

Ajja 1916-2007

The Avadhut

by Andrew Cohen

“I am not in mind at all. I am in a state beyond all thoughts and emotions. I am speaking, but I don’t know anything. I don’t think; I read no books. For the true knowledge itself, none of this is necessary. For intellectual discourse, books are necessary, but for Self-experience, nothing is required. If I am in some remote corner, also it doesn’t stop. It spreads through the whole universe, percolates through the whole universe. If one reaches that state of ananda, even if he is in some remote corner, it just spreads. Even if he tries to hide, it just radiates from him. It reaches throughout the whole universe, the entire cosmos.”*

Ajja

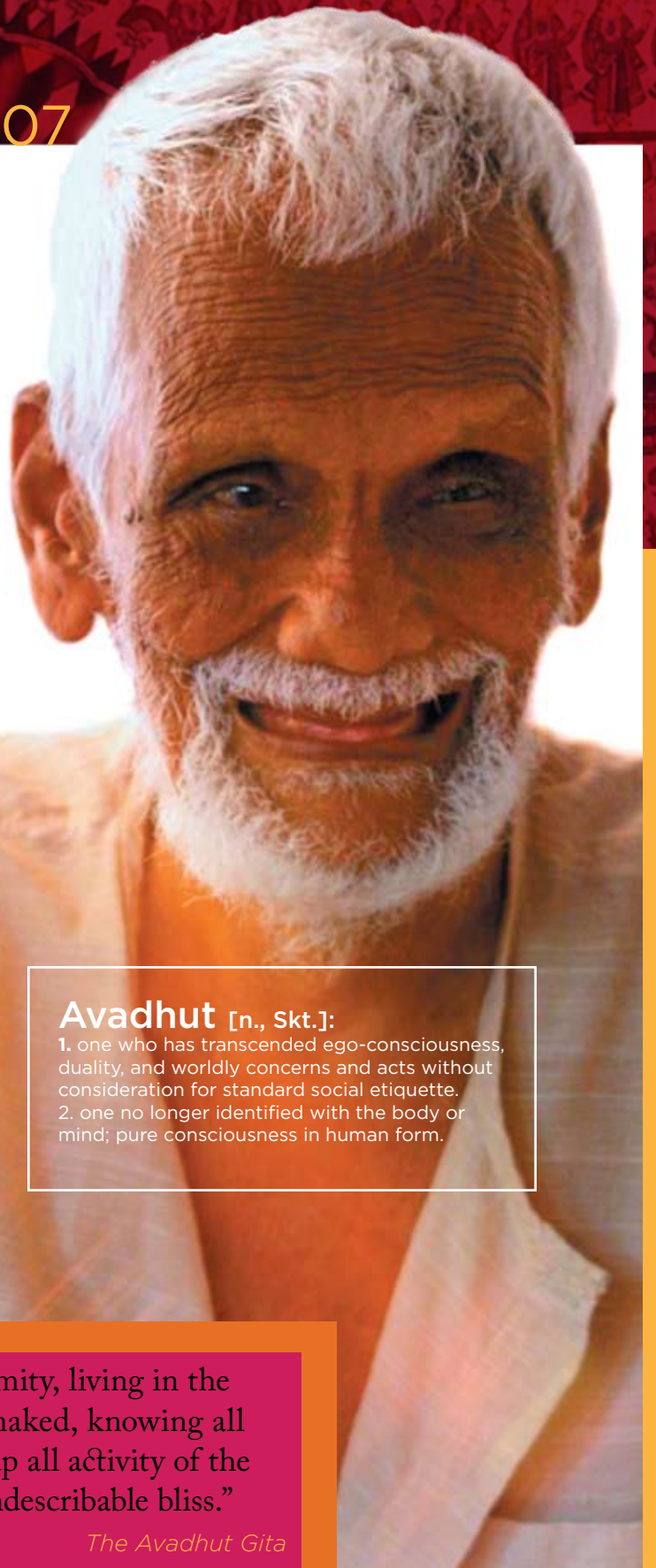
* the spiritual bliss of Self-realization

Avadhut [n., skt.]:

1. one who has transcended ego-consciousness, duality, and worldly concerns and acts without consideration for standard social etiquette.
2. one no longer identified with the body or mind; pure consciousness in human form.

“The Avadhut in unshakable equanimity, living in the holy temple of nothingness, walks naked, knowing all to be Brahman. . . . Having given up all activity of the mind, he is in his natural state of indescribable bliss.”

The Avadhut Gita





Ajja, or “grandfather” as he was fondly called by those who knew him, was one of the most truly liberated human beings I have ever had the privilege to meet. What struck me most about him was that he seemed to literally have no ego-consciousness left in him—at all. His ego, apparently, had been burnt to ashes in the fire of his own passion for the Divine.

I met him three times over a period of several years, and I was always taken aback by the power of his childlike innocence and the profound freedom from this world and everything in it that he emanated from every cell in his frail body. His absolute transparency and utter lack of even a trace of self-consciousness always highlighted the subtle, and often not-so-subtle, inner duality of everyone else in his vicinity. It’s only possible to know what enlightenment truly is when you’re in the presence of someone like Ajja.

The story of his life and awakening is a wild one indeed, the likes of which only seem to happen in Mother India. Ajja had been a wealthy farmer until the age of thirty-six when, as a result of a sudden illness and an experience of extreme pain that lasted for six months, he began a process of one-pointed inquiry that led to a dramatic and profound awakening. “I am not the body,” he reportedly declared at the time. “I have no mother. I have no father. I am that Brightness.”

Ajja made some truly outrageous claims, including that the great Mahatma Gandhi’s soul had apparently entered his body at the moment of his awakening, making it possible for the great social activist to achieve final emancipation. “The one who was here is gone,” Ajja said. “Someone else has come.”

Ajja’s awakening initiated a sixteen-year period of wandering throughout India, often naked, moving in and out of ecstatic states of consciousness, and frequently losing touch

with bodily awareness for long periods of time. In 1961, while in Rishikesh, he heard a voice that called out to him: “Come to me. You come to me. I am here in Ganeshpuri.” Responding immediately, he went to Ganeshpuri to see the legendary Avadhut Swami Nityananda, with whom he spent only five minutes. Not a word was uttered as they stared into each other’s eyes. It was this meeting that enabled Ajja to “come back to earth”; he soon began wearing clothes again and speaking with others.

This kind and very gentle man was not really a “teacher” in the traditional sense. I’m not even sure he was able to share directly with others the true depth of his own profound experience. But his living example of absolute egolessness and surrender was unparalleled, reminding me of a sign in the office of the Sivananda Ashram in Rishikesh with a statement that always took my breath away: *Teaching means Being.*

I conducted an in-depth interview with Ajja in 1998, which was published in Issue 14 of *WIE*. I was pleased to discover when I went to see him again the following year that my article “Who Is Ajja?” had generated a lot of interest in this great being not only among Western readers but, to my surprise, even more so in India itself!

Ajja left this world on March 12, 2007. In the last years of his life, a small ashram was built for him outside Mangalore, where his devotees continue to live under his guidance. As Srinath Radha, one of his closest disciples, confided in me last spring: “I am quite sure he will continue to take care of us. I mean, that’s too small of a thing for him to really bother about—but he will take care.”



Find out more about Ajja’s remarkable life and legacy at wie.org/ajja