittering things, they would be poor and backward. "Have you not everything you need? Has Allah not given you everything? You have treasures that you do not appreciate because you take them for granted. You have a clean nature, a well-functioning community, you have peace and calmness, and you have Islam! That all can be taken away from you if you desire things that will make other people envious! Things that you do not really need but which distract your attention from Allah! Especially beware of television, where all these pretty things are advertised," I raised a warning finger. "Shaitan!" I shouted. "You forget Allah and will covet the worldly life!" I acted like a television viewer, who stared spellbound with big eyes into the TV screen, and everyone laughed.

It was obvious that I was an attraction here in the villages, and the Amir was delighted that the mosques filled so nicely, though I always forgot to invite the people to join this specific group.

A friend of Edi appeared one of the next days and told us that the police in Mataram got notice of a European preaching in the villages, and perhaps even knew that I possessed no passport.

"We should go to a friend of mine," said Edi. "He is a judge and can perhaps give us some advise what we can do. He lives twenty kilometers from here."

Edi lent a motorbike and we went the next morning. On the way, the front tire of the scooter burst at almost 60 kilometers per hour and we wobbled meandering across the road. Luckily there was no oncoming traffic, and Edi managed to keep the scooter in balance. "Alhamdulillah²³" he said, wiping the sweat from his forehead.

The judge was still quite young and very nice. He laughed out loud at the story of how I had burned my passport, and said it reminded him of how the early Muslims had conquered Andalusia. They would have burned their ships, so there was no going back, and I would have chosen the modern version. But I could get now a lot of trouble with the immigration authorities. "It is best you go to the nearest police station and report your passport as stolen, because that happens to many foreigners."

I thought about it. I would have preferred to stick to the truth and not to lie and not to take this emblem of the Antichrist again. But maybe the rules had changed now?

²³ All praise belongs to Allah.

We went to the noon prayer first, where I asked for an inspiration. The intuition told me that with a passport I could do significantly more for others than just sitting as a martyr in prison.

Edi and the judge were very happy about my decision. The judge tapped me on the shoulder and said: "If you want, I will be looking for a pretty pious woman for you. There is already a German Muslim in the neighbourhood, who is married to an Indonesian. Sweet children he has! And he also likes to call the Adzan, just like you!"

It was already night when we reached the harbor, but we were lucky and caught the last ferry to Bali. Edi brought me to a friend of his named Harry, who worked with stencils. He showed me some shirts he made that I liked well, and I considered dealing with clothes to generate some kind of income should I decide to stay in Indonesia.

"I think you do not need to go to Jakarta," said Harry, "isn't there a German consulate on Bali?"

"Could be! Good idea!" I said, pleased, because I did not even know how I would have come to Jakarta.

Edi went back to Lombok and left me with Harry, who borrowed a motorbike with which we drove to Sanur to the consulate. A friendly lady told me, I would need photos and a certificate from the police that my passport had been stolen in order to get a new one. So we went to the police station of Sanur, where I reported, my passport had been stolen at the beach.

"And where do you live now?" asked the policeman.

"With a friend," I showed the policeman one of Harry's business cards.

"I'll just call this number and check it," said the policeman while standing up, when I interjected, the friend would be waiting outside and I could call him. I hurried outside and explained Harry briefly what I had told the police. "You have to come in for a short while!"

The policeman interrogated Harry, who stated that he had met me at a mosque in Denpasar and then invited me to his home.

"Oh no! I told the guy that I had met Harry at the beach!" I thought worriedly.

"You have to report a foreigner staying with you," the policeman said unkindly, but seemed not to notice the contradiction.

"That's what I am doing now," replied Harry piously.

The police officer asked a few more questions and I realized that I was ill-prepared for the interview. But eventually we got a copy of the police report and drove back to the consulate.

"All my money got stolen too," I claimed, "and my return ticket!"

"You are not able to prove when you entered the country?" asked the woman, and I shook my head. "Then you can get problems. Immigration authorities will want to prove that."

I did not flinch, though I felt a little queasy.

"The best is to first get the ticket and to go to the authorities for the new stamp one day before departure. Then usually they do not have enough time anymore to check it."

Why did this nice woman give me such great advice? Did she suspect anything?

"Do you have relatives that could send you the money for the flight?"

"Yes, I have!"

"Then you can use our phone to call them. But keep it short, it is expensive."

"Hi Daddy! It's me ... In Bali ... yeah, I'm fine! Look, good news and bad news! The good one: we will meet again soon; the bad one: you need to send me the money for the ticket ... let's say 1500, - DM ... Deutsche Bank, Surabaya ... great ... about a week ... okay, thank you! ... Bye!"

Soon I got the provisional passport and the money. Then I booked a flight for Thursday afternoon to Paris. The next day was Wednesday, and I went anxiously to the Kantor Imigrasi.

I got introduced to a mustachioed inspector in a dark brown uniform whom I presented the police report, the plane ticket and a letter from the consulate, in which the case was briefly described and kindly asked for an unproblematic solution.

"Yes," said the inspector, and tugged at his beard, "but we need to check that. So easily we can not give you the visa. When and where have you entered Indonesia?"

"On the 15th August in Medan," I lied, "but it could also have been the 14th or the 16th, I am not sure anymore."

"And you do not have anything that could confirm that?" The inspector asked distrustfully.

"No, everything got stolen!"

"Then we will have to call Medan now. You have to buy a phone card. You get it at the post office."

"I can give you the money directly," I said, hoping that with a little 'money under the table' the case could be settled.

"No, no," said the inspector and called a guy in a light brown uniform. "Go with this man to the post office and then come back with the card."

So I went at the back of the official's motorbike to the post office and bought the card. When I returned, I was asked to sit on a bench and wait. After an hour, someone came and said that at the moment it would be impossible to get a line, I should wait a little while longer. So I sat trembling all afternoon on my bench and went only for prayer to a nearby mosque.

"Lord, please let them not get a connection ..." I prayed.

In the evening I was told that I should come back tomorrow morning, at the moment nothing could be done.

The next morning they tried again, and this time it worked and they got the connection: "Medan gives us notice in an hour."

I rushed to the mosque and prayed: "I know it does not look good, but if you want, I still get my stamp!"

This time I was introduced to another inspector, because the man from yesterday apparently was off duty today.

"Medan has informed us that on the 15th of August no German with your name has arrived there," he said, looking me in the eyes like he wanted to eat me. I did however not falter and immediately said: "But I told your colleague that I do not know anymore if it has been really the 15th! It could also have been the 14th or the 16th!"

The inspector leaned back in his chair, apparently bad-tempered, and did not say anything.

"I do not understand the problem," I said cheekily. "If there is someone in Germany without a visa, he gets deported! I do not want to stay in Indonesia but to leave!"

"It's not about the Europeans! I know you can get a visa. We are concerned with the macro problem," admitted the inspector. "I will ask my superior what to do with you!"

I put my provisional passport in front of him: "I have to go now to the mosque for noon prayer. If you would be so kind to decide then, please! I need to leave soon in order not to miss the flight."

When I returned from prayer, the passport was already stamped and waiting for me. Relieved, I left the building, thanked God, and hurried to pick up my things at Harry's house. Harry was waiting excitedly for me and was mighty glad that everything went well.

"I have been sitting in the mosque and prayed for you all the time," he exaggerated a little and drove me to the airport.

Epilogue

Since then more than twenty years have passed. Islam transformed my life, like God says in his Holy Book:

Allah is the Protecting Guardian of those who believe. He bringeth them out of darkness into light. [al-Baqarah 257]

I also found true what is written in the bible:

And he who leaves houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields because of my name, he will get it hundredfold (in this world) and will reach eternal life. [Matthew 19.29]

During my journey I found indeed hundreds of people who treated me like their brother or son! In the Koran God gives a similar promise:

And as for those who emigrated for the Cause of Allah, after suffering oppression, We will certainly give them goodly residence in this world, but indeed the reward of the Hereafter will be greater, if they but knew! [An-Nahl 41]

God gave me indeed goodly residence in this world and in fact much more than I was ever hoping or could have dreamed for when I left Germany. He gave me a colourful adventurous life free of the shackles of slavery and the conviction to have found His religion! So I ardently hope, I also will get the second and most important part of the promise, a good place in the hereafter and get spared of the torment in hell as a result of my own stupid deeds.



God never breaks His promise! May He guide us always to all good in this world and the next! All praise belongs to Him!

