

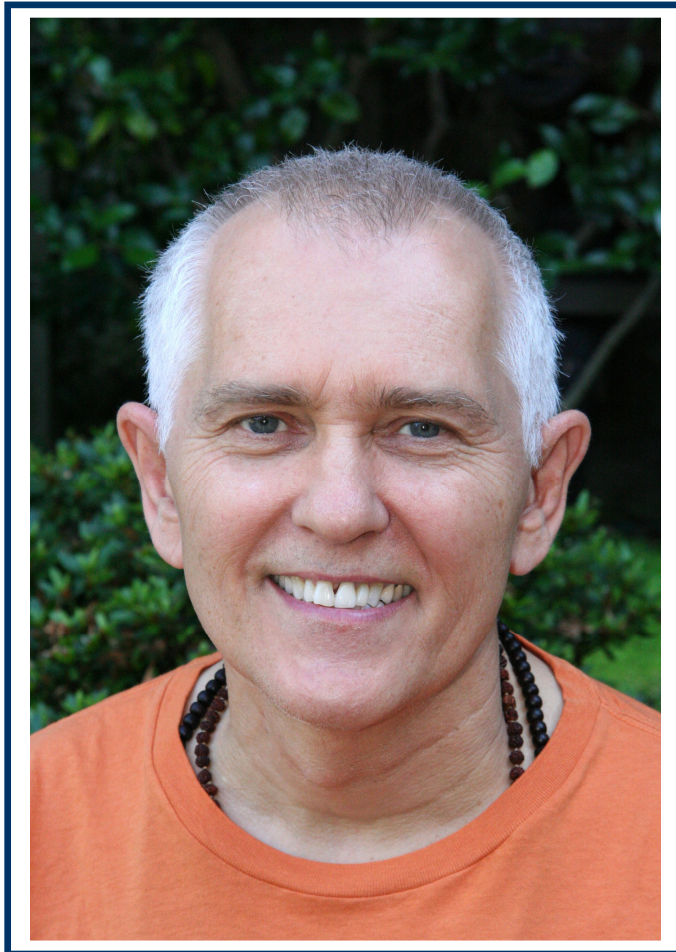
Swami Ganeshananda

Swami Ganeshananda (formerly Per Oskar Johansen) was born on November 2, 1944, in Norway while the German Nazis occupied the country and Europe was under siege during World War II. He moved to the United States when he was a young man of 18, uncertain of his future. After he had spent a few years searching for a place in the world, he began to feel a longing for spiritual connection.

Speaking of that time, he says, “I was like a leaf in the wind. I was involved in all kinds of things, demonstrations against the Vietnam War and such, and was a college student and had an okay life, I guess, but after awhile there was something in me that started to well up and said, “There’s got to be more to life than this.” But I didn’t know how to change, and felt I needed help. There was a yearning building up in me and it got so strong that at one point I was seriously banging my head on the floor and I was saying, “God help me!” I wanted some kind of change that would open up a deeper place, a place that I’d read about or heard about, but couldn’t find within myself.”

“My father had died early so I was knotted up in my heart, and I wasn’t really conscious of how much pain I had in my system, and there was a lot of ice. When we talk about tension, you can almost think of it as a kind of ice throughout your psychic system. It’s too painful to feel, so we feel nothing. But I started to have some experiences that began to loosen that up.”

In a serendipitous encounter, he met a woman in New York who happened to be a student of Swami Rudrananda’s (Rudi’s). He was intrigued by her experience with Rudi and was anxious to meet him, but apparently the timing was not right: No sooner had she come into his life than she abruptly left it, only to reemerge several months later, when she called unexpectedly and invited him to meditation class.



Swamiji remembers well the day he first walked in the door of Rudi's brownstone in New York City, on September 19, 1969. Rudi gave him an introduction to meditation and taught him the double-breath exercise, and explained the practice of yoga. Swamiji said of the experience, "He had an Oriental art store and there were all kinds of beautiful artifacts and ancient things, and he sat in the back of the store – he was *not* a small man. And somewhere from deep inside me a voice said, 'You're going to do this for the rest of your life, every single day.' There was something there about that heart-to-heart contact. Rudi's heart was wide-open; it was like there was nothing to grab a hold of. Anything I tried to grab a hold of just kind of dissolved. So I felt like I had really come home to this family, it was everything I needed.

Rudi showed me right away what this relationship was going to be. I was going to have to let go of my ideas of what the situation was about; it was very simple and very sweet, but also not that easy to take right away," he said. Swamiji felt that soon after he began studying with Rudi, "something that before had been suppressed pain became a flow of energy and love that I had available for myself and for other people. This is not a theory; it is *real*. It is energy that is in the core of my being, and in every other person, too."

In February of 1973, after Rudi took Samadhi (when a Self-realized master transcends to the highest realm after the death of his body), Swamiji considered what he might do next. "I sat in meditation and asked inside where to go, what to do, now that Rudi was no longer physically present," he said. "I saw a vision of a map of the United States with an arrow pointing to Indiana, where Michael Shoemaker, now Swami Chetanananda, had his ashram. There was no doubt then where I would go next. And I have been grateful to have been able to continue my practice ever since as Swamiji's (Swami Chetanananda's) student and devotee."



When asked how he came to teach open-eye class, our advanced form of meditation, Swamiji replied: "A few days before Rudi took Samadhi, I got up the nerve to ask him a question in private that I had wanted to ask for some time – 'Do you think I'll ever be able to be a teacher of this practice?' – and without hesitation, he said, 'Within a year.' It was the last thing he said to me."

Swamiji was later empowered by Swami Chetanananda in 1976 to teach open-eye class at the ashram in Bloomington, Indiana. Consistent with his heart-centered approach to all of life, Swamiji said of teaching his first open-eye class, "It was a great opportunity to deepen my practice and feel more flow and love."

In the late 1970s, he received a Ph.D. in art education and was a tenured faculty member at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville for five years. He established a Nityananda Institute (NI) center while in Knoxville, but later left to join the ashram community in

Cambridge, Massachusetts in the early 1980s. He continued living there as a householder for a number of years.

As a professional he worked for Productivity, Inc., a business that brought Japanese manufacturing methods to America. These methods included “just-in-time” and “lean” manufacturing principles. He initially helped to develop Productivity’s first training programs in America based on direct source materials translated from Japanese, and later became a consultant. This work made good use of his teaching and writing skills, and his ability to transfer useful information and skills to a wide range of people.

After moving to Portland, Oregon in 1993 with the NI community, he left Productivity to become an independent consultant in the United States and Scandinavia. He eventually extended his teaching to include Europe and relocated there to start an NI center in Oslo, Norway on a modified scale in 2001 and in 2006 established a center in Copenhagen, Denmark. Along with Swami Prakashananda, he offered a meditation and yoga intensive there in June of this year.



During the July retreat the dissolution of his old identity as Per Johansen was complete when he became Swami Ganeshananda after taking *sannyas*, a series of rituals in which a practitioner makes a formalized commitment to spiritual practice. A *sannyasi* is given the title “Swami,” or “master of oneself.”

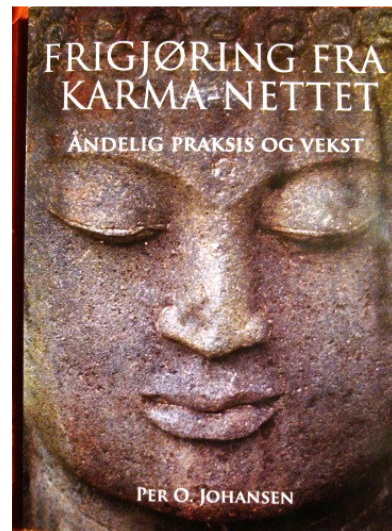


Photo: Kenny Ross

Meaning *the bliss of Ganesh*, his name “Ganeshananda” was bestowed by Swami Chetanananda, who said: “You will be Ganeshananda. Ganesh is the son of Siva (pure consciousness) and Sakti (energy). He is the dissolver of obstacles. You have worked through many obstacles, so it is a good name for you.” Swami Chetanananda went on to explain that Bhagavan Nityananda – Rudi’s guru – was considered a manifestation of Ganesh. Nityananda’s ashram in India, and the town that grew around it, were named Ganeshpuri. Hindus honor Ganesh as a representation of someone who has discovered divinity within, and the term also symbolizes the first sound – OM – resulting from the union of Siva and Sakti.

Swamiji has authored several articles about Trika Yoga practice and spiritual growth for the Norwegian journal, *Alternativt Nettverk*, and he is the author of a book (written in Norwegian), *Freedom from the Web of Karma*.

The European program will no doubt flourish under Swamiji’s guidance. “I would like to see it grow to serve as many people as possible, as deeply as possible, in their spiritual growth, and in ways that will have a positive influence in this troubled world. The form it takes is much less important to me than the quality of it. In time it may include an ashram with a residential program, retreat centers, and training



programs offered to businesses, organizations and people who want to grow as human beings and leaders.”

Swamiji recognizes the role of the teacher as key to the transformation process. “I am grateful beyond words for my teachers. Without Rudi there to awaken this experience, my life would have gone in a totally different direction. And I am also grateful beyond words to Swamiji (Swami Chetanananda), for having taken on this work at a very young age, and for continuing this tradition.”



Photo by Barry Kaplan

Considering the gifts he has received from his teachers, he says: “There is nothing you can give back, unless the opportunity comes, to be helpful. And to be empowered to be of help, and to extend yourself into the world.”

Swamiji will return to Portland this coming December, when he will join others within the TMC community for the New Year’s retreat.

– Kathy Wyer