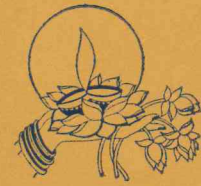


AT THE FEET OF  
MY GURU



By  
SWAMI NIRVEDANANDA

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MY GURU



(SOME RECOLLECTIONS)



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**AUTHOR'S NOTE**

The manuscript was ready four years ago but there was no keenness to give it the form of a printed book. The grace of the Master being experienced at every step ever since a malignant disease affected the body about two years ago, however, prompted me to think in terms of singing aloud the glory of the Guru while life still lingers in the body.

I am extremely grateful to my friend who readily came forward to bear the cost of printing and also to others who helped me in various ways, all of whom wish to remain anonymous. To Artist V. N. O'key I owe a deep debt of gratitude for the excellent sketch of Gurumaharaj. And last but not the least, my heartfelt thanks are due to Sri Achuthan, proprietor of Surekha Press, for planning the size and get-up of the book and for bringing it out beautifully in a short time.

I sincerely invoke the blessings of Sri Gurumaharaj on all of them. Om.

Ghazipur,  
27th August, 1988  
(*Sravana Purnima*)

NIRVEDANANDA.

## PROLOGUE

An urge within me to write about the sacred memories of the days spent at the Holy Feet of Sri Gurudeva has been persisting since some years but, somehow, a feeling of apathy takes the upper hand and the urge remains dormant. An attempt was made two years ago; after a day's scribbling there was no progress. Friends who hear some anecdotes of Gurumaharaj from me feel that these should be put in a book form like the reminiscences of other Mahatmas. Their appeals have a special weight because many of them had not even heard about Gurumaharaj before meeting me. So, keeping their suggestion in mind, and also taking Maharaj's writing on his own Guru appended to his *Spiritual Talks* as a cue, I venture to write this narrative as an act of worship unto Sri Gurudeva. Twentythree years have elapsed since Maharaj attained Mahasamadhi. Yet, many events are fresh in my memory; of the many letters received from him during my pre-monastic days some are still with me and, added to these, there are my diary notes to help me in this task. With this brief preface, let me plunge into the subject.



*Om Sri Sadgurubhyo Namaha*

## REMINISCENCE

It was in the autumn of 1953 that I met His Holiness Sri Swami Purushottamanandaji Maharaj, who was to be my Guru a few years later, for the first time in my life. It was at mid-day during the last week of October that I reached Goolar-Dogi by bus from Rishikesh and, enquiring of a lone villager who chanced to come across, I found my way to Sri Vasishtha Guha. When I went down from the road and reached the Ashrama precincts, I was overwhelmed with joy and emotion because I *felt* I knew the place very well. The valley, the river Ganga flowing not far from the Cave, tall trees and bushes, all made me happy, for they all looked very familiar to me. And when I walked towards the main cave through the bushes and garden, the sight of the Cave thrilled me beyond description. For, as a young boy, when I used to listen to the story of Sages Vasishtha and Viswamitra from my father, I had imagined Vasishtha's Ashrama in the same manner as I now witnessed before me. The small elevated platform, *gadi*, near the door of the cave, the small thatched

roof in front (the present tin-sheet roof was put up much later), were all exactly as I used to imagine as a boy; only, the door of the cave was the door of a thatched hut in my imagination. The whole atmosphere seemed very familiar. But that was not the end. One more surprise awaited me. I found a Brahmachari there and he showed me a thatched hut a few yards away where His Holiness was sitting. (There were no buildings in the vicinity; only two huts were there. Adjacent to the main cave there was a small room in which Swamiji lived. It is still there.) When I approached, I found Swamiji seated in an easy-chair outside the hut. A small table was in front of him with some books and papers on it. Holding the letter of introduction from Sri Swami Chinmayanandaji Maharaj in my hand, I approached him. What a surprise! I did not feel that I was standing before a stranger. I felt I was his own — and felt as if he were my grandfather or some close relative. I felt so familiar with him. After salutations, I introduced myself and handed him the letter. He showed me a cane stool and I seated myself on it. He opened the letter and started laughing and laughing — his inimitable and natural child-like laughter! After making some kind enquiries about Swami Chinmayanandaji who was then conducting an Upanishad Jnana Yajna at New Delhi, he started

again laughing when he read my name. He was so happy to read it — my name was Vedagiri — and asked again and again, “Who gave you this name?”; “A very good name”, and so on. He enquired whether I had had my food and I replied in the negative without any reservation. I myself was surprised as to how I behaved so naturally instead of saying, “Please don’t bother, I will have it at Rishikesh,” and the like. I felt in the heart of hearts that that itself was an indication that I was like a child before its guardian. He directed me to the Brahmacharin (Hari Prem) who gave me some *chapatis* and lemon pickle. Finishing the meal, I sat before the Swamiji again.

My intention was to spend a few days in such a lonely place and do Sadhana. Here it was an ideal place and I could do some physical service to such an aged Mahatma. But Swamiji dissuaded me saying, “You come from Bombay. There is no shop or house near by. You can’t get milk or other things. You will get bored. Moreover, I don’t encourage people staying here,” and so on and so forth. I replied that I was really not in need of any comfort and I wanted to live in such a place. If he would allow me to stay two or three weeks I would go back to Rishikesh and get my bedding etc. the following day. As if

to test me he said again and again, "I don't encourage"; "If you can adjust to this environment, I have no objections — but I don't encourage." It was time for the bus to go to Rishikesh and he advised me to leave. I said firmly that I would return the following day with my luggage and he repeated his words. I returned to Rishikesh and spent the night at the Dharma-shala where I had taken a room the previous day.

\* \* \*

I was not aware of the 'gate' system and the one-way-traffic prevailing during those days in the hill section; consequently I missed the bus the next day. The bus operators were not sure of getting sufficient passengers to run a bus by the third 'gate' timing as traffic was much less during those days. The following day, i.e. the third day, however, I got the bus in the morning and reached Goolar-Dogi before noon. Swamiji said: "You didn't come yesterday as promised. So I thought you won't be coming." I explained the reason for my failure to come the previous day and he was satisfied. He asked me to put my bedding inside the cave where Brahmachari Hari Prem, or 'Prem' as Swamiji used to call him, was living. During my stay of eighteen or nineteen

days I slept there during the night along with Prem.

My stay in the Guha (Ashrama) was a happy and memorable one. Sometimes I would assist Prem in his work, sometimes do some service to Swamiji. Swamiji was pleased with me. One day, another Brahmachari named Sadanand, who was looking after the Junior High School affairs (the school was under Swamiji's management — he handed it over to the Government only in 1957) told me that Swamiji was writing his autobiography in Malayalam. Both the Brahmacharis hailed from Maharashtra, so neither of them could go through it. When I enquired Swamiji about it and expressed my desire to read it, he explained how reluctantly he was writing it. He said that there was an insistent demand from many friends and devotees in Kerala. Moreover, if he did not write, he knew that someone will write an exaggerated biography after his passing away. To avert such a situation, he said he was writing it. He searched for the two notebooks which were lying mixed up with other books and papers, and graciously gave them to me to read. When I came to know from his writing that his Guru was Swami Brahmanandaji Maharaj, and that he belonged to the Ramakrishna Order, I felt specially attracted to

him as I had been influenced by the Life and Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Swami Vivekananda. His own life and personality also made a deep impression on my mind. I made notes of some points from his manuscript, which were of interest to me.

Although I used to meet some Swamis and visit some Ashramas in Bombay and other places, I had not thought of taking Mantra-Deeksha as I had my own views about the necessity of a Guru. Here, in Vasishtha Guha, as days passed on, I felt more and more attracted to Swamiji and came to the conclusion, "Here is the person from whom I can take initiation if I felt the necessity of it." Yes, I had been observing him closely; at the same time I was also on my guard not to be made a *chela* (disciple) unawares!

In the afternoons Swamiji used to teach Prem some lessons in Sanskrit primer and grammar, when I would also sit and listen. Sometimes he would give a few words of advice to me or enquire about my aim in life, family details, etc. One day he asked me whether I knew Kirtan. I replied in the negative, as I did not know much of music. The following day, after the lessons, he started humming. *Naanyaa sprhaa Raghupate* ... when I joined him and completed

the *sloka*. Immediately, he turned towards me and interjected: "Hey, you said yesterday that you don't know any Kirtan. Now you are singing?" I replied that I had learnt these *slokas* from Ramakrishna Ashrama, where they sing "Ramanama-Samkirtana" on Ekadasi days, and that I did not know any music. He was pleased to hear that I was frequenting the Ashrama in Bombay and associating with the Swamis there. That day onwards he made me chant the whole of Ramanama-Samkirtana in the afternoon, after Prem's class. And he directed Prem to copy it and learn the tune from me. [Later, in 1957, when a good number of us were in Vasishtha Guha, we made it a practice to chant Ramanama-Samkirtana on all Ekadasi days as is the practice in Ramakrishna Ashramas.]

One day Swamiji received a letter from one of his Sannyasin-disciples. The disciple had written that he was staying in some Ashrama in Punjab. Brahmachari Sadanand gave the news that another Sannyasin-disciple of Swamiji was about to be made the Mahant (Head) of an Ashrama at Rishikesh. Swamiji laughed on hearing this and looking at me, said:

"One should live and work independently. By depending on others one does not realise



the difficulties. Sannyasins should not stick to some established Ashramas. They should move out and experience life for themselves. Then alone they will know things as they are."

Though I was then in a workaday life, I took this as a guide-line for future and noted the advice in my diary.

As it was winter, I thought a pair of woollen stockings would be useful to Swamiji as they can be pulled up to cover the knees, and gave some money to Sadanand to get them from Rishikesh. He could get only a pair of socks but said he had asked someone to get stockings from Dehradun. I went to Swamiji at night and, with much hesitation, offered the socks. When I attempted to put them on his legs he graciously permitted me to do so. Oh! what a joy I experienced by touching his feet and doing this *seva* (service)! Two or three days later when I took the stockings to him, he questioned why another pair was bought. I explained the whole position and he allowed me to put them on his legs. He appreciated the little *seva*. I, on my part, felt highly blessed that I got an opportunity to touch his holy feet and pass my palms over his legs.

His advice always stressed on the importance of sincerity, developing Bhakti, and observance of Brahmacharya. Some of those teachings, which I recorded then, have been given in *The Life of Swami Purushottamananda*, published in 1959. Slowly, my stay in the Guha was coming to a close. One night I went to him and after salutation, sat down. He looked at me. I said I was planning to leave the following day. He smiled and said, "Yes, yes. I knew it when you came in." I sat quietly but my mind was in a great turmoil. Swamiji knew it well. Consoling me, he gave some words of advice and, in a somewhat indrawn mood, said in Malayalam, "We have become one; we have been united." I was taken aback at these words — in what spiritual heights he was and where was I? After a few days' pondering I guessed that the words signified that he had taken me into his fold.

The following day, November 15, 1953, I approached Swamiji at about half-past nine and saluted him. He was sitting in the sun. I was to leave on that day. I humbly placed an insignificant amount near him and asked his permission to leave after the mid-day meal. He picked up the money and put it back in my shirt-pocket, saying with tender love and affection, "O, Why? It is not necessary. I will keep it here. You need

it. After a few minutes' silence, he said :

"Be sincere in all actions. Develop intense love towards God."

(Pause) .. "God can be seen." Smilingly : "Yes,

I see Him just in front." (pointing to the front with raised hand. I looked at the direction, but ...)

(Pause) .. "Be in the world but not 'of the world.' Forget the 'I'-ness and 'My'-ness, and have firm faith in Him and leave everything to Him. Do not bother about anything. When time comes, things, karmas, will leave of their own accord and relieve."

(Pause) .. "The desire to know and live in Him should not be half-way. It should be like a बाढ़ (flood). It should come with such a force, and full, and wipe off old Samskaras."

These words were uttered not eloquently, but slowly and deliberately.

He said very tenderly that he was pleased with me. After a while, he continued : "We have become one. Didn't I tell you yesterday itself ? We are united."

After meals I boarded the bus with a heavy heart. My whole being was turbulent. Emotions were welling up. I was feeling remorse for not having requested Swamiji for initiation. At the same time, the question, 'Is a Guru essential ?' was also lurking in the mind. With great difficulty I checked my feelings as I noticed that already some passengers, all hill-men, were gazing at me. The bus was speeding towards Rishikesh; the green mountain and the blue waters of the Ganga were all the same as I saw earlier. But this time I had no eyes to enjoy the beauty as my mind was heavy. Somehow, I did not burst out weeping although I had to wipe my eyes many times with handkerchief.

\* \* \*

## II

It was only after three years and three months that I could go to Vasishtha Guha again and have Swamiji's *darshan*. But during the interval I used to get letters from him showering love and blessings, and also offering advice now and then. He also sent me during the period some of his books like *Spiritual Talks*, *Atma Katha*, etc. as and when they were published. A few months

after returning to Bombay I happened to see a book, *To Badrinath*, written by Dr. K. M. Munshi who was then the Governor of Uttar Pradesh. Hoping that he would have written about some saints of the Himalayas in it, I bought a copy. To my surprise there was a chapter on "Vasishtha Guha" in it. Swamiji had already told me that a few weeks before my reaching the Cave, Governor Munshi too had come there. I noticed that he had given the name of our Swamiji as 'Purushottamananda Saraswati' in the book. I wrote to him drawing his attention to this discrepancy and pointed out that the Swamiji's name was Purushottamananda 'Puri', not 'Saraswati' as Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa's Guru was Totapuri and all Sannyasins of that *parampara* (lineage) belonged to the 'Puri' denomination. Dr. Munshi appreciated it and asked whether 'Saraswati' also belonged to the Dasanami Order. Luckily, I had noted a *sloka* giving the ten 'names' from Swamiji's manuscript of his autobiography and I quoted this *sloka* to explain to Dr. Munshi that 'Saraswati' also came under the Dasanami Order of Sannyasins. He thanked me for the information. Later, I sent copies of all the correspondence to Swamiji. He was pleased, and in his reply sent to me on May 3, 1954 he wrote : "... We could not easily forget you. You

did well in writing to the Rajyapal..." How happy I felt on receiving the letter !

Towards the end of 1955 I started reading *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. I could not do it with as much concentration as is necessary to imbibe the teachings fully, yet, within a few weeks many of my doubts were cleared, the most important one being the necessity of a Guru in spiritual path. Yes, when a giant and scholar like 'M', the author of the *Gospel*, who was confused by different views regarding the idea of a personal God, was knocked down on his very first visit to the Saint of Dakshineswar, what chance do I stand ? On the early morning of Guru Purnima day in 1956, sitting before the photo of Sri Ramakrishna in the old shrine of the Bombay Ashrama, I mentally accepted Swamiji as Guru and started repeating a Mantra. The same day I wrote to him in detail about the process I adopted. He replied : "... was very happy to go through it. Lord bless you !" I had enquired whether Swamiji would be in the Cave as I wished to go there, but he forbade me to go as it was malarial season then. Thus, for three years, my visit was being postponed. When he at last gave me the green signal, I had some urgent work at home and had to go South; when I was ready to go, either the season was bad or Swamiji

was away. I longed to have his *darshan* and he too enquired periodically as to when I was going to take leave, indicative of his love and eagerness to bless me in person. Thus days passed on.

\*                      \*                      \*

With Swamiji's permission I reached Vasishtha Guha again on February 25, 1957. The following afternoon, i.e. on February 26, Swamiji said to me : "So you want Mantram ? Tomorrow is Sivaratri. I will give you Mantram tomorrow morning. Take only milk and fruits tonight and don't take anything tomorrow till initiation."

In the evening Swamiji was sitting on his seat near the entrance to the cave. Some of us were sitting in front of him. A devotee from Lucknow had come with his family and they also were there. For some time there was some talk. Then Swamiji kept quiet. All of us also sat there quietly, meditating. When it was dusk, Swamiji called Brahmachari Atma Chaitanya and asked him to keep an oil lamp inside the cave and carry his *asana* (seat) inside. Swamiji followed him and took his seat in the interior of the cave and asked Atma to send me in, telling him, "I will initiate him just now." When Atma

enquired whether he should ask me to take bath, he replied : "Oh, No, . . . Let him wash his feet etc. and come quickly." When the Brahmachari told me of Swamiji's decision, I was taken by surprise. By the time I washed my feet and face, and placed my offerings in a plate to be taken inside, he called for me two or three times. Hurriedly I entered the cave with the offerings. Swamiji was on his elevated seat. His face shone brilliantly in the light of the tiny oil lamp. He bade me sit down at his feet. After the preliminaries like *achamana* etc., he gave me the scared Mantram. He made me repeat it several times, he also repeating it in between. Then he got up, telling me to sit there and do Japa for some time. I also got up and saluted him by placing my head on his feet and placed my offerings at his feet. Swamiji said, "I had a strong feeling that I should give you Mantram just now, instead of tomorrow. So I thought, *subhasya seeghram*". Returning to his seat outside, he asked for the *panchangam* (almanac). After consulting it he remarked that there was Pradosha and some other combination at that time. It was, therefore, a very auspicious time and that was why he was inspired to initiate me just then. Referring to this incident a few months later, during Satsanga, Swamiji said that it was this, namely, the initiation at that particular moment, that quickened

the spirit of renunciation in me. (Within forty days of reaching Bombay I was back in Vasishtha Guha as a renunciate.)

I was on a short leave and so I could not stay at the Cave more than a week or so. This time some Sannyasins and Brahmacharis (disciples of Swamiji) were there. The former hermitage now bore a full-fledged Ashrama atmosphere. But I missed my old friends Prem and Sadanand — the former was at Brindavan, and the latter was on a long pilgrimage. Apart from the increased number of members, there were other physical changes too. Not far from the cave where there was a thick jungle with tall trees and thorny bushes — the place where Swamiji used to sit for meditation in the evening hours — there stood a building. It had three rooms on the ground floor and one on top at one end of the terrace with a spacious frontage. The thick wood had been washed away by the October '56 flood and the building had just been completed. If I enjoyed the solitude during my earlier visit, I was equally happy with the community life now. Of course it was all due to the presence of the central Figure, Sri Gurumaharaj. Without him life would have been insipid.

On Mahasivaratri day (Feb. 27), the Ashramites performed Akhanda-Parayanam

(non-stop recital) of *Shri Ramacharitamansa*. I also joined them. It was the first time that I was reading *Ramacharitamansa* but no one could believe it. Even Swamiji appreciated how naturally I adapted myself to the various tunes while reciting with others, some of whom were good reciters from Uttar Pradesh. At night, lest Swamiji should be disturbed as he was not keeping well, we did the recital in the terrace-room of the new building, of our own accord. And the following day, i.e. on February 28, 1957, Swamiji shifted to that room.

March 6, 1957: I was to leave for Rishikesh by the half-past-nine bus. When I went to Maharaj at about half-past-seven in the morning to offer a flower and do *namaskara* he welcomed me with a smile, and asked: "*Where will you go? Where will you go?*" When I sat down by his cot after saluting him, he asked further: "*Do you want to go?*" I replied: "If Swamiji would permit, I would like to go." Then he asked me to repeat the Mantram audibly and he also repeated it rhythmically and advised me to do likewise. After a while, he said:

"Do not fail to remember Him. Do Japam twice daily. Unless the mind is made steady,

unless the wanderings of the mind are checked through Japam, meditation will not be successful."

"Love Him. What is wanted is Love. Blessed is he who can Love — Love — Love."

By nine o'clock I packed my bedding etc. and was ready to start. I went to Maharaj to take his blessings. A disciple of Maharaj, Brahmachari Vedabandhu, a Yogi and Ayurvedic physician, was also sitting in the room along with two or three inmates of the Ashrama. He had come from Bombay the previous day, after many years, for a few weeks' stay. When I went and prostrated myself before Maharaj, he said to Vedabandhu with a laugh, whilst patting (blessing) me with one hand, "See, he wants to go from here." The words struck me like an arrow and I felt ashamed that I should be going back to Bombay to re-enter a workaday life. With a choked throat and tears in my eyes, I said with folded hands: "Call me Maharaj, once for all so that no thought of going back will arise. Please call me like that."

As Vedabandhu had arranged for a small feast, he requested me to stay for the mid-day meal and Swamiji also advised me likewise. So I stayed for the meal and left by the afternoon bus. Halting at Haridwar and Delhi *en route* I

reached Bombay on the night of 11th or 12th March.

\* \* \*

Hardly twenty days had passed since my return from Vasishtha Guha when, one morning, while meditating in the Ramakrishna Ashrama shrine, various thoughts about leaving hearth and home came to my mind intensely. It was not a day-dream, nor an intentional planning. It all came spontaneously and I remained a witness. I would say it was a "Call of the Heart." When I got up I was fully possessed of the same thought, namely, leaving home and repairing to the Himalayas. As soon as I came home from the Ashrama I wanted to write to Swamiji about the whole thing in detail. When I sat down to write, after the initial salutation, my mind became blank and I did not know what to write and how to describe my feelings. After a couple of minutes I completed the letter. Even now I remember the few words I wrote on that day, almost verbatim — probably it was on March 30, 1957. The letter ran as follows :

Revered Swamiji,

Pranamas.

I wanted to write to you but I do not know what to write. You know everything. Instil in me Bhakti and Sraddha. Yes, that is what I want — Sraddha, more and more.

I am doing well by your blessings.

With Pranamas again,

. . . .

After a few days of watching the mind when I was convinced that the 'Call' was genuine and I really wanted to lead a monastic life, I wrote to Swamiji again, presumably on April 13. I told him in that letter that I was giving up my job and leaving Bombay on April 17 and hoped to reach Vasishtha Guha on April 19 to take shelter at his feet. Two days before my departure, i.e. on April 15, 1957, I received a postcard from Swamiji in reply to my earlier letter of March 30. I had disclosed these matters to a Swamiji in Bombay who was my well-wisher and whom I used to meet almost every day. When I showed him the card, he was astonished, and said: "Yes, you have got a real Guru," and patted on my shoulder as a gesture of congratulation and blessing. The letter, reproduced below, shows how a

Sadguru understands the inner feelings of his disciples even though not a word is uttered about them :

Vasishtha Guha  
Rishikesh  
13.4.57

My dear Giriji,

Last day I received the parcel of books, money and letter. Glad you are doing well. Yes, when the mango is ripe it can no longer be on the tree. It has to fall. So (when) the Buddhi is ripened through the many worldly experiences how can it remain in the world. It has to seek shelter at the Feet of the Lord. And this is real Sannyasa. Work on and He will take you by and by. One must have faith and patience. All well here.

Today is Vishu.

With love and best wishes,

I remain,  
Affly. yours,  
PURUSHOTTAMANANDA

[Was it a mere coincidence that I too intimated Swamiji of my final decision on the same date, viz: 13-4-57?  
— S.N.]

\* \* \*

## III

Swamiji was a confirmed Vedantin. But there was a happy combination of Bhakti also in him. He always advised : "Think, Think"; "Discriminate, Meditate," and so on. Another point on which he laid emphasis was "Love". His own love for others was like that of a mother's toward her children. When anybody suffered it was his suffering. Not only human beings, even plants had his sympathy. Once a few mango-grafts were planted in the Ashrama. On the second day when he was coming down from his room, he noticed a plant near the stair-case and reached towards it. Removing his upper garment he held it above the plant to protect it from the sun, and called us. When we approached, he asked us to provide shade for the new plants by fixing poles and placing leaves above them. His facial expression showed his feeling for the plant — the face had faded in sympathy with the plant!

\*                     \*                     \*

Once Maharaj decided to construct a compound wall as a protection from flood waters. Masons and labourers were engaged. Some of the Ashramites also joined hands. The work went on for a few days. Maharaj had planned

the wall to be of a certain height but before reaching that height, one day he ordered the work to be stopped. All our pleadings could not change his decision. And what he said was an eye-opener to us : "Look, not that I wanted a compound wall to protect the buildings and all that. I wanted to help the poor villagers, so I started the work. Money should not be given gratis. It will make them idle, you see." And while making payments he would ask for the account of each worker and then give two rupees extra to one man, three to another, and so on. (Two or three rupees had great value in 1958-59.) To some he would give clothes also. This was one of the ways in which he expressed his 'feeling for others'.

\*                     \*                     \*

Let me cite one more instance of Swamiji's compassion, this time for an absolute stranger : It was the summer of 1959. One day in the hot sun a well-built person of dark complexion came to Vasishtha Guha for Swamiji's *darshan*. He looked like a poor peasant or labourer, and he had an awkward look on his face. He was suffering from piles and was wandering desparately in the hills. Swamiji advised him to go to the hospital run by Sivanandashram in Rishikesh where he



would be attended to. The man left then, but was back again after a day. The surgeon, after examining him, sent him away as the piles was not ready for surgical operation. He said that he was desparate because of acute pain etc. and did not want to go anywhere. He wanted to stay in the Ashrama (Vasishtha Guha) and render some *seva* (service). He believed that service to Mahatmas alone would cure him of his ailment. Swamiji advised him to return home, but he would not listen to any advice, and was adamant. He knelt down before Swamiji and implored him to be allowed to stay and do some *seva*. Swamiji, laughing, asked one of his disciples, the present writer, to fetch a stick lying near by, as if to beat him. The man immediately offered his own heavy *lathi* and bent down to receive the blow. Maharaj simply laughed and laughed. It looked as if he enjoyed the play. He ordered the disciple to bring on orange from his room. When it was brought he began peeling it himself. When the man extended his palms to receive the *prasada*, Maharaj, by gestures, asked him to open his mouth. He knelt down immediately and opened his mouth. Then Maharaj put a piece of the fruit into his mouth. When he had eaten it, another piece was put. Thus he put three or four more pieces of the fruit into his mouth. While doing so, Maharaj's face was beaming with love and compassion.

Then the man saluted Maharaj by lying flat on the ground before him and went away as advised. This time there was no pleading from him for being allowed to stay in the Ashrama. On reaching the road he started clapping his hands and dancing with joy, uttering, "I am blessed; I am cured," and so on. What was it that the absolute stranger received from Maharaj? Nothing but compassion and unalloyed love! Yes, his love and compassion knew no bounds; they were all-embracing.

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#### IV

On December 1, 1957, the 79th Birthday of Maharaj was celebrated. He had not been keeping well since a fortnight. In spite of severe cough and weakness, he was in high spirits on that day. A devotee had called Dr. Fakay, a leading allopath, from Rishikesh to examine Swamiji. He came in the afternoon. Being a spiritual aspirant himself, and a devotee of Sadhus, he examined Swamiji with Sradha and opined that Swamiji's blood pressure was low and heart weak. Then he prescribed some medicines.

Some religious discussions went on. Then

Maharaj gave his opinion about medicines and treatment :

MAHARAJ : Look, medicines have their limit. The best remedy is to keep the Pranas in their proper places. If Prana, Apana, Vyana, Udana, Samana-Vayus are in their places, the mind will become calm. When there is slight displacement, anger, anxiety, illness, etc. come — and MEDITATION does the job of keeping the Pranas in their places.”

DOCTOR (with folded hands) : “Yes, Maharaj. But we can deal only with matter and you can deal with mind — and that is the best thing.”

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Once I suggested to Maharaj that he write a book of short advices which would be useful for devotees at large. He simply laughed and brushed aside the suggestion. After a few days, on December 3, 1957, when some of us were sitting in his room, he wrote a few lines on a piece of paper and gave it to me, telling others, “He wants me to write something.” This is what he wrote :

“Om

Life is a journey. Be wise and cautious. Every false step will lead us to ruin and destruction. So be careful. Always keep the company of the wise and follow them. You will Reach The Goal — Om”.

Those days some of us used to go and sit in Maharaj's presence in the morning when he opened the door of his room. Four or five days after his Birthday celebrations in 1957, some of us were with him. Some discussions were going on and he gave us some advice. Then Maharaj said: “Now I can leave — I can go.” Again, after a few seconds, “My task is finished — so I can go.” Then, turning to everybody, he asked, “What do you say ?”

Krishna Priya (Mataji) said : “Then who is there for us ?”

Maharaj laughed and replied, “Yes, it may be for the sake of you all that I am still living.”

\* \* \*

## V

Maharaj could easily detect what was going on in the minds of others. It was difficult to hide anything from him. On January 1, 1959 he was starting for Delhi. Some of us were packing his bedding and other things. Some wrong notions crossed my mind about the preparation when Maharaj looked at me and said: "This is also worship. Do you understand? This is also worship." I was put to shame and became pale, and meekly replied. "Yes, Maharaj." No one else knew the significance of these words.

Another instance: Once Maharaj asked me to send a money order to a lady who was in straitened circumstances. Perhaps somebody had written about her condition. She happened to be a member of Maharaj's *poorvashrama* family, so I felt something bad about it. I was still filling up the M.O. form when Maharaj said, *as if* by way of explanation, "Look, I consider her like other devotees. You know I send money to some devotees when they are in distress. This is also like that, but a small amount."

How unobtrusively he erased the wrong notions from my mind! What impression these

words made on my mind can better be imagined than described.

\* \* \*

Sometimes, Maharaj would ask a person to sing a particular Kirtana or hymn without enquiring whether he or she knew it. And almost in all cases, it turned out that that particular Kirtana or hymn was the person's favourite one. Once I was coming to attend the afternoon Satsanga. I was still a Brahmacharin and had not been ordained a Sannyasin. Maharaj and others had assembled and the Satsanga was about to commence. When I was nearing the place, Maharaj, slightly raising his right hand, chanted: *Om-ityetad-aksharam-idam sarvam* and signalled me to proceed. I continued the succeeding Mantras automatically, at the same time bowing down before him and taking my seat, but not recollecting the Scripture in which these Mantras occurred. Only when I reached the seventh Mantra did I realise that it was Mandukya-Upanishad. Now, I had learnt the chanting of some Upanishads and other texts during my pre-monastic days and this particular Upanishad was my favourite. But I had never told Maharaj about this. After completing the text and the Peace Chant I bowed down to Maharaj once again. I

chanted it all alone and was extremely happy that Maharaj gave me an opportunity to chant my favourite Upanishad in his presence. Then Maharaj enquired : "So, you knew it ?" I replied that I had learnt the chanting from a Swamiji of Ramakrishna Ashrama at Bombay. The next day onwards, during the forenoon Satsanga I was asked to chant one Upanishad each day, for a few weeks. Thus Gurumaharaj gave me an opportunity to chant in his presence all the nine Upanishads, the chanting of which I had learnt earlier, more than once.

\* \* \*

R. Dubey, a devotee from Bihar, came one afternoon. Though he used to write to Swamiji occasionally, he had not intimated about his arrival. After placing his offering before Maharaj, he prostrated himself before him and sat down. None of us *gurubhais* knew him personally. Maharaj did not make enquiries of him but asked some of us to give him the *Ramacharitamamasa* and asked him by gestures to read some passage at random. He opened the book and recited a few *chaupais* with his heart and soul in them. Only after that Maharaj enquired about his welfare, etc. Later, he told us that when he came to Vasishtha Guha for the first time about

fourteen years before, the same thing happened: Then also Maharaj just asked him to open the book and read even before enquiring about him. He left the same day but had been impressed so much that he considered Maharaj as his Guru and started writing letters now and then. And now when he came after fourteen years without notice, Maharaj did the same thing and what was more, the portion he read was the same which he read during his earlier visit. It moved him very much. A staunch devotee of Sri Rama, he used to read *Ramayana* with devotion and Bhava. He stayed two or three days and took Mantra-deeksha from Maharaj before leaving.

\* \* \*

Let me cite one more incident. A South Indian couple, disciples of Swamiji, came from Gujarat for three or four days' stay. Their little children had learnt *Vishnu-sahasranama* by heart and they recited it before Maharaj, one afternoon. He was very happy and put some questions to them and gave them some sweets. Then he asked the couple : "Do you know *Shyamala-dandakam* ? Recite." They were taken by surprise at the command. They both knew the hymn, so they recited it with great devotion. Normally, they spoke very little before Maharaj;

therefore when Maharaj asked them to recite the hymn it was like giving them an opportunity to do some *seva*. They were beside themselves with joy, and grateful to Gurudeva for his kindness.

\* \* \*

## VI

Maharaj could understand the nature of a person from his physical features. At times he studied it through other methods also. One can't say for certain in what way he studied every disciple. About six months had elapsed since my joining the Ashrama. One night I was sitting in Maharaj's room, by his cot. He asked me to raise my hand and when I did so he passed his palm over my forearm three or four times. I guessed that he was examining my character thereby. After a few minutes' interval, I asked him with trepidation, what he was examining but he did not say anything. Three or four days later, during the *Gita* class, while commenting on the term *arjavam* occurring in the sixteenth chapter, he laid emphasis on sincerity and explained :

"Thought, word and deed should all be in

consonance with one another. They should be in a straight line and not in a crooked one which is nothing but deceit. That is *arjavam* (straightforwardness)."

Then he gave a general advice :

"Be sincere always. Your body, mind, action, speech — everything should reflect sincerity. Even by touching the body one can feel it.<sup>1</sup> Mere lip-talk won't do. It should affect the whole body."

[1. At this point he looked at me and said : "The other day I touched you and you were asking what it meant."]

\* \* \*

Even as Maharaj spontaneously asked somebody to recite or sing particular Mantra or Kirtanas, at times he inspired some to *do* certain things. A few months after my arrival at Vasishtha Guha, on December 1, 1957, Gurumaharaj's 79th Birthday was celebrated. On that day, a young man from Delhi, camping in an Ashrama at Rishikesh, came with some monks of the Ashrama at eleven o'clock and left at two in the afternoon. He was talking too much of himself as a writer and so on. The next evening he sent a report on the Birthday celebrations through an Irish youth who was also staying

there. His description had no bearing on the actual happenings for he had not been present from early morning of that day. He had cooked up things to make it the whole day's report. Maharaj was not pleased with it and he laid it aside. Later in the evening a strong feeling came in my mind that I should try my hand at it and, accordingly, I wrote a report. The following morning I was going to Maharaj with the report in my pocket when the Irish youth also joined me and said that as Maharaj was not pleased with his friend's report, he had written one. So I didn't disclose about my writing to Maharaj. When the gentleman presented his report, Maharaj asked me to read it. It was like a child's essay because he was quite fresh in India and did not know anything about our custom and other things. Naturally, Maharaj was not pleased with that either. After some time I said hesitatingly: "Maharaj, I too made an attempt last night and..." but before I could complete, he said, "Yes, yes. Read it. *It must be nice.* Read it." (He laid emphasis on the words "must be".)

There were some devotees (householders) and inmates of the Ashrama, sitting with him in the sun. When I read the whole matter, Gurumaharaj and all others appreciated it. Maharaj said to others with a smile: "Didn't I say, 'it must

be nice'?" He asked me to take out copies of it and send to various devotees and others. When Maharaj said 'Didn't I say...', I understood that it was he who prompted and guided me to write.

\* \* \*

The report on the proceedings of Maharaj's Birthday celebration was written under inspiration from him. The following year, i.e. in 1958, he engaged me in a greater task. During the year he told me two or three times to translate his *Atma-Katha* into English as many of the North Indian devotees were requesting for it. But I suggested the names of two other Sannyasin-disciples of Maharaj for the job. They were senior to me and I believed that they were better qualified than I. As I had never done any literary work before, I was afraid that my translation may not be of a good standard. Every time Maharaj dismissed my suggestion saying, "No, No." His Birthday fell on 21st November that year. Four or five days after the celebration, he called me one evening. I went and bowed down to him. He was sitting outside his room and seemed to be in meditation. He asked me to bring the packet of writing paper which a devotee had brought. Presuming that he wanted to write or dictate something, I brought his pen also and sat

by his side. To my surprise, he said: "Take it (the packet of papers) down and translate the *Atma-Katha*." I was aware that many of the householder disciples who came for the celebration had prayed to Maharaj for this. And when Maharaj uttered these words I was unnerved. It was a great task and I was afraid of any lapses that I might commit. For a second, my mind became blank. Maharaj seemed to be in a higher mood. However, I picked up courage and started saying with trepidation that so-and-so would be able to do it in a better manner, but he cut me short and said: "No — (pause) *You can do it* — (pause) No hurry, do it slowly — (pause) a few pages every day." I was still in a state of bewilderment when he continued: "*Do it as a Sadhana*." That sealed my lips for he was in a high spiritual mood. Not only that, he was prescribing a course of Sadhana for me! Immediately, I prostrated myself before him and Maharaj signalled me to go, by shaking his head. I still stood there and he looked at me enquiringly. I said, "Maharaj, one request. A verbatim translation is too much for me. Moreover, there are many details which can safely be omitted without in any way affecting the text. So if Maharaj would permit, a "Life" can be written based on *Atma-Katha* and something can be added to it."

He agreed. I also got his permission to use exercise books for the work instead of the loose paper sheets.

The *Atma-Katha* has no chapter headings; only chapter numbers are given. So two or three chapters were condensed and translated according to topic, and chapter headings were given in the "Life". Sometimes, after writing a chapter, I would struggle for one or two days for a suitable heading. Then, at an unexpected moment the heading would strike. Thus it was an experience of Guru's grace at every step while writing the book.

One such experience was after writing the chapter narrating a very important event in Gurudeva's spiritual career. In spite of racking the brain for the whole day I was unable to find an apt heading to it. Leaving that problem I started working on the next chapter. During the early hours of the third day, while brushing the teeth by the nearby brook, the caption, *FIRST FLASH OF THE ABSOLUTE*, flashed across my mind resembling a lightning before the eyes. I was taken quite unawares! Oh! What an ecstatic feeling I experienced then! I felt like jumping and running to my cave to note it down. Ah! I can never forget that experience.

When the typescript of *The Life of Swami Purushottamananda* was placed before him he went through it leisurely. At times he called me and asked why a particular matter was not given in detail as in the original or how I got certain details which were not in the *Atma-Katha*. He was satisfied with my explanations. In one place, however, he suggested deletion of a sentence quoted from another publication. It was about his first meeting with Sri Swami Nirmalanandaji Maharaj and the particular sentence was eulogistic of him. His modesty would not allow such a sentence to be reproduced in his "Life". How he appreciated me for finding out such passages and inserting them in their proper place! After two days' perusal he approved the manuscript and handed it to the devotee who had volunteered to publish it.

\* \* \*

## VII

Money, he seldom handled himself. When devotees offered money or when a money order came, generally he would ask some of us to keep the amount in the box. Likewise, if money had to be given to somebody, it was again done by some of us at his command. Sometimes, when a disciple returned from Rishikesh after purchasing

provisions, etc. he would ask for accounts to the last pie just to test him or to teach us that one should not be negligent in any dealing or, maybe just to enjoy the play. Once, after his Birthday Celebrations, some money was there and he wanted to send it to the bank. A disciple of his who was in the army had come on leave and he was to go to Dehradun for the purpose. He and I were separating the currency notes of different denominations and counting them in Maharaj's presence. Maharaj also came closer, picked up a few notes and started counting. I watched him closely as I was getting an opportunity to see how a person like him established in spiritual heights handled money. Holding a few notes in his left hand he started counting by placing on the floor one note after another by right hand, just as a child would do. After counting five or six notes in this manner, he placed all the notes on the floor and withdrew, saying, "Oh! You (both) count them." The way he held the notes and the manner in which his fingers acted while counting, as also how he put the notes on the floor, all showed how difficult it was for him to handle money. The whole action seemed as if a child was playing with cards. Watching the *leela* — yes, I won't hesitate calling it a *leela* — I could not help laughing internally; at the same time I also felt fortunate that I could catch a glimpse



of the behaviour of a realised soul in such mundane affairs. The scene is still green in my memory.

\* \* \*

Just as Maharaj was beyond money and calculations, he was beyond Time also. Sometimes, when he asked for something, he would demand it immediately as a child would do. Once, while returning from Ganga after evening bath, he asked for some *khichri* (a preparation of rice and dal cooked together, adding salt and turmeric powder) to be prepared, saying that he was feeling hungry. However hastily one works, it takes some time to cook the stuff. But within a few minutes Maharaj was on his seat and asked: "Is it ready? Bring it." If he were told that it would take another ten minutes, he would say after a while that his hunger was gone and he did not want *khichri*. (All that he would eat would be just three or four spoonfuls of it.)

Likewise, sometimes he would ask for the mid-day meal much earlier than usual, saying that he was hungry. On such occasions we had to be very tactful. We would hurriedly move about here and there as if searching for something, sweep the floor and sprinkle some water over the place, place his *asana* after dusting it a

few seconds and pretend to do something or the other, just to pass time and 'keep his hunger alive'. In between he would say, "Hey, bring it quickly". We would tell him that so-and-so was just bringing the food and so on. All the while we would be in tension, and only when he finished his meal would we be relieved of anxiety.

We knew very well that he was not an ordinary person. Nobody could fool him. Our intention in playing such parts was to see that he did not withdraw his mind from what he wanted, for Paramahamsas are just like children. Such instances convinced us that the Realised Ones are beyond the bounds of Time.

And they are beyond the limitations of Space too! Maharaj's own utterance on the point is worth noting:

Sometime in the year 1958 the then Ambassador of Switzerland in India, his wife, two members of his staff and a lady, all foreigners, came to Vasishtha Guha along with their friends, Mrs. and Diwan Jarmani Dass. They were on their way to Badrinath in their cars. Mrs. Dass, a disciple of Maharaj, had intimated that the party would come to the Cave for Maharaj's

*darshan*. They halted for a few hours and resumed their journey after mid-day meal. They spent some time with Maharaj, discussing religion and other matters, and asking various questions. I registered in my memory two of their questions and the answers that Maharaj gave for I considered them very important. I believe it was the Press Attache who asked :

PRESS ATTACHE : "Swamiji, you have some disciples here. Do you give them regular training ?"

MAHARAJ : "They observe and learn from my life."

AMBASSADOR : "Don't you think, Swamiji, that saints like you can do good to more people if, instead of living in the cave, you move about among the masses ?"

MAHARAJ (laughed and said authoritatively) : "Sitting in a cave one can influence the minds of people far away, you see. One can move mountains ! It is not necessary to go anywhere."

All were awe-struck on hearing Maharaj's answer.

\* \* \*

## VIII

To his disciples he was not merely a Guru but a Father, Mother and Guru, all combined. Naturally, sometimes, some of us took liberties with him and argued with him on some points. On such occasions, more often than not, he remained unruffled and even appreciated if it was reasonable. Rather than narrating such episodes involving other brothers, let me relate an instance concerning myself and show how Maharaj practised what he preached.

Once Maharaj decided to give Brahmacharya Deeksha to a scholar who was staying in Rishikesh. One day he told me that he would include me and some other inmates also in the ceremony and give us the ochre clothes. Then he added, smilingly, "There will be no difficulty in getting Bhiksha at the Annakshetra if you have *geru* clothes." As the scholar had approached Maharaj mainly because of this problem and especially as Maharaj was smiling, I took his words as a dig at me and replied immediately : "No, Maharaj. I don't want *geru* (clothes) for the sake of Bhiksha. If I have Maharaj's blessings, there will be no difficulty in getting Bhiksha wherever I may go. When Maharaj pleases to give Sannyasa, then, of course, I'll have *geru* clothes — not now for

the sake of *Bhiksha*." I uttered these words spontaneously and smilingly. Maharaj remained silent for a while and then said: "Hey, in the Mission (meaning, Ramakrishna Mission) also they give Brahmacharya Deeksha." Without any hesitation I replied immediately: "Yes, Maharaj. But the Brahmacharins there remain in white clothes." Maharaj simply assented saying, "Yes." I said again: "Whatever Maharaj considers beneficial is acceptable to me. I am not against Brahmacharya Deeksha or *geru* clothes. I replied in this manner only because Maharaj said, 'for the sake of *Bhiksha*,' and I laughed.

On the appointed day the scholar was given Brahmacharya Deeksha and *geru* clothes. No one else was included in the list. A few days later I started feeling somewhat guilty of arguing with Guru and 'winning the case'. It was troubling my mind. So one day I approached Maharaj and asked permission to go to Dwarka and other places, telling him the reason and begging his pardon. And he from his great heights said coolly: "Oh! I have forgotten the whole thing. I am not offended at all, you see. And there was nothing wrong in what you said. Don't worry about it." I recollected immediately what he had

said about a Sadguru:

"... Differences of opinion do not matter, even opposition does not matter, provided the disciple is convinced that he is fighting for a principle. The Sadguru who is compassionate will understand and not take offence. Rather, he will be pleased that the disciple has the courage to stand for the right."

— (*Spiritual Talks*. Ch. X)

Thinking of his magnanimity, my throat became dry and I bowed down before him. Notwithstanding his assurance I explained that I needed a change, as I was disturbed on this score and he permitted me to go. That even my 'curt' replies did not annoy him, made me feel very bad. Indeed, who can fathom the greatness of a Sadguru!

\* \* \*

How an unintentional neglect on my part in carrying out the instruction of my Guru resulted in pain, is an incident I can never forget. It happened a few months before the incident narrated above took place. In the month of May 1958, Gurumaharaj advised me to go on a pilgrimage to Sri Kedarnath and Sri Badrinath and stay at the latter Dham for some months. I was

to do the pilgrimage on foot, taking Bhiksha of raw rations from the villages on the way and cooking my food. He gave me twenty rupees for my expenses and advised me to purchase a small iron pan for baking *chapatis*, a vessel for cooking, etc. from Rishikesh. Before I proceeded to Rishikesh for the purpose, a senior *gurubhai* described to me the dark side of this proposition, namely, the difficulty in reaching the villages from the main path, getting Bhiksha and cooking the food etc. for a man of my background and temperament. He suggested an alternative method and convinced me that Maharaj won't be displeased if I followed that advice. I should have ignored him and pinned my faith on Guru's grace, but I am ashamed to say that in a moment of weakness and foolishness I yielded to the 'counsel' of my *gurubhai*. Accordingly, I obtained 'ration coupons' from Baba Kalikamliwala Kshetra on which free rations are supplied to Sadhus at specified 'chattis' (halting places) on the way, and where vessels are also lent for cooking, free of charge. I purchased some items necessary for the journey, *minus* the pan and vessel. When I reported about the whole thing to Gurumaharaj on return from Rishikesh, he did not even murmur at my action. So I took it that he had no objection to what I did. The following

morning I prostrated myself before Maharaj and started on my *yatra* with his blessings.

Sadhus holding the coupon were given a pair of non-leather shoes at Deva Prayag and I also got a pair. But the shoes were so hard and ill-fitting that within a day there were sores on my toes and heels. Walking became difficult. Legs were swollen too. I skipped Kedar and took the Badri route. Somehow I reached Karna Prayag and rested there for the night. The next morning I found it very difficult to walk. Reluctantly I took a bus to Pipalkoti, the terminus, mentally praying to Maharaj to forgive me for this. Again from Pipalkoti I dragged myself on upto Joshimath where I stayed three days and treated the wounds. I gave away the shoes to a Sadhu who was in need of them and proceeded to Badrinath, wearing my *chappals*. The wounds had almost healed and I spent a few days at Badrinath happily. But, then, another trouble raised its head : an internal abscess on the sole of one foot gave me so much pain that I could not walk even a few yards. There was no external mark; the pus had hardened. So the doctor had to make an incision, scrape it and dress the wound. Maharaj got the news from some Sadhus who visited Vasishtha Guha on their return journey from Badrinath.

One day I got a letter from Vasishtha Guha saying that Gurumaharaj wanted me to return. When I reached Guha, Maharaj very kindly enquired about my welfare and about various other things. He did not say anything about my actions and things went on in the normal way.

One day, in the following summer, I told Maharaj that I had a desire to go to Kedar-Badri as I could not visit the former Dham the previous year owing to the trouble in the legs. He replied in a very calm mood: "Last year I told you to take Bhiksha on the way, but listening to so-and-so's counsel you obtained coupons from Kalikamliwala Kshetra. So you got a pair of shoes and consequently suffered. *You didn't listen to my words!*" I felt the heavens had fallen on my head. For a few seconds I sat like a lifeless creature, full of remorse and repentance. Then I craved forgiveness for my lapse. But he had no anger! He advised me, however, not to go on pilgrimage at that time for obvious reasons. And I gave up the idea.

In this instance also how magnanimous he was! Acting contrary to his instructions amounted to insulting him, albeit unintentionally. Yet Gurumaharaj did not even raise his brows! Nevertheless, I got my just punishment from

Nature for my conduct right from the third day of my journey!

\* \* \*

But, then, it was not that Maharaj was never affected with anger or indignation. "Anger crops up even in a Jnanin if he is insulted or offended too much, just as sparks of fire emanate from sandalwood-piece (though it is cool by nature) by excessive friction," says Sant Tulsidas in his *Ramacharitamansa* (see Garuda-Kakabhusundi dialogue). Once a minor altercation took place between two Brahmacharins. One of them had borrowed an umbrella from somebody and kept it in the cave but it was not to be found there after a day or so. Since he and a junior brother were not getting on well for some time, he suspected that the latter might have hidden it somewhere to tease or embarrass him. After an exchange of hot words between them — accusations and denials — the senior reported the matter to Gurumaharaj. When Maharaj questioned the other Brahmacharin, he pleaded ignorance. That night, the senior found the umbrella mysteriously inside the cave. He became more convinced that it was all the work of the junior member as he used to claim that he knew a little of magic.

The finding of the umbrella was duly reported to Gurumaharaj.

The next morning, Maharaj was coming down from his room for Satsanga. Seeing me going to the Ganga to fetch water, he hailed me and said with some indignation: "Hey, so-and-so found the umbrella in the cave last night. I have understood the whole thing. It was other Brahmachari who hid it first and replaced it in the cave later. Call him. Don't go. Wait and see." I called him. He came and bowed down to Maharaj and was just getting up when Maharaj went nearer, and said in a serious voice: "Hey, you had kept the umbrella in the cave." The Brahmachari, still on his knees, replied with folded palms: "No, Maharaj, I did not keep it there. Perhaps he (the senior) himself would have kept it. I did not do it." Maharaj could not accept his answer. Staring at him he said in an angry mood, raising his voice, "Who, do you think, I am? Do you think you can hide anything from me? You had kept it there."

The matter ended there. But when he uttered these words, his angry tone shook even me, who was merely a witness! But, indeed,

how he controlled his anger and became his normal self within a moment, and took his seat for Satsanga!

\* \* \*

In another instance, Maharaj became much more serious because the provocation was too much. Once, during the winter, when Maharaj was away from the Cave, a Brahmachari quarrelled with the other two inmates who were looking after the Ashrama affairs as per Gurudeva's instructions, and wrote letters to Maharaj complaining about them. A Sadhu from South India was staying in the Ashrama. When he returned to the South he met Maharaj somewhere there. Maharaj enquired of him and got all the news about the behaviour of the Brahmachari. Previously also, on several occasions, he had given Maharaj enough room for irritation. Once his action became so mischievous, that Gurudeva told some of us, "When he came here I got letters from some Ashramas, giving his antecedents and saying that he was unfit to be allowed in any Ashrama. Yet I allowed him hoping that he would improve here. But, see, how he is behaving even against me!"

This time, on the day of his return from tour, Maharaj, sitting on a chair, was looking at

the things that his attendant Brahmachari had brought from the South — like some plants, vessels, etc. Some Ashramites were sitting in front of him and I was standing behind. Presently the Brahmachari came and, after saluting Gurumaharaj, sat down in front of him. Then the following conversation ensued :

MAHARAJ (in a serious tone) : “Hey, What all things you did in my absence? Can’t you remain peacefully?”

BRAHMACHARI : “Maharaj it was Swami — who started the quarrel with me. The fault is not mine. That’s why I stopped coming here for meals.”

MAHARAJ : But Br. — was here. Couldn’t you have come and taken meals from him?”

BRAHMACHARI : “O, Maharaj, they both are one party.”

At this, everyone had a hearty laugh. But Gurumaharaj could not tolerate such insolence. Leaning forward and striking his stick heavily on the floor, he roared like a lion : “What! One party! I have tolerated all along. You are unfit to stay in the Ashrama. Vacate the room and quit immediately.”

And the Brahmachari had to leave the Ashram the same day. When Maharaj roared, every one of us became still for, never before had we seen him in that mood. Later in the evening, my *gurubhai* Swami Bhumananda who was sitting in front of Maharaj at the time, told me : “O Brother, today I saw the greatness of Maharaj. When he leaned forward and uttered those words his eyes were wide open and were fearful to look at. It seemed that fire was emanating from them as from the third eye of Lord Shiva. That fellow would have been ruined had not Maharaj controlled himself immediately. The lifting up of his heavy eye-lids and their closing down were all so quick like the flash of a lightning.”

A few years later, when I came across a verse in *Kaivalya Navaneetam* (a treatise in Tamil on Advaita Vedanta) describing the characteristics of a Jivanmukta (and even now, whenever I remember that verse), the incident narrated above comes to my mind. The relevant portion of the verse concerned records :

“Even if desire etc.\* crop up, these will vanish in a trice; they (the Jivanmuktas) will not take them to heart. They will live in the world like water on the lotus-leaf.”

\* viz : ;Desire, Anger, Avarice, Delusion, Pride and Jealousy.

\* \* \*

## IX

Maharaj was always in a high state of spiritual absorption — not like a stock or stone but in a natural state. Whether he was bathing, eating or talking, he was in Sahaja Samadhi. It was, therefore, not uncommon for him to sport in wits and jokes at times.

One afternoon I was sitting in his room. It was two or three days after Vijaya Dasami. Maharaj asked me when was the Full Moon day. I consulted the almanac and replied him. "Oh, day after tomorrow?" said Maharaj, and continued: "Well, I will give Sannyasa to G. on that day." (G., a bachelor, had come to Gurumaharaj at the age of sixty-two and was in the Ashrama since two years. Maharaj had given him Brahmacharya Deeksha the previous year. In spite of good qualities and devotion, he had an easily irritable temperament; he could be easily provoked even by simple jokes.) After a while, Maharaj said: "Don't tell anybody about it now. When G. comes (he was staying in the Ashrama building higher up the road, a furlong away) meet him in the garden, give him a surprise by breaking this news to him and watch his reaction."

I did likewise. Meeting him on the way I asked him in an alarming manner: "G., have you

heard the news!" He was perplexed and asked me anxiously, what it was. I replied: "Maharaj has decided to give you Sannyasa the day after tomorrow." He sneered at me thinking that I was playing a joke and walked away abruptly. Telling him that Maharaj was calling him, I followed. He went and bowed down to Maharaj. When Maharaj told him of his decision, G. was very happy and looked at me. After he left the room Maharaj asked me about G's reaction and I explained the whole thing in detail with some action. Maharaj enjoyed it and laughed like a child.

\* \* \*

Another instance: One afternoon, after the Satsanga, Maharaj asked for something but it could not be found. Someone said that 'Pujari' (a Brahmachari whom we brothers sometimes used to refer so, as he was doing the worship of Lord Shiva in the cave and of Sri Krishna kept in an altar) might have kept it somewhere. He had gone to Rishikesh on some errand. "Who is Pujari?" enquired Maharaj. Someone replied: "K — Brahmachari." "Oh, P-u-j-a-r-i," said Maharaj in a drawling tone. Then he asked, "What is the meaning of (the word) Pujari?" One of us said, "One who does Puja." He was



not satisfied, so he asked another and he also gave the same meaning in different words. With a smile on his lips, Maharaj said, "No, No," and looked at me. By now I had guessed that Maharaj was poking fun and I said, "An enemy of worship." At this almost all the *gurubhais* stared at me for, according to them, I had indulged in blasphemy — that too in the presence of Gurumaraj! And G., referred to earlier, who was sitting by my side, protested by uttering, "What?" But Maharaj welcomed the answer. Laughing and laughing, he said, "Yes, Yes." Then he went on telling some more words giving their different meanings — words like 'Jagannatha' (the Lord of the universe, or one for whom the universe is the lord, in other words, a mendicant); 'Pitambara' (one who wears a yellow robe, or one who had drunk the cloth — after burning it into ashes and dissolving it in water). Thus he explained that certain words could be interpreted differently, by applying *Tatpurusha* or *Bahuvrihi Samasa* (conjunction in Sanskrit grammar).

\* \* \*

### X

Maharaj did not observe any distinctions on the basis of caste, colour, etc. in the matter of imparting religious instructions or giving initiation. Even at the time of meals he didn't have

any such reservations. Apart from the Ashramites and other Sadhus, devotees and visitors, including foreigners, would all sit with him for meals. All the same, he respected the sentiments of aged orthodox people and did not compel them to break their age-old tradition. I remember two such occasions. Whenever very orthodox Brahmins came to Vasishtha Guha, he would ask us to seat them for meals inside the cave, and not along with others. And he would detail one or two disciples who hailed from the Brahmin community to serve them food. All this he would arrange without any request from the visitors, and without telling openly why he was arranging so. Thus he upheld their orthodoxy and sentiments, and saved them from the embarrassment of having to eat with people of different castes and religions. He was so considerate. And they on their part felt extremely grateful to him for this gesture.

\* \* \*

### XI

Those who came in contact with Maharaj, the disciples and devotees, all know how he was concerned about their welfare, spiritual as well

as secular. He had a soft corner in his heart for every one. Depending on the degree of faith and devotion each one experienced Gurudeva's benign hand in every endeavour, especially in distress. Let me narrate a particular case :

M., a South Indian, used to come to Vasishtha Guha occasionally from Delhi, where he was working. His own Guru was the Head of a Math in the South, but he had great regard for Maharaj also. Once he brought his mother and another lady, both aged widows. They were leading an austere religious life as the South Indian Brahmin widows were wont to. As soon as they came, M. informed us that though the other lady had no objection in partaking of the food in the Ashrama, his mother was more orthodox and, therefore, they will cook their food themselves. We agreed and he took them both to Maharaj's room for *darshan*. While coming back, his mother told him that Maharaj's *darshan* had elevated her so much that her reservations were gone and she would deem it a privilege to have *prasada* (food) in the Ashrama of such a Mahatma. As per Maharaj's instructions both the ladies were seated inside the cave for meals. (This was one of the instances referred to in the earlier section.)

After meals and a little rest both the ladies spent some time with Maharaj, asking questions

and telling him about their *anushthana* (observances), etc. They both were happy to receive instructions from Maharaj. Then, without adopting any roundabout method, M's mother requested *upadesam*, meaning, Mantra-Deeksha, abruptly. The other lady also joined her. I was present in the room, so Maharaj asked me to light the oil lamp and bring some *Ganga-jal*. Then he gave them Mantra. They both were overjoyed that they could get Deeksha from such a Mahatma so soon !

After about three months Maharaj received a letter from M. saying that his mother was seriously ill at his native place and he was going home to see her. A few days later, Maharaj told us one day : "Why no news from M. ? What a man he is ? He hasn't written about his mother's condition," etc. The next day we waited for the mail but there was no letter from him. Maharaj expressed his anxiety once again. In the afternoon he raised the topic and said : "Why not send a telegram to M. ?" The letter in which he had given his home address had been destroyed — it was a long address and his place was far away from the District headquarters. However, a telegram was sent in the hope that the Head Post Office would transmit it to the telegraph office nearer to his village or send it like ordinary post.

After that, Maharaj did not show much concern but was looking for M.'s letter every day. About a week later, M.'s letter came, informing that his mother passed away peacefully and that her obsequies were coming to a close, but he had not mentioned the date on which she expired. He had written therein that during her last two days or so his mother was often calling on Maharaj. Within three or four months of meeting Maharaj and taking initiation from him she had developed such a degree of *sraddha* and devotion that she was always thinking of him. And she breathed her last peacefully with her Guru's name on her lips. When M. came to Vasishtha Guha after a few months, we asked him details and the date of his mother's demise, without divulging anything about the anxiety that Maharaj had shown about her. And it turned out that Maharaj was anxious at about the same time as she was calling on him! How the gracious Guru reacted to the sincere prayer of a disciple lying on death-bed nearly two thousand miles away!

\* \* \*

## XII

Swamiji was always in Sahaja Samadhi. Naturally, nothing escaped his attention. In reply to some questions if we gave an answer contrary to what we gave on an earlier occasion, he

would immediately say, "Hey, you told me differently on that day!" and so on. Thus if he remembered various matters even after a long time of occurrence, he also seemed to forget some which showed that he was 'not of the world'. Yes, he was in a different world altogether. Sometimes, while explaining some serious and subtle points to somebody, or at times even during conversation, he would forget the person whom he was addressing and switch on to a different language which the other person did not know. While talking to a foreigner he might unwittingly jump from English to Hindi or Malayalam, or to an Indian who knew only Hindi he would talk in English or Malayalam. When he finished the topic we would tell him that he was explaining in — language (which the other person did not know). He would laugh heartily and ask us to explain what he said, to the person concerned.

\* \* \*

Perhaps it would not be out of place here to cite another instance of this type. Since Maharaj often engaged me in handling his correspondence, I have had to answer his peculiar and vague queries more than once. One interesting conversation was like this:

"Hey, What is his address?"

"Whose address, Maharaj?"

"Hey, — He . . . What is his name, — I forget."

After a few seconds of reflection :

"So — and — So's address?"

Laughing : "Ha ! Yes, Yes, How did you know?"

"The other day Maharaj showed me his letter. He had written that . . . (something special or peculiar). So I guessed that Maharaj wanted to reply his letter."

"Yes, write down his address on this. I will write to him later."

\* \* \*

One more instance comes to memory. I had been on a tour upto Kanyakumari as advised by Gurumaharaj, and was returning to Vasishtha Guha after six months. It was about twelve noon when I reached Guha. Swami Bhumananda, one of my *gurubhais*, was with Maharaj, writing letters for him. When he saw me he reported to Maharaj that I was coming.

MAHARAJ : "Who?"

BHUMANANDA : "Nirvedananda."

MAHARAJ : "Which Nirvedananda?"

BHUMANANDA : "Maharaj, our Nirvedananda, — Nirved."

MAHARAJ : "Who is it? Oh, I don't understand. Let him come."

Swami Bhumananda was at his wit's end. He was telling Maharaj my *poorvashrama* name to help him recollect. Just then I entered the room and prostrated myself before Gurumaharaj. On seeing me he exclaimed : "Oh, it is Nirved!" and laughed. After making some kind enquiries, he said : "See, (I'm in a) new Kutia!" I replied that I knew about it as A. had written to me while it was under construction. Then he asked my opinion about it. I said that it was nicely done. "Hey, tell me," he said. I again replied that it was nice. "No, no. Come out," he said. Now I knew that he wanted to bring out what was in my mind — a discrepancy I had noticed from a distance. So I replied with hesitation, "Maharaj, if I were here I would have suggested that some space be left between the hill and the wall. As the wall is now joined to the hill, water may seep into the room through it during the rainy season."

Looking at Bhumananda, Maharaj said laughingly and pointing to me: "See, see. I *knew* he will have something to say." He appreciated my view and said, "Yes, I had told them (my *gurubhais* who were supervising the construction) to construct the wall away from the hill but in my absence from the site they constructed it touching the hill to make the room more spacious."

I narrate this just to show how Maharaj not only knew what was going on in the minds of others but how he appreciated others' views. And, how 'other-worldly' he might have been not to recollect a disciple by name who was virtually his secretary!

\*

\*

\*

## EPILOGUE

In the foregoing pages I have attempted to recount some of the events that took place during my stay at the Feet of my Guru. Apart from the joy derived in recollecting those blessed days, which meant mentally re-living those past days, it has afforded me an opportunity to ponder afresh the advices and admonitions received from him. What is more, the different facets of Gurumaharaj's personality have also been projected in the process.

The reader will find included in this some of Gurudeva's intimate and affectionate remarks, to wit, those made by him on the eve of my departure from Vasishtha Guha in 1953, etc. These are very personal and sacred to me; nevertheless I have narrated them reluctantly because some brother-Sadhakas insist that such remarks and anecdotes have a deeper meaning, and should not be kept a secret. I hope the narration of such events will be viewed in the same spirit. Indeed, these should be considered as revealing the heart of a Mahapurusha.

In the Appendix that follows, some of the letters written to me by Gurudeva, mostly during my pre-monastic days, are reproduced. As can be seen, they reflect his love and affection; also they contain some advices.

Swamiji has been referred to in this narrative by different appellations: Swamiji, Gurudeva, Maharaj, Gurumaharaj. During the earlier days he was referred to as 'Swamiji' by his disciples, lay and monastic, and was addressed as such. 'Maharaj' was introduced by someone much later; gradually it gained currency and became prominent. These different designations have been employed in the book as they occurred spontaneously while contemplating on the various incidents. This explains why a uniform pattern has not been adhered to in this regard.

It was indeed my good fortune that I sought refuge at the Holy Feet of such a Mahapurusha and more so because he gave me refuge. Now he is no more in physical frame but he continues to look after the welfare of his spiritual children, as every Sadguru does. His love for his disciples is a thing that can never be forgotten, May we, his children, reach our Goal by his blessings! Om.

As stated at the outset, I have written these *Reminiscences* as an act of worship unto Gurumaharaj. May he be pleased to accept this worship of his child, however faulty and insignificant it might be. Om.

इत्येषा स्मृतिमयीपूजा श्रीमत्सद्गुरुपादयोः ।  
अर्पिता देशिकस्तेन प्रीयतां मे दयानिधिः ॥

॥ ॐ तत् सत् ॥

Camp : Almora,  
11 August, 1984  
(*Shravana Purnima*)

## LETTERS

(1)

Vasishtha Guha  
Rishikesh  
15.12.53

My dear Giriji,

Your letter. Thanks. I was not here for some days. Somebody took me to Amritsar. I reached back only a few days back. Hence the delay in replying. Yes, you are with us. Prem is somewhat successful in imitating your tune of *Ram-nam*. He is happy to receive the copies of the same. He was also with me to Amritsar. All well here. Last day they celebrated the Birthday. It went off grand. My love and best wishes to you. Lord bless you.

Affly. yours,  
Purushottamananda

[Note: This was the first letter  
to me from Swamiji]

(2)

Vasishtha Guha  
Rishikesh  
15.3.54

My dear Giriji,

I have received all your letters. I was not keeping good health. Hence the delay in replying. I was at Lucknow, Sitapur, Delhi, Moradabad, Bareilly and Prayag. You must have read about the great tragedy at Prayag. I was there then.

Now I am alright. Hope you are doing well. I was remembering you almost always. Be happy.

Affly. yours,  
Purushottamananda

Prem is alright.  
We are having *Ram-nam*  
almost every day —  
whenever we can. — P.

(3)

Vasishtha Guha  
Rishikesh  
24.3.54

My dear Giriji,

Very glad to see your loving letter. We were in a safe place. We were not in any way affected. I had that rheumatic pain which was very much persisting this year due to great cold. At Lucknow I had to undergo some treatment — now alright. Sadanand is gone to Rishikesh. I shall be sending his letter to him. The school is going on — Iyer too.

Be happy.

Affly. yours,  
Purushottamananda

(4)

Vasishtha Guha  
Rishikesh  
3.5.54

My dear Giri,

Very glad to see your letter. We could not easily forget you. You did well in writing to

Rajyapal. The pictures are given for framing nicely. Why did you send this ... ? You are more in need of money. Yes, Lord is blessing you. I am sending two copies of *A Peep into the Gita*. One copy you can present to the library — Asram.\*

All well here. Iyer is the headmaster now. Hope this finds you in good health. With my love and respects to the saints in the Asram.\*

I remain,  
Affly. yours,  
Purushottamananda

\* Ramakrishna Ashram, Bombay.

(5)

Vasishtha Guha  
Rishikesh  
14.7.54

My dear Giriji,

We have received the books and letter and that which was enclosed secretly. Very glad to know that that Swamiji is remembering me. Please convey my best love and respects unto you. It is very good you are associating with such good souls. Yes, it is very difficult to get



Satsanga. All well here. We are getting rains. Tomorrow comes Guru Purnima. We are to worship the first Guru Vyasa. Sivanandaji was quite unwell. Now he is becoming better. Be happy and happy in Lord.

Affly. yours,  
Purushottamananda

P.S.

The *Gayatri* is a very useful publication. Try to send us more copies if possible.

— P.

(6)

Vasishtha Guha  
Rishikesh  
4.8.54

Dear Giriji,

Glad to receive your letter. Yes, I have received the *Gayatri* booklet. When I require I shall be writing to you again. How are you? That lady was ... of Ottapalam. She must be still there only. Some ladies of Palghat also came here. They could stay here only for a day .... They all went to Bombay. Those days

it was raining. Mother Ganga came close to the Cave. I am only at the Cave now. All others are at the top. Food for me is being brought here. Yes, be happy. Search for the invisible.

Affly. yours,  
Purushottamananda

(7)

Vasishtha Guha  
Rishikesh  
27.9.54

Dear Giriji,

Your letter of the 19th reached me duly. Very glad you are becoming more and more inclined to the Path Divine. And what is there in the material world — They are all hallucinations. They are taking the ignorant from one object to the other. And these people waste their lives in the pursuit of happiness — just like the poor beasts running after the mirage in the hope of quenching the thirst. So, wise are they who take a turn back. You ask my advice. Yes, look at the world — then your Vairagya must increase

daily. Vairagya is the beginning and end of religious life. So keep the eyes wide open. As regards the Mantram you can take up Gayatri. It is Saguna as well as Nirguna. Get up early morning, take your bath and sit in a nice corner in a convenient *asana* facing the sun, and after worshipping all the great souls you can make your mind a little calm and meditate the Lord in the heart and begin repeating the Gayatri Mantra. Begin on an auspicious day — Vijayadasami is very good. It is also nice to keep a Rudraksha-mala. The more (one does) the Japa, greater the merit. Depending on the time available Japa can be decreased or increased. Japa can be done even at night. You are strictly observing Brahmacharya, aren't you? Lord bless you. In that book all rules about Gayatri are given in detail. Do (Japam) as much as you can.

So begin. You can write to me about your doubts. I shall be writing to you. All well. Now I am at the Guha. All are doing well.

Affly. yours,  
Purushottamananda

Note: Part of the letter is translated from Malayalam.

(8)

24 Park Road  
Allahabad  
25.10.54

My dear Giri,

Your card. Thanks.

Now I have no mind to go anywhere from here. This is a very fine place — All quiet — near to Ma Ganga. I shall be here for a long period, it seems. I feel healthier also here. They are all coming here from Lucknow &c. I wish you all success.

I remain,  
Affly. yours,  
Purushottamananda

(9)

Vasishtha Guha  
Rishikesh  
24.2.55

My dear Giriji,

Your letter of the 18th we received here the day before last being redirected from Allahabad.

On the 20th December I left Allahabad to Kanpur and Lucknow, and reached here on the 4th of last month. All well. Now the season is very fine here. Hope you are doing well with your mother and sister. Lord bless you all.

I remain,  
Affly. yours,  
Purushottamananda

(10)

Vasishtha Guha  
Rishikesh  
2.4.55

My dear Giriji,

Your P.C. Thanks. You have got some responsibilities — you cannot run away so soon. Stick to the gun. Lead a pure life and forget not Him the Lord.

All well.

Affly. yours,  
Purushottamananda

(11)

Vasishtha Guha  
Rishikesh  
12.4.55

My dear Vedam,

Your letter to hand. Why do you send the note. Duty if properly done is a form of worship as well.

Lord bless you. All well here.

Affly. yours,  
Purushottamananda

(12)

Vasishtha Guha  
Rishikesh  
7.9.55

Dear Giriji,

Very glad to receive your letter. We are all well here. Sadanand is gone to Narendranagar. His letter will be given to him when he returns. One Major\* Parameswaran Pillai chanced to come

here and he happened to see what I had written\*\*. It is not yet completed. He is very eager to get it printed. So he has taken it with him. It will take some time to take the shape of a printed book. When are you going to take leave?

With love and best wishes,

Affly. yours,  
Purushottamananda

\* Major-General, but Swamiji referred to him as 'Major'.

\*\* His *Atma-Katha*.

(13)

Vasishtha Guha  
Rishikesh  
23.9.55

My dear Giri,

Glad to see your letter. Sadanand is here. Everything is going on. We are intending to have a Saptaha — Bhagavata Saptaha Parayanam — from tomorrow. By the first week of October or so I may go to the plains. How I love you, you

know. Write to me letters now and then.  
Lord bless you.

Affly. yours,  
Purushottamananda

Yes, he is the gentleman, Major Pillai.

(14)

Vasishtha Guha  
Rishikesh  
2.12.55

My dear Giri,

Thank you for your letter. Did you succeed in marrying your sister? All well. Now I am going to start to Delhi tonight. Thence after a week to Lucknow &c. All well.

Affly. yours,  
Purushottamananda

(15)

Vasishtha Guha  
Rishikesh  
9.3.56

My dear Giri,

Your P.C. I was remembering you all the while. I do not know whether you succeeded in marrying your sister. I reached this back from my touring on the 11th of January. All well here. We have applied to Govt. to take the school in their hands. We may be relieved, it seems. You are alright, I hope, in spite of all the difficulties.

Lord bless you.

Affly. yours,  
Purushottamananda

(16)

Vasishtha Guha  
Rishikesh  
28.5.56

My dear Giriji,

Glad to receive your letter of the 17th instant. Glad to know Sadanand's people are all doing well. I do not know where he is at present. I am sending you a copy of *Spiritual Talks*. With love and best wishes,

I remain,  
Affly.,  
Purushottamananda

(17)

Vasishtha Guha  
Rishikesh  
31.7.56

My dear Giri,

I received your letter today — was very happy to go through it. Lord bless you! Do not take leave now. The season is not good — malarial. I shall be writing to you again. With all love.

Affly. yours,  
Purushottamananda

(18)

Vasishtha Guha  
Rishikesh  
30.8.56

My dear Giri,

Your letter. Now the weather is not bad. So you can come here. All welcome.

Affly. yours,  
Purushottamananda

(19)

Vasishtha Guha  
Rishikesh  
17.9.56

My dear Vedam,

We were anxiously awaiting your arrival. Today your letter reached here. Yes, that is good. Have the function done. Lord bless you. All well. With love and best wishes,

I remain,  
Affly. yours,  
Purushottamananda

(20)

Vasishtha Guha  
Rishikesh  
8.11.56

My dear Giriji,

Your letter of 2nd inst. also reached me. Very glad to know that the marriage was well off. All God's Grace. You have heard of the flood. I hope. On the 9th last the Mother Ganga

entered into the Cave. We all shifted to the school side. So no life was lost. But much damage was done. It is all being repaired. I have come back to the Cave. All well. With love,

Purushottamananda

(21)

Vasishtha Guha  
Rishikesh  
24.12.56

My dear Vedam,

Your letter. Excuse me for the delay in replying. Yes, everything went on well. Some 1000 persons were fed on that day. As regards the Asrama I am indifferent. One Sambanand wants an Ashrama on the bank of Bharatapuzha.\* So he is trying. I also gave him a sum of Rs. 101/-. We are constructing here a building for the sak of those who visit here. Within a month it will be completed, it seems. Hope you are all well.

Affly. yours,  
Purushottamananda

\* A river in Kerala

(22)

Vasishtha Guha  
Rishikesh

21.1.57

My dear Ved,

Your letter. I think I shall be here only during Sivaratri. If I go elsewhere I shall be writing to you. So come. The rest at sight.

Affly. yours,  
Purushottamananda

(23)

Vasishtha Guha  
Rishikesh

21.3.57

My dear Veda,

Glad you have reached Bombay quite safe. The pen also I received. All well here. S. Satyananda left this for Uttarkashi. This body also is in good health.

With love and best wishes.

I remain,  
Affly. yours,  
Purushottamananda

[The following are from among the several letters received after I was initiated into Sannyasa — S.N.]

(24)

[Translated from Malayalam]

Vasishtha Guha  
Rishikesh  
15.9.59

My dear Nirved,

Your card was received here today. I returned from Dehradun the very next day — didn't go to Chakrata. Mubayi also came with me. Yesterday there was a grand Onam feast. My food is still vegetables and fruits and milk only — very happy indeed. Even now there is rain. Naidu and others have left. M. is now in hospital at Uttarkashi. He has various diseases.

My love to all.

Affly. yours,  
Purushottamananda

[Received at Agra where I had been in connection with the printing of  
*The Life of Swami Purushottamanda* — S.N.]

(25)

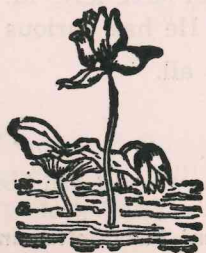
Vasishtha Guha  
Rishikesh  
2.1.61

My dear Nirved,

Glad to receive your letter. P. is still here only. Today he is giving a feast .... He is very happy here. The plastering of the building is going on. Hope you are in good health. How is Satyanandaji ?

Affly. yours,  
Purushottamananda

[Received at New Delhi. This turned out to be Maharaj's last letter to me — S.N.]



## POSTSCRIPT

### A FOREIGNER MEETS MAHARAJ

Given below is an interesting account of a friend on his first meeting with Maharaj. SWAMI JNANANANDA GIRI who hails from Switzerland, is more an Indian than a Swiss, having never left the shores of this country ever since he came more than thirty-five years ago. Whenever he came to the North from his Guru's abode in West Bengal he used to spend a few days at Vasishtha Guha also as he not only liked the place but valued the company of Maharaj. Even now he recalls his first visit to V'Guha with great admiration for Maharaj whenever devotees, Indians and foreigners, request him to narrate about the Mahapurushas he has met in the country. What follows is the Swamiji's narrative in his own words. — S.N.

"It was during the rainy season in the year 1955 that I set out from Rishikesh walking along the motor-road by the Ganga in the direction of Vasishtha Guha. My intention was to have the *darshana* of the great Swami Purushottamanandaji Maharaj who lived there and of whom I had heard while staying at Rishikesh.

Late in the afternoon I came near to my destination. I descended from the motor road on a narrow footpath that led through the dense lush forest towards the river. Soon I reached the ashram precincts.



All day long I had been thinking of the divine presence that permeates these sacred forests and mountains. A deep sense of timeless ecstasy filled the very heart of my being which, on approaching that forest hermitage, turned into a mysterious expectation.

I found Swamiji Maharaj sitting on an elevated mud platform in the open, just in front of his small Kutir next to the entrance of the cave. A few Brahmacharins and householder devotees were also by Swamiji's side.

The elderly saint, with flowing long white hair and beard, did shine like a Rishi of ancient times. A heavenly smile lit up his bright face ! As I moved closer, with my folded hands in salutation, the saint's smile turned into cheerful laughter. Laughing heartily like a child, he bade me sit down with a gentle gesture of his hand. Not asking anything he looked for something amongst letters, papers and books that did lie by his side. He picked up one picture-postcard, perhaps received by that day's mail, and still laughing, he waved that card before me and then handed it over to me, now asking : 'Do you know this country and place ?' I looked at the postcard and replied that I know it, it is Zurich in Switzerland ! To my surprise that card depicted just

that particular part of the town where actually I was born ! I was indeed wondering how Swamiji knew my nationality and how he happened to show me this picture postcard. He then made a few enquiries about me, my Guru, etc.

I felt wondrously uplifted in the saint's august presence. I was allowed to stay at the hermitage. For a number of years thereafter I kept on visiting Vasishtha Guha to be with dear Swami Purushottamanandaji Maharaj whenever I came to that region of the Himalayas."

SWAMI JNANANANDA

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