



SWAMI NIRVEDANANDA

A True Sannyasin

By

DEVOTEES

शान्ता महान्तो निवसन्ति सन्तो
वसन्तवल्लोकहितं चरन्तः ।
तीर्णास्स्वयं भीमभवार्षवं जनान्
अहेतुनान्यानपि तारयन्तः ॥

स्वामी शान्तानन्द जी महाराज द्वारा
साक्षीकर्तृ प्रदत्त ।



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PREFACE

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The life of a saint is the best commentary on God. Saints affirm His Existence. God manifests Himself through them again and again to draw His children towards Him. Simply by recalling their lives and by following in their footsteps, we can reach the Supreme Goal. But alas! Often our own Samskaras, tainted by the dust of the world, allow us at the most to admire them, without deeply involving ourselves in the religious pursuit.

Saints have that natural inclination to remain unknown to the world following as they do the golden rule, "Keep away from name and fame," so as to lead a life of uninterrupted communion with God. They teach through silence, even by their gracious glance. Their lives teach us more than whole libraries on religion and philosophy. A few words from them become the sum and substance of our holy scriptures. The rare existence of such saintly flowers in full bloom may not be known to many, but it is the fragrance they leave behind that sustains the moral and ethical values that guide our conduct. Our gratitude to them cannot be and should not be confined to mere admiration for them. Their lives are to be followed.

Swami Nirvedanandaji was one such flower in full bloom. He was born in Kerala and was initiated into spiritual life by Swami Purushottamanandaji Maharaj, a monk of the Sri Ramakrishna order. Swami Nirvedanandaji assimilated and lived the teachings of his Gurudev at Ghazipur. Virtues such as purity, dispassion, simplicity, endurance and surrender to the supreme were exemplified in his life.

We confess our incompetence to write a book on him but our primary attempt here is to compile in one place Swami's articles and poems most of which were published in several

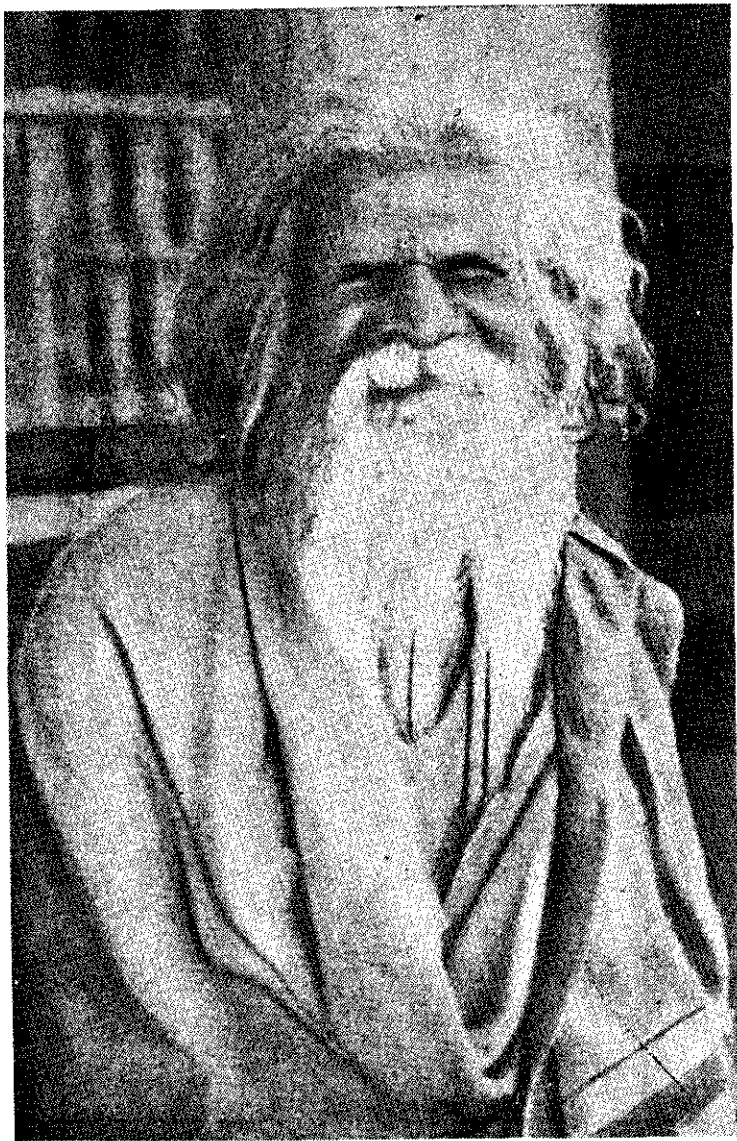
journals. However, as we proceeded on this elevating venture, we felt more inspired by his life and gathered courage to collect Swamiji's letters and other material from all available sources to present an outline of his life, a life that was self-effulgent. Deficiencies are unavoidable in a work of this nature. Often, experiences relating to a great soul might appear to be exaggerations if not taken in the true spirit. However, all possible care has been taken to avoid exaggerations while narrating his life.

As Swamiji was a man of few words, he expressed himself more eloquently through his letters written to his many friends, who consider themselves to be his devotees. We have included excerpts from such letters in this book chronologically, in our attempt to enable the readers to meet him through them. These letters are not only of common spiritual interest but also provide practical guidance on spiritual Sadhana.

We are indebted to Swami Sankaranandaji, Swami Jnananandaji and Sri K.V. Janakiramanan for encouraging us by making weighty contributions to the book. We are also grateful to Sri K. Subbarayan for his editing of the manuscript, and to Sri V. Achuthan, Proprietor of Surekha Press, for planning and seeing through the publication of the book in a beautiful manner and in a short time.

We sincerely invoke Swamiji's blessings on all those who have co-operated with us in this venture by giving us their guidance and assistance at every step.

DEVOTEES



SWAMI PURUSHOTTAMANANDAJI MAHARAJ

Varanasi by the
Rishikesh
10-5-54

Life is short and way too long
Be ye traveller quick and smart.
Keep your aim quite fast in heart
And the way will itself become short.

Mishaps and trouble, His Blessings both
Take them all with hope and joy.
He is all love and mercy great
Waiting to meet all at the gate.
Pack up, pack up with haste in mind
And speed on like a madman, friend,
Looking neither bitter nor blither
To lay thee thyself at His feet.

With Blessings from a sincere one
I remain ever all yours
A Seeker of Him who dwells in Cave
Purush and Uttam who feels for all

AN APPRECIATION

This book on one of our senior Gurubhais, Swami Nirvedanandaji, is brought out by his devotees and admirers after his Mahasamadhi on February 28, 1991, a holy day, mainly for circulation among them. There is really no need to introduce Swamiji to his devotees and admirers.

However, earnest Sadhakas, who are new to the spiritual path, will be immensely benefited when they come to know the various aspects of Swamiji's spiritual life. His life and teachings are a perennial source of strength and guidance to his devotees.

Swamiji's outlook on life and behaviour truly justified his name Nirvedananda - one who has a complete disregard for worldly objects. He was neither a pessimist as one might be led to think on hearing the name nor an optimist. He never entertained either extreme idealism as some Sadhus are prone to, or ultra realism to show himself to be very modern to the world. In fact, he lived purely the natural life of a Sadhu, without attracting the attention of the public by any outward show such as in dress, words or eloquence. He did not hanker after position, name or fame. But the disciplined life of a Sadhu as advocated in our Sastras, which he lived, earnestly and gradually earned for him the love and respect of both Sadhus and householders, in fact, of everyone with whom he came in contact. Yama and Niyama (यम और नियम) are the two cornerstones of life; and life is blessed when these great virtues are practised irrespective of time, place, religious faith and the philosophy one may adhere to. These are the real wealth and ornaments of a man who desires happiness and peace in this world and hereafter. Swamiji always tried to abide by these two

Mahavratas till the last moment of his life even when he was bedridden for four to five years with a malignant disease.

Swamiji had very great faith in Guru Maharaj and in the teachings of the Sastras. Maharaj's words were gospel truth for him. When the "Purushottamashtakam" was published in 1987 from Vasishtha Guha, he wrote to me : "I have been daily reciting the last sloka before going to bed ever since I read it in 1957 when it was composed."

कारुण्यंमृतवर्षिनेत्रयुगलं यस्य प्रकृत्या स्वयं
दीनानामुपरिस्फुटं वितरति प्रीत्या च हेतुं विना
तस्यैव स्वात्मरतस्य पूज्यचरणदून्दूस्य मे सहस्रो-
रदूतात्मयतीश्वरस्य करुणापात्रं भवेयं सदा ॥

Those who had seen Swamiji on his death-bed were able to realise that his prayer was fulfilled. Even though he lived away from Vasishtha Guha, he always thought of the welfare of our Gurusthan and worked accordingly, by contributing articles on Maharaj to magazines like "Bhavan's Journal" and "Mountain Path", writing and translating Maharaj's works and encouraging people to visit Vasishtha Guha. His letters were a source of inspiration and strength to his Gurubhais, lay disciples of Maharaj and his friends and devotees.

He was not in favour of too much argument regarding controversial points in religion and philosophy. He would simply remark, "All this logic is too much for me ; I believe in what the tradition and the Sastras say, and I am quite happy and satisfied." His physical needs were the barest minimum and hence as a Sadhu he was not a burden on society. He never built a Kutia for himself. All his belongings could be collected in a small bag. He never carried a watch; but he could indicate the

correct time at any moment astonishingly accurately. He was very punctual, systematic and perfect in all his dealings. This is possible when a man loves whatever small or great work he undertakes. And love includes faith also. Swamiji always enjoyed the freedom of a Sadhu. He was sensitive to public criticism and fought shy of addressing an audience. It was not that he was lacking in knowledge and power of expression, which are evident from his articles to magazines, translations and booklets. Non-interference in the affairs of other people was another virtue seen in Swamiji, though he was ever ready to extend his helping hand to anyone who approached him. Over and above that, he also gave sound advice and suggestions, out of love.

He was, of course, a true Nirvedananda and was not interested in gardening; but the aesthetic sense in the Swamiji would make him sit watching for a long time a flower about to bloom in a garden at dusk or dawn. He would watch closely the bud of a Nisamukhi opening its petals one by one while its outer covering turns back and goes down suddenly with a jerk. He used to get so much overjoyed that he would call others to observe the wonderful Leela and power of God manifesting through His creation. He was such a refined soul that he could not bear the sight of people plucking flowers in a rude manner, hurting both the flower and the plant.

Swamiji was by nature very reserved and selective in making friends, devotees and disciples. When, after a careful study for a long time, he accepted anyone as a deserving one, his relationship with him lasted lifelong. Born and brought up in a highly cultured atmosphere, he was very polite, his language was very courteous and he never hurt the feelings of others by word or deed." अन्नं न निन्वात्" this injunction of our Sastras was scrupulously observed by our Swamiji while taking Bhiksha. If

someone asked him about the preparation of food which was not to his taste, he would smilingly remark, "Yes very nice, you can reduce or increase salt or chilly next time,"and only this much. Swamiji was fond of tea and "Any time is tea time" was true in his case.

We could very well say without exaggeration that our Swami was a कृतकृत्य, one who has fulfilled his duties. In his Poorvashrama as a dutiful son he looked after his parents, brothers and relations: after renunciation as a disciple, he dedicated his life to serving Guru Maharaj, strengthening the institution at our Gurusthan and popularising Maharaj's name and teachings to the learned public; as a Gurubhai he loved other Gurubhais and was loved by them in turn; as a Sannyasin he respected other Sannyasins; as a Sadhaka he went on pilgrimages, studied Sastras and did Tapas; as a guide he gave sound advice and guidance to earnest seekers in their spiritual path.

Thus on close observation and study we find some essential features of a seeker manifesting in and through our Swamiji - some springing spontaneously and some cultivated deliberately. The way to imbibe such qualities is to observe and appreciate them in others. The following pages will give more details about the various aspects of Swamiji's spiritual life.

Hari Om Tat Sat

Swami Sankarananda

Mangalashram
Uttar-Kashi
July 26, 1991
(Guru Purnima)

VASISHTHA GUHA - I

ॐ

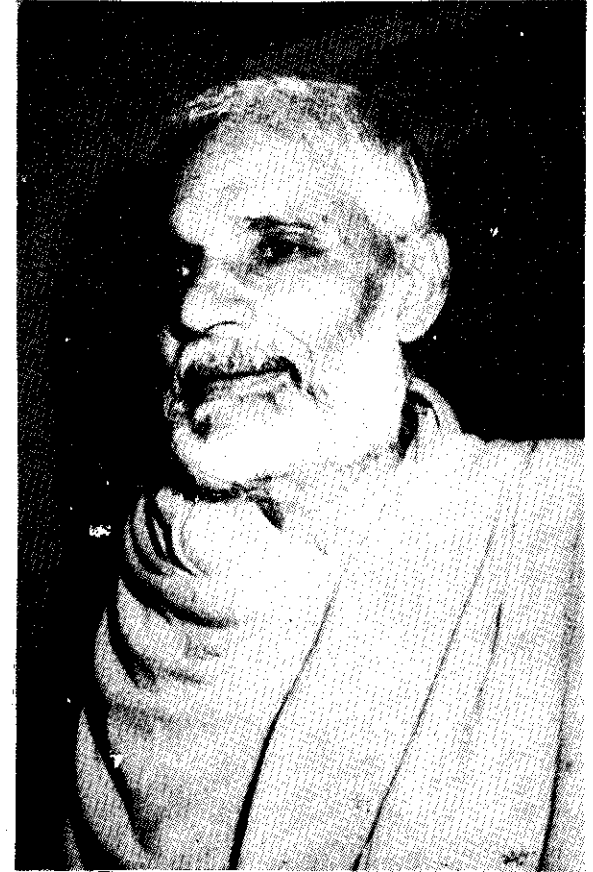
उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत
प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत ।
क्षुरस्य धारा निशिता दुरत्यया
दुर्गं पथस्थत्कवयो वदन्ति ॥

Arise, awake, and learn by approaching the excellent ones. The wise ones describe that path to be as impassable as a razor's edge which when sharpened, is difficult to tread on. - Kathopanishad I.III.14

Many might have heard this famous exhortation of the *Kathopanishad* but exceptional are those who make it the pole star of their life and rarer still are the ones who reach the Goal in their lifetime.

In the modern days of materialistic hankerings, Swami Nirvedanandaji Maharaj of Kurtha, near Ghazipur, in Uttar Pradesh, was a shining example of such a great soul. Living a simple and secluded life in a small kurti (hut) on the banks of Ganga, he not only treaded the path compared by the Upanishads to the razor's edge and reached the Goal on the strength of Gurubhakti and Brahmanishtha, but also inspired others to follow the path.

Swami Nirvedanandaji was not a great scholar in the usual sense; he did not write many books; he neither delivered spiritual discourses nor established any institution. Even the



SWAMI NIRVEDANANDAJI MAHARAJ

न गुरोरधिकं तत्त्वं न गुरोरधिकं तपः
तत्त्वज्ञानात्परं नास्ति तस्मै श्रीगुरवे नमः

number of those who got Mantra Deeksha from him can be counted on the fingers. However, he was a brilliant example of the true spirit of Sannyas. The vows of poverty and purity, the two pillars of Sannyas, were as if personified in his character.

Born on December 23, 1923 in a village at Chittur in the Palghat district of Kerala, Vedagiri, as Swamiji was called during his pre-monastic days, was the eldest son of Sri Lakshmana Iyer and Smt. Sitalakshmi Ammal. He had three younger brothers and two sisters. His parents were very religious. Reading the lives of saints and other holy books marked the beginning of the religious bent in the life of Vedagiri. The family's financial constraints stood in the way of his pursuit of higher studies. Seeing a silver line in those dark clouds he learnt to value the things available to him.

Although not much is known about his childhood, his passing the Senior Cambridge examination in First Class testifies to his brilliance as a student. With such intelligence and application he could have completed his higher studies creditably and embarked on a successful professional career. However, destiny had chalked out an entirely different path for him.

Sri Lakshmana Iyer died just when Vedagiri had passed his Senior Cambridge examination and being the eldest son, he had to take over the family responsibilities. It is possible that the sorrowful events of his early life had kindled in Vedagiri's heart the flame of renunciation which in later years became a blazing fire.

Burdened with family responsibilities, Vedagiri left his native place in search of a job. He was deeply pained that he could not continue his higher studies and it became a positive trait in his character to learn from anything and anybody around

him throughout his life. Vast was his range of experience and keen his sense of observation.

After a short stint of service in the medical wing of the Indian Army, he came to Bombay and took up a job with the Burmah Shell Oil Storage & Distributing Co., (now Bharat Petroleum Corpn. Ltd.). Keeping his personal expenses to the minimum, he used to send most of his earnings for the maintenance of his family. During those days he used to stay as a family member with his childhood friend Sri V.V.K.Moorthy.

Vedagiri gradually became a regular visitor to the Ramakrishna Mission, Bombay, and daily participated in the Arti. He thus came into contact with a group of like-minded friends. Vedagiri soon developed a good rapport with the Sannyasins and Brahmacharins of the Ramakrishna Ashram. During this period he earnestly read "The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna" which helped clear many of his doubts. The tiny sapling of his spiritual yearning began to grow, watered by the lofty teachings of "The Gospel". Vedagiri had already gone through several books on the life and teachings of Swami Vivekananda. Vedagiri's involvement in the Mission activities in Bombay became a part and parcel of his life and laid the foundation for his spiritual life gradually and subconsciously.

However relating to this phase of life he himself once said in later years, "I never thought of becoming a monk. All that I had decided was to lead a celibate life and to live on my pension after my retirement". But he never drew up any long-term plan except for the decision to remain a bachelor. Once an insurance agent approached him for taking a policy. Vedagiri declined immediately remarking "I already have a policy not to have any insurance policy". He keenly observed the lives of those around him and drew lessons for himself. Observing the Bombay crowds from the top of a building or from

a railway overbridge was one of his hobbies during those days. He also used to visit holy places like Ujjain and Omkareshwar.

Years passed and gradually Vedagiri's brothers completed their education, one sister was married and, in a manner, he was free to settle down in his own life. Now a strong thirst for intense spiritual life started dominating his thinking more and more. The Upanishads have declared :

श्रेयश्च प्रेयश्च मनुष्यमेत -
स्तौ सम्परीत्य विविनक्ति घोरः ।
श्रेयो हि घीरोऽपि प्रेयसो वृणीते
प्रेयो मन्दो योगक्षेमाद्वृणीते ॥

The preferable and the pleasurable approach mankind. The man of intelligence, having considered them, separates the two. The intelligent one selects the electable in preference to the delectable; the non-intelligent one selects delectable for the sake of growth and protection (of the body etc.).- Kathopanishad I.ii.2.

Vedagiri, a truly intelligent person chose what was श्रेयस (sreyas) for him rather than प्रेयस (Preyas). He began an intense search for a suitable place for his spiritual practice. His search led him to the Feet of Sri Swami Purushottamanandaji Maharaj of Vasishtha Guha. During the middle part of this century, the holy land of Uttarkhand spanning Haridwar and Gangotri was blessed by the presence of three great spiritual personalities, namely Swami Tapovanji Maharaj of Uttar Kashi, Swami Purushottamanandaji Maharaj of Vasishtha Guha and Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj of Rishikesh. Swami Purushottamanandaji was a disciple of Srimat Swami Brahmanandaji (Raja Maharaj), one of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and the first

President of Ramkrishna Math and Mission. Purushottamanandaji who began his spiritual life under the guidance of Srimat Swami Nirmalanandaji (Tulsi Maharaj), was given Mantra Deeksha by Swami Brahmanandaji in the year 1916. In 1923 Srimat Swami Shivanandaji (Mahapurush Maharaj), the second President of Ramkrishna Math and Mission, initiated him into Sannyas.

Some years later, Swami Purushottamanandaji settled down in Vasishtha Guha, situated at a distance of about 22 km on the Rishikesh-Badrinath road in a thick jungle, practised intense Tapasya and attained the Goal of life. He was well known as a realised Soul in that part of the country. Vedagiri was fortunate enough in finding his Guru in Purushottamanandaji Maharaj. The bee finds its way even in thick jungles if the flower is in full bloom.

With the intention of spending a few days at some lonely holy place for Sadhana, Vedagiri reached Rishikesh in October 1953 via Delhi where he met Swami Chinmayanandaji, who encouraged him to have a darshan of Swami Purushottamanandaji at Vasishtha Guha. He also gave him a reference letter to Swamiji. Vedagiri's first visit to Vasishtha Guha and his meeting with Sri Swami Purushottamanandaji can be summarised in one sentence - he went, saw and was conquered ! As soon as he reached that holy place, he was overwhelmed with joy because he felt he already knew the place very well. In his book "At the Feet of my Guru", which he wrote many years later he has vividly described these events. He found Maharajji seated in an easy chair in front of a small hut. Vedagiri prostrated before him and handed over the letter from Swami Chinmayanandaji. After reading the letter Maharajji made some kind enquiries about Swami Chinmayanandaji and started laughing and laughing - his inimitable and natural child-like laughter. His whole reaction was as if he knew that

Vedagiri belonged to that place and only a lost child had returned home. Even Vedagiri did not feel that he was standing before a stranger! He felt he was in the presence of one who was most intimate to him.

With Maharajji's permission Vedagiri stayed for about three weeks at the Ashram. Although during his stay he was much attracted towards Maharajji he did not request for Mantra Deeksha as he then had 'his own views' about the necessity of a Guru in spiritual Sadhana. How strange! The same person in his later years was to write in one of his letters, "Practising Sadhana without the guidance of a Guru is like rowing a boat without an oar! "

Though Vedagiri's attraction for Maharajji began increasing day by day, his first visit to Vasishtha Guha was coming to an end. The night before his departure for Bombay he went to Maharaj and after salutations sat down near him. After hearing from Vedagiri that he was planning to leave the following day, Maharajji smiled and said " Yes, yes, I knew it when you came in ." Vedagiri sat quietly but his mind was in great turmoil. Maharajji gave him some advice and then in a somewhat indrawn mood said, "We have become one; we have been united." Vedagiri was taken aback. But only after a few days' pondering he could realise that Maharaj had taken him into his fold. The following morning when Vedagiri approached Maharaj to take his leave, Maharajji in a voice full of love and affection told him that he was pleased with him. Maharajji also gave him the following advice in a slow and deliberate fashion:

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

"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 and *karmas* will leave of their own accord."

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

After a while, he continued : "We have become one. Didn't I tell you yesterday itself? We are united."

After mid-day meals, Vedagiri boarded the bus for Rishikesh with a heart full of emotion and tearful eyes. Full three years and three months were to pass before he could get another darshan of his spiritual Master.

Back in Bombay, though Vedagiri had not received Mantra Deeksha from Maharaj, he regularly received guidance from him through letters. It was during this period that he was fully convinced about the necessity of a Guru in spiritual Sadhana. Ultimately, as it was not possible for him to go to Vasishtha Guha immediately, in the early morning of the Guru Purnima day in 1956, sitting before the picture of Sri Ramakrishna in the old shrine of the Bombay Ashram, he mentally accepted Maharaj as his Guru and started repeating a Mantra. When informed by Vedagiri about this, Maharaj was very happy and blessed him.

Vedagiri's second visit to Vasishtha Guha was only for a week in the last week of February 1957, but it was very important from his point of view. His whole purpose, this time, was to request Maharaj for Mantra Deeksha. He reached there on February 25, 1957. On the following afternoon, i.e. on the 26th, Maharaj said to him, "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."

However, at dusk on the same day Maharaj went inside the cave, sat on his *asana* and urgently summoned Vedagiri inside. Telling him not to bother about bath or other formalities, Maharaj commanded him to take Mantra Deeksha just then. After his initiation, Maharaj told him, "I had a strong feeling that I should give you Mantra just now instead of tomorrow." After that, coming outside he asked for the almanac (Panchangam) and remarked that, that was a very auspicious time and because of that he was inspired to initiate Vedagiri just then. A few years later, referring to this incident, he also remarked that because of his initiation at that particular moment, the spirit of renunciation in Vedagiri was quickened. Just 40 days after reaching Bombay after his second visit to Vasishtha Guha, Vedagiri was to be back at the feet of his Master as a renunciant!

At the end of his second visit, Vedagiri was to leave for Bombay via Rishikesh on March 6, by the 9.30 a.m. bus. When he went to Maharaj in the morning to offer flowers and his pranams, Maharaj asked with a smile "Where will you go? He further asked : "Do you want to go?" Vedagiri could only reply, "If Swamiji would permit, I would like to go." Then Maharaj asked him to repeat the Mantram he had given him the previous evening and 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 Vedagiri went to Maharaj to obtain his blessings before departing for Bombay. A disciple of Maharaj, Brahmachari Vedabandhu, and a few inmates of the Ashram were sitting in the room. When Vedagiri prostrated before him,

Maharaj said to Vedabandhu with a laugh, while patting Vedagiri with one hand, "See, he wants to go from here." The words struck Vedagiri like an arrow and he felt ashamed that he was going back to Bombay and back to his work-a-day life. With a choked throat and tears in his eyes, he said with folded hands: "Call me Maharaj, once for all so that no thought of going back will arise. Please, call me like that."

Vedagiri reached Bombay on the night of March 11 or 12, 1957. After returning to Bombay, it was becoming increasingly difficult for Vedagiri to continue with his job. The thoughts about leaving home and returning to the Himalayas were continuously haunting him. On the morning of March 30, 1957, while meditating in the Ramakrishna Ashram shrine, he received, what he called in later years, a "Call of the Heart" to choose a monastic life. However, some hankering to stick to his job in Bombay still unsettled his mind and he was in a fix - whether to take the final plunge or not. By this time he had completed eight years of service with Burmah Shell. Though his job helped him to fulfil his obligations to his family orphaned by the death of his father, it also carried with it some binding Samskaras which caused some turmoil in his mind. In later years he once said, "It is easier to get a job than to come out of it (if an alternative job is not already sought)." His "Call of the Heart" was pitted against the little hankering after his job. In this state of mental turmoil, he wanted to write a long letter to Swami Purushottamanandaji seeking guidance. However, when he sat down to write, his mind became blank. The only thing he could write was, "I wanted to write to you but I do not know what to write. You know everything. Instill in me **Bhakti** and **Sraddha**. Yes, that is what I want — **Sraddha**, more and more."

After watching his mind for a few days and when fully convinced that the 'Call' was genuine and that he really wanted to lead a monastic life, he wrote to Maharaj again, presumably

on April 13, that he was giving up his job and leaving Bombay on April 17 and hoped to reach Vasishtha Guha two days later to take refuge at his feet. Two days before his departure from Bombay i.e. on the 15th, he received a post card from Maharaj, also written on the 13th, in which Maharaj had written, "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 many worldly experiences how can it remain in the world? It has to take shelter at the Feet of the Lord. And this is real Sannyas. Work on and He will take you by and by. One must have faith and patience."

Well, the 'mango' has ripened fully and it could no longer remain attached to the tree of Samsara. Vedagiri was now firmly prepared to take the plunge into the blissful Ocean of Lord. The grace of the Guru and the mercy of the Lord freed the bonds of his Samsara. Vedagiri took one step towards Him and He came forward by ten steps in conformity with His Eternal Promise. Vedagiri resigned his job and left Bombay on April 17, 1957 and joined the Vasishtha Guha Ashram on April 19. He now became a renunciant. Maharajji was so pleased with his name Vedagiri that he advised him to continue the same name as a renunciant also. Vedagiri began acquainting himself with the Ashram life to the minutest detail. Study of various scriptures, service to his Gurudev and participation in the Ashram activities were added to his Sadhana. He soon became one of Maharajji's beloved disciples. Vedagiri's mind was so much tuned up with that of Maharajji's that he often quickly did whatever Maharajji wanted, without being asked. He worked as Personal Secretary to Maharajji.

He was ordained a Sannyasin by Maharajji on March 7, 1959 and was named Swami Nirvedananda.

Swami Purushottamanandaji encouraged his Sannyasin disciples to go and meet their mother, if alive and to seek her blessings, as and when it was possible. His instructions were followed by Swami Nirvedanandaji and he met his mother in Bombay and sought her blessings.

After joining Vasishtha Guha Ashram, till the Mahasamadhi of Purushottamanandaji Maharaj in 1961, except for brief intervals spent in undertaking pilgrimage to various holy places, Swamiji stayed at the Ashrama and practised intense spiritual Sadhana under the direct guidance of his Sadguru. It was during this period that on the admonition of Maharaj, he translated the Autobiography of Maharaj from Malayalam to English as a part of his Sadhana.

At the Ashram, Swamiji maintained a good rapport with all his Gurubhais - Sannyasins and householders. He learnt Sanskrit grammar from his Gurubhai Swami Bhumanandaji. He studied various scriptures in depth with Swami Bhumanandaji and other Gurubhais. Swami Bhumanandaji was a great Sanskrit scholar and a favourite disciple of Guru Maharaj. But soon he became seriously ill and Swami Nirvedanandaji served him continuously at the Ramakrishna Mission, Kankal (Hardwar) till Swami Bhumanandaji breathed his last there.

By observing his Gurudev's routine life Swami Nirvedanandaji learnt many things. He was very fond of rendering personal service to his Gurudev. The manner in which he served his Master was applauded by his Gurubhais also, all of whom lived like a well-knit family with their Gurudev as their friend, philosopher and guide. Life there used to be charged with spiritual vibrations till Swami Purushottamanandaji Maharaj entered into Mahasamadhi on February 13, 1961 (Maha Sivaratri).

Swami Nirvedanandaji was away at Varanasi on a pilgrimage at the time of the Mahasamadhi of his beloved Gurudev. On his return to Vasishtha Guha he found the great vacuum. He deeply felt the loss. At first he was unable to restrain himself. After the death of his father he found himself an orphan once again — with much greater force this time. Through his parents he got the physical body but through the Grace of Maharajji he had achieved THAT after which nothing else remains to be achieved. Swamiji remained dumb struck for some time but soon the teachings of his Gurudev came to his aid. Swamiji soon began realising Sri Ramana Maharshi's words "The Guru is more internal." The Guru may be dead to skeptics but is alive to all those who believe in Him. Swami Nirvedanandaji always remained a firm believer in his Gurudev. So, the physical absence of his Guruji could not shake him much.

Now Swamiji and his Gurubhais engaged themselves in preparing the blue-print to run the Ashram on the ideals of their Gurudev, who had converted the very dust of the Ashram into a **tapobhumi**. After some initial strains, the Gurubhais formed a Trust entitled "Purushottamananda Trust." However, Swamiji ensured to exclude himself from the Board of Trustees.

Remembrance of one's Guru is always soothing, uplifting and liberating. The exercise is in itself a vital part of Sadhana. Swamiji always remained close to his Gurudev both before and after the Mahasamadhi. He used to say in later years, "Every Sadhak is supposed to identify his Self with the entire cosmos but he should never attempt to identify himself with the Guru."

Swamiji did not stay for long in Vasishtha Guha after the formation of the Trust. Being a Sannyasin he planned nothing for the future. Even during his visit to the Ashram, he had noted down in his mind Maharajji's view of how a true Sannyasin

should lead his life. Maharaj had said in connection with one of his other Sannyasin disciples, "By depending on others one does not realise the difficulties. Sannyasins should not stick to some established Ashrams. They should move out and experience life for themselves. Then alone they will know things as they are."

Swamiji's own ideal in this regard, as he was to mention many years later in one of his letters, was :

पंचाक्षरं पावनमुच्चरन्तः पतिं पशूनां हृदि भावयन्तः ।
भिक्षाशानाः दिक्षु परिभ्रमन्तः कौपीनवन्तः खलु भाग्यवन्तः ॥

They are indeed blessed who, clad (only) in Kaupinam (codpiece), wander about the four quarters, depending on 'bhiksha' food for maintenance, reciting the sacred name of the Lord (the Panchakshara Mantra) and meditating upon the Lord of the creatures (Pasupati, Siva) in their hearts

No wonder, that soon after Purushottamanandaji's Mahasamadhi, Swamiji left Vasishtha Guha Ashram to follow the life of a wandering monk. During this period he spent nearly a year and a half somewhere near Nasik in Maharashtra. He visited many holy places all over the country and in the course of one such wandering, he came to the holy city of Varanasi in 1966. At Varanasi someone from Ghazipur met him. The mention of Ghazipur brought to his mind Swami Vivekananda's account of his meeting with Pavhari Baba at Ghazipur and he became anxious to visit the Pavhari Baba Ashram at Ghazipur.

Ghazipur is a small township situated at about 75 km. north of Varanasi on the left bank of Uttarabhimukh (Northward-flowing) Ganga. From ancient times the area

around Ghazipur has been considered to be especially conducive to spiritual practices. According to a Pauranic tradition, Ghazipur was the kingdom as well as the Sadhanasthali of the famous King Gadhi (Gadhipur) who was the father of Maharishi Vishvamitra.

In the second half of the last century, the region around Ghazipur was sanctified by the presence of the famous saint Pavhari Baba. A contemporary of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Pavhari Baba had chosen Kurtha for his **tapasya**. After the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda had come to Ghazipur as a wandering monk and spent many days with Babaji. Throughout his life Swami held Pavhari Baba in great esteem and Babaji's place in his heart was second only to that of Sri Ramakrishna. Pavhari Baba's Samadhi still exists near Kurtha and attracts people from all over the country.

With the idea of visiting this holy place Swami Nirvedanandaji arrived at Kurtha sometime in the year 1966. Charmed by the serene and pleasant atmosphere of the place he decided to stay there for some days. At Kurtha, Ganga is separated from the village by a small nullah. Till recently only a temporary bridge used to exist for crossing over this nullah. Thus the piece of land between the nullah and the swift-flowing Ganga remains exceptionally undisturbed by the activities of the village. This was the place Swamiji chose for his Sadhana at the request of the villagers. A small thatched hut was erected under a pipal tree and Swamiji started living there, engaged in **tapasya**. He lived on the alms he collected from the villagers, a practice he followed throughout his stay at Kurtha in the following year. He would only visit three houses for his daily **Bhiksha**. True, the living conditions were harsh and the discipline he imposed on himself was severe. However he was very much charmed by the surroundings and decided to live

there for a longer time at the request of the religious-minded people of Kurtha. Consequently, after about five years, a small **pukka kuti** was built for him in a nearby field in which he stayed for more than 15 years.

The sanctified atmosphere around Swamiji's **kuti** during his stay at Kurtha is indescribable. Two small huts nearby used to be occupied by another Sannyasin (a Dandi Swami) and a Brahmachari. The Dandi Swami fell seriously ill in 1981. Swamiji rendered round the clock personal service to the Dandi Swami and also supervised and guided others to render their services to the patient in the manner befitting a Sannyasi. After the Mahasamadhi of the Dandi Swami the necessary arrangements for the **jal samadhi** and other rites were done under the guidance of Swamiji.

Nirvedanandaji's **kuti** was an ideal example of cleanness and simplicity. One used to feel as if purity and **vairagya** were actually residing there. A wooden cot, a few clothes, a water pot, some books and other minor items of daily use were all that were there. But the whole atmosphere used to be surcharged with his personality and spiritual vibrations.

It is to the credit of the residents of Kurtha that for years they lovingly took care of his daily needs.

Swamiji used to keep his whole being in tune with the Divine, his daily routine beginning at 2.30 a.m. and ending at about 10 p.m. Before going to bed he never forgot to remember his Guru Maharaj and would chant some verses, so as to begin the following morning with his (Guru's) remembrance. His intense Sadhana was a closed book for others. He always remained a quiet, simple, smiling and a friend-of-all Sadhu. The village folk saw in him a sadhu who was their own.

Swamiji never permitted anyone to serve him at the cost of one's own welfare. He knew the limitations of his friends and admirers more than they themselves knew, and he never taxed them even if they offered help willingly. Sometimes he rebuked his admirers gently if they neglected their household duties and responsibilities for his sake.

Once, while living in seclusion at Ghazipur, Swamiji mentally recalled the good old days he had spent at Vasishtha Guha with his Guruji, whose physical absence now moved him to tears. That very moment he heard a clear and soothing voice of his Guruji, "Do you think I have gone!" This experience gave him the assurance that his Gurudev was always with him.

The small **kuti** in which Swamiji lived, exposed him to the sun during the summer and Swamiji's life during the summer months was a marvel of endurance. In 1985 some village folks offered to construct a verandah in front of the **kuti** which would give some relief from the direct sunlight and when they asked for Swamiji's permission, Swamiji turned down the offer politely, saying "I live in the **kuti**, but it is not mine." Such incidents are plenty in his life which showed his intense **vairagya**. However the verandah was constructed by the loving villagers when Swamiji had gone to Uttar Kashi on a brief spiritual retreat. On his return, Swamiji, respecting the feelings of the villagers, appreciated the work.

Swamiji used to keep his purified ego in a low key in all his daily dealings. He always introduced even his devotees and disciples to others as his friends and never as his Bhaktas or devotees. Once one of his few disciples objected to this. Swamiji wrote to him, "Did you expect me to tell everybody that you are somebody other than a friend? I cannot even use the word devotee for it it would be taken to mean "my devotee."

Swamiji at Ghazipur remained so simple and serene that it is hard to recall "incidents" from his life during the years, 1966 to 1986. During this period Swamiji even visited several holy places most of which were connected with the two spiritual giants of his order — Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Swami Vivekananda. When Swamiji planned to go on pilgrimage he kept his programme a secret till the last day of his departure from Ghazipur. The reason for this he disclosed at a much later time : if he announced his programme in advance, people might offer him money for his yatra and they might feel offended if the offer was refused. In a lighter vein Swamiji used to refer money as "Vitamin M". He accepted it as Vitamin only for serving his bare necessities.

Swamiji always regarded Vasishtha Guha as his Headquarters even though he never associated himself with any Ashram after the Mahasamadhi of his Guruji. He also took keen interest in other Ashrams known to him. He sent appeals to his householder friends for financial contributions whenever need arose for his Gurubhais and other known Sadhus to renovate, repair or build Ashrams. On one such occasion he wrote to a devotee : "It is entirely up to you to decide whether to send (money) or not — but such things are **sadhu seva** which are "must" for Sadhakas." Whenever Swamiji stayed in any Ashram he took utmost care to abide by the rules and regulations of that place. His Guru Maharaj's utterance, 'feel, feel for others' had gone deep into his **Swabhav**.

While living in Ghazipur Swamiji took keen interest in the activities of Vasishtha Guha and offered his valuable suggestions as and when he felt the need to give them though he did not involve himself directly in the Ashram Management. Whenever he happened to pass through Rishikesh on his spiritual retreats in the Himalayas, he visited the Ashram for a few days. Swamiji got published the life and teachings of his

Gurudev through such books as (1) "The Life of Swami Purushottamananda", (2) "The Sage of Vasishtha Guha - the Last Phase", (3) "Guide to Spiritual Aspirants" - jotted down in Malayalam by Guru Maharaj — translated into English by Swamiji and (4) "At the Feet of My Guru" — his reminiscences of Vasishtha Guha days. Also he got reprinted "A Peep Into Geeta" and "Spiritual Talks", both published earlier by Guru Maharaj. He sent all these to Vasishtha Guha Ashram for distribution.

Swamiji while living in the **kuti** at Ghazipur fed earnest seekers with divine thoughts quietly, without entering into much conversation on the subject. Often he cut the Gordian knot of devotees' tangled problems, both personal and spiritual, by his mere presence full of spiritual radiance. His inner serenity was a great solvent of vexed problems.

Swamiji advised devotees to prefer singing Bhajans themselves to hearing recorded Bhajans of even renowned singers. He used to point out, "The moment you start enjoying the music, raga, voice and such other elements, you are out of the main theme." In Swamiji's view the right way to study the Gita and other scriptures was that "instead of giong through the whole Sloka at a time, we should first pick up a phrase or a line and dive deep into its meaning before attempting to assimilate the teaching contained in the whole Sloka." In a different context he once said : "We should stick to one Guru. If we go on digging at many places, we will find water nowhere." Sometimes he pointed out, "The similes in our scriptures etc. should not be stretched too far. They are meant to emphasize some aspects only. While comparing the beauty of one's face with that of the moon, the dark spots are ignored."

Thus, many gems of wisdom would come to light during his normal course of discussion with "friends and devotees."

People simply came to him and were charmed by his magnetic personality. They soon became his admirers. Swamiji always considered himself to be a seeker and not a teacher, but people around him learnt much by observing Swamiji's life as a seeker. Even his cleansing a lantern offered lessons not to speak of his clarifications of the subtle aspects of the abstruse Advaita philosophy. Swamiji could talk in depth on any subject and his knowledge often astonished even experts in that field. The range of his admirers included bureaucrats, technocrats, scientists, doctors, engineers, and teachers, and he took keen interest in all their professions. The simple village folk of Kurtha saw in him a Sadhu very much after their heart. They lovingly called him "Our Maharajji." His presence would impart purity and peace instantly, though people seldom realised the source. Despite his association with all class of people with whom he ever remained friendly, no one would ever dare to intrude into his domain of Sannyashood. He always kept in view the ideals for realising which he was drawn to Vasishtha Guha.

As mentioned earlier, Swamiji did not deliver spiritual discourses or engage himself in other similar activities. The three 'V's he used to emphasise more were "Vichar", "Vivek" and "Vairagya." He was seldom seen performing Bhajan, Pooja or other traditional rituals. The distinction between work and worship is only for the novices. For the advanced Sadhaka work itself becomes worship which culminates in uninterrupted worship of the Divine. The attitude of such persons become :

“यद् यत् कर्म करोमि
तत् तदखिलं शंभो तवाराधनम् ”

While describing the state of a Jnani Bhakta, Sant Jnaneshwar, the great Maharashtra saint, in the "Jnaneshwari" has said, "Similar to the wave which is always one with the ocean, a Bhakta also under no circumstances, is separated

from the Divine." He further says, "Whatever bodily activities he engages in, through them he attains Me (Sri Krishna or the Self) and Me alone. O Partha, thus, this not doing anything at all of his noble activities, becomes his great worship of Mine. Then whatever he speaks becomes My **Stava** (praise), whatever he sees becomes My **darshan** and wherever he wanders, it becomes My **parikrama**, whatever he thinks becomes My **japa**, and O, Kapidwaja [Arjuna who has monkey (kapi) as his emblem, in his flag] his very being becomes then My Samadhi." The explanation of these words become clear from Swamiji's life.

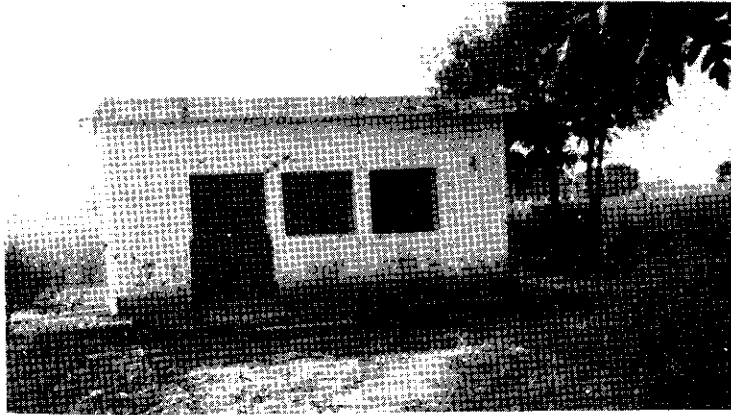
The most appealing aspect of Swamiji's life was his **gurubhakti** of the highest order. He always considered himself nothing but a small child in the lap of his **Sadguru**. It may be noted that throughout his life he always made efforts to get his Guruji's works published rather than his own. Even while giving **Mantra Deeksha** to his few disciples he never took any credit for himself. He used to say " While giving **deeksha** I pray to Sri Ramakrishna Dev and Guru Maharaj - these are your children, they were wandering lost in the jungle of the world. I have brought them back to you. Kindly take them under your fold."

Once one of his disciples was to go to a foreign country and had written to Swamiji seeking his blessings. Swamiji, along with his best wishes, sent him a small photograph to carry with him, not his own but of his Gurudev.

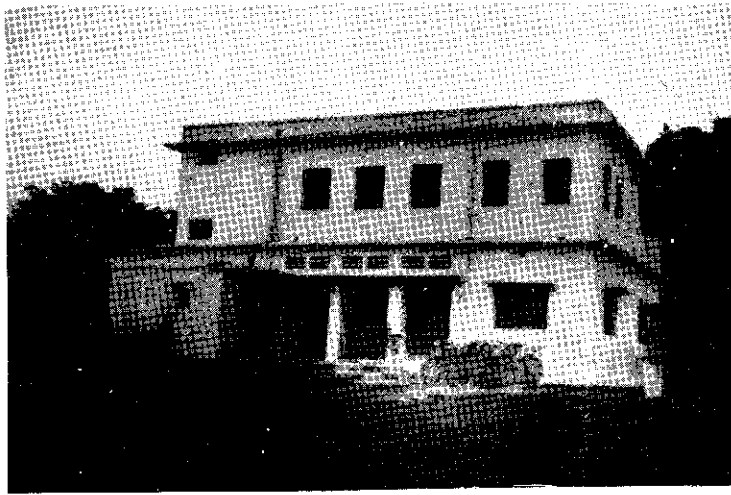
Swamiji was a man of few words. Many a time he could clear the doubts of others with a seemingly casual remark. Once, a disciple expressed the fear how there could be any escape from our past **karmas** giving the analogy of an arrow which, once released, cannot be stopped before it reaches the object. Swamiji simply remarked " Remove the object" thereby

indicating that identification with the doer and sufferer should be discarded. Swamiji demonstrated in his own life what he said.

Along with removing doubts regarding spiritual matters from the minds of those around him, Swamiji never failed to give practical advice on mundane matters and to caution them about the possible pitfalls. Because of his own experiences of office life during his pre-monastic days, Swamiji was well aware of the tensions and turmoils one has to undergo while serving any institution. His simple comment on such tensions used to be, "the more you get involved, the more kicks you will get." He also taught those around him how to bear the loss of near and dear ones. Once when he came to know about the demise of one of his disciple's beloved mother, he immediately wrote a letter of condolence full of love and sympathy. But when the same disciple, only after a few days, went to meet him at Ghazipur and stayed there for three or four days, Swamiji did not mention the subject even once, thus teaching him that one should accept these unavoidable mishaps of life without unnecessary fuss.



The *Kutia* where Swamiji lived near village Kurtha



A portion of Manav Seva Sangh building where Swamiji lived during his last illness

PART II

In October 1986 Swamiji decided to go to Bombay via Lucknow for printing some books relating to his Gurudev. His health was not very good. At Lucknow he complained of continuous back-ache. Taking it to be something similar to lumbago-sciatica, medicines and treatments were tried. There was some relief but the pain persisted. One Sunday afternoon, he was taken ill suddenly with vomiting and low blood pressure. Medication was started instantly and his life was saved that day. After a few days' rest his condition improved and he proceeded to Bombay. Though he did not complain of anything, it was known later that he was in severe pain when he left Lucknow.

In Bombay, under the loving care of his friends, detailed investigations were first carried out by one of the leading orthopaedists, Dr. G. Sundaram who referred Swamiji to Dr. R. Gopal at the Tata Memorial Hospital for further investigations. The investigation at the Tata Memorial Hospital indicated bone marrow cancer (Multiple Myeloma) in an advanced stage. Though Swamiji took it very lightly in conformity with his life as a Sannyasin, yet he prepared himself for the treatment with all sincerity. Dr. S. Gopal arranged for treatment like Radiation therapy and Chemotherapy under his supervision at the Tata Memorial Cancer Hospital .

The news of his illness and the diagnosis reached Ghazipur and Lucknow from his letters. He was anxious to return to Ghazipur after getting the green signal from his doctors and also after leaving necessary instructions to the printers regarding the publication of the books.

He wrote, "There in Kurtha (Ghazipur) I can breathe the fresh air blowing from the Gangaside, have **darshan** of Gangaji

and be free from the congested localities (of Bombay).” He was overwhelmed by the manner in which he was taken care of in Bombay by his friends and doctors and nurses who were till then strangers to him. He wrote in the same letter, “All these gestures on the part of friends and strangers throw me in a state of deep emotions and at times, I am unable to control my feelings. How am I to thank them and how am I to express my gratitude to Sri Guru Maharaj whose **kripa** alone makes all these things possible!” The life of everyone is full of events and this terminal disease could impress on him as another event only. On the other hand, the manner in which he followed the instructions of his doctors was a demonstration of the teaching that one should not be negligent in the name of Vairagya.

The disease and the strong medications made Swamiji too weak to undertake his return journey alone. Sri R.S.Singh from Ghazipur was sent to Bombay to escort Swamiji back to Ghazipur safely. Thus Swamiji returned along with detailed instructions from Dr. Gopal regarding his treatment to be continued at Ghazipur with check-ups in Bombay every six months.

Keeping in view the difficulties and inconveniences to the friends in providing regular medical facilities and other help at his **kuti** at Kurtha, Swamiji himself opted to stay at Manav Seva Sangh, Ghazipur, which was convenient to approach all times. Accordingly, all arrangements for his stay were ensured at Manav Seva Sangh even before his arrival at Ghazipur. From his room a better and closer view of Gangaji was available. The southern two rooms of the building were placed at the disposal of Swamiji. Swamiji always had a great reverence for Gangaji. Many a times he used to say “As soon as I return to the bank of Gangaji, my disease is reduced by ten per cent instantly.”

Manav Seva Sangh, established by Swami Sharananandaji has three main activities – serving the Sadhus, serving the ailing and serving the aged(साधुसेवा , रुग्णसेवा एवं वृद्धसेवा). Swamiji used to say in humour, “ I am three in one”.

After his return from Bombay, Swamiji’s condition continued to deteriorate and he was strictly confined to bed. At times, his movements even on the bed were restricted on account pathological fractures all over the body. However it was evident throughout the phase of his illness that the silent worshipper was provided with all essentials by Him silently, as and when required. Competent persons and things required by him came to him at the appropriate time and that too without his asking. No more conviction was required of the eternal promise of the Lord “ Yogakshemam Vahamyaham”.

On being asked by the devotees and others as to how he got himself into the clutches of this dreaded disease and why God was so unfair to a person like him, Swamiji always remarked, “ When I think over the Source from where all the helps are being provided, I forget the disease.” Who would not be eager to serve such a believer ! A group of **sevaks** adjusted their timings among themselves so as to attend on him round the clock and he always ensured that he was not being served at the cost of the family welfare and other necessary personal occupations of the attendants. On the other hand, it goes to the credit of this ‘sevak group’ that without bothering about their personal difficulties they served Swamiji with utmost devotion and alertness for as many as four and half years. Swamiji himself had great affection for those people. He used to say “ the manner in which these people are serving me, they may not serve even their own parents”.

As forewarned by the doctors in Bombay, the first six months showed the after-effects of chemotherapy and radiotherapy on Swamiji's body which became very weak. However, the spread of the disease was checked to a considerable extent in a few months. As a keen observer, Swamiji noticed sharply every development of the disease in his body and he explained the same in a manner as if he was narrating a tale of someone else. Soon he acquainted himself with the symptoms of the disease and whenever it spread, he only remarked in a casual manner, "It is the nature of cancer."

With the passing months, Swamiji gradually started getting up from the bed on his own which was followed by a little walking in the front verandah. Swamiji followed the instructions of his doctors to the minutest detail and presented himself in Bombay for check-up every six months on the exact date of appointment.

By the end of 1987, Swamiji snatched opportunities to complete the manuscript of his book **At the Feet of My Guru**, without asking for assistance from anyone. The complete exercise of the publication of the book was undertaken by himself. His being under the stranglehold of cancer was never a bar for him to pay his homage to his Gurudev Swami Purushottamanandaji. In the author's note to the book, Swamiji wrote, "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."

With a little more improvement in his health during the year 1988-89, Swamiji planned and prepared audio cassette recording which included some Bhajans, slokas and hymns to Guru. Again, keeping his disease in a low profile even though

allowing due treatment to it carefully, Swamiji prepared a write-up on the life of Swami Purushottamanandaji (reproduced elsewhere in the book) and sent it for publication in the journal **The Mountain Path**. Through several such incidents, devotees caught glimpses of Swamiji's devotion to his Gurudev under all circumstances.

In 1989, Swamiji took some ayurvedic treatment also at the suggestion of a Sadhu, which showed some positive results. In good humour Swamiji used to say, "My body has become a medical store and is also open for experiments." However, with this treatment Swamiji regained some strength and the visitors were reminded of his good old days at Kurtha, prior to his illness. Many of the visitors who came to Swamiji to see the 'patient' and to do some *seva* were being cured themselves of the chronic disease of worldliness in the holy presence, even though they were unaware of the metamorphosis.

Because of regular medication, diet control and his own will power, Swamiji's condition improved gradually to such an extent that when he went to Bombay in the beginning of the year 1990 for his regular six monthly check up, Dr Gopal was himself surprised and very much pleased with his improved condition. He stopped the medicines and advised that there was no need to come every six months unless any new problem arose. Swamiji returned to Ghazipur. Now he could walk a little with the help of a walking stick, could take his bath on his own and to a reasonable extent he became independent in attending to his daily chores. One day he even visited Kurtha in a jeep to cheer up his devotees there.

In spite of suffering from such a dreaded disease, Swamiji's sense of humour never left him. Except for the last month or so the atmosphere in his room used to be full of

laughter and merriment. A casual visitor could never have imagined that the person lying on the bed and cracking jokes with others in such a light mood was suffering from a disease like bone marrow cancer and was in continuous excruciating pain because of pathological fractures all over the body. It would be correct to say that Swamiji never considered his disease as disease. For him it was only an experience, just as any other experience in life. "I am just looking at it as a witness", he used to say. Normally, if one becomes a victim of such a disease, the first reaction is, "Why me"? Swamiji's attitude was entirely different. He used to say, "The cancer was in search of somebody. It got me. No problem. At least one person is saved. In my place had it been a householder, his whole family would have been ruined. Who is there for me to worry about?" Although he never worried about his own sufferings, many a time he expressed his feelings about the hardships others had to undergo because of his ailment.

Swamiji's whole life, especially his life during his last illness, was an ideal example and proof of the promise made by the Lord to Arjuna.

अनन्याश्चिन्तयन्तो मां ये जनाः पर्युपासते ।
तेषां नित्याभियुक्तानां योगक्षेमं वहाम्यहम् ॥

"To those persons who worship Me alone, thinking of no other, to those ever self-controlled, I secure for them that which is not already possessed (Yoga) by them, and preserve for them what they already possess (Kshema)."

Right from the first diagnosis of the disease, till his last visit to the Tata Memorial Hospital, Bombay, one is wonderstruck by the manner in which the medical and other

help became available to Swamiji without any problem. Even in a materialistic city like Bombay, all his attending doctors not only provided him free treatment but also felt blessed to get a chance to serve a person like him.

With the improvement in his condition, Swamiji resumed his Sadhana as much as was permissible, especially during the precious early morning hours, even though he could not sit for more than an hour at a time. After 4 p.m. till late night he used to enjoy the company of regular visitors who were always held in good humour, interrupted by some discussion on spiritual matters.

He associated himself with everyone without being personally attached to anyone. His love and compassion for all were the main traits of his character. He was always full of love and sympathy for the simple and innocent people but he kept himself away from the learned hypocrites.

Swamiji used to remark, "Those who have certain principles will have lesser trouble in life." A visitor who came in contact with Swamiji lately became attached to him and one day gathered courage to open his mind before him saying, "Swamiji, I am now on the verge of retirement and have always performed my duties sincerely and honestly amongst all the malpractices around us. Now with the approaching retirement from service, I feel lost and a sense of vacuum prevails in my heart. And I met you too late. Please suggest some way out." Observing the sincerity of the gentleman, Swamiji replied lovingly, "Take time off from your normal routine at fixed intervals, - say six months - and visit some holy places, associating yourself with the saints there. The further passage will be opened to you."

Once one of the attendants of Swamiji for want of care pushed him unknowingly, resulting in further cracking of his bones which aggravated his pain.

Swamiji made known to him politely, "I do not care a little for my life but those who have spent much of their time and energy on my illness will not spare you if they learn about your carelessness and it will be a sad affair for me. So be careful in future." Such incidents reflected the humane element in his personality.

In September 1990 Swamiji's health took a reverse turn suddenly. All the progress made so far became an illusion. Within a short span of 15 days he was again confined to bed completely. One by one different parts of his body started becoming immobile on account of fresh multiple pathological fractures. The disease in him started manifesting more vigorously this time. Naturally, it was decided to take him to Bombay for check-up and treatment without any delay. He left Ghazipur on September 20, 1990 along with two attendants this time. In Bombay the worst fears were proved to be correct as on examination it was found out that cancer had reached the terminal stage. No further treatment was possible since the already weak body was not capable of bearing the strong doses of medicines. The beginning of the end had now begun. Dr Gopal opined that Swamiji should be shifted to Ghazipur immediately. His opinion concurred with that of Swamiji's friends in Bombay and the attendants who accompanied Swamiji from Ghazipur who too felt that the banks of the Holy Ganga would be the proper place for Swamiji to breathe his last.

However, Swamiji was unaware of the gravity of his condition. A few days of further stay in Bombay would have made his chances of return to Ghazipur dim. But who would

dare break the news to the patient ? Finally it was left to Dr Gopal himself to do this painful duty. But Swamiji was first a Sannyasi and then a patient. On hearing the doctor's 'verdict' he replied calmly, "Why these people are afraid to tell me so? What is there to hide?"

At this stage he called his printer friend Sri Achuthan and conveyed to him some instructions regarding re-prints of some books relating to his Gurudev. The attendants witnessed the height of his devotion to his Guru Maharaj. Thereafter he was given nine bottles of glucose by way of injection one by one to help him bear the strain of his journey to Ghazipur. Finally, Swamiji bid his farewell to all his friends in Bombay without any sign of emotion on his face. His brothers also came to meet Swamiji but they too could not move him emotionally. They expressed their gratitude to him but Swamiji was a Sannyasin and remained as such in the midst of all their emotional outbursts. Throughout the period whenever Swamiji was in Bombay for periodic check-up, Dr G. Sundaram, a noted orthopaedist, was religiously attending on him every day.

Finally, the party left Bombay for Ghazipur on October 12, 1990 against all odds. During the return journey his two attendants were praying that they might escort him "alive" up to Ghazipur. On sensing it, Swamiji told one of them, "Some people want to see me once again and if they cannot do it they will repent all their life for not having seen me for the last time. So it (death) will not be so soon. Be confident." So, what was feared to occur shortly, was stretched to five months and he gave a chance to all his friends and admirers from distant places to have his darshan to their satisfaction.

As narrated earlier, Swamiji could not be dragged by emotions but he always respected and valued the genuine

emotions of others, if they were not binding. For mentioning one among several incidents we have to come back to Bombay during his last visit. Whenever Swamiji visited Bombay for his check-ups every six months, his arrangements for stay were made at the Mata Lachmi Nursing Home at Sion while the main treatment was provided from Tata Memorial Hospital, which is at Parel. The Superintendent of the Nursing Home, Dr Ms. S. Mirchandani, had gradually developed a great regard for Swamiji.

During his first stay there, Swamiji was treated like any other patient. However, during the second stay, a day before his departure to Ghazipur, Dr Ms. S. Mirchandani enquired as to who was bearing his expenses. On being informed that Swamiji's friends and devotees were taking care of that, she regretted for not thinking about that earlier and gave instructions to the office of the Hospital not to charge anything for Swamiji's stay and nursing at the Hospital in future. During the subsequent visits, Swamiji always received affectionate treatment from Dr. Ms. Mirchandani in her Nursing Home.

A very touching incident took place during Swamiji's last stay at the Nursing Home. By this time it had become evident that cancer was at its last stage and Swamiji was not going to return to Bombay again for his treatment. On the last day of Swamiji's stay in her Nursing Home Dr. Ms. Mirchandani went to see Swamiji. After offering pranams and enquiring about his health, she requested him to forgive her for any lapse in her service at the Hospital. Swamiji assured her that she should not have any worry about that. At the end of the meeting Dr. Ms. Mirchandani with folded hands placed in the hands of Swamiji an envelope containing some money as offering. Swamiji declined to accept saying that it was absolutely not necessary

as she had already done a lot of service to him by providing not only free stay and nursing but also by providing several medicines from the Hospital free of cost.

Hearing Swamiji's arguments Dr. Ms. Mirchandani said to him in a voice full of devotion, "Swamiji, because of the sins of the people like us, saints like you undergo so much physical suffering. Should not we do even this much service to you?"

Swamiji just couldn't control his emotions and accepted the offering. Remembering this and several similar incidents and the manner in which he was served at Ghazipur, Swamiji used to become emotional considering all this as the continuous rain of Grace of the Lord and Guru Maharaj.

During his last days he had totally gone beyond the domain of his physical body. For such persons of Self-realisation Lord Krishna has said :

गुणनेतानतीत्य त्रीन्देही देहसमुद्भवान् ।
जन्ममृत्युजरादुःखैर्विमुक्तोऽमृतमश्नुते ॥

— Gita (14.20)

"The embodied one, having crossed beyond these three Gunas, out of which the body is evolved, is freed from birth, death, decay and pain and attains to Immortality."

Swamiji, by his own example, taught all those around him that for a man of Realisation there is no such thing as death. Purushottamanandaji Maharaj, in his poem, "Admonitions of the Sannyasin" has said :

*The body may or may not live
It may vanish soon or late*

*The whole world is in the jaws of death
And what your body silly thing;
Be not cowards, be heroes*

*Face the death with all thy might
Kick them down and jump over him
Knowing thine own nature true
I'm the Self eternal ever pure.*

Hari Om Tat Sat

Swamiji proved true his Sadguru's words all through his illness.

Sometime during this last phase, notwithstanding the final 'verdict' of the doctors in Bombay and the unbearable pain all over his body, Swamiji composed two poems namely 'Purushottama Guru', (An Acrostic) and 'My Guru' (reproduced elsewhere in the book). These two poems were the last ones composed by him and were his last homage offered at the feet of his Guru Maharaj.

After his return from Bombay, Swamiji's health continued its declining trend. It used to fluctuate between very bad and critical. Swamiji now stopped all the medicines except the pain killers. Several times his acute physical pains couldn't be contained even by strong pain-killers and on every such occasion he uttered 'OM' only, though in a low voice. The diet was also now reduced to the minimum. Except the neck upwards hardly any part of the body remained free from fracture. But, the more his physical condition deteriorated the more appeared the glow on his face. Even at this critical condition, a new-comer couldn't imagine that the person lying on the bed had been declared by the doctors as a lost case. Swamiji still cracked jokes with the visitors even though he

himself declared his condition to be that of being in his death bed. Dr. K.N. Singh used to ask him "Swamiji, how are you?" The reply used to be with a smile "There is progress ..(pause) .. in decay."

One afternoon Swamiji's already serious condition further deteriorated into a sinking state suddenly and it appeared that the end was very near. The only attendant with him at that time was a very poor man and he was being paid for his devoted services to Swamiji so that his family may not suffer. As soon as Swamiji realised that he was losing consciousness, he instructed the attendant to inform the devotees about his sinking condition. The attendant would not dare to leave Swamiji at that crucial moment. Swamiji ordered him again more forcefully. "Do what I say and leave me alone." Hesitantly, the attendant left him alone and he was himself not sure that he would see Swamiji again on his return. As soon as the attendant flashed the news, the devotees assembled around Swamiji. However, Swamiji recovered again as fast as he was sinking. On regaining his consciousness he lovingly told his attendant, "Had I not recovered today, people would have blamed you for not informing them in time. So I sent you at that moment." The heart of a Sannyasi was evident to everyone present there even during crucial moments which could have been the last ones.

With the passage of time Swamiji began preparing himself subjectively for the final departure. Throughout his monastic life he never forgot the purpose for which he had accepted the ochre robes. How could he now compromise at his final crucial moment? Gradually, but with firm determination, he withdrew himself from the mundane world. He reduced his talking to the minimum. No more jokes were cracked. Once he said, "It is not for fun and humour that I have embraced the ochre robes." His meditative hours were now stretched to round

the clock with little interruptions. However, even at this stage whenever visitors from out-stations came to him, he broke his silence. Everyone now had accepted that only a few days of mortal existence were left. Prof. M.L.Tewari, one of Swamiji's devotees, had come to Ghazipur to see Swamiji. On the last day of his visit at the time of taking leave, he was feeling very depressed thinking that this might be his last **darshan** of Swamiji. Swamiji suggested his reading a small book entitled, "There is no such place as far away" written by Richard Bach. The book is exceptionally deep in its contents. The main theme of the book is :

*Can miles truly separate,
you from your friends?
If you want to be with
some one you love,
aren't you already there?*

Swamiji's **bhav** (mental state) during those days could be understood only by those who have themselves trodden the "Great Path". He, a Sadhu, who was very meticulous about keeping his little belongings in their proper place and in making proper use of all the little things available to him, now no more cared for anything or anybody around him. He demonstrated what Ramana Maharshi meant by saying, "A man should learn to make use of even dust and at the same time he should be prepared to reject the entire cosmos as mere dust". The moment was approaching for the total union of the worshipper with the worshipped.

Swamiji's physical condition was such that there was no apparent explanation for his remaining in the body. Once it was thought that he was waiting for the advent of Uttarayanam which was fast approaching. But this did not appear to be true

because Swamiji expressed his own opinion on this point in a poem (reproduced elsewhere in the book) many years ago. It was understood later on that he still had to teach his devotees a few more lessons by his own example.

Knowing the serious and deteriorating condition of Swamiji, one of his friends of the pre-monastic days in Bombay, with whom Swamiji used to visit the Ramakrishna Mission regularly, wrote a very emotional letter requesting permission to perform Japam for his (Swamiji's) physical welfare, which Swamiji refused politely. Unable to write himself, he dictated the reply to someone in which he had made a significant observation, "We are logs of wood floating in a river. It is by chance that we meet and depart but to meet again." Swamiji's refusal to accept the request of his old friend reflected the frame of his mind. Even during his gravest sufferings he used to say, "Even this will pass by." He always bore his "cross" himself, with the same enthusiasm with which he performed his Sadhana.

As he became more and more indrawn, the atmosphere in his room became more and more surcharged with spiritual vibrations. A qualified spiritual aspirant could sense this. The culmination of Swamiji's Sadhana was becoming evident in the physical and mental plane. Non-believers could now believe and believers could now tread the great path with more confidence.

With passing days Swamiji's **Brahmbhav** became more and more manifest. Once in a while, when he opened his eyes, the glow compelled his attendants to keep themselves at a 'safe distance'. Swamiji who concealed his spiritual attainments under the cloak of simplicity throughout his life now revealed them for all to see and learn. All signs of pain, which were hitherto excruciating, now disappeared when the time for his

final plunge in the Divine neared. The 'last but one step' which is said to be a crucial moment in anyone's life, was taken by him as smoothly as a boat enters a river.

During this phase, once his condition became so serious that it was thought the end was imminent. People including Captain B.K.Singh, a native of village Kurtha who was senior to Swamiji in age, began gathering around him. Swamiji had great regards for him. Bathed in pure emotions, Capt. Singh dared to innocently ask Swamiji, "Swamiji, any last wish?"

Swamiji replied instantly "The only desire left is that if there is any desire left even in the subconscious, let that too be removed" He declared further "I am no body, Mine is nothing. I have no desire."

The culmination of **Sannyashood** was witnessed by all that day. Capt. Singh further asked hesitantly about instructions for his Bhandara after his departure.

Swamiji replied in the same tenor, "**There is no need for any Bhandara. Do you people think that if Bhandara is not arranged, my 'mukti' will not occur?**"

Everybody in the room became speechless. Still with folded hands Capt. Singh persisted, "Swamiji, it is true that persons like you have no need for ceremonies like **Bhandara** but we have to live in the society. What will people say?"

For this argument Swamiji replied with a smile, "All right, if there is no attachment for organising **Bhandara**, then why should there be any insistence on NOT organising it? Do as you people wish."

Now Swamiji was beyond death and had crossed over the realm of likes and dislikes.

न मृत्युर्न शंका न मे जातिभेदः पिता नैव मे नैव माता न जन्म ।
 न बन्धुर्न मित्रं गुरुनैव शिष्य - श्रिदानन्दरूपः शिवोऽहम् शिवोऽहम्
*I have no death, no doubts, no caste distinctions,
 I have no father, no mother, no birth,
 I have no relations, friends, Guru or disciples
 I am Knowledge — Bliss-Absolute,
 I am Shiva, I am Shiva.*

On February 11, 1991, a day before Maha Shivaratri, Swamiji delivered his last message to Sri D.P.Singh, which was meant for all devotees and others. Sri Singh could not understand all that he said because of his very low and faltering voice. But these were spoken in an audible tone : "I thank all those who have served me for so many days. God bless them. Always remember God. Not only love Him but also live in Him. Go on serving the way you have served me."

When Swamiji took a pause, Sri D.P.Singh asked "any more instructions." In a low tone Swamiji said "I shall speak no more. **HARI OM TAT SAT.**"

With these words he bid farewell to this mundane world.

After this incident, Swamiji remained in his physical frame for 17 more days but he did not utter a word to anyone except '**OM**' and '**SHIV**' occasionally. The Sannyasi who hitherto taught all how to live, was now teaching how to bid farewell to this Samsar gracefully and as a master of one's own Self.

During the next 17 days Swamiji remained in Samadhi. By way of food, a few spoonfuls of water or soup were poured into his mouth everyday. Like ascending phases of the moon in the **Shukla Paksha** in the month of **Phalgun**, his **Brahmabhav** went on ascending everyday and on **Purnima**, Thursday,

February 28, 1991, Swamiji entered **Mahasamadhi** at 5.45 a.m., smoothly and calmly. The poorna merged the Poorna and only Poorna was left behind :

ॐ पूर्णमदः पूर्णमिदं पूर्णात्पूर्णमुदच्यते ।
पूर्णस्य पूर्णमादाय पूर्णमेवावशिष्यते ॥

— Ishavasyopanishad

Strangely, after Swamiji's Mahasamadhi, his devotees did not experience much of a loss or void. Earlier there was a barrier at the physical level which was now gone. The person had now become the Principle - always available to them wherever and whenever they needed.

As the news of the Mahasamadhi spread in the city and nearby villages, people gathered to pay their last homage to Swamiji. When the body was to be made to sit in **Padmasana**, all his bones cracked and the frame fell down like a house of cards. The onlookers were wonderstruck as to how one suffering from such a disease could be cracking jokes with others till recently. However, his face was serene and radiant and one could easily conclude that Swamiji was still in deep meditation and accepting the homage of all incomers. Keeping in view his great reverence for Gangaji, the body was bathed with sacred Ganga Jal followed by draping it with new ochre robes which Swamiji had himself earmarked for the occasion about six months ago. The sacred **Vibhuti** on his forehead competed with the freshness of his face. The burning of incense sticks, offering of garlands and flower petals and chanting of Holy Mantras charged the whole atmosphere with divinity. **Abhisekha** was done with milk, honey and rose water.

At 1 p.m., the body was taken to village Kurtha on way to Gangaji. Hundreds of men, women and children who lovingly served Swamiji for years as one of their own, had already assembled there to perform **Arti** and other rites. All along the route from Kurtha to Gangaji Swamiji's body was taken in a grand procession and loud chantings of 'Har Har Mahadev, Jai Kashi Vishwanath' filled the air. A boat with some devotees carried the body weighted with a stone to the mid-stream of Gangaji where She received her son, a Mahatma, into her bosom.

Except for the act of worship by the devotees, no rites were performed for the 'departed Soul' after the Mahasamadhi. Who can purify the Great Purifier !

People who loved and lived with Swamiji, now busied themselves for the performance of Shodasi (the Sixteenth-day ceremony).

On March 16, 1991, Swamiji's Gurubhai from Amar Kantak, Swami Raghuv eeranandaji, arrived a day earlier and under his expert supervision the worship of sixteen Sannyasins, mostly from the Ramakrishna Mission, Varanasi, was performed at the **kuti** where Swamiji had lived for long. All the sixteen Sannyasins were given proper **dakshina** along with ochre cloth, a copy of the Bhagavad Gita, a garland of **Rudraksha** and a pair of wooden slippers.

This was followed by a grand feast in which more than 2000 children from nearby primary schools along with about 1000 adult members participated. The feast started at 11 a.m. and continued till late night and at no point of time any of the organisers felt any sign of weariness. In and through all the acts of the ceremony, everyone felt the presence and guidance of Swamiji.

After his Mahasamadhi, Swamiji's devotees and admirers realised even more his spiritual depth which was hitherto covered under the friendly aspect of his personality.

His disciples and devotees, through this publication, offer their humble prayers at His Holy Feet. May His Grace continue to guide all Sadhakas in their journey towards their Ultimate Goal!

HARI OM TAT SAT

MY REMINISCENCES OF SWAMI NIRVEDANANDAJI

— Swami Jnananandaji

Following the advice of my Gurudeva, Swami Atmananda Giri, I used to do my Sadhana near the banks of the sacred Ganga.

During 1955 I had the good fortune of meeting the revered Swami Purushottamanandaji Maharaj of Vasishtha Guha. Swamiji kindly offered me shelter in his wonderful retreat. This was a rare blessing which I availed myself every now and then whenever I camped in the region of Uttarakhand.

On one of these visits in the early summer months of 1957 I met a new young Brahmachari who had only recently arrived and joined the Ashrama after resigning his lucrative job in Bombay.

Brahmachari Vedagiri who later became Swami Nirvedananda was then just about 30 years of age. He was three or four years elder to me. I felt naturally much attracted towards his charming personality radiating an aura of Vairagya.

After introducing ourselves, we both laughed heartily and could not resist congratulating each other on having been chosen by Providence to tread the path of renunciation. We were sharing the ecstasy of a spiritual quest that alone seemed to promise the total fulfilment in human life. Brahmachariji was a mature analyst and his faculty of discrimination was sharp. He referred to worldly life as being terribly complex if not a lie, adding humorously that it was indeed preferable to be mad in a spiritual sense and to plunge wholeheartedly into the great unknown.

I was delighted to have found in him a true brother in spirit. We drank freely of the sweet nectar that was flowing from the fountain of Guru Maharaj's wisdom and love. We felt blessed to breathe in the rarified divine air of Vasishtha Loka, to our heart's content. The presence of the Master in the ancient Guha of Vasishtha and the dense forest by the dancing, heavenly Ganga provided an atmosphere of joy that strengthened our affection into a friendship that was to last a good many years.

Intrigued by the Brahmachariji's unusual name I wanted to find out more about it. Vedagiri means a mountain of revealed knowledge. This fact inspired me with awe and reverence for my new friend. It always has been my firm conviction that the name of a person is the very index of his latent tendencies, his Samskaras. To follow the name's indication correctly would help a person enacting his chosen role in life for the highest good.

Vedagiri had already a fine knowledge of Hindi, Sanskrit and Malayalam besides his mother tongue Tamil. His excellent command over the English made it easy for us to communicate. We were then still very young and burning with the fire of renunciation. We therefore enjoyed confiding our thoughts and feelings to each other. Of our previous station in life we rarely spoke. We would only touch upon the most salient incidents that led to an inner awakening and opened up the path to Guru's Feet.

Guru is the great redeemer. Guru at first initiates, then guides and aids the spiritual growth of the disciple. The devotee needs only persevere in his quest and hold firmly to the feeling of the eternal presence. Life would then unfold its

supreme purpose. Such a keen seeker then becomes himself a veritable flame of the Spiritual Light, a torch that shares its brightness with those who feel the need for it.

Brahmachari Vedagiri was very particular about all his habits. Truth alone was true for him. There would be no compromise in his adherence to his ontology. Secular matters were kept in abeyance whenever possible. The great ideal of renunciation inspired all his talk and teachings. His theme of study was in the line of classic Vedanta. Among the scriptures the Brahma Sutras, the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita and Vivekachudamani were some of his most favourite ones. Many of these he had memorised at an early age even before joining the monastic order. Once the Brahmachariji surprised me with the Christopanishad, an excellent short treatise on the hidden mystery of Jesus Christ's advent, written by a South Indian Brahmin!

Vedagiri's spiritual inclinations awoke in him during his youth. While in Bombay he used to visit the Sri Ramakrishna Mission Centre close to his home. In association with the Mission's kind Swamis and Brahmacharis the young Vedagiri acquainted himself with the Indian spiritual lore in their Sanskrit originals. He remained ever grateful to those first benefactors of his, whose teachings, love and blessings provided a meaningful direction to his life.

Guru Maharaj was very fond of this new spiritual son. During my subsequent visits to Vasishtha Guha Ashrama I observed how the new one took great care of Maharaj's needs. The Guru was then very advanced in age. Vedagiri's attention towards the Master was often with the love of a mother as it were. Attending to the slightest wish of Gurudeva he spent most of his time in Seva. Vedagiri's great proficiency in English

prompted him to pen a life-sketch of the saint of Vasishtha Guha, based on the latter's original biography written in Malayalam. Within about two years after joining the Ashrama, Vedagiri became Swami Nirvedananda Puri. He was duly initiated by his august Gurudeva into the Dasanami order of Sannyasins.

At that time there lived another brother disciple of Swami Nirvedanandaji in the Guha. That was the young brilliant Swami Bhumanandaji. He too was extremely dear to me. We three sadhus used to meet every now and then. For almost three years we roamed occasionally together through the dense forests of the Rishikesh and Hardwar area. In their company I relished an inner attunement and state of realisation. Both these Swamis were of the most joyous dispositions due to their closeness to God. Discussions often brought about outbursts of merriment with peals of laughter. In all those years I deeply felt the thrill of divine friendship. I was indeed privileged to sport in the presence of Nirveda and Bhurna. To me it was as if these two were the very manifestation of my soul.

Such friendship endures. But with the passage of time the outer picture in this world goes on changing constantly. Bhumanandaji left for his eternal abode. Soon thereafter the great spiritual Lion of Vasishtha Guha too entered Mahasamadhi. My last visit to that Ashrama was on the occasion of the final Bhandara in sacred memory of Swami Purushottamanandaji Maharaj.

One year later my own Guru attained Nirvana in his Ashram in Calcutta. External forms vanish, but with the Master present within ourselves, we both, Nirved and I, began wandering in different directions. Thus my own peregrinations took me to many other parts in India. There was no

correspondance but we kept in touch with each other through the affectionate pujari of Sri Ayyappa Mandir at Hardwar.

II

After a lapse of many years, to be precise, sometime in 1980, Swamiji came up to my little hermitage near the hill-station of Mussoorie. Thus once again I fully enjoyed his good company. We were then in a position to share much more of our experiences as Sadhus. On my request dear Nirveda agreed to visit again and stay with me for a while. He used to come every year around the time of Diwali, a festival that we celebrate here modestly but always in great joy.

It is that part of the year that is the most serene of all seasons in the hills. Spring and summer, so full with life's activities, are then over and the early autumn puts on a crown to all achievements. Significantly alike, this was so with Swamiji too who then had attained to great spiritual heights. His wit and spontaneity was none the less and indeed wonderful to behold. Even when making himself a cup of tea he was methodical, practical and very clean. The realm of the Spirit and the so-called mundane daily routine of life were no more viewed as being separate. There was but the merging in oneness, the awareness that All This is Brahman.

It thus easily happened that even a very serious mood quickly got tempered with humorous comments. That made a certain of our retaining always a cheerful balance. Swamiji's best jokes were the ones he made about himself. He was humble indeed. Yet with regard to his keen sense of criticism Swamiji surprised me once, while we were reading together an interesting manuscript, "New Lives", written by our friend Malcolm Tillis. Nirvedanandaji mentioned to me casually that

editing had become such a practice with him that even when opening the pages of a printed book at random, his sharp eye would surely fall on a spot where there would be some kind of a mistake! "Hence be careful", said Swamiji and he laughed and laughed.

But Nirveda's heart was really drawn to the great Sanskrit scriptures that deal with the Immortality of the Soul. The theme of liberation in life and beyond was the source of strength in all of Swami's endeavour. Besides study and meditation on the Soul's transcendence Swamiji loved to chant the shlokas in a harmony of melody and rhythm of his own.

I then suggested making a cassette recording of some of these inspiring texts and Bhajans. After some hesitation there followed experimentation until everything went off well. I love to recall Swamiji's childlike enthusiasm, especially when he himself listened, critically of course, to his own voice! Some fine recordings were made of portions of Srimad Bhagavad Gita Upanishads, Shanti Mantras and quite a few Vedantic Songs, everything in Sanskrit. Swamiji himself played the cymbals for correct rhythm when recording the Bhajans.

Nirvedanandaji even joined us in our Kirtan sessions. These were mostly in the lighter mood of a joyous devotional approach to God. He always graced our prayer meetings with his flawless recitations to the great satisfaction of everyone present.

Those years prior to Swamiji's fatal illness were my last and perhaps the most beautiful period of association with him. He was then fully mature in Spirit, a senior monk he had grown into. Yet one could easily discern the ever youthful nature of his inner being.

During the remaining part of Swamiji's life I often received his affectionate letters. He never complained about suffering or hardship. In spite of the severe physical handicaps his mind and Spirit kept on expanding. He freely gave from his rich store of virtue and knowledge. In this way many good souls derived the blessing of Swamiji's Grace and Love.

Among the galaxy of Mahatmas, Swami Nirvedanandaji lived an exemplary life dedicated to the ideal of the ancient Rishis. Their revelations are timeless and ever new.

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IN THE COMPANY OF A GREAT SAINT

— K. V. Janakiramanan

H. H. Swami Nirvedanandaji Maharaj was a new star which rose from Vasishtha Guha (Himalayas) and after steadily shining in the horizon of Kurtha (Ghazipur) for a number of years finally merged with the evershining Akhanda Jyoti - The supreme Lord, to shine everywhere.

Like his Guru, he was all Vairagya (dispassion). He was a real Maharshi in the Kaliyuga, having no desire of his own, accepting nothing from anybody except the minimum required for keeping the body and soul together, having no sense of possession and with a deep and unshaken faith in his Guru and the Lord. I remember a few incidents relating to him:

After a long and intimate association with him, once I gathered courage to send an M.O. for Rs. 15/- to him, as a humble offering. He returned the M.O. without accepting it with a beautiful letter which was more or less candid in the following words:

"Consider money as always a source of 'calamities', an advice by the great Sankaracharya is not only meant for householders but is meant more so for Sannyasins like me. Lord is providing for my daily requirements, what shall I do with this money?"

At the same time, when once he went to stay with a Sannyasin co-disciple (Gurubhai), he was moved to tears by the latter's plight - his Ashram on the banks of the Ganga had been completely washed off by the Ganges in floods. He immediately wrote to a number of people known to him (including my humble

self) requesting them to send whatever money they could, to help the other Sannyasin to rebuild his shelter.

He once told me an incident from his early life as a Sannyasin. Soon after he took Sannyas from my Gurudev, he was asked by Gurudev to go on a trip to Kerala (the State of his birth), to visit places of pilgrimage. One day while in Secunderabad he had no money left even for a cup of tea (not to speak of any food) and neither had he the bus fare for moving to the next place in his programme. Absolutely unmoved he was sitting quietly in a small park from 7 a.m. to 11 a.m. A young student approached him with a request to join him for breakfast in a nearby hotel. Without a demur he accompanied and had a full breakfast. That boy diffidently gave him also Rs. 2/- apologising that he had only that much money. That was the exact bus fare required by him. Swamiji left for his way to the bus stand happily thanking the Lord who provided his needs for the day.

He was a strict disciplinarian from his very early years and very meticulous about details. Even in the days of my Guru Maharaj, many of the inmates of Vasishtha Guha used to be scared of him and used to maintain a distance from him. If he found any laxity in anybody, he would point it out to the person in simple, unembellished words, which was not palatable to many.

At the same time he was always bubbling with humour and he used to joke more often at his own expense. Once when he came to stay with me in Delhi for a few days, in early winter, on the first day he refused to have any blanket for sleeping. He did not want me even to keep it by his side for any use if later found necessary. Myself and my wife were both sleeping soundly in a side room kept half ajar. At midnight as he found it

bitingly cold he was in need of blanket and standing outside our bedroom he was calling "OM, OM" loudly several times. As neither of us responded (being sound asleep), he spent the night without a wink of sleep, shivering. In the morning, when he casually mentioned it, my wife was highly contrite and said "Swamiji, I did hear you calling OM, OM, but I thought that some divine being was chanting OM sweetly and I was trying to concentrate on that 'OM' sound. I was not at all aware that you were calling us that way. Swamiji had a hearty laugh and said "I am glad that in my misery also I was the cause for inducing meditation in your wife's mind."

With all his high state of divine contemplation and erudition, he had a childlike simplicity, an inevitable characteristic of all great saints like Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and our own Gurudev. Once in late 1959, when I went to the temple of Guruvayur, I was surprised to see Swami Nirvedanandaji inside the temple offering salutations to Lord Krishna. Though he was my Gurubhai, I had never moved with him much in earlier days not to speak of any intimacy. After exchange of courtesies, with some diffidence when I invited him to accompany me to Coimbatore where I was staying in a hotel, he readily agreed with a child's enthusiasm, without a moment's hesitation. That was actually my close association with him. As I had come on an official tour, I used to leave him in the morning and return in the evening by 6 p.m. or so. But he used to talk to me about Gurudev and about various spiritual matters till late in the night every day. Next to my Gurudev, Swamiji used to be and is the main source of my inspiration to stick fast to the spiritual goal and my ideal as a Vairagya (dispassion) incarnate. Wherever I used to fall in spiritual doldrums either I would get a comforting letter from Swamiji or many a time he would visit me

personally in my house (at Meerut or in Delhi) and spend a week or so with me.

One night in 1980 or 1981, when I was sitting on the open terrace of a guest house of Border Road Forces headquarters at Jodhpur (while on tour from Meerut) and meditating, I heard a clear voice commanding me "Go to Swamiji Nirvedananda." I first thought it was a hallucination and I resumed my meditation after a slight interval. Again the same voice repeated the command. As if in reply within my own mind, I argued thus "How can I go to Swamiji who is in Kurtha? I do not have surplus money to spend on making a trip to Kurtha and back. My resources are limited and how can anybody expect me to go thus far! No doubt if he is somewhere nearer to Meerut – say Delhi, Haridwar or Dehradun, I would not mind visiting him". Again after a little while the command was repeated. I ignored it and went to bed straightaway. The next day I reached my house at Meerut, on completion of my audit work at Jodhpur. There, my wife gave me a letter from Swami Nirvedanandaji received the previous day.

Swamiji was then staying at Barlow Ganj near Mussorie with a Swamiji of foreign origin Jnananandaji, a highly evolved saint. Swamiji had invited me in that letter to come at Barlow Ganj and spend a few days in their company. In his inevitable characteristic way, he had enclosed a diagram with full details to enable me to find the Ashram. Strange to say, next week I had an official tour programme to visit Dehradun for a couple of days. I took some days' leave in continuation and spent a few days of rare joy in the holy company of both the saints, deriving a lot of spiritual benefit.

Swamiji's love towards me was boundless, even though I was thoroughly unworthy of it. He normally used to discourage

friends or devotees (who were not Sannyasins but householders) from visiting him at Kurtha or later at Ghazipur. In 1987 or 1988 when I had been to Vasishtha Guha (Himalayas) for attending my Guru's birthday celebration and for doing 'Bhagavata Saptaha', I was thrilled to receive a letter from Swamiji directing me to come and spend a couple of days with him at Ghazipur and assuring me that my return reservation by train from Varanasi to Madras would all be taken care of by him.

For the first time after Swamiji's illness (cancer), I had his darshan at Ghazipur and I was moved to silent tears. I spent two days of perfect bliss with Swamiji and his admirers and devotees who were all of the same Sattvik temperament as Swamiji and all of them vied with one another to offer me a royal hospitality, which was highly embarrassing.

Again in 1989, I had a similar command from Swamiji while in Vasishtha Guha but at the last minute, another old Gurubhai of mine, Sri Madan Babu accompanied me for Swamiji's darshan. As Swamiji had earlier specifically discouraged Sri Madan Babu from visiting him, I was internally trembling at the reception I expected to get at the hands of Swamiji, but Swamiji was all smiles and compassion. He extended to him the same kind of treatment which he used to bestow on me. Last year (1990) in May or so, an old Gurubhai of ours, Sri M.K.Malhotra of Delhi, very much wanted to have a darshan of Swamiji who had a very soft corner for Sri Malhotra and used to stay with him for a few days whenever he used to visit Delhi. This time Swamiji wrote a stern letter turning down his request and forbidding him from visiting him (especially because Swamiji was fully aware of Sri Malhotra's ill health and delicate state in his old age). When Sri Malhotra informed me of the position, I wrote to him from Vasishtha Guha that he should

ignore Swamiji's letter and go and have his darshan. I wrote to him that such a highly evolved saint and an ideal Vairagi would be rare to meet with and he should not lose the opportunity to go and spend some time in his company (especially as Sri Malhotra had his own relation with whom he could stay at Ghazipur). Sri Malhotra went by my words and on reaching Ghazipur showed my letter to Swamiji. Swamiji just laughed but wrote to me a letter gently rebuking me for advertising about him to others. Just like my Gurudev, Swamiji always revelled in his anonymity and never liked anybody praising him either in his presence or absence.

My last visit to Swamiji in late January 1991, just a few days before his Mahasamadhi, is something which is unforgettable. As I got a letter from Ghazipur of Swamiji's fast failing health and occasional lapses of memory, I suddenly decided to visit Swamiji, and my wife was extremely eager (more than myself) too. Swamiji insisted on somebody (an officer who was attending on him) going and escorting us from Varanasi. That was when Swamiji was in the terminal stage of bone cancer. With pathological fractures in his arms and legs he was unable to move any portion of his body below his neck. It seems Swamiji was every day reminding himself of the day when I was expected to arrive.

Both myself and my wife came and fell at the feet of Maharaj. I had no eyes for anybody except Swamiji. I saw only a Tejas (glowing light), alive with compassion. Slowly, I became aware of his smiling face - all peace - infinite peace, a scene which will always remain fresh in my memory. I was tongue-tied and my eyes were filled with tears. Only heart talked to heart. He was talking for hours with my wife mainly (in my mute presence) and answering all her questions. I was only reminded of Bhisma Pitamaha lying on the bed of arrows in the

battlefield and instructing Dharmaputra on various dharmas, He was very lucid, sometimes illustrating some points with earlier anecdotes in his life (with names and dates). In between, he had to stop due to pain and sometimes from the involuntary twitching of his face or eyelids. I could imagine the extent of physical suffering he was then undergoing. His face was peaceful, animated, compassionate and not a vestige of the hellish agony to which his body was subjected to, could be seen.

One of the important questions which my wife asked was, "Swamiji, when a person like you, an embodiment of purity, always devoted to the spiritual pursuits and who had never harmed a worm even, have to suffer such bodily ailments like cancer, people would lose faith in God and in leading a pure life. Why should God inflict such a punishment on one who never deserved it? "

Swamiji smiled and at first he spoke of the possible results of past actions in previous births. Ultimately he said, "I am one who has no dependants etc. If such an ailment was to be visited on an householder with responsibilities of wife and children, what a far greater calamity would it prove for him? So it is good that it has fallen on me."

As I found that my wife was not able to fully comprehend the relevance of this answer, I intervened and asked Swamiji directly "Does it mean Swamiji that you have deliberately taken upon yourself the calamity which should have fallen on somebody else, out of your compassion?" Swamiji kept quiet. When we both repeated it insistently, very reluctantly he answered in a non-committed manner, "Such things are possible".

Next day, even though my wife and myself were talking to him from early morning till about 11 or 11-30 a.m., my wife expressed a desire to come and have his darshan once again at 2 p.m. on our way to bus stand. I gently rebuked her saying, "We have already taken leave of Swamiji. He will be taking rest at 2 p.m. and it will be unfair to disturb him. Swamiji intervened by raising his voice saying "What are you talking? The poor lady has come all the way from Madras to see me and do you mean to say that Swamiji will have no time for her but will take rest? No, No, let her come here on her way and spend some time". Can compassion rise to greater heights, Oh Swamiji! What merits have I done in my previous birth to merit such love from you!

Swamiji was a real saint who had risen above the body consciousness and was established in the Supreme.

The thoughts or remembrances of such pure souls are always purifying. May the unlimited compassion of Swamiji inspire us all and lead us all to the real goal of our life - The Supreme Being.

SWAMI NIRVEDANANDA'S
ARTICLES, POEMS AND
LETTERS



THE GURU

[From the Souvenir published by Sri Ayyappa Temple,
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गुरुर्ब्रह्मा गुरुर्विष्णुः गुरुर्देवो महेश्वरः ।
गुरुः साक्षात् परं ब्रह्म तस्मै श्रीगुरुवे नमः ॥

A very familiar sloka recited by millions of Hindus everyday. The meaning is plain : "The Guru is Brahma, the Guru is Vishnu, the Guru is Siva, the God of gods. The Guru is verily is the Supreme Brahman. Salutations to that adorable Guru!" The Guru is not only identical with the Holy Trinity of the Hindu religion responsible for the creation, maintenance and dissolution of the Universe but also with the Transcendental Brahman, the One without a second. Such is the position of the Guru. Etymologically, the word is explained as "Dispeller of darkness (Avidya)" — 'Gu' means darkness and 'Ru' means remover. This is all in the religious context. Even in a lighter sense in the ordinary usage, the word means 'heavy'. Such being the greatness even of the word, it looks audacious on my part to launch on the subject with my limited knowledge but I

मम त्वेतां वाणी गुणकथनपुण्येन भवतः ।
पुनामीत्यर्थेस्मिन् पुरमथन बुद्धिर्व्यवस्तिता ॥

(Siva-mahimnah Stotram, 3)

take a hint from Sri Pushpadanta*, namely, that my mind and speech may be purified by dwelling on the greatness of Guru. It is only this hope that has prompted me to write on the subject and this is my only apology for this venture.

II

The necessity of a Guru for a spiritual aspirant can never be over-estimated. Even in secular matters, whether it be a child beginning to learn the three R's or an adolescent wishing to learn motor driving, or any other trade for that matter, he has to put himself under a teacher who is himself competent in the subject. How much more it is in the case of a Sadhaka who has to tread the spiritual path which is likened to be the 'sharp edge of a razor'. This fact can be discerned from most of the Upanishads which deal with the subject of Brahma Vidya. The students approaching a Seer with their doubts about Atman-Brahman Reality, and the Rishi asking them to undergo some more penance according to the degree of purity of mind already achieved by them and, later, imparting the Supreme Knowledge to them, is a very common feature in the Vedantic texts. We also come across direct Sruti and Smriti passages stressing the necessity of a Guru.

(i) Says the *Kathopanishad*

उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान् निबोधत

"Arise, awake (from the slumber of Ignorance) and realize (the Atman), having approached the excellent (teachers) — (I.3.14)

(ii) The *Mundakopanishad* (I.2.12) also stresses the point thus: तद्विज्ञानार्थं स गुरुमेवाभिगच्छेत् — "To know That (Atman), he (the aspirant) should approach a Guru.....—" Sri Sankaracharya, while commenting on this passage, clarifies that one should not launch on the knowledge of Brahman independently, even though learned in the Scriptures. He says, the word *eva* is to lay emphasis on this point. (शास्त्रज्ञोपि स्वातन्त्र्येण ब्रह्मज्ञानान्वेषणं न कुर्यादित्येतत् गुरुमेव इत्यवधारणफलम्)

(iii) The *Bhagavad Gita* (IV.34) also exhorts : तद्विधिं प्रणिपातेन परिप्रश्नेन सेवया — " Know that (Supreme knowledge) by prostrating thyself (before the Guru), by questions, and by serving him....."

III

We are thus convinced on the authority of the Sastras and our own reasoning that a Guru is necessary - nay, indispensable - if we have to attain success in the spiritual path. But, a problem arises: How to recognise and choose a real Guru? What are his qualifications? Let us look to Sri Sankaracharya for an answer : He describes an ideal Guru as one 'who is versed in the Vedas, sinless, unsmitten by desire and knower of Brahman *par excellence*, who has withdrawn himself into Brahman; who is calm, like fire that has consumed its fuel, who is a boundless reservoir of mercy that knows no reason and a friend of all good people who prostrate themselves before him'.—(*Vivekachudamani*, verse 33)*. Then, again, there is no yard-stick with which to measure the

* The translation of this and other slokas from *Vivekachudamani* appearing in this article are by Swami Madhavananda. (Pub. by Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Distt. Pithogarah.)

spirituality of the Guru and make sure of his genuineness before surrendering to him. Only, we must have implicit faith. "Even the finding of a Sādguru depends upon one's Karma", says the Sage of Vasishtha Guha, Sri Swami Purushottamanandaji. He proceeds: "Many people wonder whether faith in the Guru alone suffices. They are afraid of being exploited or of being misguided. Although there is the possibility of one's being exploited by an ordinary guru who does not possess the requisite qualifications, still we must remember that we live in a world governed by Law and we get generally what we deserve. If a Sadhaka is perfectly sincere and has intense desire for finding God, there is hardly any possibility of his falling into the hands of an unscrupulous person. Things do not happen by chance but according to an over-ruling of Law known as Karma..... Besides, the more our mind becomes pure, the greater is the power of Viveka, and with a discriminating mind it is not possible for us to choose an undesirable person as our Guru. It is only unscrupulous people who generally come across unscrupulous gurus.*"

IV

The disciple surrenders himself to the Guru without any reserve and pins his faith on him for his salvation. Such a disciple who has *Ananya-bhakti* does not waver or entertain doubts about the perceptor's teachings; nor does he run about from guru to guru to achieve his aim. One who digs a well has to concentrate on one selected spot and dig persistently until water is struck. If he changes the spot frequently and digs at

* See "Spiritual Talks" by Swami Purushottamananda, (Vasishtha Guha Ashram, Goolar-Dogi P.O., Dist. Tehri-Garhwal, U.P.)

different places, he will never find water; all his efforts will result only in waste of energy, time and money. In the same manner, one has to stick to one Guru and practise Sadhanas as prescribed by him. "The knowledge that the Guru possesses can be had only by Guru-bhakti.*" says Lord Siva to Parvati. The importance of Guru-bhakti is stressed by Sruti also. The *Svetasvatropanishad* says that the spiritual truths shine forth only in him who has supreme devotion to God and an equal degree of devotion to Guru — यस्य देवे पराभक्तिः यथा देवे तथा गुरौ — (VI.23). The teacher who, having himself crossed the dreadful ocean of Samsara, helps others also to cross the same without any motive whatsoever is, indeed, a great soul. The greatness of such a Guru has no comparison anywhere. While describing the greatness of the Guru, the Lord tells Parvati: "If Siva gets angry you can find a saviour in your Guru; but, if the Guru is enraged, there is none to save you."** We come across an anecdote in the *Ramcharitamanasa* of Goswami Tulsidas, illustrating this statement of Lord Siva. It runs thus :

"A disciple was sitting in a Siva temple, doing Japa as initiated by his Guru. He, because of his lower birth and culture had grown more and more egoistic than Sattvik. The Guru never uttered a word of reproach even when his teachings were ignored or he himself was insulted. Now, when the disciple was in the temple, his Guru also happened to come there. The disciple's egoistic feelings were uppermost and he did not even

* गुरुवक्त्रे स्थिता विद्या गुरुभक्त्या च लभ्यते ।

** शिवे रुष्टे गुरुस्त्राता गुरो रुष्टे न कश्चन ।

care to get up from his seat and prostrate himself before his Guru. The latter, as was his nature, did not mind the lapse on the part of his disciple but the Lord could not tolerate the discourtesy shown to the Guru. A voice was heard, cursing the impertinent disciple, 'O sinner, you have been sitting motionless like a python when your Guru has come. For this sort of insolence, may you become a snake and live in the hole of a big tree'. The disciple realised his mistake and began trembling with fear. The Lord had cursed him but the Guru had a soft corner for his disciple. So he praised the Lord and prayed to Him to save his disciple from the wrath and the Lord had to modify the curse, making it lighter." *

This praise, called 'Rudrashtakam', is very popular among the people of North India.

In modern times too, saints have glorified the greatness of the Guru. Sri Swami Maheshwarananda Saraswati, the late Sankaracharya of the Oordhvanmaya Peetham, Varanasi, who was an authority in various Sastras, used to say like this : " If one has removed the previous day's flowers, garlands, apparel, etc. from the deity and is about to begin the worship, and if his Guru happens to come there then, he should leave everything at that stage. Then, after salutations, he should offer a seat to his Guru and perform the remaining part of the Puja including Dhoopa, Deepa, Naivedya, etc. to him. After that he can continue the worship of the deity. The Lord will only be pleased by this." ** Coming as it does from such an authority it

* See Ramcharitamanasa, Uttaraskanda

** Narrated by a learned disciple of the Swamiji.

गुरु गोविन्द दोनौ खडे, काको लागुँ पायँ ।

बलिहारी गुरु आपकी गोविन्द दियो बताय ॥ (see next page)

has the stamp of the Sastras affirming the greatness of the Guru.

There is a couplet in Hindi sung by a Bhakata-Kavi, with which people in the North are very familiar. Rendered freely, it would read :

"Guru and God have both appeared,
To whom to bow down (first)?
Precedence goes to Preceptor
For he has shown me God." ##

Sri Swami Purushottamanandaji has also dwelt on what may be called divided loyalty to the Guru and Ishta-devata. After giving a few hints, he says : "Besides, this difficulty of directing the devotion to both, the Ishta-devata and the Guru, is based upon a misconception with regard to their nature and the relation between them. There is really no difference between the two. The Sadguru is really an embodiment of the Ishta-devata and should be regarded as such. Then there will be no question of divided loyalties. We worship God in stone images. Why cannot we worship Him in a living image which the Guru is?" *

All these anecdotes, authoritative texts and statements of Mahapurushas of our day tell us of the greatness of the Guru when the disciple is a Sadhaka, one practising spiritual disciplines in order to attain the *summum bonum* of life, namely, Moksha. When one attains to that state, we learn, all differences disappear; no duality whatsoever remains — not even the difference of Guru and Sishya. After reaching that exalted state does the disciple completely forget the Guru who helped him to attain that Supreme Felicity and push him to the

* See *Spiritual Talks*

background? No, Guru is great even after reaching that state. Sri Sankaracharya tells us graphically in a few verses how the disciple, bubbling with Joy after experiencing the highest Samadhi, gives expression to his gratitude to the preceptor who made it possible for him to attain that state of Beatitude. One of the verses reads, "Blessed am I : I have attained the consummation of life, and am free from the clutches of transmigration; I am the Essence of Eternal Bliss, I am infinite – *all through thy mercy!*" *

Another savant, Sri Tandavaraya Swami, portrays the disciple's attitude and the Guru's exhortation in two beautiful songs (verses) in his *Kaivalya-Navaneetam*, a masterpiece on Advaita Vedanta in the Tamil language. We give a rough translation in brief: The disciple sings: "Salutations to thee, O father ! Thou, residing in me as Antaryamin hast been guiding me through my innumerable births and hast come out as Guru in this birth of mine to grant me Mukti by imparting the Knowledge Supreme. For this act of kindness, O Lord! O Gurudeval I know not how to repay thee. Salutations at thy Holy Feet again and again!" (1.86). And, what does the teacher demand as Guru-dakshina? The magnanimous preceptor, as befits his status, answers in very endearing terms : "My child, if you remain established in Brahman (Swarupa-jnana), not giving the least chance for doubts, ignorance, etc. to rise again, that will be the best recompense." (1.87)

* धन्योऽहं कृतकृत्याऽहं विमुक्तोऽहं भवग्रहात् ।

नित्यानन्दस्वरूपोऽहं पूर्णोऽहं त्वदनुग्रहात् ॥

(Vivekachudamani, 488)

This expression of indebtedness by the disciple is found in Srutis too, but in a seed-form, like an aphorism. The Prakarana treatises of a later period, like the ones quoted above, have elaborated and presented it in a picturesque manner.

One Sruti text reads : ते तमर्चयन्तः त्वं हि नः पिता योऽस्माकमविद्ययाः परं परं तारयसि —

✓ "Worshipping him, they (the disciples) said, 'Thou art our father that hast taken us across the other shore of Avidya'." *

From all that has been said above, it will be seen that the status of a Guru has no comparison whatsoever; he is always great and there is nothing greater than him – गुरोः परतरं नास्ति. That is the reason why it is difficult to find a real Guru. Sri Sankara too lists, among other things, the 'protecting care of a perfected sage' as a rare thing, and available only due to the grace of God.** But one need not lose heart. As we have seen in the foregoing paragraphs, if one is perfectly sincere to find God, to attain Brahmajnana, he is sure to find a Sadguru. If a question is again raised as to how one decides upon a particular person as his Guru, we can only say that intuition plays the part of a guide in that matter. Or, as someone has said in a different context, 'the heart knows the reason that reason does not know' aptly fits in here also.

Before concluding the article, let me offer grateful Pranamas to my revered Guru whose grace alone helped me to write on such a lofty topic as this. Whatever good point is found in this, is all due to him; irrelevant points and inadvertence being entirely mine.

May the grace of the Supreme Guru be ever upon all.

Shantih ! Shantih ! Shantih !

* Prasnopanishad, VI, 8

** Vivekachudamani, 3

OM : ITS SIGNIFICANCE AND CHARACTER

(Published in Bhavan's Journal, October 1, 1985)



ओमित्येतदक्षरमिदं सर्वम् — "All this world is the syllable Om," says the Mandukya Upanishad. The Prasnopanishad emphasises that what is Om is verily the higher and lower Brahman, i.e. the unmanifested absolute Brahman and the manifested Hiranyagarbha.

It is the sound symbol of Brahman in the Upanishads, and the Mundakopanishad exhorts, "Meditate upon the Self as Om." The syllable Om is extolled in the Kathopanishad also where we read: "That goal which all the Vedas proclaim, which all the penances speak of, and desiring which they (the aspirants) practise Brahmacharya, is Om..... This support (Om) is the best, this support is the supreme," etc. And the Bhagavad Gita also states that he who departs from the body uttering the mono-syllable Om attains the highest goal. Likewise other Srutis, Smritis and Puranas too sing the glory of Om in various ways.

All religious acts, charities, penances, auspicious rites etc. are begun uttering the letter Om. One verse says that the syllable Om and the Atha are themselves auspicious as they have come out of the throat of Brahma in the days of yore (in the beginning). Thus the glory and importance of Om can never be described exhaustively. Our aim here is to trace how the character ओं came to be represented as ॐ in a more convenient manner, for we do not find this particular form included in the vowels or consonants section of the Devanagari script.

We all know how the syllable is written in the normal way : the Devanagari vowel 'O' is employed with the *anusvara*, a dot marked above, as shown on Fig. 1.

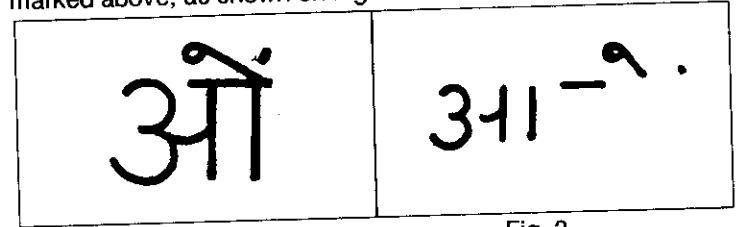


Fig. 1

Fig. 2

In writing this, one has to lift the pen five or six times. This hampers the speed in writing, and Om has to be employed very often as it occurs in several places in the Mantras etc. — an easier method has to be devised. How our ancients effected the metamorphosis is very interesting to investigate.

On analysis, it will be found that the syllable shown above (Fig. 1) comprises various limbs, written one after the other, as indicated in Fig. 2

Put together, the six limbs make up the complete syllable. Now, in the first stage of the metamorphosis, the initial four limbs are coalesced into one - see Fig. 3.



Fig. 3

This crude form is then given a beautiful shape which would further reduce the strain in writing as shown in Fig. 4.



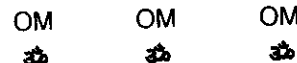
Fig. 4

The whole of आ is absorbed in this figure, including the top horizontal line. What remain are the last two limbs, namely, the hook and the dot. Having given a different shape to the main character, attention is focused on these limbs also which stand in need of modification. Accordingly, the hook is drawn in the form of a curve, giving the shape of a crescent, and the dot placed inside the curve, i.e. above it. Along with this change the oval shape, made up of the two vertical and one horizontal lines (comprising limbs 2, 3 and 4) is also reduced to a smaller size, and the final and popular form takes its shape — (see Fig. 5)



Fig. 5

Now that the whole process of the metamorphosis is outlined, it becomes intelligible why some orthodox scholars object to the character being written as ॐ and the like, and insist on making a circle of the wave like line as shown in Fig. 5 above. Although they don't explain the 'why' of it, it will be observed that this form alone represents all the limbs correctly — the two vertical lines are joined together at the bottom for the sake of convenience in writing and the upper horizontal line, shedding a portion on either end, connects the two at the top — and this seems to be the reason behind the elders' insistence. Thus having come to know the secret in a scientific manner, let us stick to writing the sacred syllable in its correct form, adhering to the orthodox views.



The Sage of Vasishtha Guha : Swami Purushottamananda

(Published in The Mountain Path, October ,1986.)

VASISHTHA GUHA – a cave associated with the name of Muni Vasishtha ! Fourteen miles from Rishikesh, on the motorable road to Badrinath, lies this cave. One gets down from the bus and descends a hundred and fifty feet along a rugged path and flight of steps to reach this ancient place full of vibrations felt by those whose hearts are attuned. As one gets down the steps and walks about a hundred yards through the Ashram garden, one comes face to face with the renowned cave, Vasishtha Guha. It is a natural cave having a depth of about fifty-five feet, with two compartments, the front one being about twenty feet by twelve feet. There are a few small buildings and a temple in the vicinity of the cave. Not far from the cave flows the celestial river, Ganga. The cave lies on the right bank, facing the river. The natural setting of the cave in the midst of austere nature, steep hills and overhanging trees, and the rippling waters of the Ganga on one side, fill the mind with thoughts sublime.

Our subject, Swami Purshottamananda, made this Guha his abode of tapas more than half a century ago. (The place was not so easily accessible in those days.) Born on 23rd November 1879 at Tiruvalla in Kerala State, to a pious couple, Narayanan Nair and Parvati Amma, many years after their marriage, he was named Neelakanthan by his parents. He was deeply religious even when he was a boy; and at studies brilliant. When he was in the sixth form (Matriculation) his

studies were interrupted by a severe attack of rheumatism. Repeated attacks of the illness only redoubled his religious fervour. He mastered the Sanskrit language and studied the Gita and other texts during the long period of illness. His religious bent of mind brought him under the influence of Swami Nirmalananda of the Ramakrishna Mission, then taking roots in Kerala. Neelakanthan worked under Swami Nirmalananda for more than twelve years. When Swami Brahmananda, the first President of Ramakrishna Math and Mission, visited Kerala, he gave mantradeeksha (initiation) to Neelakanthan. That was in the year 1916. And, the second President, Swami Shivananda (Mahapurush Maharaj), ordained him a Sannyasin on Sarat-Purnima day in the year 1923 at Belur Math and gave him the monastic name, Swami Purushottamananda.

A few days after the Sannyasa ceremony Swami Purushottamananda left for Varanasi, Haridwar and other sacred tirthas. After a few years' pilgrimage in the Himalayas, he settled in Vasishtha Guha in the year 1929 to spend his life in prayer and meditation in the solitary cave in the midst of a dense forest. A man of courage and inner strength and extreme dispassion, he chose this cave for his *tapasya*. During those days there was no motorable road not even a regular foot path from Rishikesh to the cave. One had to walk along the river Ganga, sometimes ascending uphill. Yet he preferred the place as the very name "Vasishtha Guha" had a charm irresistible. He had to undergo great hardships during those days. The nearest place of human habitation was a hamlet three miles away and he had to trek uphill and downdale to reach it and obtain the bare necessities of life. The rheumatic attacks had left his right leg emaciated and weak. He had to limp all the way, which made it all the more painful.

Once, when his fire had gone out, he had to walk the whole distance to the village to get fire! But he did not give up the cave or his austerities. Help came to him in various ways. On another occasion when he was in need of fire and was reluctant to walk all the way to the village and waste four precious morning hours, a stranger came on a raft from the other bank of Ganga, gave him a box of matches of his own accord, and went away. The same evening Swamiji received half-a-dozen match boxes sent by a Mahatma of Rishikesh through somebody. And when the season of harvest came round, one day he was getting ready to go to some villages for collecting foodgrains. Just at that moment, a former acquaintance, Swami Narayana Giri, came from Rishikesh. He accompanied Swamiji to the villages and carried the load single-handed, not allowing our subject to carry anything. Swami Purushottamananda at first protested as he did not like the visitor doing such services. Only after coming to an understanding that the visitor would stay with Swamiji during the *chaturmasya* period (rainy season) and share whatever they collected, did he allow him to do the *seva* (service). Such instances increased Swamiji's faith in God. His perseverance, intense *tapasaya* and complete surrender to the Lord resulted in the fulfilment of his aim in life namely, Self-realisation.

He was a true Vedantin, a happy blend of *Jnana* and *Bhakti*, who exhorted his disciples to meditate. On hearing good devotional music (*kirtans*) he would go into ecstasy and become unconscious of the surroundings. Tears would trickle down his cheeks while reading or hearing certain portions of *Srimad Bhagavatam*. He advised spiritual aspirants to "feel, feel for others", "be sincere and true", and "surrender completely to the Lord." He also stressed the importance of *brahmacharya*

(continence), and said, "If you have *brahmacharya* you have everything; if not, you have nothing."

*Anumodaamahe brahmacharyam-ekaanta nirmalam
Dharmyam yasasyam-aayushyam lokadvaya-rasaayanam*

was one of his oft-quoted slokas. The meaning is simple :

"We admire *brahmacharya* of 'purest ray' which is conducive to virtue, fame and longevity, and is a panacea for all the ailments here and hereafter." *

Swamiji was averse to publicity. Yet many and varied were the people that flocked to him for solace and guidance. His mere darshan gave peace. Sometimes, people went to him with a long list of questions, and without their uttering a word the answers came to their mind after sitting in his Presence or Swamiji himself raised the topic and gave the answer directly to them or to someone else. His childlike laughter was something one could never forget. Yes, his love, compassion, subtle humour, and advice on spiritual matters in homely words — all these made even a newcomer or a shy person feel quite at home, with him.

Gradually an ashrama sprang up and a few monastic disciples stayed with him. It was like a family unit or, rather a *gurukulam*, where the disciples lived like his children and served him. He was father, mother, guru — everything to his monastic as well as lay disciples.

* 1. *Spiritual Talks*, 2. *A Peep into the Gita*, 3. *Guide to Spiritual Aspirants*, and 4. *Upadeshamrit (Hindi)* are some of the publications that contain the Sage's lofty teachings. These can be had from Vasishtha Guha Ashram, P.O. Goolar Dogi Pin :249303, (Dist. Tehri Garhwal) U. P.

Swami Purushottamananda did not go on lecture tours; seldom did he speak in large gatherings. But wherever he went he held *satsanga*, cleared the doubts of *Sadhakas* and gave them spiritual instructions.

More than three decades Swamiji lived in Vasishtha Guha and attained *mahasamadhi* at the age of 82, after a brief illness. He spoke at length to his disciples two days before the event and attained *mahanirvana* on the night of Mahasivaratri, Monday, the 13th February 1961. In the place sanctified by him a temple has been erected and a marble statue of the sage has been installed. Swami Purushottamananda of Vasishtha Guha was esteemed in the Haridwar-Rishikesh region as one of the three 'Spiritual giants'—Trimurtis—of the Himalayas, who hailed from South India, the other two being Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh and Swami Tapovanam of Uttarkashi. This is what Dr.K.M.Munshi, wrote after paying a visit to the sage at Vasishtha Guha in 1953:

"Such knights-errant of the spirit are to be found in all countries, but perhaps more in India than anywhere else. Whatever the modern world may say, such men will be continue to be found in all ages, men who, not content with their everyday life, will insist on climbing the Everest of the Spirit with cheerful confidence. While we search for the mirage of Happiness they seek the Holy Grail with courage and faith; and they are the men who convert the rose of the world into the mystic rose that Dante sang of." *

U T T A R A Y A N A M

Published in Bhavan's Journal, March 1, 1982.

On the eve of Makara-Samkranti, a *Sadhaka* (spiritual aspirant) contemplates:

"The Northward journey of the Sun, Uttarayanam, begins on Makara-Samkranti day (c. Jan 14). People become jubilant and welcome the period. The longer nights of winter months start diminishing and the days get warmer, brighter and longer. The earlier period of six months, the southern passage of the Sun or Dakshinayanam, was like a 'dark period' when various religious rites were suspended. The dawn of Uttarayanam finds a revival of such activities and it also brings hopes in the minds of parents trying to settle the marriage of grown-up daughters. In general, Uttarayanam ushers in cheer and activity. This is what we find in the world around us.

"Is it only a physical phenomenon of the objective world, or does it convey a subtle meaning of events occurring in the subjective personality also?"

With such an enquiry in mind, the disciple approaches his Guru for an answer:

* *City of Paradise and Other Kulapati's Letters* (1955) P. 69 — Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay 400 007.

DISCIPLE

O Holy Sire,
Does all this convey
Any meaning to one
Who treads the Path
To Goal Supreme?

PRECEPTOR

Well asked, My child,
Intelligent art thou.
Know they are symbols
With deeper meanings.

What is the journey,
Where is the North;
What is the Sun,
Hearken with patience:

The crown of the head
Is North in a man.
Spiritual Energy,
The Sun in him.

The upward journey
Of Spiritual Energy
(Which they call
Kundalini Shakti)
From its base
Near the anus
To the crown
Of the head
Marks the dawn
Of Uttarayanam

In a Sadhaka
Treading
The Spiritual Path

Darkness of Ignorance
And consequent dejection
Gradually fade
As the Sun in him
Rises higher and higher.

Trickles of bliss
The aspirant feels
As the Shakti
Marches on.

When
The Shakti reaches
The crown of the head,
Otherwise called
Sahasrara,
Climax is reached
Of Uttarayanam.
Perfect Peace
And Supreme Bliss
The aspirant enjoys
In his own Self.
Transmigration
He transcends too.

DISCIPLE:

Thy nectar-like teaching,
O Revered Sire,
Has today given me
A fund of knowledge

*But confounded am I
'bout another event ...*

PRECEPTOR:

*Yes, My Son,
Hesitate not.
Come out with it,
Your doubt may be solved.*

DISCIPLE:

*Bhishma, they say,
Was a realised soul
Yet he lay
Many a day
Awaiting the day
Of Northern journey
Of the Sun
For leaving the body?*

PRECEPTOR:

*The Knowing Ones
Have no South or North.*

*Maybe to prove
That death is at will
Of a Realised One
That Bhishma lay
Till that day.*

*Or,
Reverting to the symbol,
We can say
That Bhishma waited*

*Merely to teach us
That Happiness comes
Only when
Spiritual Energy
Marches Northward.*

*Remember, My Son,
The Vedic lore?
The Scripture* says
In very clear terms :
"If It ** is realised
(While yet living)
Here, in this world,
Then there's True Life;
Otherwise awaits
Perdition great."*

*Thus —
Symbolic are these
With profound Truths
Concealed in them.
Think deeply
Dive deeply.*

*Then the pearls
Of Ancient Wisdom,
Yours for certain!*

* Kenopanishad, II. 5.

** Brahman, the Absolute.

DISCIPLE:

*Salutations to thee
 O Perfect One!
 Enlightened am I
 By thy noble precepts.
 Salutations to Thee
 Again and again.*

A REPROOF TO A DOZING SOUL

*Why do you weep, my friend;
 The Goal is not in sight?
 The sun is bound the northward round,
 So muster courage and march onward!*

*What ails thee, O friend;
 'Dark night of the soul'?
 Then search no more in corners dark
 But enter thou the open glades.*

*Atman's doubtless all.
 'Inside' ; 'Outside' Two?
 This truth shines as One, not three,
 If you as simple Being be!*

A REPROOF TO A PSEUDO-KUMBHAKARNA

*Feigning to sleep as one in coma,
Calling yourself a Kumbha-Karna?
Off with the mask and come out-of-doors
For who you are we all do know.*

*"A Jnanin, sometimes, dons the cloak
Of a madcap or a simpleton."
So have we heard from those who know
And in you we see a specimen now.*

*Be true, Brother, and be natural;
Be a guiding star to those
Sadhaks dozing in family ties
That they may emulate you in life.*

10.7.1990



SWAMI PURUSHOTTAMANANDAJI MAHARAJ

MY GURU

*Who fed me with thoughts divine,
And bless'd me when I sought refuge,
And keeps me under his benign care,*

— My Guru !

*Who, by his glance of compassion,
Filled my heart with devotion,
And stirred up my dormant dispassion,*

— My Guru !

*And who, like a lodestone, attracted
The deluded me from wilderness,
And took me in his fold for ever,*

— My Guru !

*To abide in thee, the Self, for ever and aye,
Grant me wisdom, power an' courage;
And bless that I be Thy worthy child,*

— Oh! My Revered Sadguru!



PURUSHOTTAMA GURU

(An acrostic)

*Purity of thoughts
Unselfish deeds,
Remembrance of God
Under all circumstances;*

*Sincere devotion
Higher aspiration,
Open-hearted dealings—
The surest means to Peace;*

*Time is fleeting fast
And life is ebbing too,
Moments though they seem
Ages, alas are lost;*

*God, coming as Guru
Uplifts the dozing chela,*
Reminding him of his nature Divine
Ushers a spiritual life in him.*

EXCERPTS FROM LETTERS

03. 01. 1978

It is necessary to take a firm decision (regarding the type of life one wants to live). Even if one remains at home, one should have a clear-cut idea of Spiritual life, and good guide - महापुरुषसंश्रयः Practising Sadhanas without the guidance of the Guru is like rowing a boat without an oar.

22. 09. 1978

You are a scientist and have a 'research mentality'. You may interpret a dream of normal kind; but this is 'Supra-mundane'. How will the material mind catch the meaning of spiritual truths? Only a spiritual intellect can get a glimpse of the Truth. And all our Sadhanas are to get rid of the dross of the mind, so that the spiritual truth may reflect in it. ... God will show the way. He is our Inner Controller(अन्तर्यामी)... Let our mind sport at the Lotus Feet of the Lord!

01. 12. 1980

'श्रेयांसि बहु विघ्नानि' - (In good undertakings there will be many obstacles) - is an old saying... Service to parents is essential. Done with a good spirit it will only help one in his spiritual pursuits. On the other hand, elders say that if the mother sheds tears because there is nobody to serve, each drop of her tears will stand like a mountain on the path of a Sadhaka who ignores his mother and does Sadhana. So there is no harm even if the regular Sadhanas have to be curtailed in order to attend to parents. Such service itself should be performed in a spirit of Sadhana. Only one must make it clear to them of one's aim in life and seek their blessings and co-operation. But the world is such that it will not readily agree

to such 'adventures' and, again, the same world will worship such people if they stick to their guns and reach the goal — nay even if they make a little progress in the spiritual path. Therefore, one has to be firm in his ideal and adjust to other environments without sacrificing the ideal. Even in the work-a-day life, and with neighbours and others, one will have to move like a normal person, keeping the ideal always intact. We cannot put a fencing around us and drive all unwanted people away. As Sri Ramakrishna says, "let us do our Sadhana within the mosquito curtain at night when nobody will see". Let the fencing be mental and not material Pray, pray, pray. Pray to God with an open heart to guide you along the right path. Plead with Him not to entangle you in the snares of the world, and, pray to Him also to give wisdom to those who try to unsettle your mind and disturb you. Has not my Guruji said again and again in "Guide to Spiritual Aspirants" that God will hear all our prayers and fulfil our wants? He was an authority, so we can take his words as guarantee. If we are sincerely following the spiritual path, nothing can harm us. There may be some pin-pricks now and then to test our sincerity. One should not lose heart. Every time after meditation chant:

ॐ असतो मा सद्गमय

तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय

मृत्योर्मांशुमृतं गमय

ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः

12. 08. 1981

Improvement on all sides (in material things), but while taking stock, is there improvement in ourselves or are we stagnant? God bless us !

माघ कृ. ३, २०३८ वि. स.

तदनुसार जानुअरी १२, १९८२

प्रिय आत्मन्

सबसे पहले " तिल गुड घ्या, गोड बोला " ।

क्यों मकर संक्रान्ति में तिल-गुड लेना ? शायद यह प्रथा इसलिए चली आ रही है कि माघ मास में ठंड अधिक होता है और तिल, गुड दोनो ही गरमी देने वाले है। शास्त्रानुसार और ही कुछ मतलब होगा। आप रा. स्व. सं. वाले जानते होंगे। इतना तो सब जानते है कि उत्तरायण प्रारंभ होता है, और इसी को लेकर लोग बहुत प्रसन्न होते है। हाँ, सूर्यनारायण उत्तर की ओर चलने लगते है, रात कम और दिन अधिक होने लगते है, उष्णता भी आने लगती है- यह सब पृथिवी में - आधिभौतिक/ अध्यात्म में उत्तरायण क्या है? यह तो अचानक ही कल ही विचारधारा में आया। " अबद्धं वा सुबद्धं वा " अपने विचार को लिख ही देता हूँ - साधकों को अंधकार, अर्थात् अज्ञान, कम होते हुए, दिन-प्रकाश-ज्ञान बढ़ना- ही तो रात छंटना, दिन बढ़ना कहा जाता है? और उत्तरायण ? कुछ दिन पूर्व मैंने जो पुस्तक पढ़ी, "शून्य क्रि. पू.अथवा क्रिस्तु उपनिषत् " २००० बी. सी. ऑरक्रिस्ट उपनिषत् ,उसका लेखक की व्याख्या से प्रभावित हुआ मै, यह कहूँगा कि कुण्डलिनी शक्ति का निद्रा से जागृत होकर ऊपर की ओर चलना ही उत्तरायण है। मनुष्य के शरीर मे सिर ही तो उत्तर है और जैसे २ कुण्डलिनी उत्तर की ओर चलेगी उतना ही प्रकाश, ज्ञान, साधक अनुभव करेगा। यह तो आनन्द की बात है। बाहर, सूर्य

प्रकाश से साधारण जन प्रसन्न होते हैं, योगी लोग अध्यात्म प्रकाश से आनन्द अनुभव करते हैं। तो, उत्तरायण में शरीर त्यागना, जैसे भीष्म पितामह ने किया, इसका अर्थ यही होगा कि पूर्ण ज्ञानी होकर शरीर त्यागना - "इहैव तैर्जितः सर्गो..... (गीता), "इह चेदवेदीत् अथ सत्य मस्ति....(केनोपनिषत्) इन वाक्यों का भी अर्थ ऐसा ही है - (ब्रह्म में - साम्य में- जिनका मन स्थिर है वे लोग यहीं- इस शरीर में रहते हुए ही- संसार को- पुनर्जन्म को जीत लेते हैं ", " यहाँ रहते हुए ही उस तत्त्व को जान लिया तो सत्य है ") अब हमारा कर्तव्य, उस शक्ति को "उत्तरायण "करना है। प्रस्तुत लेखक पक्के योगी थे, इसलिए उन्होंने क्रिस्तु के उपदेशोंके योगमार्ग का अवलम्बन लेकर व्याख्या की है। हमें तो भक्ति, ज्ञान मार्ग द्वारा ही उस स्थान पहुँचना है। "रात गवायो....." की तरह कितनी ही संक्रान्ति बीत गई। ग्रह संक्रान्ति हमें उत्तरायण में प्रवृत्त करावें। ॐ ॐ ॐ

.....मकर संक्रान्ति रा. स्व. सं. वालों के लिए एक महत्वपूर्ण पर्व है, इसलिए मैंने हिन्दी में लिखने की चेष्टा की। त्रुटियों की ओर ध्यान न देते हुए सार को संग्रहण करियेगा। १.१.८२ को सुबह गुरु महाराज के प्रति विचार- ध्यान- चलते-चलते, तुलसीदास जी की एक चौपाई इस प्रकार मन में आइ-

श्री गुरुदेव चरण रति मोरे।

अनुदिन बढ़ाहि अनुग्रह तोरे।।("सीताराम" के स्थान पर "श्री गुरुदेव")

सुनने में आया कि "भक्ति" के बाद आप राज विधा..... में हैं। दिन में पुराने पत्थरों पर अनुसंधान, रात में भगवद्बचनों में। बहुत

अच्छा। एकाग्रता से उत्तरायण मार्ग पकड़ना सरल है। और क्या लिखूँ—
कहाँ लिखूँ?

23. 10. 1982

... Hope your backache is gone. After all, the physical body is to experience happiness and misery - and the mind takes them as its own.! And we, the real "We" take the mind to be ours or the mind itself as "We" — comes then all the troubles.

08. 03. 1983.

The winter is over - the cold wave is over. Yet, why should Mataji take so much interest (to prepare the woollen scarf for me)? That is Lord's grace, Guru's grace. If only we fully acknowledge it and are conscious of it, how grand and happy our lives would be ! But, man has no patience and worries over many things. We have to pin our faith in Bhagavan's assurance, "योगक्षेमं वहाम्यहम्" May He bless us to have faith in Him ! Om.

05. 08. 1983

In youth one does not care about health - rather feels it something below his dignity to acknowledge illness or physical weakness. But he will have to pay for such negligence later on, with interest ! I hope you are your normal self now, physically and spiritually.

07. 02. 1984

One thing one has to remember, when one wants to leave the evil company. There will be severe tests in the form of attractions. One has to be firm.

13. 04. 1984

Keep up the spirit (of Sadhana). Even if you don't find any tangible result in a short while, don't give up. The Samskaras stored up in the mind since many births can't be erased in a trice. 'Patience, Purity, Perseverance' - Swami Vivekananda used to stress on these for success in spiritual life. Then the fourth 'P' - 'Perfection' can be achieved..... Progress depends upon our sincerity and effort. There is no time limit. It can be attained in two days or in two lives, depending on the dispassion and detachment towards material objects. Mantra Japa purifies the mind, brings concentration and this will help in meditation. The grace of God is always there, only we shut our eyes and turn our back towards Him. So we don't recognise or feel His grace.

20. 07. 1984

Wherever we are, we have to remember our aim and remember Him always. Whether you jump into Advaita or slowly glide into it, the final Truth lies in Advaita only. No doubt, one cannot and must not jump without preparation - one will break his limbs. Mango cannot be ripened by pressing it - and when it is ripe in its own normal way, it is sweet and nice.

10. 08. 1984

Mental worries, anxieties etc, will naturally affect the physical health also. And, if mind and body, both are affected, जप-तप and all spiritual practices will also be affected. You can't keep aloof from the struggle but you can control your activities and strain, mental and physical.

Yes, if the body is neglected no spiritual observances would be possible.

26. 09. 1984

Reading of religious/spiritual books is good, no doubt. But devote more time for Japam. As you know, more and more Japam will help quietening the mind. By constant practice, it will become as natural as breathing to repeat the Mantra always. You have read quite a lot. Whatever happens in the world is all outside of 'You' - 'You' are not touched. So don't allow the mind to be swayed by these external disturbing factors.

17. 11. 1984

... Don't bother, my boy, nobody can do any harm to another unless it is due to the latter - Sri Rama says (in Adhyatma Ramayana): "Nobody does anything (by way of bringing happiness or misery) to another. It is due to ignorance that another person is giving (trouble). It is false arrogance which makes one feel 'I am doing, for the whole world (everyone) is bound by its (his/her) own karma".

सुखस्य दुःखस्य न कोऽपि दत्ता
परो ददातीति कुबुद्धिरेषा ।
अहं करोमीति वृथाभिमानः
स्वकर्मसूत्रग्रथितो हि लोकः ॥

So, think of the Lord, do Japam and meditation, pray, pray, and pray. Take nutritious food and some tonic for general health of brain. Don't allow your brain to deteriorate due to worries and anxieties of this type. Hope you are better -

perfectly all right - by now. Do not, for once, misunderstand my above suggestions/advice. I am saying this with all sincerity.

This year Gangaji remained far away during floods. So the **kutias** are not affected. People have a good crop of Bajra. It has grown so tall and dense that I lost my way on the first day (afternoon) while returning from Ganga. And had to ask someone to show the way to **kutia** ! Yes. we have lost our way to our real **kutia-s** and are wandering in the forest ! God alone can save us.

04. 12. 1984

‘ शरीरमाद्यं खलु धर्मसाधनम् ’ - The body is the prime instrument for (carrying out) religious practices. So take care of it. That is the boat—it has to be kept in good order.

07. 02. 1985

‘ लोकाः समस्ताः सुखिनो भवन्तु ’ is our prayer. Remember Him, the Lord. He is our ALL.

02. 05. 1985

Art is a Science, “yes, you are correct”, replied the artist and ... *Science is an Art*. ‘Very true’, said he.... Whether one is a scientist, spiritualist or materialist one sees things as per the colour of his glasses and he gets the treatment as he himself gives others. Love projected from your heart gets a ready response from the other person also even though the language barrier lies in between.

22. 07. 1985

Is not promotion (in office) a ‘necessary evil’ whether you like it or not? With promotion, additional responsibilities and headaches, without that, humiliation.

12. 09. 85

May you speedily return to normal health by the grace of God ! Om !

कृष्णाय वासुदेवाय हरये परमात्मने ।
प्रणतःक्लेशनाशाय गोविन्दाय नमो नमः ॥

01. 10. 1985

.... You have added another feather (ailment) to your cap ! You have listed some of the tenants occupying your physical frame but what about those sitting on your nerves and emotions ? I mean the spirit of service which puts you out of gear often as you exceed your capacity when you jump into action, whether it is some friend or institutions. Now, you will have to regulate such activities also. I can't say, ‘put a stop’ because one's nature can't be changed. Moreover service to others is service to oneself, from a broader point of view.

Good, you had three weeks' probation on Bhiksha. But that was a forced one. Now aspire for a permanent voluntary Bhiksha -

पंचाक्षरं पावनमुच्चरन्तः पतिं पशूनां हृदि भावयन्तः ।
भिक्षाशाना दिक्षु परिभ्रमन्तः कौपीनवन्तः खलु भाग्यवन्तः ॥

“They indeed are blessed who, with (only) a Kaupinam (loin-cloth) on their body, wander about the four quarters with

"bhiksha" food for maintenance, reciting the sacred name of the Lord (the Panchakshara Mantra) and meditate upon the Lord of the creatures (Pasupati Siva) in their hearts".

14. 10. 1985

Don't you think that fear about fear is more fearful than fear itself ?...

क्षुद्रं हृदयदौर्बल्यं त्यक्त्वोत्तिष्ठ परंतप
सुखदुःखे समे कृत्वा लाभालाभौ जयाजयौ
योगस्थः कुरु कर्माणि

and many more man making exhortations. One has to face challenges and experience ups and downs in life. Then only one becomes seasoned, *pucca*. An easy-going cushy life with no problems to face and solve, no worries in life, etc. will only make one sensitive and allergic. Only by going through different phases of life does one gain experience not only in the empirical but religious/spiritual area too, in my view.

14. 10. 1985

What a funny thing you write! Your parents are old and your house is old-fashioned. One can find love, affection, regard, etc. only in old hearts. New fashionable houses and people are inside " बदरिकाकारः बहिरेव मनोहरः - hard + big seed inside, only goodlooking outside, like बेर - plum ". If you have a place in your heart ah!

26. 01. 1986

Don't get emotional about everything. Everyone feels for and sympathises with another - I mean those who are closely known/connected by friendship etc. I can understand your

feelings for your parents. It is the duty of everyone to serve his parents in their old age. (Do you know, I myself had to exert and control my feelings at the time of bidding farewell to your father, thinking of his helpless condition because of his loss of eyesight. And what can you do except providing comforts, treatment, service etc. No one can take over the suffering of others. And, for the sake of constant service, you cannot leave your job and be at his side. Anyway, there are others to look after him, he is not without anybody at home. Whether the absence of a "shock absorber" puts you to much care and anxieties of your own nature — excessive feeling - does it, one can't say. However, one has to train one's mind, especially one who is a bachelor and wants to lead a higher life. Study of religious books, Vedantic texts etc. should give us some correct understanding about things and persons, and our relationships with them. One should be loyal, dutiful, loving etc. to parents but should not get *too much* attached even to parents. What is attachment after all? It is mostly for the physical frame. And we know it is liable to growth, old age, destruction etc. So with all affection, love and other essential qualities, one should develop some detachment also. Keeping the mind busy in office/research work etc. to divert it from such worries is no solution. These are only 'dopes'. Correct understanding of the values of everything will alone solve the problem. Discrimination is necessary. Upanishads teach us that "one is dear to another not because of bodily relationship like wife, son, husband etc., but for the sake of Atman". But we do not know this fact. Once we realise the Oneness of Atman - one Atman residing in all bodies - the false notion of wife, mother, father, son etc., will vanish. Then it will be Atman loving Atman. We have to attain the realisation of this एकात्मभाव . You have worked on *Jnanesvari*, copied it 2 or 3 times and by now you must have become familiar with some of the lofty teachings. Devote more

time to meditate on such teachings, analyse them and try to make them your own, i.e., identify yourself with the teachings. Pray to God. Do more Japam with भाव .

22. 02. 1986

Whether the mind is steady or wandering, we should continue the Japam fully as per our resolve. We must have faith. Slowly but surely, one day we will reach the goal, i.e. attain real peace and realize Him.

14. 03. 1986

... Worries or anxieties about the past, present or future do not help us in any way. Rather they eat us away..... A Sloka comes to mind at this juncture.

चिन्तायाश्च चिन्तायाश्च बिन्दुमात्रं विशेषतः ॥
चिन्ता दहति निर्जीवं चिन्ता दहति जीवितम् ॥

(Between चिन्ता (anxiety, worry) and चिन्ता (funeral pyre) the only feature is the (') (the dot over चि in the word चिन्ता). The common feature is the burning quality. Whereas चिन्ता consumes the dead one, चिन्ता burns up the living one !)

So we have to give up worries. The second chapter of the Bhagavad Gita elaborates on this subject. Sri Bhagawan's advice from Sloka 11 onwards is very illuminating and instructive. Please try to dwell upon those teachings - and get over the past.

On the opening page of "A Peep into the Gita" there is a Sloka:

कृष्णाय वासुदेवाय हरये परमात्मने ।
प्रणतः क्लेशनाशाय गोविन्दाय नमो नमः ॥

It is very potent Mantra as well not only a prayer. So if you like you may (both) learn it by heart and chant it mentally at all times of the day. In the morning and evening at home, it can be chanted audibly also.

May Lord bestow upon you both pure devotion unto His Lotus Feet ! Om!

03. 04. 1986

.... The sloka " कृष्णाय " can be chanted any time of the day or night. One can derive benefit by chanting it to tune during or after आरती etc., but at other times it can be done mentally. There is no fixed rule or number to be done. The more we do it with feeling, the quicker the mind will get saturated with the thought of God.... As you know, one of the adjectives in it is " प्रणतः क्लेशनाशाय - one who destroys the miseries of those who prostrate themselves before Him" - i.e., those who surrender. According to one's feeling (or desire) it will mean miseries in mundane life or of the Samsara itself. That is the greatest misery. Let our prayer be for the removal of संसारक्लेश. Glad to know that you are doing Japam of your Ishta Deva, as suggested by BahenjiAs for knowing more of अध्यात्म , some treatises on Vedanta will be helpful - (e.g. *Atmabodha*, *Aparokshanubhuti*, *Vivekachudamani*) - all are Sankaracharya's

works.... Intellectuals can understand these texts and it will help in developing faith in God, or Atman. Since most of the people have a particular attraction for a particular deity - Ishta - the combination of Bhakti and Jnana will suit them. Especially in these days we come across Mahapurushas of this type - Sri Ramakrishna and others. Some आलम्बन (support) is necessary for most of us and that is the Ishtadeva whom we propitiate through the Mantra given by the Guru. More reasoning minds can follow other paths. Sri Ramana Maharshi's "Vichara Marga" is one. "Talks with Ramana Maharshi" will give an insight into his way. But he does not decry Bhakti. He himself has composed many verses on the Lord of Arunachala.

Please go through the Vedanta the Vedantic treatises mentioned. They all say the same thing but in different ways. What is real, what is unreal, Atman and अनात्मन्, permanent and perishable etc. A sense of dispassion is aroused for all worldly possessions or happiness through discrimination, and a real longing created for the attainment of ever-lasting peace and happiness.

20. 07. 1987

....I sincerely thank you and other well-wishers who take interest in my health and pray to the almighty God for a speedy recovery. I am moved very much when I receive such letters. Subjectively, I take the present condition also as an "experience". I don't view it as "suffering". Whatever lies to my credit will come to me alone, therefore no 'grumbling', no 'sorry'. The Lord is giving me this "experience" also and I patiently bear it. And when I think of His benevolent hands coming to my aid through His various children, I shed tears silently and secretly. What pains me much is not the physical pain which is, no doubt, unbearable at times, but that others have to serve me in all

respects as I am completely bed-ridden. Even this letter is being written in lying position. No doubt, people are serving voluntarily and cheerfully, with no grudge but as I am not used to taking service from others it gives me much pain. But then, it is His will or others' and my 'Prarabdha'! That is the only consolation....

....May Lord be pleased to draw you nearer unto His Lotus Feet and free you from the shackles of Samsara ! Om !

07. 01. 1988

.... That Kalpataru (1st Jan.) day was 102 years ago. Why should it be only on the 1st of January ? For a devotee everyday should be, rather is, a Kalpataru day - so I feel. Only, one does not treat it as such, so he misses the opportunity of gaining His Grace. We attach importance to specified days like Ramanavami, Janmashtami etc. and celebrate God's advent. On other days is He not with us ? He is Immanent and Transcendent, so say the Srutis and Mahapurushas. Let us cultivate the habit of remembering Him everyday and at all times. As Gurumaharaj says, we have to be sincere. In one place he says, "God knows only one language, the language of the heart (*Spiritual Talks*). If we are sincere He will guide us and take us towards Him by and by. Why emotions? "I want to give six good citizens to the country". Is that not your dear father's desire? Keep this sentence always in front of you and act in consonance and do not act in any way which might go against his wish. The blessings of parents have great value. Pray to God that He gives you strength to lead a pure life, a useful one for self and others, with no blemish on oneself and family. Name, fame, wealth, property, these are not our aim but purity, sincerity and Bhakti etc. as Maharaj says, 'Be in the world but not of the world'.... so keep the ideal in front and march on ! Lord bless you ! Om !

12. 12. 1988

... The penultimate sentence in your letter, "Please advise me what would be श्रेय for me" brings to my mind a Mantra (verse) of Katha Upanishad, the gist of which is - The two paths of श्रेय and प्रेय (The Good and the Pleasant) are there before man. The wise man examines them both thoroughly and separates them. Being desirous of the श्रेय (eternal Good) the wise man chooses the श्रेयोमार्ग and the dullard desiring योगक्षेम (materially pleasant) opts for the प्रेयोमार्ग

Thus, if we have started feeling that there is a life beyond the one in which we are now engrossed, and that there is very little time left with us, we have to devote whole-heartedly to that path which can give us Happiness and Peace. Why should there be any, "Duwidha"? Why should retiring from the present "active" life create any psychological problem? When one chooses a path, a path which he is convinced would be for his spiritual welfare, where is the chance of any adverse effects taking place? Moreover, you are not going to give up the reading habit completely. Religious/spiritual literature will be replacing academic/scientific ones. Plan your life in such a way that you devote your time for prayer, Japa, meditation, Swadhyaya and some scriptures which would keep you occupied with reasoning or analysing or thinking deeply into the "state beyond sorrow". One can forget oneself in Religious/Spiritual literature. And a few minutes/hours for some light hobby like gardening-watering the plants etc. - or for a long stroll and such things. Friends will advise according to their mental make-up. We have to probe into ourselves and find whether we are in tune with their thoughts or whether our aspiration is for something beyond mundane life. If we do not

plunge into such a life even at the last leg of our journey, 'evening of life' as they call it, we will only repent at the last moment when there is no time left. I have often heard a quotation from an old Mahatma in my younger days- "Had I but served God with half the zeal I served the King!" - a heart-broken Bishop or Religious person lamenting when he was in trouble or in some such circumstances - When you both are devoted to religion, you can turn your house into an ashrama. But make sure that there is not the least ambition for name or fame from the academic side. You have been honoured in various ways. Thanking Him for all such favours, now devote your remaining life for thinking of Him, to sing His glory and to have Him as your own - to merge your mind at His Lotus Feet. May Sri Ram who proclaimed:

सकृदेव प्रपन्नाय तवास्मीति च याचते ।
अभयं सर्वभूतेभ्यो ददाम्येतत् व्रतं मम ॥

'I give अभय (fearlessness from birth and death i.e. Moksha) to anyone who but declares, "I am Thine" and surrenders. This is my व्रत (vow)'. May He show you correct path and shower His blessings abundantly on you both.

27. 01. 1989

..... As for your queries : Good that you have a Mantra to which you are fully devoted. Japa or repetition of Lord's name in a systematic manner is a discipline which is a *sinequanon* for the majority of Sadhakas. Japa purifies the heart, develops devotion to the Lord and makes one fit for higher thinking and meditation. Unless the mind is trained to stick on to one ideal, say a personal God - Ishta - it will not remain one - pointed during meditation. So, after a few days of practising Japam alone, one should combine meditation of the Lord with Japam

and without Japam also. This sort of Sadhana gives concentration and elevates mind. Side by side, at other times, reading of scriptures, teachings of Mahatmas, etc., should be undertaken. From the teachings of these texts one can find out where one fits in. If one feels that a purely analytical method of Sadhana is the proper thing for his temperament, he should undertake that. Ramana Maharshi's Vichara Marga as one can grasp from "Talks with Ramana Maharshi" and other books is preferable to Paul Brunton's explanations. (Brunton has been accused of twisting Maharshi's teachings in some of his books). On the other hand, if one is of devotional temperament primarily, he cannot, (and should not) be asked to take to the path of Knowledge, which will only upset him. The same is the case with a person inclined to Jnanamarga (Go through the second chapter of Gita - also the twelfth). Ramana Maharshi, J. Krishnamurti and people of their calibre are very rare. It is indeed difficult for a beginner to take to the path of Knowledge, (निर्गुण) or Vichara - क्लेशोपशान्तस्तेषाम् (Gita XII.5), But after a few days of practice, when one comes to feel intensely about a particular path, he can adopt it with advantage. Don't indulge in speculating about the paths. All paths lead to Him. Sadhakas vary in temperament, therefore so many paths. Pray to Him from the core of your heart to show you, and lead you by the correct path. As you find in my Gururji's teachings (and all others' also) it is sincerity that counts. If we are sincere about our pursuits and pray for His help, guidance will come surely. A combination of Japa, meditation, practising discrimination and such allied Sadhanas is doubtless beneficial and that is the method advised by many of the saints for the present generation. Carry on. The Lord will throw light. May His blessings be ever upon you !

20. 01. 1990

*Who fed me from her gentle breast
And hushed me in her arms to rest
And on my cheeks sweet kisses pressed -*

My Mother

The above is the first stanza of a Poem captioned "My Mother" by an English poet, which we had in our English text in the seventh standard. Yes, everyone adores his mother; mother gets precedence even over father. So it is natural to feel sorry for not having seen her in her last moment or taken part in the final rites. But, then, your mother would have only been glad that her son, though he could not attend on her, had been helping so many people in cremating their near and dear ones. Whatever is born is bound to die - जातस्य हि घृणो मृत्युः The body of the mother is gone but has the mother gone ? So long as one remembers and loves her she is in his heart. No doubt everyone gets affected when his father or mother passes away. Although you have a mature and philosophical mind, you along with are sure to feel the loss more as you have nothing like 'family' to divert attention. The mind devoted to mother should now be diverted to God. There alone one can find peace.

08. 01. 1990

..... There is no conflict at all between Bhakti and Jnana. In fact, we generally come across great men who have trodden the synthesized path. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa was all Bhakti for outward appearance and all Knowledge inwardly. He called the future monks on week days and gave them Upadesa on Jnanamarga. Swami Sivanandaji (Divine Life Society), my

Guruji and the present day Mahatmas have followed such a path. There is no ritualism at all in this. Doing Japam, worshipping the idols of one's Ishta Devata (chosen deity) singing Arti etc. or chanting Vedic Mantras - these are not ritualism. These are various means to keep the mind engaged with the Lord. If one can devote his mind always to God, these can be dropped. They are not a "must". They are only props to augment our devotion. When one is free from Mantra Japam etc. the time can be devoted to reading scriptures or teachings of Mahatmas and enquiry into the nature of the Self. Jnanamarga is by inquiring - विचार i.e. आत्मविचार . By thinking on the essential nature of the Self which is free from senses etc. one goes deeper and deeper. The love and attachment of all material objects, including one's own body, senses etc. and the so called near and dear ones slowly slide into the background as wisdom dawns that these are ephemeral and perishing and that Atman alone is ever-lasting Bliss. Thus the combination of the two paths is not at all ritualistic but a method which is most suited for many people in the present age. One can tread the path of Knowledge alone without any aid these days. It needs a keen intellect and deep concentration. You may carry on. Even the Lord whom we worship is not different from us. But so long as we have the body idea and we feel we are mere Jivas, we have to look to the Lord as Supreme and worship Him.

12. 01. 1990

"Who am I" is the विचारमार्ग . Sri Ramana Maharshi recommended the Vichara Marga which leads to the Supreme Knowledge. He has composed some Slokas and songs for the sake of devotees at their request and some of them were sung before him. He himself used to say that Arunachaleswara (Mahadeva) was his Father. There was abundance of devotion in him. Hanuman, when asked by Sri

Rama as to how he thought of him (Rama), replied, "When I have body-consciousness, I am Thy servant, when I feel I am a Jiva, I am Thy part, when I feel that I am the Self, I am (none but) Thyself. This is my firm conviction."

देहबुद्ध्या तु दासोहं, जीवबुद्ध्या त्वदंशकः ।
आत्मबुद्ध्या त्वमेवाहम् इति मे निश्चिता मतिः ॥

So, a devotee feels himself as one with the Lord when he discards the body idea etc. Some of the Slokas of Sankaracharya, some scriptural passages etc. have been given, under the heading, "Vedantic Stotras" or some such heading as a last part in "Altar Flowers", published by the Ramakrishna Mission, with Sanskrit original and English translation. If you go through them you will get a hint as to how to meditate on those ideas - like "I am not the body ... I am the Self..." etc. Somehow these thoughts came to mind, so I am scribbling these lines. What I write is all what I have read from books or heard from Mahatmas.

07. 02. 1990

"Welcome all afflictions." If we have such an attitude, what misery or pain can affect us? No doubt physical pain and discomforts will be there. But if we mentally resort to them, they create more havoc — It is like remaining quiet when someone abuses; if we reply in the same language, more vulgar words will pour out of the other person's mouth; if we keep quiet he will be tired and will withdraw. So long as the mind is kept on higher ideals (or even extrovert but away from the body) bodily afflictions affect the least.....

देशत्यागो महान् व्याधिर्विरोधो बन्धुभिः सह ।
धनहानिरपमानं च मदनुग्रहकारणम् ॥

(Emigration from one's native place, great afflictions, opposition from friends and relatives, loss of wealth and dishonour are because of My blessings.)

Sri Krishna's words quoted from *Narada Pancharatra* or some such book which I happened to read in some magazine a few years ago. So these afflictions are all His Blessings ! OM!

