

There are many people, unknown, quiet and deeply connected with the Divine and thereby with everyone. Abdullah was one of them. His life was an inspiration. He died 26 years ago at the age of 30. Those who knew him still talk of him and his loving nature.

It was August. The monsoon clouds were heavy between the mountains. I had travelled for the first time to Nainital, which is situated at a height of some 2000 metres in the Himalayas. Together with a porter I walked for about an hour towards Ban Niwas, a branch of Aurobindo Ashram, on top of a hill away from the town.

Abdullah had reached by night bus from Delhi some hours before me. I saw him sitting by the window trimming his beard, when I put my laundry on the washing line and liked him at first sight.

Abdullah was from Jordan. He was the eldest of ten siblings and had worked in Saudi Arabia to contribute more effectively to the family budget. One day he

came across a small book by Sri Aurobindo titled *The Basis of Yoga*. Aurobindo's thoughts touched him deeply – so deeply that he started saving for a journey to India. He was 27 when he flew to India in October 1979 and straight away headed for the Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry. There he integrated himself into the community and worked on the ashram farm. Soon, however, he felt certain stagnation.

“People liked me. I was popular. But I was disappointed, in fact really depressed. Even in Saudi Arabia, I had been popular. But if this is all in life, I don't want to live, I felt at that time”, he later confided to me.

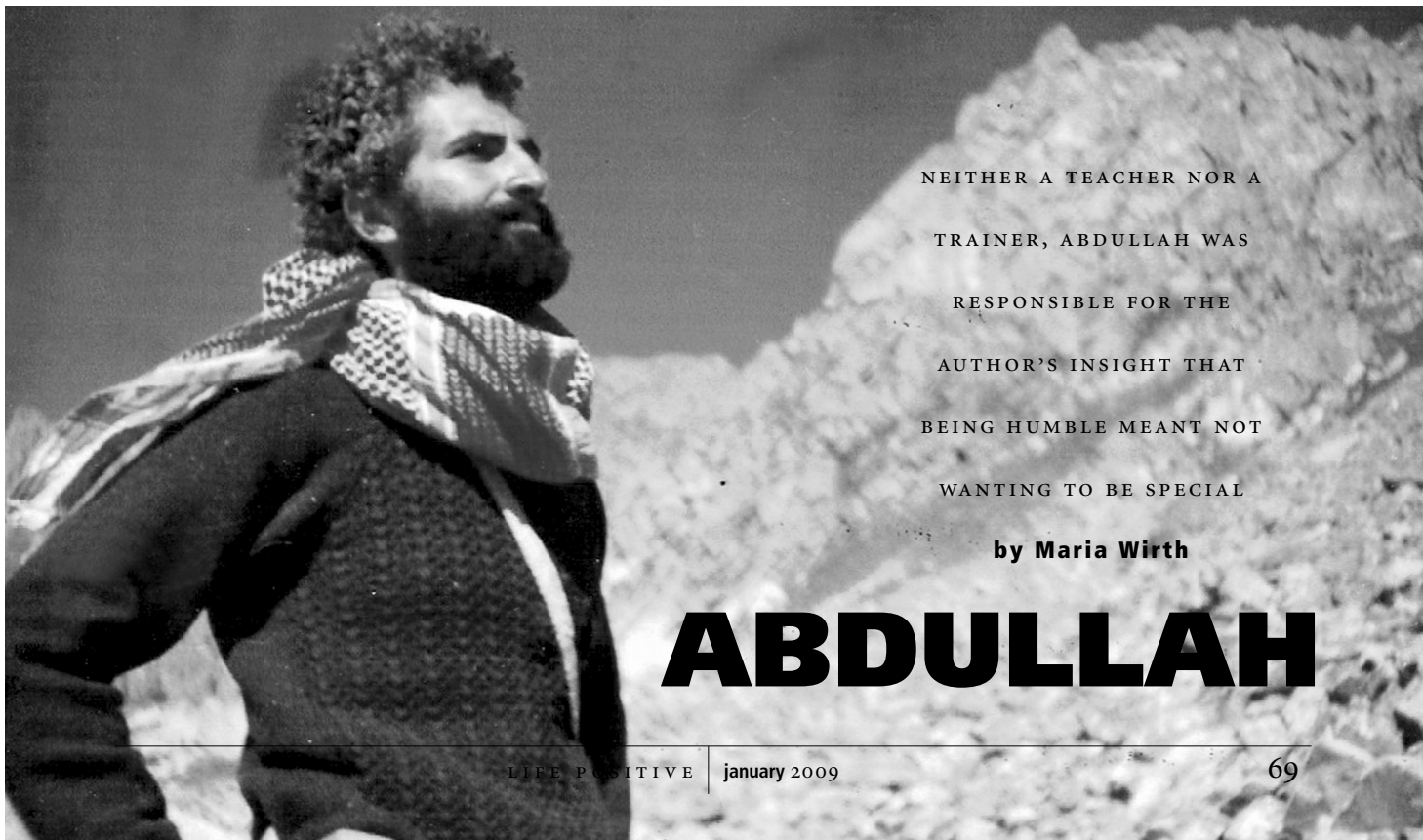
He changed the place and went to the Delhi branch of the ashram. There, too, he was made welcome. Among other tasks, he was to guide the visitors around the ashram. Surendranath Jauhar, the grand old man, who had built up the Delhi ashram on his huge, private property and regularly spent the summers in

Nainital, told me over lunch, “Since Abdullah shows the guests around the ashram, everyone is very impressed. In fact they are extremely impressed.” And after a dramatic pause he added, “Not by the ashram, but by Abdullah!”

It did not take me long to realise that Abdullah was not average. We spent a lot of time together and soon almost the whole day.

Every morning Abdullah asked the cook whether he needed anything from the bazaar in town. Something or other was always needed and Abdullah offered to get it. Then he asked me, whether I would come with him and I always said yes. The first climb together with the porter had seemed long and arduous. With Abdullah by my side it was easy and a joy.

We also wandered into the surrounding villages. The peasants invited us into their houses and urged us to have tea and snacks. Abdullah accepted their hospitality without any hesitation, whereas



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by Maria Wirth

# ABDULLAH

I, with my German mindset, started to calculate that those small farmers were poor and I did not want to deprive them of the little they had, like their hard earned biscuits. Yet I also could feel that they genuinely enjoyed our presence and happily offered whatever they had.

Abdullah sometimes sang spontaneously one of the songs of Kabir, a saint who lived 600 years ago, when India suffered under Muslim rule and who worked in his life for a reconciliation between Hindus and Muslims. When Abdullah sang, everyone was quiet. He touched the simple folk with his sincerity.

Abdullah was intuitive, calm and loving and I could learn a lot from him. For example, when he took the soiled hand of a beggar child into his own, looked into his eyes and asked what his name was. Then that little face lit up with joy.

The monsoon was over. Abdullah suggested visiting the temples in Badrinath and Kedarnath at a height of over 3000 metres. When we silently walked down to the bus stand at five o'clock in the morning, I briefly glanced at him. In the same moment he looked at me, earnestly – and I could feel that I had fallen in love with him. Only a few months ago I had intensely thought about love (see my article in *LP*, Nov. 2007) and realised that falling in love with one particular person is not the ultimate and yet I could not help it. In fact I enjoyed it.

Probably it was my good luck that I fell in love with Abdullah. Because he had not fallen in love with me. Maybe he did not even know that state. He simply loved. Only years later I got a notion what the difference is. And only after I could feel that difference in myself and not see it merely intellectually, being in love with somebody automatically lost its great attraction. I am in love when I need the other person to be happy, when life seems grey and dull without him or her. I love, however, when out of my own fullness I flow out to the other in love. When I love, I am free, when I am in love with somebody, then I am bound to that person.

When our glances met that morning, I did not make these distinctions. We enjoyed our pilgrimage. It was like a dream to climb together almost 4000 metres high. Everywhere we got in contact with locals and pilgrims who had come from all corners of India. The atmosphere on the treks and in the buses was full of joy and excitement.

Abdullah had a humorous remark for each situation and often made everyone laugh, when we could have cried as well, for example when we got stuck at landslides. Our co-travellers enjoyed his company and during tea breaks some passengers inevitably called us to join them. They wrote down mantras for us, taught us the arati song “Om Jaya Jagadisha Hare” and kept singing the tune till we had internalised it, gave us addresses of temples and saints whom we should not miss, told us stories about Ram and Krishna and discussed highest philosophy. It was interesting. Nevertheless I would have sometimes preferred to be alone with Abdullah. He, however, did not have such preferences.

“When I came to India, I had consciously given myself to the One – to Him as the Absolute as well as immanent in His manifestation,” he later wrote in a letter to me. “I try to be open for everyone whom I meet. It is not for me to judge or be selective, because He is looking out from all eyes.”

Abdullah talked about God as if he was the only true beloved, ever close, intimate, and present, who directs everything for one's best and whom one meets in each human being. Therefore there were only brothers and sisters for him. The path that he so conscientiously followed was the same that I also wanted to follow, but kept forgetting in daily life. He reminded me of it through his behaviour. I had the impression that he had an inexhaustible store of love. It made it easy for him to give himself and his time so freely to others. And it made him so likeable.

“What is your work,” somebody asked him once in the Aurobindo

Ashram in Delhi. An ashramite who heard it answered for him, “His work is to love”. And when once an acquaintance asked us when we are going to marry, Abdullah said calmly and with a serious mien, “Don't you know that I am married already?” “Really? With whom?” the questioner reacted in surprise. “With everyone”, Abdullah replied and it was typical of him.

Once we attended a talk of Jiddu Krishnamurti in Delhi. After the talk a friend took us back on his motorbike. He asked Abdullah to get down at a certain crossing, in case a policeman was posted there. “You know it is not allowed to be three on a bike”, he said. “No problem”, Abdullah replied. “I will convince the policeman that we are not three, but one.”

Abdullah felt closely connected with everyone. He was convinced that there is only one Brahman, Allah, God or Self (names don't matter). So his Self was also the Self in all others. For him it was clear that in every human being the one God wanted to give full expression to his beauty, love and fullness. The differences among human beings are only in the degree in which the potential is manifested. The potential itself in everyone is the same.

“On this physical plane you are closest to me. But my love for everyone is the same”, he told me once. It was not really what I wanted to hear. I would have rather had him say that I was special, that he loved only me. But Abdullah could not do me this favour, if he remained true to himself.

He tried his best to make me understand how he perceived the world. “Do you feel the beauty here?” he asked for example, when we admired the fiery evening sky at sunset from the top of a mountain. My attention had been directed outwards and I had not felt my heart. But when he pointed to it, I sensed what he meant.

“Try to draw the sexual energy upwards with the help of the breath and let it not go downward the easy way,” he once said out of the blue when we were on our 14-km trek to Kedarnath. “There

is an amazing potential of bliss in us, far more bliss than what sex can give.” I believed him, because I had once experienced amazing bliss. I was 22 at that time, was sitting on my bed and meditating with a mantra that a TM teacher had given. Fully unexpected, something suddenly opened up within me and almost unbearable bliss spread out all over for a long time. Afterwards, I tried to describe it in a letter to a friend. I tore the letter in the end, because I felt that nobody would understand, if one had not experienced it oneself.

So it made sense what Abdullah said. I knew there was great bliss in me and in everyone, though I had no idea how to access it. It was helpful to be with Abdullah. Again and again he directed my attention back to the one Self.

Something had happened to Abdullah a few months after he had arrived in India. He had felt very depressed and seriously thought of suicide. “In addition to my depression I had a bad flu with high fever and truly felt miserable. I don’t quite know what happened. Something shifted and I felt absolutely wonderful. I still had a bad flu, still had fever. Yet now I enjoyed it,” he shared with me. “This shift stayed. It is not important whether I am healthy or sick.”

Once, we visited a family in Delhi who were friends with Abdullah. They had two sons, 20 and 21 years old. I talked a lot with Karu, the elder one, and it was a joy to be with him. Three days later Abdullah got a message from the mother. “Come! My son has died in a road accident.” It was a heartbreaking situation. The body of Karu was lying on the floor in their flat, covered with a white sheet, dead. His father sobbed uncontrollably. His mother tried hard to compose herself. A girl kept staring at the body with tears rolling down her cheeks. I admired Abdullah. He did not fight back tears like me, though he had been close to Karu. He knew not only intellectually that everything is for the best and nothing really is lost by dying. Karu’s father put his head on

Abdullah’s shoulder and wept. Abdullah sang with a low voice a soothing song into his ear. He had calm shining eyes.

We also spent time together in Pondicherry and Auroville. There, too, Abdullah would give his time freely to whoever asked for it. Yet in the westernised atmosphere of Auroville and Pondicherry, his attitude was a challenge for me. I could sense that two foreign women were in love with him. I could of course not blame them, but it brought out jealousy in me. Abdullah had calm, shining eyes when he held my head in his hands and asked, “Did you ever think of being humble?” A guru could not have aimed a better blow at my ego. I cried in my room for a long time, without really knowing why it hurt so much. Maybe, because I used to think that I was rather

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humble. Abdullah’s remark showed me that being humble did not mean to stay in the background for whatever reason. It meant: not wanting to be special. It seemed impossible. It felt like having to pull out some vital organ. Maybe, those tears were some sort of an initial cleansing and the wish to be special has to fall off by itself. It cannot be ‘done’.

We also attended an international conference on “Ancient Wisdom and Modern Science” in Bombay. It was my first assignment for a German magazine and I felt intimidated by all those confident and competent looking delegates. The oneness of all was a topic at the conference, yet it seemed theoretical in the atmosphere of this 5-star hotel. It had felt more real for me outside in India. Abdullah, however, was the same. He saw

through the masks and loved what was behind them, never mind whether the mask looked arrogant or humble. Once, he sat next to a well-known Israeli rabbi and the two talked and laughed. After a while the rabbi bent over to me and said, “One simply has to love him, isn’t it?”

Abdullah was greatly devoted to Sri Aurobindo and wanted to go to Pondicherry in the heat of summer. It was a difficult decision for me, but I cancelled the train ticket that he had got for me in the last moment. He would come back to the north, we would meet again...

Abdullah wrote long letters from Pondicherry. He shared his thoughts and daily life in great detail. He also mentioned that he and a friend from Syria took swimming lessons from an Australian. Once, however, there was a gap of almost two weeks when no news came. I became restless. Finally a letter reached, strangely from one of his friends in the Ashram. I was confused, hastily opened it and read: “Dear Maria, I don’t know whether you know already. On July 20th, he (the ‘he’ was crossed out and Abdullah written over it) drowned in the sea in Pondicherry.”

NO! was all I could think and feel.

#### **Epilogue:**

It was very painful, yet already on the first day a voice got occasionally through to me: “Be bold, Maria! You know that I am not dead.” There were many amazing incidents. For example a few weeks later in Haridwar, I had brought a friend to the night train to Delhi. It was late, when I came back to the Tourist Bungalow and sat for meditation. It was more a kind of dozing, yet suddenly I jerked awake: “Happy birthday, Maria! Happy birthday, Maria!” I clearly heard. “This is Abdullah”, I knew, and wondered why he wished me a happy birthday. Then I remembered that ‘tomorrow’ was my birthday. “Maybe it is tomorrow already?” I switched on the light. It was midnight sharp. ☾

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