



## *Warren P. Vickerman* **An Unkown But Great Disciple**



### **Soul-friends incarnating together**

Over a century ago, a handful of spiritually towering soul-friends came down to earth, almost simultaneously, hand in hand like brothers – or better: like a father with his sons – in order to flood the world with a great Light:

- Yogananda (\*1893);
- Rajarsi Janakananda (\*1892);
- Dr. Lewis (\*1893);
- Oliver Black (\*1893);
- Swami Dhirananda (\*1893, Yogananda's close boyhood friend, early associate in his mission, "my best friend").

### **An unknown brother**

United with them incarnated another brother, about whom we hardly hear anything, even though he was one of them: Warren P. Vickerman (\*1893).

Yogananda himself told the monks at Mount Washington (see *Conversations With Yogananda* by Swami Kriyananda) that Mr. Vickerman in a past life had been his child and heir. When Yogananda was William the Conqueror, his second son was Rufus, who became his successor to the throne (William II of England). He remained completely loyal to his father. Rufus, known for his brusque personality, in this lifetime was born as Warren P. Vickerman, again of somewhat rough manners, it is said.

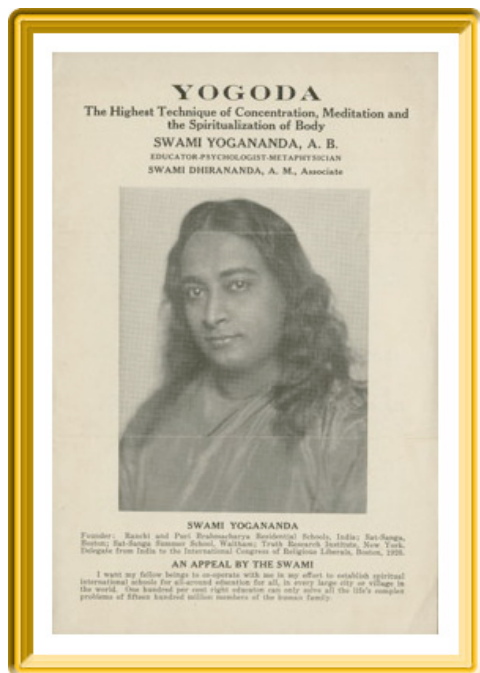


In that former lifetime, William the Conqueror's other male heirs were Robert Courthouse, who in the present lifetime became Swami Dhirananda, about whom Yogananda said that he would be "liberated after another three incarnations"; the third son was Henry I, who in the present lifetime became Swami Kriyananda. He, according to Yogananda, would "find God at the end of this life."

To Kriyananda's surprise, Mr. Vickerman took an instant liking to him when they met in New York in April 1955, remarking to him several times, with emphasis: "I don't know what it is about you, but I feel as though you were my brother." His sentiment seemed unusual, as Kriyananda was only 28, while Mr. Vickerman was in his 60ies. It was a brotherhood rooted in those distant lives.

Kriyananda describes Mr. Vickerman as "slightly softer" than Rufus. He adds: "Vickerman's nature was warm and enthusiastic—blustering, yes: rather like those hirsute blusterers who like to puff out their long mustaches and make the long hairs fly out before them every time they expel their breath." And: "Vickerman was loyal to Yogananda, even as William Rufus had been to his father, but he was still too rough-hewn to live in close proximity to the guru." (See *Two Souls, Four Lives*, by Catherine Kairavi).

**Not yet breathless...**



“One day I saw in the newspapers that a certain Swami Yogananda was scheduled to give a lecture in Philadelphia. I dismissed the thought of listening to him, and told myself impatiently, ‘I’ve heard too many swamis! I’m not interested in what they have to say. But if this man can help me to go breathless, I must go and meet him.’

"Yes," he said, equally briefly. "Come inside."

"I entered, and he touched me. All at once, my breath stopped: I entered the breathless state of superconsciousness.

Since then, I have been his devoted follower."

He was in ecstasy: “I knew that I had found my guru.” As Daya Mata recounts, during that meeting Yogananda initiated Mr. Vickerman into Kriya Yoga, which he faithfully practiced throughout his life.

Yogananda also bestowed on him, a married householder, the authority to initiate devotees into Kriya Yoga, as one can read in an SRF inter-colony bulletin, in April 1958, describing Mr. Vickerman as an advanced disciple.

The Master affectionately called him “Vicky,” as a father would call his son. (By the way, Yogananda’s seemed to have loved nicknames: Rajarsi was “Little One”; Kriyananda, “Walter”; Dr. Lewis, “Doctor”; Gyanamata, “Sister”; Durga Mata “Duj”.)

Vicky's wife Anne recounts that Yoganandaji often stayed with the Vickermans in New York. Vickie was an excellent cook, and so was Yogananda. The two of them often spent hours in the kitchen cooking up Indian specialties, and creating new ones. Whenever Anne (who couldn't cook at all) entered the precincts she was immediately shooed out and the door closed, as the experts continued their culinary conquests.

## A yogi with a busy life

Mr. Vickerman was a businessman. His family ran a carpet business, the *Pennsylvania Carpet Company*, of which he was Vice-President. In 1925, when Yogananda established his Mount Washington

headquarters, he generously supplied carpets for the rooms. Later he donated carpets also to the Hollywood Church (those deep blue carpets).

Similar to Rajarsi Janakananda and Oliver Black, he was an extremely active executive. When asked how he could find time to meditate in the midst of his responsibilities, he would laugh and answer: "When one's desire for God-realization is strong enough, he will stay up all night if necessary, to meditate. He finds then that he can perform his worldly duties with greater ease and right direction, and can overcome all obstacles."

Apart from his intense business and meditative life, Mr. Vickerman found time for yet another task: he organized regular meditations in his New York home, for devotees whom he had instructed in the Self-realization teachings. It became an SRF meditation group. Also his wife Anne was active in it.

SRF writes that Mr. Vickerman strongly supported his Master's work financially, by interesting devotees and friends in helping Yogananda's mission. "Many substantial gifts were received by SRF as a result of the interest awakened by Mr. Vickerman in his friends and business acquaintances."



Anne, his wife, recounts that Mr. Vickerman was serious about finding God, and expected other yogis to be the same. He was a truly advanced yogi, meditating nearly all night, sitting on his twin bed. Anne would be in the other bed, reading. Just before Vickie began to meditate, he would open the drawer in the table beside his bed and bring out a handful of *Almond Joy* candy bars, which Anne loved. Tossing them over to her, he would say: "Here, enjoy yourself." And she did. Eating the *Almond Joys*, she watched as he went deeper and deeper into meditation, entering *samadhi* without breath or heartbeat, and sometimes levitating off the bed. And that was how she fell asleep every night.

Vicky radiated a calmness and happiness which impressed all those who met him. Yogananda in fact taught: "The best advertisement for Kriya Yoga is a good Kriya Yogi." Vicky of course was not only a good, but an extraordinary Kriya Yogi. He practiced the highest form of Kriya Yoga, which is done without breath. In that state the devotee experiences his eternal soul: "Breathlessness is deathlessness."

SRF writes that in 1956 Daya Mata (then still called Sister Daya, but already president of SRF) visited Vicky and Anne in New York City. Daya recalls: "What I remember most about him was his tremendous love for our Master and his keen interest in the growth of the work of Self-Realization Fellowship. He loved to reminisce far into the night about the days when he first met his Guru. Vicky's piercing blue eyes would fill with tears of joy and love as he spoke about Master. Though Vicky was a businessman in the world, he was not of this world. His deep spiritual understanding and example drew many souls unto the path of Self-realization. He left a beautiful memory in the hearts of all who knew him."

One day Anne came across a modern translation of the Bible. She read out to Vickie the part in *Revelation* in which Saint John has a vision of Jesus with seven golden candlesticks. The translators had used the term "lampstands," which they felt modern people could relate to. Vickie's comment was: "My God, it sounds like Saint John's vision took place in Macy's Department Store!"

### **His wife Anne**

Anne, his wife, merits to be presented in her own right. She was a completely devoted soul, one who was greatly admired by other devotees. About her background: Anne was born into the topmost

stratum of New York City society, known as the *Four Hundred*. Famous people were her close friends. Her best friends were Wanda and Wally Toscanini, the daughters of Arturo Toscanini, the great conductor. Three to four nights of every week she would have dinner with the Toscanini family, and it was always spaghetti, at the demand of the Maestro.

In 1924, Swami Yogananda came to New York and spoke in Carnegie Hall. Anne went to hear him and became his faithful disciple. The life of the *Four Hundred* was the only life she had known, but when many of the them derided and denounced the Swami, Anne cut nearly all her lifelong high-society ties, making Yogananda's disciples her only close friends. This shows great strength of character, wisdom, and utter devotion. Her family must certainly have been abhorred. What they didn't know is that Anne simply changed her life from worldly nobility to spiritual nobility.



After Vickie's death Anne moved to Mount Washington and then to Hollywood, living just around the corner from the SRF Center. She single-handedly managed the bookstore and often filled in as cashier in the cafe Yogananda had created. In later years she lived in Encinitas, near the hermitage. Anne was good friends with Daya Mata. Her whole life was completely dedicated to God and Guru.

However, Anne shared a strange prophecy. More than once when talking with Vickie and Anne, Yogananda had told them: "In three generations you won't even know I came to this country." When they asked him what, then, was the use of his coming here, he replied: "I have planted the seed and it will grow. My work will go on, even if sometimes my name will not even be mentioned."

### **No nonsense, please!**

Vicky's deep spiritual insight was demonstrated when he was visited by a person who spoke at length about his yogic experiences. After the man left, Anne remarked about how impressed she had been. "It was all lies; not a word of truth in it. I was watching his heart center all the time," Vicky quietly stated.

He was a no-nonsense man, somewhat brusque, as we said. One day a woman came to him in great distress. "Oh! What shall I do? Every time I start to meditate I fly up astrally out of my body and hit my head on the ceiling!" Vickie looked at her with a glint in his eye and said forcefully: "Lady, when you are in that state there is no ceiling!"

William Rufus (his former lifetime) is known to have had most difficult relations with the church, which his father, William the Conqueror, had tried to strengthen, together with Archbishop Lanfranc (Sri Yukteswar). In this life Mr. Vickerman, maybe as a karmic consequence, was not a prominent part of SRF's organizational development.

Vicky also never lived at Mount Washington, not even for a short period. In general he was, it is reported, "almost fiercely skeptical of the bonafides of churchmen."

He remained therefore an unknown figure, even though he certainly is one of the great souls who were intimately close to Yogananda: he was his son and successor in a previous life; a devotee who entered into breathless ecstasy at their first meeting; he received Kriya Yoga right away; he was soon trusted to bestow the sacred initiation into Kriya. All that is more than unusual. We hear similar stories, it seems, only about Rajarsi Janakananda, Oliver Black, and Dr. Lewis.

### **A moral for devotees**

As a moral of his story we might state that some devotees, however close they are inwardly to their guru, and however advanced, are simply not cut out for religious organizational work, or for being physically close to the guru. Their magic happens inside.

Another “moral” is that some devotees might be highly advanced, but on the outer “stage of life” they manifest a somewhat odd character, at times possibly quite eccentric, out of the norm in some way. If their eccentricity or strange originality comes not from the ego, but from the soul, it is to be accepted, even encouraged.

Swami Kriyananda for example was known to consciously defend the strange individuals: “Toleration for eccentricity has prevented the social sanctioning of mediocrity.” And: “We encourage eccentricity at Ananda.... At Ananda, perhaps infected by my own light attitude toward excessive formality, people are encouraged to be simply themselves as long as they develop inward devotion to God.”

### **His passing**

At any rate, the great soul Vicky passed away on December 4 1957, just 5 years after his Master. They had incarnated together, and then left together.

