



The Vedanta Kesari



Lessons from Swamis

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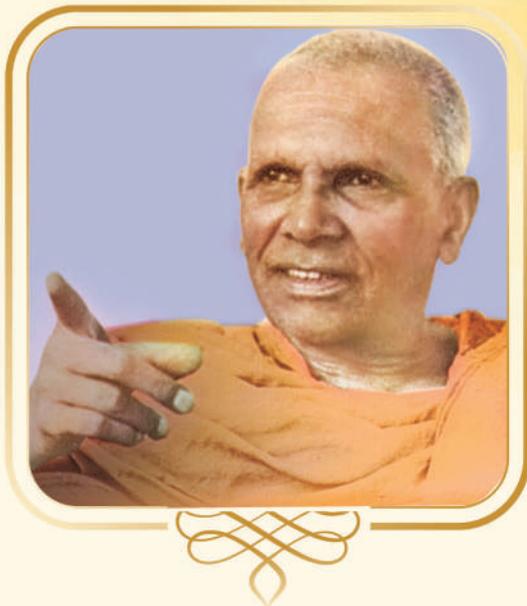


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A Cultural and Spiritual Monthly
of the Ramakrishna Order since 1914

December
2020

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*“Are you growing spiritually?
Can you love others? Can
you feel oneness with others?
Have you peace within
yourself? And do you radiate
it around you? That is called
spiritual growth, which is
stimulated by meditation
inwardly, and by work
done in a spirit of service
outwardly.”*

- Swami Ranganathananda

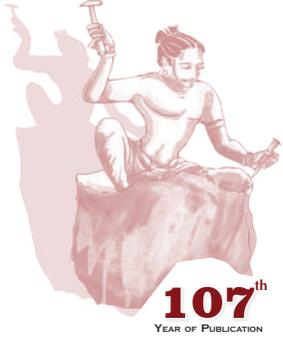
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THE VEDANTA KESARI

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The Vedanta Kesari



**One hundred and seven years
and going strong....**



First issue of
Brahmapadin, September 1895

He was a much-celebrated and much-feted Swami. His famous address at The World's Parliament of Religions, Chicago in 1893 had catapulted him to the status of a super star. But Swami Vivekananda was not one to bask in chaffy glory. A letter to one of his trusted followers, from the USA, dated 12 Jan 1895, read, 'I want to preach my ideas for the good of the world. ...What work have you done in the way of advancing the ideas and organising in India? ...My life is more precious than spending it in getting the admiration of the world. I have no time for such foolery.'

Swamiji, as Swami Vivekananda was fondly addressed, loved and revered his motherland as his own mother. Every breath of his aspired for her well being and every cell in his body yearned that she regain her lost glory. She had been a beacon light for the world until repeated invasions pillaged her ruthlessly and left her not just poverty-stricken but also psychologically drained. The latter struck at the very core, underlying the urgency for immediate redressal. Swamiji's panacea for this lay in India's very own practical and ennobling Vedantic wisdom. Vedanta recognises no weakness. It proclaims that in every individual lies a mine of strength. All that is needed is an effort to draw from it.

Swamiji started looking for the right channel to propagate the powerful message of Vedanta. He opted for the print medium and decided to bring out a journal, giving it the name *Brahmapadin*. In February 1895, he sent from USA \$100 and a letter to his trusted disciple Alasinga Perumal. The letter read: '*Now I am bent upon starting the journal. Herewith I send a hundred dollars... Hope this will go just a little in starting your paper.*'

If selflessness and devotion would have a form, it would have borne the name of Alasinga Perumal. *Brahmapadin* became Alasinga's calling and the first issue rolled out from a press in Broadway, Chennai on 14 September 1895. The magazine included a poem of Swamiji specially composed for the occasion. It was titled, '*The Song of the Sannyasin.*' One verse ran thus:



First issue of
The Vedanta Kesari, May 1914

"Strike off thy fetters! Bonds that bind thee down,

of shining gold or darker lesser one

Love, hate — good, bad — and all the dual throng,

know slave is slave carefid or whipped, not free

For fetters, though of gold, are not less strong to bind;

then off with them Sanyasin hold say om tat sat om

(Handwritten words in Swamiji's own hand)

With this message that marked its mission, Brahnavadin made a determined entry into the strife-ridden climate of pre-independence India. The birth of the magazine was certainly an occasion for celebration but the struggles were far from over.

One of Swamiji's letters to Alasinga read: 'I learnt from your letter the bad financial state that Brahnavadin is in.' This was followed by another letter that carried the line, 'I pledge myself to maintain the paper anyhow.'

Bolstered by this pledge, Alasinga Perumal braved on, surmounting many an impediment. Sadly, Swami Vivekananda passed away in 1902, at the age of thirty-nine. Alasinga's intense anguish morphed into heightened devotion towards the magazine. But the next hurdle in Brahnavadin's journey came in 1909, in the form of Alasinga's own demise. In May 1914, the magazine, tottering as it was, floundered and ground to a halt.

It was at this crucial juncture, that the Ramakrishna Mission stepped in to revive it. The Mission was itself in its nascent stages with many a teething problem but nothing could come in its way of reviving the Brahnavadin. For, had not their beloved Swamiji repeatedly said, 'The Brahnavadin is a jewel — it must not perish!' And so, the very same month when Brahnavadin closed, it was resuscitated with the new name *The Vedanta Kesari*.

The history of *The Vedanta Kesari* is much more than just a tale of sweat, toil and a dream realised. It is a narrative of Swamiji's passion for India and Alasinga's devotion to his master. It is a celebration of love, transcending forms.

Appeal

For the last 106 years, without missing a single issue, the magazine has been carrying the invigorating message of Vedanta and alongside, continuously revamping itself to meet the changing needs of the times.

The relevance of Vedantic wisdom to everyday life is all the more pertinent today than ever before. 'Arise, Awake and stop not till the goal is reached,' is the thundering motto of Swami Vivekananda. The Ramakrishna Mission, as you all know, is a unique organisation where sannyasis and lay people come together and endeavour for the common good. Let's join hands in taking forward our revered Swamiji's vision and mission for The Vedanta Kesari.

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Become a Patron of *The Vedanta Kesari* & help us to meet the running cost by **contributing every month ₹ 5,000/- & above**



Swami Vivekananda

ATTENTION

Despite the disruption caused by Covid-19 lockdown, *The Vedanta Kesari* has been printed and posted every month for India only. But we have come to know that subscribers in some parts of the country have not received some issues. Given the current situation, it will not be possible to resend the physical copies.

All our issues are available every month for FREE download at chennai.math.org. It is also available FREE as individual articles in the 'Vedanta Kesari' Telegram Channel. *Install* the Telegram App in your electronic device, *Join* the Channel, and *Share* with others. The Channel also has video-clips of senior sannyasis of the Ramakrishna Order.

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इति रामकृष्णेशोभा इवाङ्गेषु इति रामकृष्ण



सर्वधर्मस्थापकस्त्वं सर्वधर्मस्वरूपकः ।
आचार्याणां महाचार्यो रामकृष्णाय ते नमः ॥

O Ramakrishna, establisher of all the faiths, embodiment of all religions, and greatest among the teachers, my salutations to you.



यथाग्नेर्दाहिकाशक्ती रामकृष्णे स्थिता हि या ।
सर्वविद्यास्वरूपां तां सारदां प्रणमाम्यहम् ॥

My salutations to Sri Sarada Devi, who is the embodiment of all knowledge, who is undifferentiated from Sri Ramakrishna just as the power of burning is from fire.



परतत्त्वे सदा लीनो रामकृष्णसमाज्ञया ।
यो धर्मस्थापनरतो वीरेशं तं नमाम्यहम् ॥

My salutations to Swami Vivekananda*, who though always established in Supreme Consciousness, is engaged in establishing religion as directed by Sri Ramakrishna.

(*Addressed here as Viresha because he was born from the blessings of Lord Vireshwar Shiva at Kashi)



कालिन्दीफुल्लकमले माधवेन क्रीडारत ।
ब्रह्मानन्द नमस्तुभ्यं सदुरो लोकनायक ॥

O Brahmananda, great preceptor and leader of the worlds, one who delights in playing with Sri Krishna on the lotus blossomed on Yamuna, my salutations to you.



योगानन्दः प्रेमानन्दश्चान्ये वै ये च पार्षदाः ।
रामकृष्णगतप्राणाः सर्वास्तान् प्रणमाम्यहम् ॥

My salutations to Yogananda, Premananda and all the other divine companions, whose life is anchored in Sri Ramakrishna.

— Swami Saradananda



Sri Ramakrishna



Sri Sarada Devi

Monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna



Swami Vivekananda



Swami Brahmananda



Swami Shivananda



Swami Akhandananda



Swami Vijnanananda



Swami Saradananda



Swami Premananda



Swami Ramakrishnananda



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Swami Trigunatitananda



Swami Advaitananda



Swami Subodhananda



Swami Yogananda



Swami Niranjanananda

Presidents of the Ramakrishna Order



Swami Brahmananda
1901-1922



Swami Shivananda
1922-1934



Swami Akhandananda
1934-1937



Swami Vijnanananda
1937-1938



Swami Shuddhananda
1938-1938



Swami Virajananda
1938-1951



Swami Shankarananda
1951-1962



Swami Vishuddhananda
1962-1962



Swami Madhavananda
1962-1965



Swami Vireswarananda
1965-1985



Swami Gambhirananda
1985-1988



Swami Bhuteshananda
1989-1998



Swami Ranganathananda
1998-2005



Swami Gahananda
2005-2007



Swami Atmasthananda
2007-2017



Swami Smarananda
2017-



Illuminating Anecdotes

It is through the Divine Mother that Sri Ramakrishna interacted with the world. Hence, his every act and relationship was an exposition of dharma, the eternal cosmic law of righteousness. It is this that made Mahatma Gandhi state: “The story of Ramakrishna Paramahansa’s life is a story of religion in practice. His life enables us to see God face to face.”

Sri Ramakrishna exhorted his monastic and householder disciples too to lead a God-centred life. To achieve this, one of the practices he repeatedly advocated was *satsanga* or holy company. Satsanga restrains our negative samskars, awakens our good samskars, and slowly develops in us love for higher dimensions of life and for God. The scriptures declare that saints are the greatest purifiers because the Lord is enshrined in their hearts, and getting their company, which is extremely difficult, is a sure sign of God’s grace.

Interaction with saints is like education in a practical laboratory. The attitudes, choices, and conduct of saints, reveal how the subtle ideas of scriptures can be put into practice in daily life. There is an interesting anecdote that reveals how in Sri Ramakrishna’s company, Keshab Chandra Sen, the leader of Brahmo Samaj, learnt the important lesson of humility that makes one bow down to the Lord present in every being. Sri Ramakrishna tells his young disciples:

“Did the young Bengal, that you see, care for devotion and such other things? They did not even know how to salute with their heads bent. I went on saluting them with my head bent and then they gradually learnt how to bow down their heads in salutation. I went to Kesav’s house to see him. I saw him sitting in a chair. I saluted him with my head bent. At that, he just gave a nod in return. At the time of my leaving later on, I saluted him with my head completely touching the ground. He then folded his hands and once touched his head with them. The more the intercourse between us increased, the more he listened to talks and the more I saluted him with my head bent, the more did he begin to bow down his head in salutation.”

As Christopher Isherwood writes in his foreword to *History of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission*, “Spiritual truth is eternal, but it has to be restated and re-demonstrated in a human life in order that it may solve the varying problems of each succeeding epoch.” To carry out such demonstration for centuries to come, Sri Ramakrishna created a band of sannyasis who through the guru-shishya parampara have kept alive his unique teachings and methods of practical spirituality.

This issue presents anecdotes from the lives of some of these second and third generation sannyasis of the Ramakrishna Order. Through their lives, they show how in this modern world we can hold on to God with one hand and perform with the other our worldly duties with excellence and non-attachment.

Over 100 monastics and 50 devotees responded to our call to share anecdotes from their interactions with the past swamis of the Order. Some of these selected anecdotes and some others translated from the Order’s literature in regional languages are presented in this issue. It is suggested that after reading each anecdote one should reflect deeply on all the dimensions of the teaching before further reading.

May the light of realisation that shines forth in these anecdotes, illumine our lives. ✱

The Ramakrishna Movement

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1836 – 1886) recognised and worshipped in his lifetime as an *avatara* or incarnation created a band of monastic disciples with Swami Vivekananda as their leader. The advent of Sri Ramakrishna was to re-establish religion in its universal framework. As the first step in realising this goal, he enabled and empowered his disciples with spiritual illumination and inspired them, through Swami Vivekananda, to work in an organised manner for the spiritual awakening of mankind. The spreading of Sri Ramakrishna's ideas is commonly known as the Ramakrishna Movement.

This Movement began with a big bang when Swami Vivekananda, also simply addressed as 'Swamiji' burst on the world-stage at the Parliament of Religions held at Chicago in 1893. After returning to India, Swamiji, with the support of the sannyasi and householder disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, established the Ramakrishna Mission Association on 1 May 1897. In 1897, the sannyasi disciples of Sri Ramakrishna were able to set up a permanent monastery at Belur in the Howrah district of present West Bengal state. Popularly known as Belur Math, it became the centre of the Ramakrishna Movement with branch centres springing up across India and in foreign countries.

Thus the Movement took a concrete organisational shape as Ramakrishna Math, registered as a Trust in 1901, and Ramakrishna Mission registered as a Society in 1909. The Math is the monastery where young men seeking to realise the Truth join from all faiths, castes and countries. In the Mission, the same sannyasis work with lay devotees to serve men, women, and children without any distinction of caste, religion or race. The spirit behind such service is *Shiva Jnane Jiva Seva*, or serving individuals seeing the living God in them. The Math and the Mission, the twin organisations, are together referred to as the Ramakrishna Order or Ramakrishna Sangha. There are now around 1800 monastic members in the Order.

The Motto: The motto of the Ramakrishna Order was formulated by Swami Vivekananda as आत्मनो मोक्षार्थं जगद्धिताय च, "For one's own salvation and for the welfare of the world."

The Ideals: Work as worship, potential divinity of the soul, and harmony of religions are three main ideals on which the Order stands. This ideal of 'service to man is service to God' sustains the hospitals, dispensaries, mobile medical units, schools, colleges, rural development centres and many other social service institutions run by the Order.

The Emblem: The emblem of the Ramakrishna Order depicts Sri Ramakrishna's message in a visual form — harmony of all the paths of sadhana in realising God. The components of the emblem are "A lake ruffled by the wind; the sun rising, as it were, from its waters; a full-blown lotus rearing its head above two floating leaves; a swan sailing gracefully on the troubled waters; and a serpent with outstretched tongue, upraised hood; and a Mantra in the central part of its body तन्नोहंसः प्रचोदयात् meaning 'May the Self inspire and guide us.' Here sun = Jnana or Knowledge, stormy water = work, lotus = love, serpent = Yoga, and swan = the Self.

Headquarters: Belur Math, on the banks of river Ganga, is the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Order. On the other bank of the river is Kolkata, one of the major cities of India.

Services: The Math and the Mission run around 1200 educational institutions (formal & non-formal), 13 hospitals, 124 Dispensaries, 58 Mobile-Medical Units, 7 Nursing Training Institutes, and a number of Tribal and Rural development centres.

Centres: The Ramakrishna Order has 221 branch centres all over the world of which 167 centres are in India, and rest 54 are spread out in 23 other countries.

About some terminologies in this issue

Thakur: Sri Ramakrishna as addressed by devotees in West Bengal.

Holy Mother: Sri Sarada Devi, the spiritual consort of Sri Ramakrishna who was one with him in spiritual eminence and who also gave mantra-diksha.

Raja Maharaj: Swami Brahmananda, one of the 16 monastic direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. He was first addressed so by Swamiji and then by others because once Sri Ramakrishna had opined that Brahmanandaji had the capacity of a king.

Mahapurush Maharaj: Swami Shivananda, one of the 16 monastic direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. He was first addressed so by Swamiji and then by others because he like his guru had maintained absolute chastity even after marriage.

Mantra: "A mantra is a special kind of linguistic formula which has (as stated by Patanjali in his Yoga Sutras I.29 and II.44) the intrinsic power to remove obstacles on the spiritual path, awaken spiritual consciousness and reveal the Chosen Deity."

Japa: Repeating the mantra of one's chosen deity.

Guru: One who gives the mantra. This process of giving the mantra is called mantra-diksha or initiation.

Mantra-diksha: "This has three main functions. In the first place, the aspirant receives the mantra from the Guru. Secondly, through the initiation the spiritual aspirant learns a particular technique of meditation developed by the Guru. This enables him to stick to a definite spiritual path, and steadfastness in one path is very much necessary to attain success in spiritual life. Lastly, spiritual initiation admits a seeker into a spiritual community. What this implies in the Ramakrishna Movement is that the soul of the seeker gets plugged into the powerful spiritual current generated by Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother and the disciples of the Master." (Swami Bhajananda).

Sannyasa-diksha: A young man joining the Ramakrishna Order receives brahmacharya-diksha or the vows of chastity after 6 years. Then after 3 years he receives sannyasa-diksha, the final vows of renunciation and a new name.

President & Vice President: In a democratic manner, the senior swamis of the Order elect the Trustees of the Order who then are responsible for the all-round functioning of the Order. These Trustees in turn elect a swami as the Vice President or President of the Order. The President and the Vice President are called diksha-gurus because they are authorised to give mantra-diksha. Some senior swamis in foreign countries too are authorised to give mantra-diksha.

Mahasamadhi: The passing away of a yogi.

Pranams: Bowing down at the feet of the elders seeking their blessings.

Prasad: Consecrated food with the power to sanctify the receiver.

Calcutta, Madras, & Bombay: The old names of Kolkata, Chennai, & Mumbai, three major cities of India. The anecdotes in this issue are all from the time when these cities were known by their old names; hence we have retained it.

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- ❖ **Swami Suviranandaji** – is the current General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Order.

- ❖ **A sannyasi**, a sannyasi of the Ramakrishna Order whose reminiscences of Swami Vishuddhananda are published under the penname as Bhikshu Vishuddhaputra.
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- ❖ **Ishadhyanananda, Swami** – is the Assistant Minister of Vedanta Society of Sacramento, USA.
- ❖ **Jagannathananda, Swami** – a sannyasi of the Order who passed away in 2012.

- ❖ **Jitakamananda, Swami** – is the Head of Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission, Mangaluru.
- ❖ **Jnanatmananda, Swami** – a disciple of Swami Brahmananda, served the Order at Udbodhan, Deoghar, Patna, Dhaka, Kankhal, Varanasi Sevashrama and other centres. His reminiscences of ten direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna are published in the book “Invitation to Holy Company”
- ❖ **Kamatmananda, Swami** – is the Head of Ramakrishna Math , Madurai.
- ❖ **Kirthidananda, Swami** – was an editor of The Prabuddha Bharata and served for some years as the head of Ramakrishna Mission, Aalo in its early years.
- ❖ **Krishnatmananda, Swami** – served for some years in Shillong ashrama.
- ❖ **Lokanathananda, Swami** – serves in Belur Math.
- ❖ **Medhasananda, Swami** – is the Head of the Vedanta Society of Japan, Zushi.
- ❖ **Mitrananda, Swami** – was a disciple of Swami Virajananda and passed away in 1992.
- ❖ **Muktidananda, Swami** – is a Trustee of the Order and serves as the Head of Ramakrishna Ashrama, Mysuru.
- ❖ **Mumukshananda, Swami** – was a Trustee of the Order and passed away in 2017.
- ❖ **Nikhileswarananda, Swami** – a popular speaker among the youth and in interfaith forums, serves as the Head of Shri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Rajkot.
- ❖ **Nilamadhavananda, Swami** – is serving in Ramakrishna Mission, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka.
- ❖ **Niramayananda, Swami** – a disciple and personal attendant of Swami Akhandananda, served as an editor of Udbodhan, the Bengali monthly of the Ramakrishna Order and was Head of Udbodhan, Bombay Ashrama. He passed away in 1984.
- ❖ **Nirantarananda, Swami** – was a sevak of Swami Gambhiranandaji, and is now the Secretary of Ramakrishna Mission, Jammu.
- ❖ **Nirjarananda, Swami** – a disciple of Swami Brahmananda, served at the Institute of Culture (Kolkata), Advaita Ashrama, Cherrapunji, Jayrambati, Baranagore, Kamarpukur, Dhaka (Bangladesh) and other centres and passed away in 2002.
- ❖ **Nityasthananda, Swami** – is the Secretary of Ramakrishna Mission, Davanagere.
- ❖ **Pravrajika Brahmoprana** is a sannyasini of the Ramakrishna Order and is serving as the resident minister at the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of North Texas, USA.
- ❖ **Pravrajika Dayaprana**, is a sannyasini of the Ramakrishna Order and serves at Sarada Convent of Vedanta Society of Southern California, USA.
- ❖ **Pravrajika Shuddhaprana**, a disciple of Swami Virajananda, the 6th President of the Ramakrishna Order, was a Vice President of Sri Sarada Math and Ramakrishna Sarada Mission. She attained mahasamadhi in 2016.
- ❖ **Pravrajika Vrajaprana** is a sannyasini of the Ramakrishna Order and serves at Santa Barbara Convent of the Vedanta Society of Southern California, USA; she has authored a number of books.
- ❖ **Puratanananda, Swami** – serves in Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur, Kolkata.
- ❖ **Purnananda, Swami** – serves in Belur Math.
- ❖ **Purushottamananda, Swami** – a prolific writer & orator in Kannada, and gifted singer, was the founding-Secretary of Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Belagavi.
- ❖ **Raghaveshananda, Swami** – author of a number of popular children pictorial books, is the Head of Ramakrishna Math, Ootacamund.
- ❖ **Ritananda, Swami** – serves in Ramakrishna Math, Rishikesh.
- ❖ **Rudratmananda, Swami** – a disciple of Swami Vishuddhananda, served among other centres as the Secretary of Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Kanpur and passed away in 2013.
- ❖ **Sastrananda, Swami** – was a former Secretary of Ramakrishna Mission, Chandigarh.
- ❖ **Satyaprabhananda, Swami** – was a sevak of Swami Ranganathanandaji, and now serves in Ramakrishna Mission ashrama, T. Nagar, Chennai.
- ❖ **Satyapriyananda, Swami** – lives in Belur Math and regularly contributes thought-provoking articles to the magazines of the Order.

- ❖ **Satyarupananda, Swami** – is the Head of Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Ashrama, Raipur.
- ❖ **Satyeshananda, Swami** – is one of the current Assistant General Secretaries of the Order.
- ❖ **Shantatmananda, Swami** – is the Head of the Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi and is instrumental for the nation-wide value education training— “The Awakened Citizenship Program.”
- ❖ **Shashankananda, Swami** – is the Head of Ramakrishna Math, Purnea.
- ❖ **Shivapradananda, Swami** – is the Secretary of Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Purulia.
- ❖ **Shivavratnanda, Swami** – was an attendant of Swami Shankarananda, the 7th President of the Ramakrishna Order.
- ❖ **Shrikantananda, Swami** – is the Head of Ramakrishna Math, Pune.
- ❖ **Shuklatmananda, Swami** – rendered personal services to Swami Saradeshananda for ten years from 1978 to 1988 in Vrindavan and is now serving at Kankhal Ashrama.
- ❖ **Somatmananda, Swami** – is the Secretary of Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Asansol.
- ❖ **Sridharananda, Swami** – is the minister-in-charge of the Vedanta Centre of Sydney.
- ❖ **Sumangalananda, Swami** – serves in Belur Math.
- ❖ **Sunisthananda, Swami** – serves in the Melbourne Chapter of the Vedanta Centre of Sydney, Australia.
- ❖ **Suvijneyananda, Swami** – serves in Ramakrishna Math, Nagpur.
- ❖ **Swahananda, Swami** – a disciple of Swami Vijnanananda, served in many centres, was editor of The Vedanta Kesari and the minister of Vedanta Society of Southern California from 1976 to 2012.
- ❖ **Tanmayananda, Swami** – translated ‘The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna’ & ‘Sri Ramakrishna, The Great Master’ into Tamil, and now lives in our ashrama at Kankhal.
- ❖ **Tapanananda, Swami** – was a disciple of Swami Virajananda and passed away in 2012.
- ❖ **Tathagathananda, Swami** – a disciple of Swami Virajananda, was the Minister of the Vedanta Society of New York from 1977 to 2016 and authored a number of scholarly books.
- ❖ **Tattwasarananda, Swami** – is the Principal of the Probationers’ Training Centre at Belur Math.
- ❖ **Tejashananda, Swami** – a disciple of Swami Brahmananda, served as editor of The Vedanta Kesari and Prabuddha Bharata, the two leading English monthlies of the Ramakrishna Order and was the 1st Principal of Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, Belur Math, Howrah.
- ❖ **Varananda, Swami** – was a disciple and sevak of Swami Vireswarananda, and developed Antpur ashrama, the birth place of Swami Premananda. He passed away in 2019.
- ❖ **Veerabhadrananda, Swami** – is the Head of Ramakrishna Math, Haripad.
- ❖ **Vidyatmananda, Swami** – an acclaimed painter, the swami served in Hollywood and Gretz Ashramas.
- ❖ **Vimokshananda, Swami** – is the present and 1st Minister-in-Charge of the Ramakrishna Centre, Dublin, Ireland (Éire Vedanta Society).
- ❖ **Vimurtananda, Swami** – a former editor of Sri Ramakrishna Vijayam, the Order’s Tamil magazine is in-charge of Ramakrishna Math, Thanjavur, a sub-centre of Chennai Math.
- ❖ **Viswashrayananda, Swami** – served as the editor of *Udbodhan* for some years.
- ❖ **Yogeshananda, Swami** – serves at the Trabuco Monastery of the Vedanta Society of Southern California, Hollywood and has authored many books.
- ❖ **Yogeshwarananda, Swami** – serves in Ramakrishna Mission T. B. Sanatorium, Ranchi.

DEVOTEES

- ❖ **Ajoy Kr. Dutta**, a Padma Shri awardee social worker, is a long-standing devotee of Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Guwahati.
- ❖ **Amrita M. Salm**, Ph.D. associated since 1972 with the Vedanta Movement, especially the Vedanta Society of Southern California. She has authored *Mother of Mayavati: The Story of Charlotte Sevier* and *Advaita Ashrama* and *The Inspired Life of Sarah Ellen Waldo*. She was also the chief editor of the English translation of Sri Sri Ramakrishna Punthi, known as *A Portrait of Sri Ramakrishna*.

- ❖ **Basanti Mukhopadhyay**, a devotee from Kolkata and a retired professor of Bengali, Women's College, Baghbazar, Kolkata
- ❖ **Carolyn T. Amory**, Bob Doolittle, and Surendar M. Jain were associated with Ramakrishna Vedanta Society, Boston, USA and contributed their reminiscences about Swami Sarvagatananda in the book 'The Lamplighter: Swami Sarvagatananda in the West.'
- ❖ **Dharmadas** (Jon Monday) is a long-standing devotee of the Vedanta Society of Southern California, Hollywood, an American producer and distributor of CDs and DVDs and has produced a number of documentaries on the Vedanta Movement in the West.
- ❖ **Gurudas Chattopadhyay**, a devotee from New Delhi.
- ❖ **Keerthi Kumar**, retired Principal of Ramakrishna Mission Vidyashala, Mysuru.
- ❖ **Laxminaraian Induria**, a devotee of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda from Bhopal, worked in his youth days with Swami Atmanandaji of Raipur Asharma.
- ❖ **Nityaniranjan Kundu**, Prof. retired as Head of the Dept of History at Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, Belur Math, and is the Vice-President of its Alumni Association.
- ❖ **Piyush Kanti Roy, Dr.** served as a Gynecologist in Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan, Kolkata.
- ❖ **Prashanta Giri, Dr.** was Head of the Department of Statistics, R. K. Mission Residential College, Narendrapur.
- ❖ **Raghu Raman, Dr.** Senior Principal Consultant & Director of Arriscar Pty. Ltd., Sydney, has long been associated with Ramakrishna Movement and with Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai since his youth.
- ❖ **Ramakrishnan, C.S.** was a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai and served as the editor of The Vedanta Kesari from 1979 to 1986.
- ❖ **Ramesh Shenoy a student of Boys' Home** at Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission, Mangaluru in 1960s, retired as a senior executive from the Reliance Group and lives in Mumbai.
- ❖ **Ramesh Umrani** is a consultant trainer and the Director, Vivekananda Institute for Youth Awakening, Yelahanka-Bengaluru.
- ❖ **Santwana Dasgupta**, was an acclaimed researcher and a former professor of Economics of Bethune College, Kolkata. She has authored the book "Social Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda."
- ❖ **Sudarsanam Sukumaran Master** from Puranattukara, Kerala was closely associated with Swami Ishwarananda.

RESOURCES FOR SOME ANECDOTES

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- ❖ **Swami Kailasananda Jivan o Smriti.** Ed. Swami Ritananda, Published by Yogeshchandra Majumdar, Kolkata, 2012
- ❖ **Swami Gambhirananda Ek Mahajivaner Katha.** Advisors: Swami Prabhananda & Swami Chetanananda. Compiled by Smt. Sujata Sinha, Published by Swami Gambhirananda Centenary Committee
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- ❖ **Swami Nirvedananda Jivani o Rachanadi-Sangraha.** Swami Amalananda. Kolkata: Ramakrishna Mission Calcutta Students' Home, Belgharia, 1991
- ❖ **Swami Vireswarananda A Divine Life.** Ed. Swami Satyamayananda. Published by Sri Shantanu Chowdhury, Swami Vireswarananda Smriti Committee, Kolkata, 2015
- ❖ **Swami Yatiswarananda As We Knew Him.** Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 2014
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- ❖ **Swami Tyagishananda.** Swami Kirthidananda. Published by Swami Vivekananda Educational Society, Bengaluru, 1994
- ❖ **Glimpses of Holiness.** Swami Sastrananda. (Private Circulation)
- ❖ **The Lamplighter Swami Sarvagatananda in the West.** Wendell Benway, Fred Huyghue, Cyrus Mehta, Elva Nelson, Archibald Stark, Eleanor Stark—40th Anniversary Committee, Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of Boston, 1995
- ❖ **Swami Lokeshwarananda Satabarsher Alope.** Published by Swami Lokeshwarananda Janmashatabarsha Udjapan Committee, Nanritam, Kolkata 2009.
- ❖ **The Platinum Jubilee Souvenir.** Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan, Kolkata, 2007
- ❖ **Serving God in Man— Centenary Commemorative Souvenir.** Swami Suprakashananda. Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Vrindaban, 2007
- ❖ **Ramakrishna Mission Calcutta Students' Home, Belgharia, Souvenirs: 1976, 1994**
- ❖ **Dub Dao.** Bhikshu Vishuddhaputra. Published by Ramakrishna Mission Saradapith, 2014
- ❖ **Gems of Memories: Reminiscences of Swami Saradeshananda.** Swami Shuklatmananda, *Prabuddha Bharata*, May-December 2017

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Br. Biswajit, who assists the Editor in *The Vedanta Kesari* Office, coordinated the anecdotes collection and translation, and also in preparing the issue. Our staff, Sri Sekar D., designed the issue. Our special thanks to both of them.

Swami Shankarananda

Amrital was the nephew of Swami Sadananda, a disciple of Swami Vivekananda. This gave him the opportunity to meet Swamiji and most of the other direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. Thus inspired, he joined the Ramakrishna Order in 1902. He travelled extensively with Sadanandaji and Sister Nivedita. He received his sannyasa-diksha from Swami Brahmanandaji in 1906 and from 1909 served as his secretary for 11 years.

He was known for his adventurous spirit and leadership qualities. It was his relentless effort that saw the completion of the Math building at Bhubaneswar Ashrama in 1919. He also supervised the construction of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi's temple, Swami Vivekananda's temple, and Swami Brahmananda's temple in Belur Math. In 1947 he was chosen as the Vice President, and in 1951 the 7th President of the Order. He attained mahasamadhi on 13 Feb 1962.



Offering pranams to Sri Ramakrishna

Swami Shankaranandaji once told Swami Veetaraganandaji (Shyamapada Maharaj), "Do you know how to offer your pranams to Sri Sri Thakur when you visit the temple? Never rush to offer your pranams. Stand calm and look at Sri Sri Thakur for a while. Imagine and try to feel the living presence of Sri Sri Thakur and that he is looking at you. When your mind is focused, imagine that you are holding Thakur's feet and offering your pranams."

— Swami Medhasananda

Offering pranams to sadhus

From 1950 onwards I would visit Udbodhan, or Mother's house, and was thus acquainted with the resident swamis. Swami Advayananda told me the following incident.

Swami Shankaranandaji had come to Udbodhan to offer pranams to Holy Mother on the auspicious occasion of Vijaya. After seeing the Mother, he went to Swami Atmabodhananda's

room. All the other swamis came there to offer their pranams to Shankaranandaji. As he was just about to leave, Swami Shraddhananda (then editor of the journal *Udbodhan*) came hurriedly and made pranam by touching Shankaranandaji's feet. Annoyed, Maharaj said, "One should not pay respect like this. Offering obeisance and receiving it are not trivial matters. One who is bowing down should have an attitude of self-surrender. When someone bows down to me, I pray to Thakur for his welfare."

— Swami Chetanananda

Shraddha in every work

I was then at the Entally Sarada Mission Ashram which had recently been established with a school for the elderly women. One day, I and another sannyasini went to Belur Math and we decided to return after partaking of the noon *prasad* at the Math. As usual, after offering pranams to Sri Ramakrishna, we went to offer our pranams to Swami Shankarananda Maharaj who was the President of the Order. When we entered Maharaj's room he asked us, "Don't you have the school today?" I answered, "Yes, Maharaj, it is there. However, the school starts at half past twelve. We'll quickly take *prasad* and reach the school. We may be just a little delayed." Maharaj became grave and said, "Today, you go back, no need to take *prasad*. Go and start your school-work at the appointed time. Come and have *prasad* on a holiday." We returned immediately without uttering a single word. We learnt a good lesson and understood that every work is equally important and has to be done with proper attention. As our school was small, we thought a little delay would not hamper the work; but revered Maharaj made us understand the importance of this very work.

— Pravrajika Shuddhaprana

Importance of routine

Swami Shankarananda Maharaj took a keen interest in our spiritual growth. All of a sudden, one day he asked me, "Do you attend the vesper service daily?" I replied, "I used to attend. For the last few days, I am unable to do so." Maharaj then said, "See! It is not good to break the rules. It won't matter if you come to me a little late. If you break one rule, gradually you will flout all the rules one by one."

Even when his health was broken, Maharaj never deviated from his daily routine. One day I entered his room at dawn, and found Nani Maharaj holding him in a sitting position on his bed. Later I inquired Nani Maharaj, "Why were you holding Maharaj like that?" He replied, "Maharaj told me that his body was not in his control and was staggering. And he didn't want to miss his practices. So, he asked me to hold him." That hour was Maharaj's regular time for his *sadhana*.

— Swami Shivavratanaanda

Mindfulness

Once, as soon as I entered his room, Swami Shankarananda Maharaj said, "Tell me how many palm trees are there in the Math?" My immediate reply was "None"! "Come towards my head-side, and look out from the window towards the Industrial School. What do you see?" I saw a palm tree, which I had not noticed till then. He told me, "Wherever you stay, always carefully watch your surrounding areas."

— Swami Shivavratanaanda

Culture through Sanskrit

It was a Sunday and the date was 20 April 1958. I went to offer my pranams to Swami Shankarananda Maharaj after the Sandhya arati. Maharaj was seated on his bed. When I stood up after bowing down, he asked, "Have all the examinations in your University got over?"

I replied, "Intermediate Examination is over. But, Annual Examination of the college will start from tomorrow. Also, University Examination is going on for B.A. students in some other centres."

Maharaj then said, "See, how the students created anarchy in some of the Examination Centres in Calcutta during the School Final Examination! They broke and damaged everything, even boycotted the examination. This kind of unruly and rebellious attitude of the student community is harmful for the society as well as for the nation. They are the ones who are going to build the society in the near future. But, the kind of unruly behaviour that has crept into the educational system, is leading our country into darkness. These days, it is happening everywhere. I saw in the newspaper that in America as well the youth community has started displaying similar unruly attitude.

"In our times, we were taught Chanakya slokas, and Hitopadesha. In those books, there used to be many educative slokas and moral stories. Reading them at a tender age helped us to learn many things and the education in values created a permanent impression on our mind. But, you see, now-a-days, such books on moral education are no more a part of the school curriculum. Due to lack of respect for Sanskrit scriptures, there is a growing tendency of such unethical attitude in the student community."

— Swami Tejasananda

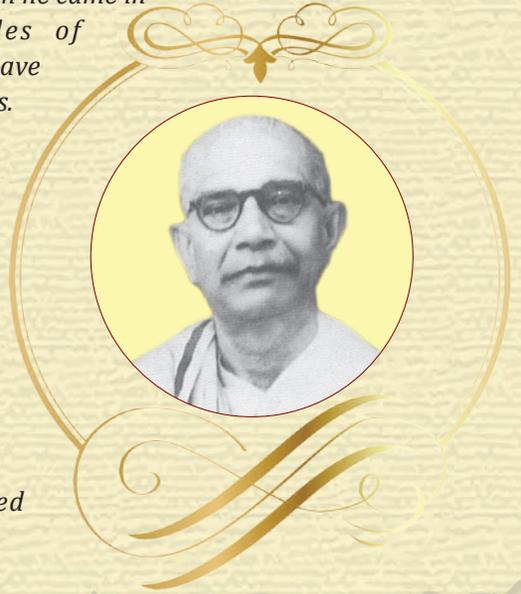
Swami Vivekananda Temple, Belur Math



Swami Vishuddhananda

In a library, Jitendramohan picked up Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings by Max Müller. This book gave him the link through which he came in contact with the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi gave him mantra-diksha in 1906 and also his ochre robes. In 1908 while sending him to Madras Math, Swami Brahmanandaji wrote to Ramakrishnanandaji "Sending a sadhu who is always immersed in the thought of God." Later, at Varanasi in 1921, he received sannyasa-diksha from Swami Brahmanandaji.

He served in many centres of the Order, and was the head of Ranchi Morabadi Ashrama for 25 long years. In 1947 he was chosen as one of the Vice Presidents, and in March 1962 he became the 8th President of the Order. He attained mahasamadhi on 16 June 1962.



Sacred Chitrakut

There is a belief among the sadhus and devotees that if a spiritual seeker goes to Chitrakut Hill, a spot associated with the life history of Sri Rama, and prays earnestly for a vision of his/her Chosen Deity, that desire is fulfilled, provided the seeker has chittashuddhi or purity of mind. Swami Vishuddhananda Maharaj was blessed with such a vision of God. I have been profoundly impressed by this incident, and greatly enthused to go to Chitrakut and take my chance for the vision of God having sufficient purification of mind.

— Swami Shivamayananda

How to treat a thief?

Subodh Babu looked after the grocery and vegetable shopping for Belur Math. Almost every night he would come to offer his pranams to Swami Vishuddhanandaji. Maharaj too was very affectionate to him. On one such visit on 22 June 1954, Maharaj asked him, "Subodh, have you ever been cheated while shopping?" Subodh Babu replied, "Maharaj, today itself I was cheated."

He then narrated how the man delivering a food item had stolen some of it and the gate-keeper had found him out. When Maharaj wanted to know how he had handled the matter, Subodh Babu replied, that he had nicely scolded the man before dismissing him.

On hearing this, Maharaj said, "It would have been a noble thing on your part, if you had given that man 6 annas (small change) to buy that food item for himself."

— A sannyasi

On visiting a sannyasi

3 December 1954. Swami Shantanandaji had come to Belur Math after a long period. When I told Swami Vishuddhanandaji that I had gone to offer my pranams to Shantanandaji, Maharaj asked, "Did you ask him any question?" I replied, "No, I didn't, as he was going to take bath." Hearing this Maharaj mildly scolded me saying, "When you visit a sannyasi, you must seek his advice, you must enquire, 'Maharaj, how to gain devotion?'. Should I teach even these things? And, even if you have attained devotion you must ask how to get more devotion. Nah! As if you are already full of devotion and there is no need to ask for more!"

— A sannyasi

Importance of tough experience

27 December 1954. I went to Swami Vishuddhanandaji at night. I felt blessed to have the opportunity to massage his feet. Probably, his leg was aching a lot. And so, after a while he himself instructed how to massage. He felt great relief after the massage. Then while talking with him, I mentioned that revered Upen Maharaj was very loving and never scolded me. To this Vishuddhananda Maharaj said, "Now you do not understand that you are harmed by such treatment. Later, when you will go to another place, who will treat you so lovingly? Only receiving care and affection will not do any good. It won't make you strong. If you can accept the scoldings and insults as you do the love and care, then you will understand that you are on the right track. सुखदुःखे समे कृत्वा लाभालाभौ जयाजयौ "Treating pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat with equanimity." We have received so many harsh scoldings from the children of Sri Ramakrishna!"

— A sannyasi

Work and worship

When I sought to accompany Swami Vishuddhanandaji as his attendant, he recalled an incident from his own life. Swami Brahmanandaji had sent him to South India to be with Swami Ramakrishnanandaji. But, Vishuddhanandaji had the desire to stay with Brahmanandaji and serve him. One day, when he conveyed his desire through Krishnalal Maharaj, Brahmanandaji immediately told Vishuddhanandaji, "See, as a brother, as a friend, I tell you, work and worship should go hand in hand." Narrating this Vishuddhanandaji declared, "These words are still ringing in my ears."

— A sannyasi

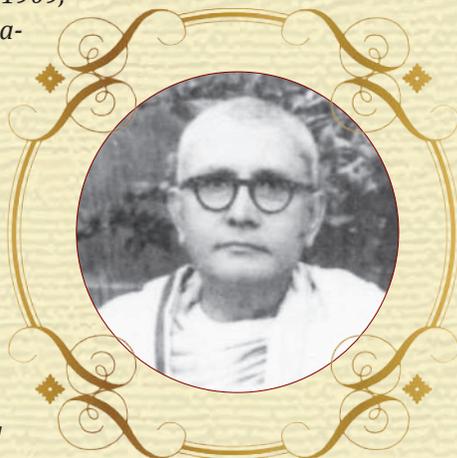
Swami Madhavananda

“He is like ivory encased in gold”, is how Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi described young Nirmal. After completing his bachelor’s degree in English from Presidency College, Calcutta, Nirmal Chandra

Basu received mantra-diksha from Holy Mother in 1909, and joined the Order in 1910. He received sannyasa-diksha from Swami Brahmanandaji in 1916.

He served for some years at the Vedanta Society in San Francisco, USA, and then served as the General Secretary of the Order for nearly two decades from 1938. In March 1962 he was chosen as the Vice President and in the same year on 4 August he became the 9th President of the Order. He attained mahasamadhi on 6 Oct 1965.

Madhavanandaji was a noted scholar and authored and edited a number of books and translated Vedantic scriptural texts into English. Holy Mother once told him, “Sri Ramakrishna is all. Work of the Order is true service to Him.” Madhavanandaji lived by these words.



Ramakrishna bhava Ganga

It was 1935.

Grand preparations were going on for Sri Ramakrishna’s Centenary Celebration. One day I went to visit the ‘Holy Mother’s house’, the Udbodhan, in Calcutta. Swami Arupananda (Rashbehari Maharaj) who had been an attendant of the Holy Mother, had come from Varanasi, and I was to take him to the Eye doctor in the afternoon. That same afternoon Swami Madhavanandaji (Nirmal Maharaj), then Assistant Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, came from Belur Math to the Udbodhan with a file of legal documents. He went upstairs and after saluting the Mother in the shrine, came quickly down again. Then we three started along Baghbazar street. Both the swamis were disciples of the Holy Mother; and their conversation began thus:

Swami Arupananda: Brother Nirmal, where are you going this afternoon with these files?

Swami Madhavananda: Rashbehari-da,* I am going to the house of an attorney. I will have to consult him because we are going to acquire some land on the western side of the Belur Math.

Rashbehari Maharaj became silent and then gravely said: Brother, do you remember when we came, what we saw? And those who are coming now, what do they see?

S. M: Everything is in man's destiny.

S. A: (in an indrawn way): When we came we observed a tremendous current of *japa*, meditation, and other spiritual disciplines flowing in our Order. Do you remember?

S. M: Of course I do. By the impetus of that spiritual current we are moving even now.

S. A: Now the present generation is seeing tables, chairs, typewriters, accounts, and files. Can you tell me what force will guide them?

S. M: Then let me tell you, Rashbehari-da, that he who has brought them will guide them. We never say, follow us! We tried to learn from the lives of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, and they instructed us to work for Thakur (Sri Ramakrishna) and Swamiji (Vivekananda); and thus we jumped into their work. I know very well Thakur and Swamiji are at our back—they are seeing everything—and they will see till the end.

S. A: What will happen to this present generation who did not witness the holy lives of the direct disciples and did not get any instruction from them? What will be the fate of this present generation who are only working and working?

S. M: Rashbehari-da, did we ask this present generation to join the monastery? They have come after reading the literature of Thakur and Swamiji, and hearing about them. They have come because of their attraction, and they love their ideal. So they want to dedicate their lives to that noble cause. What a greatness they have! They will not have to learn from seeing our lives; their passionate love for their ideal will guide them.

Both were silent. I listened to the sound of their footsteps. After a while Swami Madhavanandaji again broke the silence:

S. M: Rashbehari-da, the water of the Ganga at Gangotri (source of the Ganga), Hrishikesh and Hardwar is crystal clear, but that at Dakshineswar and Belur is muddy and dirty, and moreover so many things are floating on it. It does not mean that the mother Ganga has lost her purifying power!

We reached Shyambazar.** A bus was about to leave. Swami Madhavanandaji quickly jumped on the footboard of the bus and, holding the hand-rail, said: Good bye, Rashbehari-da.

We moved towards our Doctor's clinic. Rashbehari Maharaj, after a long silence, said: Did you notice—what a genius! The Ganga at Belur may not be crystal clear as at Hardwar and Hrishikesh, but she does not lose an iota of her purifying power.

* *The Bengali suffix 'da' means 'elder brother'.* ** *A busy section of Northern Kolkata, about a kilometer from Udbodhan.*

— Swami Niramayananda

Work is worship

In 1957 Swami Madhavanandaji, then the General Secretary of the Order, came to Delhi centre for the opening of the new Temple. I was then a brahmachari in that ashrama. Swami Ranganathanandaji was the head of the centre. After the Temple Opening, Swami Jitananda (Dinabandhu) who had received sannyasa the previous year, approached Madhavanandaji and

complained, “I am looking after the construction activities in the ashrama for the last nine years without any respite. Now again there is a proposal of my being sent to Vrindavan centre for similar work. Every morning during the last nine years I could do just the minimum japa and the whole day I was involved in construction work. In this manner I have wasted nine years of my life. Therefore, please give me two years of leave so that I can go for tapasya.” Swami Madhavanandaji said immediately, “Granted your request. But then your thinking that you have wasted nine years of monastic life is not correct. You have worked for the Sangha. Therefore, you have served Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji. So the years of your hard work are not lost but have been your worship of Sri Ramakrishna.” The complaining swami understood that work in our Sangha is worship of Sri Ramakrishna.

— Swami Gautamananda

He, not we

Swami Madhavanandaji was in Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, New York for his medical treatment. Swami Nikhilananda was in charge of that centre. During Madhavanandaji’s stay, the local devotees brought many varieties of food item for Maharaj and the other swamis. While eating, Nikhilananda commented one day, “See Maharaj, because of your august visit here we are also getting all these special eatables.” With a smile Madhavanandaji replied, “Look, I am reminded of a story from the Bible. Jesus was being taken into the city of Jerusalem riding on a donkey’s back as per custom. Many people garlanded Jesus and he in turn put those garlands around the donkey’s neck. The donkey felt very happy at the great attention it was receiving and thought they were showing so much respect to him. It therefore slowed down its walking to receive more of their attention. But what did it receive? It received a few beatings from the rider to go forward and quicker.” Narrating this Madhavanandaji said, “Even so, the special food we are receiving are all for Sri Ramakrishna and his glory, not for you and me. We need not be vain in thinking otherwise.”

— Swami Gautamananda

We are merely trustees

I was then at Patna ashrama. A neighbour constructed his house very close to the ashrama boundary violating the local corporation rule without paying any heed to ashrama’s request and even kept a window facing the ashrama guest house. He started a private hostel for youth and working people, which caused much inconvenience for the lady devotees while passing through that way. But he came to his senses when he was told that a boundary wall would be raised just on the boundary line, which would make the house devoid of light. He pleaded with the ashrama authorities to leave at least 2-feet distance from the boundary line and the ashrama’s Management Committee acceded to his requirement. And thus the boundary wall was raised. On an occasion Swami Madhavanandaji visited the ashrama and noticing the wall he asked me, “Whose land have you given away in this way? Who has authorised you to give away that piece of ashrama’s land?” I kept quiet. When the members of the Managing Committee of the ashrama came to meet him, Maharaj put to them the same question. One of the members, who was previously a high-ranking government official argued saying, “You are sadhus. Why are you speaking in this manner for this small piece of land?” Then, in a stern voice Maharaj replied, “We are not the kind of sadhus you think. People have trusted us and given us the land for a specific

purpose. We have no right to deviate even an inch. We are merely trustees. We will become traitors if we don't use a thing for the purpose for which we have accepted it."

— Swami Jnanatmananda

The mantra is enough

Immediately after Swami Madhavanandaji initiated me, I sat in a hall to meditate; after initiation we had to meditate in the hall till the others were initiated. While meditating so, my experience was very unique. Next day when I told this to Maharaj, he immediately said, "Too much of emotionalism is not good; there should be a balance of rationality and emotionalism." And then after a pause, waving his hand very forcibly, three times he uttered, "Don't be emotional! Don't be emotional! Don't be emotional!" And then there was silence for the moment. Again very lovingly he said, "Have faith in the mantra and God. All will be done by this mantra itself. Meditation is difficult but with japam, meditation will automatically take place. You will see God but not with these eyes. For that you will get another eyes, the eyes of knowledge."

— Swami Shashankananda

Unfailing Mother

Once in a conversation with Swami Madhavananda Maharaj, who was then General secretary of the Order, a swami asked, "Maharaj, we sometimes take some actions which we are not supposed to do and it is not possible to disclose these things to anyone. If you come to know about those actions, you will not forgive me. But I continue to feel very sad and guilty. What are we supposed to do in such situations?"

Madhavanandaji said, "Go to Holy Mother's Temple, disclose everything to her, and apologize to her saying, Mother, I shall never repeat these things. Please forgive me."

The swami asked, "If I tell this to Mother, will she forgive me?"

Madhavanandaji then said emphatically, "Why has she become a Mother if she can't forgive Her children? Else she could have been an aunt!"

— Swami Medhasananda

Dichotomies synthesised

On the eve of the birth centenary celebration of Holy Mother, I was looking after the publication department of Advaita Ashrama. At that time, work was underway to publish the book *Great Women of India*. Madhavanandaji Maharaj put in extraordinary efforts in editing the book. To seek his editorial directions, I had to occasionally go to Belur Math. One day it was past evening when I reached Belur Math. Approaching his room, I found the door closed. He was preparing to sit for his evening meditation. But he sensed that someone was waiting outside and enquired accordingly. When I responded with my name he switched on the light and asked me to come into his room. The moment I stepped in, Maharaj said, "Whenever you need to meet me, come straight in. To me, Thakur's work and meditation are identical." No sooner did I hear this my mind was lit up with the meaning of that great mantra of Swamiji 'Work is Worship'. This mantra assumed a form, as it were, in the life of Swami Madhavanandaji. In course of his discourses and advice to the sannyasis, he would often say with emphasis, "Should we forget Swamiji's message: Work is Worship?" While saying this, Madhavanandaji would put a great stress

on the word 'is'. Indeed, his great conviction and realisation would shine through in the pronunciation of 'is'.

— Swami Nirjarananda

Personify rather than publish

Once various places of our country were inundated in a devastating flood. Several voluntary organisations of the country plunged into the relief work. The Ramakrishna Mission too was doing the relief work in the flooded areas. While the newspapers daily published the detailed relief activities of other organisations, the coverage of the relief activities of Ramakrishna Mission was indeed meagre. One day some swamis told Swami Madhavananda Maharaj who was then the General Secretary of the Order, in a somewhat complaining tone, "Maharaj, we are not doing any less relief work than other organisations. But our relief work is not receiving publicity in the newspapers." After listening to them, Maharaj said, "Well, do one thing. Please collect the detailed information of the daily activities of the sannyasis of our Order – even such information as how long they are meditating etc. Everything will be published." Those who came to complain felt very ashamed and left silently. Loath to self-advertisement, he was likewise not supportive of wide publicity of the activities of the Order.

"Calm and silent and steady work, and no newspaper humbug, no name-making, you must always remember." Is not the above incident a reflection of these words of Swamiji?

— Swami Krishnatmananda

Destiny of divine deeds

Once one swami asked Swami Madhavanandaji, "If while doing 'relief work' one passes away even before one has realised God – what would happen to such a soul?" In reply Madhavanandaji immediately said in a voice ringing with conviction, "It is my firm belief that Sri Ramakrishna will hold the hand of such a person and take him with him."

— Swami Nirjarananda

A lesson in Titiksha

Sometime in January 1962, after his brain tumour operation, Swami Madhavananda Maharaj was just back from America. Arrangements for his stay were made in the ground floor of the same building where he was to later stay as the President. One morning, after finishing his japam when he was offering pranam to Ganga, as was his wont, he fell from the bed. The new monastic attendant was of a little diffident nature. He heard a sound and saw that Maharaj was not on the bed. Meanwhile as I came out of Swamiji's temple after offering pranam, the attendant told me what had happened. Going inside I saw Maharaj was wedged in a small space on the ground between the window and the bed, and he was doing japam. I asked, "What happened Maharaj?" Pat came the reply, "I fell down, and I cannot get up." I exclaimed, "Your attendant would have come if you had but called him." Maharaj replied, "He would anyway come after sometime – I'm now doing japam." Sadhus rushed in after hearing the news. When he was helped to get up, it was found that his collar bone had fractured. With such intense pain, he was doing japam!

— Swami Mitrananda

Swami Vireswarananda

In Feb 1897 Panduranga Prabhu was a 4-5 years old boy, when sitting on his father's lap he saw Swami Vivekananda at Castle Kernan (now Vivekananda house) in Madras and also received a lozenge from him. He later did his graduation from Presidency College, Madras and then joined the Order at Madras Math in 1916. He received mantra-diksha from Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and sannyasa-diksha from Swami Brahmanandaji in 1920.

He was General Secretary of the Order for 7 years and then served for 19 long years as the 10th President of the Order from February 1966. He attained mahasamadhi on 13 March 1985 at the age of 93.

Vireswaranandaji streamlined the functioning of the branch centres of the Order, gave shape to rural development projects, initiated youth conferences, and translated important scriptures into English.



Not a V.I.P

I remember an incident that happened in 1957 in Bombay. I was then a brahmachari at the Bombay Ashrama. Swami Vireswarananda Maharaj had come there for a month's stay. Mr. Chou En-lai, the then Prime Minister of the Peoples' Republic of China came to Bombay. Maharaj desired to go and see the public reception being given to him at Malabar Hill. He wanted to take me with him as a guide. The Head Swami of the Bombay Ashrama said that he could easily secure a special invitation for him to sit in the V.I.P. enclosure. But Maharaj would have nothing of it; he wanted to just look at the whole affair being one among the crowd. So we went to Malabar Hill, along with another aged swami. There were scores of young men in the crowd. Revered Maharaj, the aged swami and I were standing amidst the crowd at a higher point and watching the procession. Some young men were even resting their hands on Maharaj's shoulders to gain a better view of the procession. In spite of that, Maharaj preferred to be among the commoners than being among the elite.

— Swami Smaranananda

Mother's love

Swami Vireswarananda Maharaj was then the General Secretary of the Math and the Mission. I was just a brahmachari initiated into the vows of brahmacharya. One summer afternoon

I came from Narendrapur centre, travelling on a bus, to meet Maharaj. I had with me a letter sent by the Secretary of Narendrapur. I was drenched in sweat. Maharaj was working at a table adjoining the western wall of his room on the first floor. As soon as I offered pranams and handed him the envelope, he took a look at me and with great concern said: "Sit, sit. Sit on that chair." I sat in the chair with some hesitation. He asked, "When did you start?" I answered him.

He left his work and stood up. There was a small almirah adjoining the eastern side of the room. From an earthen pot he took some water in a tumbler and added a few spoons of sugar in it. Then squatting on the floor, he started preparing sharbat (a sweet beverage) using the tumbler and a mediumsized glass. In the meantime, he called an office boy, gave him some money from the drawer and told him to buy some ice from Belur Bazar. I thought that to beat the scorching heat, Maharaj wanted to drink some cold sharbat. I took this as an opportunity to render him a little service. So I went forward to make the sharbat. But he didn't allow me. Seeing my restlessness to serve, he ordered: "Sit quietly." What to do! I sat quietly. He prepared the sharbat and kept it in the almirah. Then he talked with me on this and that for a while, and then gave his attention to his desk work. As soon as the office boy returned, he asked him to wash the ice in the tap water downstairs. Then Maharaj placed the ice in the glass and poured some sharbat on it from the tumbler. I thought that he would now drink it. But Lo! He came forward, held the glass in front of me and said: "Take it." I was startled. He was the General Secretary! The highest administrator! And I was but a young novice of yesterday!

— Swami Prabhananda

Self-effacement

One day Swami Vireswarananda Maharaj entered Janasiksha Mandira [a unit of Saradapitha, a branch centre just adjacent to Belur Math] through the rear gate and asked me: "I am told that you show 16mm films using a projector. Is it so?" I replied, "Yes, Maharaj." He then questioned, "Do you know how to remove footage from a film and splice it again?" When I said yes, he took out a film reel and said, "Well, you shall have to do a job for me."

Let me mention in this connection that Sri Sarada Math [a monastery for sannyasinis] was established at Dakshineswar on 2 December 1954. Swami Shankarananda Maharaj, the then President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission consecrated Sarada Math as part of the efforts to fulfil Swami Vivekananda's great vision of women upliftment. Swami Vishuddhanandaji, Swami Madhavanandaji, Swami Vireswaranandaji and many other sannyasis attended the ceremony which was filmed; and it was this film reel that Maharaj had brought with him.

Maharaj then told me: "Run the film on the projector and remove the portions that I point out" Accordingly when I projected the film, he asked me cut out those parts where he was seen. I was adept at doing this job and hence had no problems in completing the task. He was very happy to see the edited version of the film. Maharaj was very much averse to seeking self-publicity and he preferred to do Thakur's work staying in the background. Pleased with my work, he asked in a most natural manner, "Hey, won't you serve me some tea?" I replied, "Certainly, Maharaj." "I knew that he loved to have very hot tea in small quantities, and so arranged for the same. Sipping the tea, he spoke with me so informally that I was hardly aware of the fact that he was one of the Assistant Secretaries of the entire Order and I was just a newly joined brahmachari. In this way he made me his own on the very first occasion.

— Swami Vagishananda

In the presence of the living God

One day, Swami Vireswarananda Maharaj returned to Belur Math after a long tour. The flight was delayed, and when he reached Belur Math it was 1:30 in the morning. But he did not go to his room. Instead he sat on a chair outside the temple and waited for darshan of Sri Ramakrishna. It appeared as if he was waiting to inform Sri Ramakrishna about his visits to various places. It was like a person waiting to inform the head of the family about his travel experiences. The temple opened at 4:00 in the morning. Maharaj then had a lingering darshan of Sri Ramakrishna and only then did he go to his room.

— Swami Kamalatmananda

Be silent when Thakur rests

In 1981, I was in the second year at the Brahmacharis Training Centre in Belur Math. Swami Vireswarananda Maharaj was slightly indisposed then. I had the blessed fortune of reading to him passages from books of his choice when he took rest after noon Prasad. So far as I can recall, a book I read to him was *Dharma Prasange Swami Brahmananda*. He enjoyed listening to my readings from this book.

One afternoon, during these reading sessions, he suddenly said, "Afternoon is the resting time for Sri Sri Thakur. There should be absolute silence everywhere in the Math. It is imperative on all of us that we make no noise. But there is so much sound from doors. It disturbs Sri Sri Thakur in his rest." His exact words still ring in my ears, "Why do you bang the door?" I felt so embarrassed by this rebuke. Maharaj was reminding me of the importance of silence in our life.

— Swami Puratanananda

What is Karma Yoga?

Once Swami Vireswarananda Maharaj had come to Ramakrishna Ashrama, Gwalior, to give mantra-diksha to the devotees. To attend on him I had accompanied Swami Atmanandaji. One day finding an opportunity I told him, "Maharaj, we, sadhus and brahmacharis work with unselfish motive. Hence, all our actions automatically become Yoga. We don't need any other spiritual discipline. Even Swami Vivekananda has said that by performing selfless service one can attain Mukti." Revered Maharaj very firmly replied, "No." I pointed out, "Swamiji has said that Karma Yoga leads to Mukti." Then Maharaj asked, "Do you know what Karma Yoga is?" After a pause, he himself answered, "Conscious and constant remembrance of God while working." This instruction is like a light house in our life.

— Swami Satyarupananda

Excellence in work

Swami Vireswarananda Maharaj used a chair, the back-rest of which had a pattern of square grooves carved on wood. One day while we were present in his room, a brahmachari was dusting the furniture in Maharaj's room. He casually wiped the chair with a piece of cloth. Seeing that Maharaj said: "Wait." He then took a thin stick, wrapped a piece of cloth around the tip of the stick and proceeded to clean each square groove in the chequered pattern by inserting the tip of the stick into the groove and wiping it clean from inside. He did not say a word of admonishment but amply demonstrated how any work ought to be performed with meticulous care.

— Swami Sumangalananda

Mailing meditation!

In the early days of his monastic life when Swami Vireswarananda Maharaj was at the Advaita Ashrama he had to write the addresses on hundreds of letters every day. In the evening he had to go on foot to the Post Office to dispatch them. Asked whether he found this job monotonous and dry, he would reply, "Why should I? In our country most of the cities and towns are named after various names of God. Whenever I wrote an address I thought I was repeating and meditating on a particular name of God."

— Swami Varananda

Importance of clarity

Once Swami Vireswarananda Maharaj wanted to know something, but I could not give a definite answer. I said, "Maharaj, it seems to me..." Irritated, Maharaj said, "Never say, 'It seems', or 'I think so' and all such vague words. Either say, 'I know' or 'I don't know.' I am going to make a decision based on your words. If what you say is wrong, my decision will be wrong." I learned a good lesson.

— Swami Chetanananda

Queen of Bethlehem

One day we heard that Swami Vireswarananda Maharaj had asked all the brahmacharis from the Training Centre for Brahmacharis to go to his quarters after eleven at night. We became a bit anxious, "What's the matter? Why such summons from Maharaj so late at night and so urgently?" In the Training Centre the 10:30 P.M. bell signals bedtime. Being hurriedly woken up, we all went to Maharaj's living quarters. Swami Bodhatmananda, our Principal, who was also anxious, came with us.

When we reached the entrance of Maharaj's quarters, we saw him standing at the entrance with a mischievous smile on his face. His smiling countenance relieved us from all our worries. A particular type of flower had bloomed, which looked very nice and had a sweet fragrance. It belonged to the Cactus family and had a very high sounding name 'Queen of Bethlehem'. It opens its petals at around 10 o'clock at night and closes at early dawn. If one wants to see it, that was the time for doing so. Maharaj liked this flower very much and wanted the brahmacharis to see it as well. He himself ushered us towards the flower to explain its uniqueness. We rejoiced at his joy; moreover, we had an extra bonus: his darshan and pranams at an unusual hour.

— Swami Purnananda

Lesson in Obedience

When I was serving as a volunteer in one of our ashramas (now in Chattisgarh), Swami Vireswarananda Maharaj who had come to give *mantra-diksha*, asked me to switch on the fan. I saw it was in speed one. I thought it was not enough and increased it to speed three. After some time, Maharaj called me and asked, "What did I tell you?" "You told me to switch on the fan." "Did I tell you to increase the speed of the fan?" "No, Maharaj." "See, if you do not obey small instructions properly, you will also not obey higher instructions properly. Sometimes you will take liberty in spiritual instructions too and come to grief." Through a small incident Maharaj taught me the importance of obedience.

— Swami Nikhileswarananda

Divine intuition

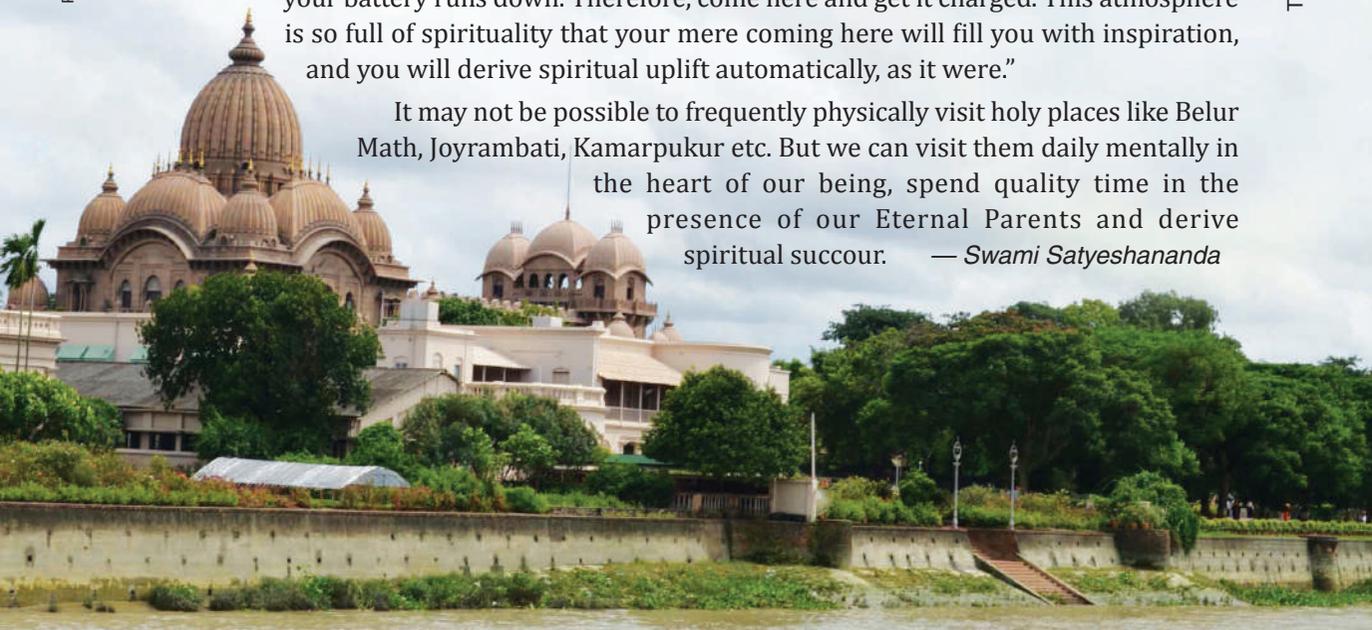
This incident happened in Silchar. On the day before their initiation the devotees as usual had gathered before Swami Vireswarananda Maharaj for his instructions. There were almost 300 aspirants that day and their numbers too had tallied with that of those present. But before anybody spoke, Maharaj suddenly said, "If any one of you has received initiation from any other place then he/she must leave." There was no response to this. Maharaj repeated his command more sternly but even then no one got up to leave. When there was no response even on the third such instruction, Maharaj called his secretary, Swami Prameyanandaji and told him, "Tell them that no one will receive initiation." Prameyanandaji Maharaj then appealed to the gathering with folded hands, "Why are you spoiling the chances of others? Please leave if any of you have already received initiation." Soon a middle-aged lady got up and left. Maharaj subsequently initiated all the others. Later it was learnt from the lady that she had earlier received initiation from two other places. She was curious to find out what the initiation ceremony was like here and so applied for initiation and had provided false information in her application. Although she had hoodwinked everyone else, she could not escape the supra-sensual piercing sight of Maharaj.

— Swami Sumangalananda

Belur Math: The Dynamo of spirituality

Swami Vireswarananda Maharaj would passionately exhort all spiritual aspirants to derive spiritual benefit and inspiration from Belur Math's atmosphere. He would say "Remember Belur Math first, then other centres. You may have to work in other places for a long time, you may not have stayed longer here, but remember that all the inspiration that other centres have got is from this place. This is the place which radiates spirituality, which radiates the message of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. So try to come and stay here even for a short time when work permits. That will inspire you and give you tremendous energy to work with greater zeal when you go back." Again, he would tell the sadhus, "Whenever your battery runs low, come here and get it charged at Belur Math. This is a spiritual dynamo and from here the spiritual power is, as it were, distributed throughout the world and because you are far away from this dynamo, your battery runs down. Therefore, come here and get it charged. This atmosphere is so full of spirituality that your mere coming here will fill you with inspiration, and you will derive spiritual uplift automatically, as it were."

It may not be possible to frequently physically visit holy places like Belur Math, Joyrambati, Kamarpukur etc. But we can visit them daily mentally in the heart of our being, spend quality time in the presence of our Eternal Parents and derive spiritual succour. — Swami Satyeshananda



Swami Gambhirananda

After obtaining his bachelor's degree in Economics in 1922, Jatindra Nath Datta briefly worked as Military Accounts Officer at Rangoon. He then joined the Order in 1923 and received mantra-diksha from Swami Shivanandaji. Later, he received sannyasa-diksha from his guru in 1928.

He became the General Secretary of the Order in 1966. He was chosen as the Vice President of the Order in 1979 and then as the 11th President of the Order in 1985. He attained mahasamadhi on 27 December 1988.

Gambhiranandaji was a prolific writer and translated many scriptures into English. His seminal books include the *Life of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi*, *Life of Swami Vivekananda*, and *the History of the Ramakrishna Order*. He was especially noted for following daily routine with clock-like punctuality.



Overcoming ego

Swami Gambhiranandaji, was the President of the Order. Once I went to meet him in his room and humbly asked him, "Maharaj, when I surrender the fruits of my actions, be it positive or negative to Sri Ramakrishna, I do it wholeheartedly. But still I find that my ego crops up and I either feel proud of the success or sorry for failure. How to overcome this problem?" Maharaj advised, "Keep up the habit of surrendering yourself daily and remember Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji before and after any work. Gradually the hold of ego will become weak." Then he added "See, to do sadhana one should possess qualities of steadiness and patience."

— Swami Animeshananda

Punctuality

I joined the Order in 1976 at Belur Math. After a few days I came to know that Swami Gambhirananda Maharaj, the General Secretary of the Order, was a strict disciplinarian and stickler to punctuality. As his eyesight was poor, every day at 2 P.M. somebody would read out to him newly published books. Coming to know of this I once approached him and audaciously said that I wanted to read out the books to him. He agreed. I would reach his room before 2 P.M. He would come out of his bedroom exactly at 2 o'clock and go to the Office which was the adjacent room. He would give the book and tell the pages to be read. I would read sitting across the table.

After some days, one hot April afternoon I overslept and woke up at exactly 2 P.M. I rushed to Maharaj's office and was 5-6 minutes late. After I made pranams, he signalled me to sit. Then he turned an alarm clock on the table towards me without saying anything. I was embarrassed and apologetic. I learnt the importance of punctuality and was never late again.

— Swami Nikhileswarananda

Value of 2 minutes

I had the blessed fortune to serve Swami Gambhiranandaji as his sevak. Maharaj strictly followed a daily routine. In those days, at 5.00 P.M. he would go out for his afternoon walk. One day I came to him and said, "Maharaj, it's time for your walk; please get ready." "I am ready. You are late," pat came the reply. I said, "No, Maharaj, it is now 5.00 o'clock." Maharaj then just picked up the table clock with his left hand, read the time, and told me, "Just look at it." I replied, "Maharaj, it is only two minutes past five. It's nothing." After a little pause, Maharaj asked me, "Do you know at what speed a Boeing flight travels?" I gestured that I didn't know. Then Maharaj said, "Listen, a Boeing plane flies at the speed of six hundred kilometres an hour. In a minute it goes ten kilometres and twenty kilometres in two minutes. And you say that two minutes is nothing!"

— Swami Nirantarananda

Karmaphala of a brahmajnani

One day Gambhirananda Maharaj spoke to me about the four castes and the duties assigned to them in the Gita. He said that each will get the fruit of his actions. Then referring to a man of Knowledge, a Brahmajnani, he asked what would happen to the fruits of his action? I kept quiet as I did not know the answer, being just a novice. Then Maharaj said that those who served him and spoke well of him will get the fruits of his good actions; those who derided him and spoke ill of him will get the fruits of bad actions performed unintentionally by him. He himself will remain untouched.

— Swami Satyapriyananda

How to handle a mistake?

It was the year probably 1977 or 78. I was working in the Mission Headquarters Office at Belur Math as assistant to a senior Swami who was in-charge of the Accounts Department. One day this swami showed me the draft of a letter to be sent to a branch centre. Young and immature as I was, I immediately blurted out that the sentences were not grammatically correct. The swami became very upset. He caught hold of my hand and virtually dragged me to the room of Swami Gambhirananda Maharaj whose office and residence was in the first floor of the then Headquarters Office. He went and told Maharaj straightaway, "Maharaj, this upstart is saying that your language is not grammatically correct." Then only I realized that the letter had been dictated by Maharaj. But, Maharaj was calmness personified. He did not make any comment, but simply said, "Please read the draft." When he read out, Maharaj remarked, "He is right. Please take down." He dictated a fresh letter. I was stunned beyond words. Maharaj, who had written innumerable books and was so highly qualified, obviously could not have made that grammatical error. It was the mistake of the swami who took down the dictation and that was because he was somewhat short of hearing. But, Maharaj did not go into any of these details. Neither did he reprimanded the swami, nor did he praise me. He simply dealt with the matter in the most matter of fact manner. He did what was immediately necessary i.e., to correct the error by giving a fresh dictation. Maharaj was the administrative head of the worldwide organisation, an outstanding

sannyasi with 60 years as a sannyasi in the Order, and I was a rank beginner in the Order just about six months old, and yet the way he dealt with the situation was truly amazing. It was a great lesson of calmness, equanimity, perfection, etc.

— Swami Shantatmananda

My mother and Holy Mother

I joined Belur Math as a novice in 1985. Soon after joining I had a very keen mental turmoil. Swami Atmasthananda Maharaj, who was in-charge of Pre Probationers Training Centre, where the newly joined young brahmacharis live, sensed that I was undergoing some kind of mental agony. When he found out what it was, he arranged for me to meet Swami Gambhirananda Maharaj, who was then the President of the Order.

When I went to Maharaj's quarters at 4.00 P.M. Maharaj was sitting on his easy chair. Though he looked very grave, there was a kind of spiritual bliss in the room. He asked me, "Yes, my child what is troubling you so much? Thakur has given shelter to you. Tell me what is there in your mind."

I then told Maharaj. "I love my mother very much; in a way I am a mother's boy. At home, every morning I used to bow down to my mother. Now, that I have left home, is it alright if I continue to mentally offer pranams to my mother? Or will it create problems in my monastic life and spiritual journey?"

Hearing this, Maharaj laughed heartily and then commented, "Mother's grace in there on you. Now you do this. In the morning after getting up when you offer pranams to your own mother, think that she is *Bhagavati* Herself. Our Upanishads also tell *matru devo bhava*, 'May your mother be a god unto you.' And then when you make pranams to Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, do so with the bhava or feeling that it is she who has given birth to you."

Continuing, Maharaj asked, "Is this okay my child? Our Holy Mother, is mother of all, the real mother. Read Holy Mother's life and think, ponder on various aspects of her life. She will definitely bless you and I too will pray for you."

My mental anguish vanished for ever. And I believe that it is definitely Holy Mother's grace and the effect of Gambhirananda Maharaj's prayer and blessings, that I had the opportunity to sing the glory of Holy Mother for 14 long years at our Pune Ashrama, and also conduct Sunday discourse on Holy Mother from 2003 to 2016.

— Swami Suvijneyananda

Goodness over rules

I used to look after the legal part of the work in the Order's headquarters when Swami Gambhiranandaji was the General Secretary. Whatever letters came by post would first be read by Maharaj. He would write my name on some of the letters. This meant that his Assistant Secretaries would read those letters and pass them on to me. I would then have to discuss these letters with Maharaj and frame proper replies.

Once a letter came from a Board of Trustees of an organisation from Bombay. They were requesting for a copy of the Rules and Regulations of Ramakrishna Mission. They had also mentioned that the Ramakrishna Mission was marching forward in a disciplined way because its rules and regulations were very good. Hence, they wanted to adopt some of these rules into their own organisation. When I read out this letter to Maharaj, he immediately said, "That's not it! Our

Order is doing well not because the rules are good, but because the men are good. The day the members become spoilt no rule will be able to save this Order."

— Swami Rudratmananda

Self-identity

Swami Gambhiranandaji kept an eye on how the sadhus and brahmacharis developed their sense of brotherhood in the Order. Once during his evening walk, Maharaj went towards the Training Centre for Brahmacharis. Meeting a Brahmachari on the way, Maharaj asked him, "How many of you are there in the Training Centre?"

"Here we are 70 people," replied the brahmachari.

"Oh! You are people!" remarked Maharaj.

Understanding Maharaj's intention, the brahmachari again replied, "No, Maharaj, we are brahmacharis."

'Say that,' was Maharaj's comment.

— Swami Nirantarananda

Scriptural study

My life has been impacted by his scholarship, renunciation, devotion and punctuality. Not only was he fond of scriptural studies, he also encouraged others to do so. Also, he would be upset if any day went by when he could not do any writing. Similarly, he would keep a strict watch on whether our studies were progressing properly. A few months before he breathed his last, he had told me, "Look here, wherever you are posted after my passing away don't give up the study of the Upanishads." In this way he would motivate us.

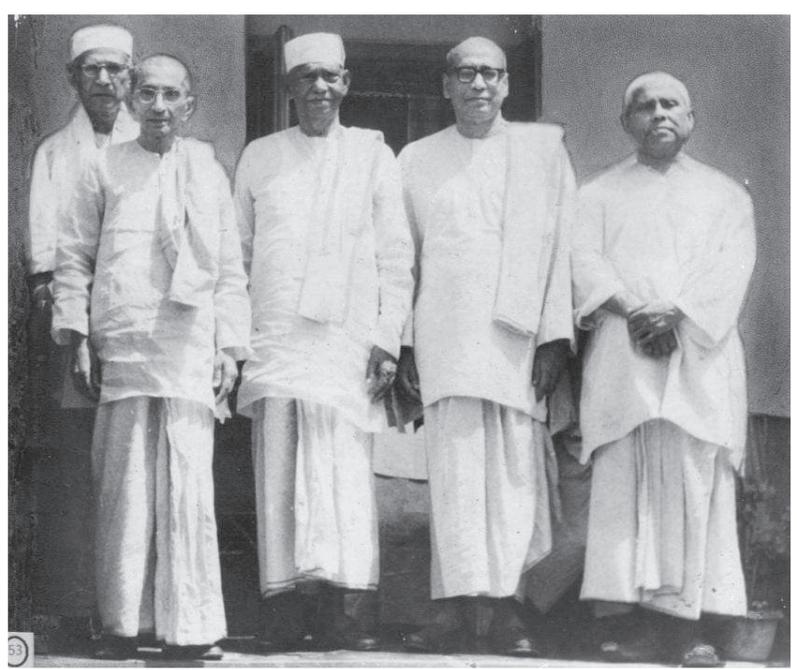
Once we went to Agartala. In the evening he asked me, "Ratan, have you studied something today?"

I replied, "No, Maharaj."

"Why not?" asked Maharaj.

"I did not get the time. After arriving all the time was spent in settling in."

"See, amidst all this you have to find time to



Swamis Asangananda, Vireswarananda, Abhayananda, Gambhirananda and Bhuteshananda

study.” Maharaj then quoted this sloka “*samudra santakalole snatumicchati durmatih* “He is a foolish person who says that he will bathe in the sea after it becomes calm without waves.”

Often he would ask, “How are you progressing in your Sanskrit studies?” At night before Maharaj went to bed, I had to recite in front of him one sloka from the Upanishad or Gita. One night the doctors had come to see him. I thought that I would not have to recite a sloka that night. But just before going to bed he called out, “Today Ratan did not recite a sloka! Without hearing the sloka I cannot get sleep.”

I have seen his dedication. Whenever he decided to do something, he would do it then and there.

— Swami Amalatmananda

Devotion to truth

Once, during the morning walk a monastic attendant accompanied Swami Gambhiranandaji. As they walked by the Brahmacharis’ Training Centre, the attendant plucked some fragrant flowers from the Training Centre garden to put them in Maharaj’s room.

When Maharaj smelt the fragrance, he asked the attendant:

“What flowers are these, and who has brought them?”

“Maharaj, during the morning walk I brought them from the garden of the Training Centre.”

“Did you take permission to pluck them?”

“No, Maharaj.”

“Without asking if you take something which belongs to others, it is an act of theft.”

Then Maharaj sent the attendant to inform the Head of the Training Centre and seek forgiveness for having plucked the flowers without permission.

— Swami Yogeshwarananda

Mother has seen me!

Swami Gambhirananda Maharaj, had come to Mysore as the President of the Ramakrishna Order. As is the practice, he was to visit Goddess Chamundeshwari, the presiding deity of Mysore. For the convenience of Maharaj to get in and out with minimum effort, a car with a low floor (Fiat car) was arranged to take him and his monastic assistant to the hill top temple at 7 P.M. Since the Head Priest of the temple was known to me, the President of Mysore Ashrama had asked me to escort Revered Maharaj. I was cautioned before hand that the aged Maharaj should not be made to stand for a long time in the temple and the darshan of the Divine Mother was the only priority. Accordingly Maharaj was escorted to the very door step of the brightly illuminated sanctum for a clear darshan of the Deity. Besides, Maharaj used a pair of tiny binoculars to have the clearest view of the Divine Mother. Arati over, Maharaj was escorted straight to the car, specially permitted to be parked at the main entrance of the temple. While driving back to Ashrama, I asked, ‘Maharaj, could you have darshan of Mother?’ After a little pause Maharaj replied in a steady voice, “No matter! Mother would have seen me!!” I was shocked. Even decades after this incident, I get thrilled whenever I recall the firm conviction of Maharaj. Yes, great sadhus look at things in great perspectives.

— Keerthi Kumar

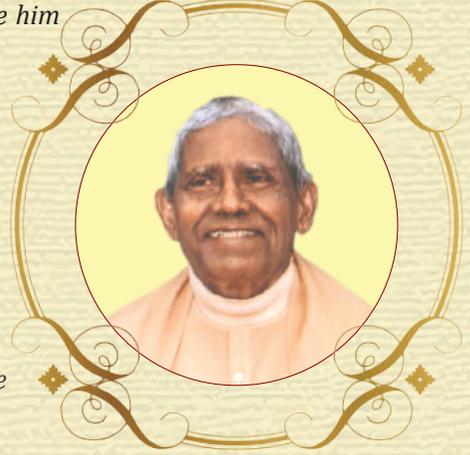


*(Standing L - R) Swamis Yatishwarananda, Gopalananda, Vireswarananda, Hariharananda,
(Sitting L - R) Gokulananda, Sharvananda, Brahmananda, Shankarananda, Shankarananda, Ambeswarananda
at Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Madras, in 1917*

Swami Bhuteshananda

As a student in Calcutta, Vijay Chandra Roy started frequenting Belur Math and came to know many of Sri Ramakrishna's direct-disciples. He received mantra-diksha from Swami Saradananda in 1921 and joined the Order in 1923. Swami Shivananda gave him sannyasa-diksha in 1928.

He established the Ramakrishna Movement on a firm footing in Shillong and Rajkot and spread Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature in regional languages. In 1966 he was appointed as an Assistant Secretary of the Order. In 1975, he became one of the Vice Presidents of the Order and on 24 January 1989, he became the 12th President of the Order. He had a very fine sense of humour and was a great scholar. He attained mahasamadhi on 10 August 1998.



Meditation through songs

I heard a monastic brother of our Order telling Swami Bhuteshananda Maharaj, that he would take a book of songs whenever he went to Uttarkashi, and would concentrate on certain songs. He had beneficial results because there are many songs which help one to intensely pray to God. Surprisingly, Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj said that he too had done the same thing when he had been to Uttarakashi in his early days. Let me mention one such song composed by Vidyapati:

माधव बहुव मिनति करि तोय,
देइ तुलसी तिल देह समर्पिनु,
दया जनु न छोड बि मोच,
गनइवे दोष गुणलेश न पाववि जब तुँआ करवि विचार,
तुआ जगत्पति जगते कहा यसि जग बाहिर नइ मुइ छोर,
किये मानुष पशुपति किये जन भिये अथवा कीट पतंग,

A free translation of the song is given below:
Madhav, I pray to you again and again,
Taking Tulasi and Til in hand i.e., formally I
am offering my body to you.
Be kind enough not to forsake me.

करम विपाके गतागति पुनःपुनः मति रह तुयौ परसंग।
कहन विद्यापति अतिशय कातर
तरचिते इह भव सिन्धु
तुँआ पदपंकज करि अवलम्बन
तिल एक देह दिनबन्धु।

If you start counting my faults,
You will not find a trace of merit,
You are called the Lord of the Universe,
However insignificant I am,
I am not out of the Universe.

Man, brute and bird are created,
Or created insects and moth,
By adverse fruits of action,
Going and coming again and again (i.e., cycle
of birth and death),

Let these befall me,
But in all births, may I have
Unflinching devotion to your blessed company.

That is what Vidyapati humbly says for crossing the ocean of the world. Grant me refuge in Thy lotus feet, even for only a moment!

— Swami Shivamayananda

Stick to principles

I was sent to Rajkot to start our Gujarati monthly *Sri Ramakrishna Jyoth*. Before leaving I took the blessings of Swami Bhuteshananda Maharaj who had served for long in Rajkot. He gave me many valuable instructions on how to go about the project. Later, when he was the President of the Order, I again met him on 25th and 26th November 1996 and asked many questions regarding how to spread Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature, how he had managed things when he was there, etc. Among other things he told me, “Never compromise on principles.” Then he narrated an incident that happened during his tenure as the head of Rajkot Ashrama.

The year was 1963. Swami Vivekananda’s Birth Centenary was being celebrated. It was decided that the Gujarati version of *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* would be brought out in 12 volumes. The Panchayat Minister of the State Government was a close friend of our ashrama. He asked Maharaj how many copies the ashrama planned to publish. When Maharaj said they had planned for a thousand copies, he said, “What! Only thousand copies! No, no, you must publish six thousand copies!” As Panchayat Minister, he made an announcement that the Government would give all panchayats 50% grant if they purchased Swamiji’s Complete Works in Gujarati. While the cost of the volumes was Rs. 60/- they would have to pay only Rs. 30/-. In this way Swamiji’s message spread across Gujarat during Bhuteshanandaji’s time. Then the Minister suggested to Maharaj that a Press Conference could be organised in which the *Complete Works* would be released so that it would receive publicity. Maharaj agreed. Usually such Press Conferences are held in hotels where the journalists are also offered refreshments. Maharaj did not agree to this. He said “I am a sannyasi, I will not go to a hotel.” Finally, the Minister accepted Maharaj’s stand and arranged the Press Conference at his own residence.

— Swami Nikhileswarananda

Bhakti is superior

On one occasion Swami Bhuteshananda Maharaj was describing the days of his spiritual practices in the Himalayas. He told me that once he was climbing down from the mountains alone and with very little possessions, totally free from any attachment. As he sat under a tree, he had a feeling of completeness, a sense of freedom. I asked, “Was it the highest, most desired state?” He replied, “No, bhakti is superior.”

— Swami Brahmeshananda

Celebrating spiritual birthday

I was then operating the Fax machine at the Headquarters Office in Belur Math. To handover the fax message, I was permitted to visit at any time the Trustees including Swami Bhuteshananda

Maharaj, who was then the President of the Order. Once, when I went to handover a fax message to Bhuteshananda Maharaj, he said “Rajen, to keep eyes open and ears open, but to keep the mouth shut is itself a Tapsya, and you are doing that.” I then recounted to him a discussion I had with some senior swamis which gave me a new understanding of the hymn on Sri Ramakrishna composed by Swami Vivekananda which is sung every evening during *sandhya arati* in our ashramas. Maharaj was very happy and then he told me, “Remember, there are four things we should bear in mind:

1) Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi are living entities; 2) They came for our good; 3) They are our own; 4) Have faith in their redeeming power.

Then he asked me “Do you remember the date of your mantra-diksha?” When I replied that I did, he told me, “Every year, you should celebrate that day like worldly people celebrate their birthday.”

Then he explained how to celebrate the diksha day:

1) Sprinkle Ganga water on yourself (a purifying act); 2) Offer *argya* (flower / bilwa leaves) at the holy feet of Sri Ramakrishna giving all your karmas and karma phalas of this life and previous lives, and imagine that Sri Ramakrishna has accepted it; 3) Now your slate is clean and on it Sri Ramakrishna has written the Divine Mantra; 4) This begins your new life.

“Sri Ramakrishna is all in all. He is the *Karta*, the agent of action. If there is no more doership in you, then there is no question of enjoying or suffering their results.

— Swami Suvijneyananda

This is my purpose

It was probably 1995, when I visited Belur Math on one of my annual visits. I would usually stay in the Math for 2 to 3 weeks just to see Swami Bhuteshananda Maharaj. On that visit I wanted to ask him some questions. But as he was very busy, I could not get an opportunity to ask those questions. And soon it was time for me to leave. So I asked his attendant swami, “May I see him?” But unfortunately he again had an important meeting to attend. So I gave up. Then suddenly someone called me and said Maharaj would meet me before the meeting. So I went to his room and at the outset apologized, “I am sorry, I disturbed you.” He immediately replied, “No, you did not disturb me. This is my purpose.” He again strongly said, “I am here for this purpose only.”

— Pravrajika Dayaprana

Every being has its own purpose

This is an incident from the last phase in Swami Bhuteshananda Maharaj’s life. It was evening. He was walking along the path in the garden. I went to join him in the walk. On seeing me, he pointed at the garden and said, “Have you understood why they have cleared the garden by cutting down the sunflower plants? It is because the plants have grown old and will not give flowers any longer. What is the point in keeping the drooping old plants in the garden?” We remained silent and kept walking with him. Maharaj continued, “I was on a tour to USA. One day I saw herds of cows and buffaloes moving along the road before our car. I asked: ‘Where are they going?’ They said, ‘They have become old and hence will no longer produce milk. That is why they are being taken to the slaughterhouse.’” We remained silent.

After a while Maharaj himself broke the silence and said, “Indeed, the cows have grown old and they will not produce milk anymore; the plants have grown old and will not produce flowers any longer. Elderly men and women who visit me, rightly say that they are no longer wanted in their homes, and hence are moving to old-age homes. I have also grown old; what am I doing?” We were stunned, and could say nothing. I still remember that, after this, we walked for some time more, and Maharaj did not say anything for a long while. He was completely silent. We understood that connecting with the plants, Maharaj’s mind had become engrossed in very profound thoughts. Everyone becomes unwelcome in this world as soon as what they have to offer to the world is finished. They do not even have the right to survive or to occupy a small corner of this universe. The contribution made throughout one’s life must not be forgotten, and it should entitle one to live in this world with dignity. What kind of a world is this which mandates one is not even eligible to survive once one ceases to have the ability to contribute to the world? These were the things which Maharaj, it seemed, wanted to convey through the silence.

Again, Maharaj spoke in a solemn voice, “Did you notice how selfish mankind is! The plants had grown up, but they were cut down since they no longer produce flowers. That is, as it does not serve my purpose any more, what is its utility? We human beings always think of our own purposes —we never think that, irrespective of our purposes, a living being can have its own life, its own purpose. Sometimes men complain, ‘Why has God created these worms and insects?’ This implies that as they are of no use to us, they are useless. Without referring to himself/herself, without relating everything with his or her own purposes, a human being can never think of anything. This is, precisely, the ego-centric mentality. They do not think even for once that even those that do not serve their purposes have a life of their own.”

— Swami Ritananda

Rise above it

During one of my many visits to Belur Math I was sitting in Swami Bhuteshanandaji’s room and complaining that the local women who sat outside on the veranda of Thakur’s temple after arati gossiped then and how much it bothered me. Rather than condemn them or show sympathy towards me, he told me, “Rise above it.” He taught me we must rise above or transcend everything.

— Amrita M Salm

Not befitting a devotee

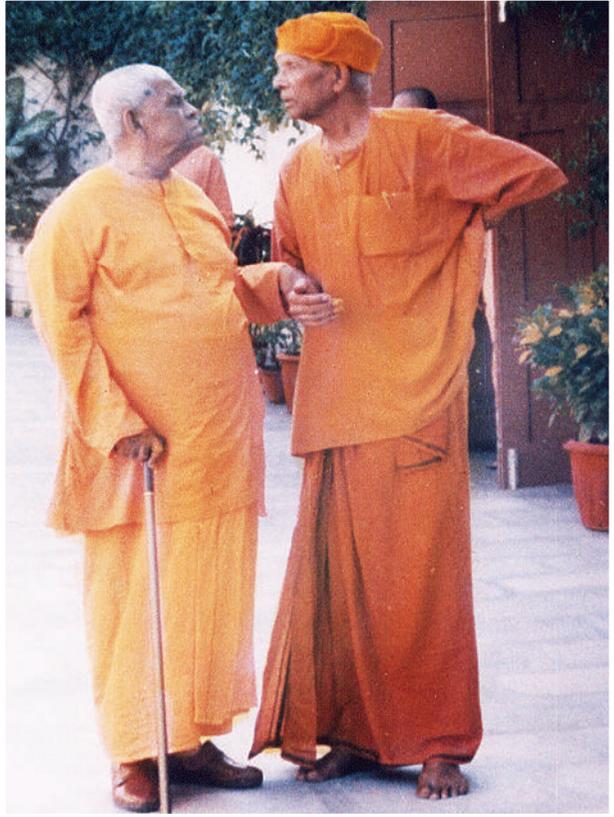
Swami Bhuteshanandaji disliked negligence in fulfilling one’s responsibilities. I used to be employed in an office. So even on festival days and functions I had to leave for work after offering my pranams at the Math. I felt bad about this and expressed the same to Maharaj. He replied, “Duties should be fulfilled with diligence.” I remember an instance when a person working at the airport came to meet Maharaj. Maharaj asked him, “Did you finish your work shift?” The devotee replied, “I informed one of my co-workers that I was leaving.” Maharaj inquired again, “Haven’t you informed your supervisor?” When the devotee replied in the negative, Maharaj became serious. After a long pause he said, “This isn’t something befitting a devotee.”

— Basanti Mukhopadhyay

Count your blessings

On a visit to Swami Bhuteshananda Maharaj, I could not help expressing my frustration, “Maharaj, we received mantra-diksha long ago – about 45 years ago –, but we don’t seem to have advanced much!”

Maharaj looked at me with a penetrating gaze and said, “Mother, isn’t it your great fortune that you have remembered God every day?” Startled, as if a bright spark of lightning struck me, I realised that it was indeed true that countless number of people did not have the great blessing of taking the name of God every day! If we look at it that way, we are blessed indeed! Such is His divine grace! I remember something that the 8th President of the Order, Swami Vishuddhanandaji Maharaj had said, “Know this well; when your guru gave you mantra-diksha, he offered you at the feet of Thakur. You are dedicated at Thakur’s feet—how blessed is your life! Do you know what we do when we initiate devotees? Just as devotees offer flowers at Thakur’s feet, we offer the seekers of initiation at His!” Bhuteshanandaji’s words cleared my mind of the clouds of doubt which had long kept it overcast with doubts and frustrations. I returned home with my mind filled with joy and heart fully content. For many days, I experienced a heavenly sense of fulfilment.



Swami Bhuteshananda & Swami Ranganathananda (R)

— Santwana Das Gupta

Mutual affection

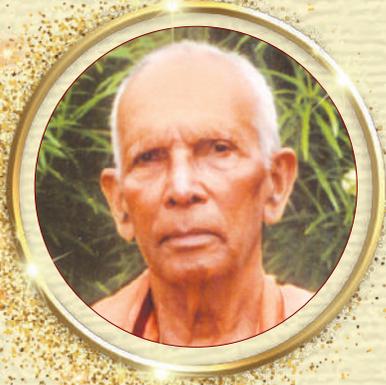
While meeting devotees every evening, Bhuteshananda Maharaj would sometimes make some remarks that were just as witty as they were profound and universal. I remember one afternoon, in particular. An elderly lady devotee had come to meet Maharaj with her new daughter-in-law. After pranams, she said, “Maharaj, she is my daughter-in-law, a very sweet girl.” With a happy smile, Maharaj raised his hands in a gesture of blessing and said, “You see mother, you too should be sweet, then your daughter-in-law will remain sweet.” Thus, in a moment, the all-renouncing sannyasi gave the secret of domestic happiness to the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law.

— Gurudas Chattopadhyay

Swami Ranganathananda

Reading The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna at the age of 15 had a tremendous impact on Shankaran, a boy from Trikkur village in Kerala. In 1926 Shankaran received mantra-diksha from Swami Shivanandaji and joined the Order at the Mysore Ashrama. His sannyasa-diksha too was from Shivanandaji in 1933.

Under challenging circumstances, he served as head of the ashramas in Rangoon from 1933 and in Karachi from 1942. He developed the Delhi ashrama during his 13-year tenure there, and gave shape to the Hyderabad centre as its head for 20 years. In 1990 he was chosen as one of the Vice Presidents of the Order. From 7 Sept 1998 he served as the 13th President of the Order until his mahasamadhi on 25 April 2005. Known as the unofficial cultural ambassador of India, he lectured in about 50 foreign countries spreading the message of Vedanta. His articles and books help in understanding Swami Vivekananda's message of man-making.



Blessings of power

Swami Akhandanandaji, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and a spiritual dynamo, was in charge of our ashrama in Sargachhi. When young Swami Ranganathanandaji was in-charge of the Students' Home in Bangalore Ashrama, he once went to Belur Math and visited Sargachhi to seek Swami Akhandanandaji's blessings. After offering his pranams he said, "Maharaj, I am in charge of so many young men in the hostel. They want to hear from me about Swami Vivekananda, Holy Mother and Thakur. Please bless me so that I can speak to them effectively." Swami Akhandanandaji blessed him from his heart saying, "Yes, you will certainly speak to them, you will certainly speak to them."

By the power of this blessings, Swami Ranganathanandaji became as it were, an honorary ambassador of Indian culture and went around the world spreading the message of Swami Vivekananda in particular and Ramakrishna Mission in general. People would be charmed by his speech and remain spell bound forgetting time for one whole hour. He has spoken in almost all the important universities in America and in many universities in India, receiving appreciation from eminent intellectuals. I myself experienced his powerful spiritual presence while staying with him

for several years. That was the power imparted by Swami Akhandanandaji. The then Prime Minister Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, President Dr. S Radhakrishnan and others were his great admirers.

— Swami Gautamananda

Sangha is everything

In 1972 summer, Swami Ranganathananda Maharaj was resting in our Kankhal Ashrama. He had just come back from the West after delivering Convocation Addresses at Moscow and Princeton University. Luckily I happened to be at the Kankhal Ashrama then. One day after noon prasad I was in his room; he was lying on his bed. I started massaging his feet, and said, “Maharaj, would you mind if I ask a question?” Maharaj simply replied, “Ask”.

So, I asked, “Maharaj, now you have become so big, are you in need of the Sangha’s support any more?” Immediately, Maharaj sprang up and said, “What are you saying? Without Sangha I am a zero.”

When he was elected as the President of the Sangha, one day at 3:00 P.M. while walking in Belur Math campus, he said, “At Belur Math I feel, I am a PPTC brahmachari—so rich is the magnitude of spirituality here.”

Interestingly, from a month before his mahasamadhi, Maharaj used to say, “I will again come back as a brahmachari and serve Guru Maharaj.”

— Swami Suhitananda

Service and inner peace

At Belur Math, one day some doctors came to Maharaj to seek his blessings. They were leaving on a short trip to nearby villages to conduct medical camps and serve the villagers. On knowing the reason for their visit, Maharaj smiled and asked, “Why do you need my blessings. Any work done in the form of service is in itself a blessing.”

I was surprised. Maharaj would generously bless everyone; but to these doctors who were going out for such a noble cause, why was he refusing to give his blessing?! Sensing my curiosity, Maharaj said, “Why does anyone need blessings? It is for inner peace. This peace does not fall from the sky or cannot be found beneath the earth. It is inside us. Any kind of service brings out joy, that is a blessing.”

We all go to the temple to worship the *murti* there which is a living presence of the Lord. But we should not neglect God in his incarnation as living human beings. He who is there in the temple is also present in our heart as the inner Self. So, our worship should not stop at the temple. We should on coming out of the temple, worship God residing in all living beings. This message is straight from the life of Sri Ramakrishna, who taught us to see God with eyes closed in meditation and see Him with eyes open in our daily life. Therefore, the service of the common man in those remote villages and worship of God inside the temple are not two different things, but form one integral part of inner peace.

— Swami Asimatmananda

Preparation to serve the Lord in man

It was sometime during 1988-89. Swami Ranganathananda Maharaj had come to Belur Math and was staying in the ground floor of Trustees’ Building located behind the main temple at the Math. I was at that time in the Probationers’ Training Centre, a centre where brahmacharis of the

Ramakrishna Order undergo training for two years. I was in the second year. Whenever we used to get an opportunity, it was customary for some of us to visit Maharaj and listen to him speaking.

One day we 3-5 brahmacharis entered his room after the noon - prasada. Maharaj was reclining on his cot and there were two young sadhus and one brahmachari standing beside Maharaj's cot and talking to him. One of the younger swamis asked if Sri Ramakrishna's idea of *Shiva jnanae jiva seva* can be really practised, and what was Maharaj's guidance in this matter. Maharaj listened carefully and after a pause simply got up from his reclining position and sat on his bed and pointing out with his hand to a calendar on the wall which had a picture of Neelakanta Shiva — Shiva with blue neck — said. "Do you see the picture of Nanjunda Shiva on the calendar there. Nanjunda means one who could take the poison and in return give nectar." Explaining further Maharaj said "If you want to really practice *Shiva jnanae jiva seva* you have to be like that Nanjunda Shiva. You have to take all the difficulties, ridicules, and obstacles and in return you must be able to give only love and something good to the person and the people, considering them as the embodiment of Lord Shiva and serve them. However, this is not as easy as we talk. We need to seriously reflect over the concept of divinity of man and practice it in our day to day life."

— Swami Muktidananda

Mangoes and Atma-vikas

Once, Swami Ranganathananda Maharaj visited our Narendrapur Ashrama and spoke about his experiences in the West to the students and teachers in our college. The same evening, he was to speak before a gathering of our school students from the Bengali section. I was eager to know how he would talk about the Atman to such small children and how he could cross the language barrier. He spoke in Bengali – Hindi mixed language.

Maharaj narrated the story of children playing and a man coming with a basket of mangoes to the outhouse. He called one of the boys and told him to eat a mango. The boy took the mango, cleaned it, cut it to pieces, ate it all by himself and rushed back to join the game. The man then called another boy and told him to eat the mango. But this boy was different. He cleaned all the mangoes, cut them to pieces, took it out running towards the boys who were playing and told them, here are mangoes, let us eat these and then play. Maharaj stopped and asked who had atma-vikas. The idea of atma-vikas was thus imprinted on the minds of the young boys. This was the amazing ability to raise or lower himself to the level of the hearers.

— Swami Satyapriyananda

Sri Ramakrishna's Will

After my two years' training at the Training Centre for brahmacharis, I had the opportunity to serve Swami Ranganathanandaji as one of his sevaks.

One day, while having lunch, he was talking about the exodus from Burma when because of political turmoil, all Indians had to leave that country. Then, one of his devotees, who happened to be a government official had come to meet Maharaj with the offer that he could arrange for him an air ticket to India. Without a moment's hesitation, Maharaj asked him if he could arrange tickets for all the people with him. When the official demurred, Maharaj told him that he preferred to walk back to Calcutta with the rest of the evacuees. Hearing this, I asked, "Maharaj, were you not afraid of such a perilous journey?" Maharaj looked at me and said, "Fear? I thought if Sri

Ramakrishna wants to save me, then nothing can kill me; and if he wants to kill me, nobody can save me.” Such was his tremendous faith in Sri Ramakrishna.

— *Swami Satyaprabhananda*

The joy of Atman

That Swami Ranganathananda Maharaj’s mind was always glued to the thought of Atman-Brahman can be known through the following incident. Sometime in 1987, he came to Delhi Ashrama to receive the first Indira Gandhi National Integration Award and deliver his Acceptance Speech. It was evening and he was proceeding towards the waiting vehicle to go to Vijnan Bhavan, the venue of the programme. A young volunteer, unaware of the fact that revered Maharaj was in hurry, came forward to offer his pranams right on the pathway near his room. As was his practice, revered Maharaj stood still, aligned his both feet, as if ready to receive the pranams (which he always did as a mark of respecting the Divine present in those who touched his feet) and graciously accepted the young man’s pranams. After touching his feet, the young man said to revered Maharaj with a smile on his face, ‘Pranams, Maharaj.’ Looking at his smiling face, Maharaj spontaneously remarked, ‘Ah, the joy of Atman is on your face!’ Seeing a sparkle of Atman everywhere! This unexpected remark left a deep impression on the youth’s mind.

Swami Ranganathanandaji found in even trivial events the idea of the all-pervading and joyful nature of man — Atman.

— *Swami Atmashradhdhananda*

Constructive bombs

I was in-charge of the sales section at the Hyderabad Math. One day Ranganathanandaji Maharaj said, “I am going to a college to give a lecture. Be ready at 4 P.M. You will have to arrange a book stall there.” I replied, “Today is a holiday for our book-stall. No worker or volunteer is available. How can I manage all alone?” Maharaj said, “Why? I am there. I can ask some students to help you. See, if they only listen to my lecture, they will soon forget what I told them; but if they purchase books it will remain with them. Somebody else will also read the books in their house. Swamiji’s literature is like a time-bomb. If not today, at some time in the future, they will explode. These bombs are not destructive; they are constructive bombs.”

Whenever and wherever he went to give a talk, Maharaj always carried books with him and at the end of the lecture he would speak about the importance of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature.

— *Swami Shrikantananda*

Pinpricks in life

It was in the year 1989. Swami Ranganathananda Maharaj had contracted Pulmonary Tuberculosis and was recuperating at Arogya Bhavan, Belur Math. His blood sugar levels were fluctuating. Br. (Dr) Devendra Maharaj (Late Swami Varishthananda) and I had gone to Maharaj to check his blood sugar with Glucometer. We told him “Maharaj, we are going to check your blood glucose. We are going to prick your finger a little with this needle. It will be a little prick and it will not hurt you.”

Though not in sound health then, Maharaj replied humorously, “My boys, go ahead and prick as you like. I have had so many pinpricks in my life. I was not perturbed by them at all.” After we

finished our work, Maharaj said, “Criticisms are like these pinpricks. We must learn to take criticism in the right spirit and move ahead. We must not be cowed down by these pinpricks of criticism.” A very important lesson for some of us who become very sensitive and just cannot take criticism.

— Swami Satyeshananda

Lesson in self-dependence

When we were in the Training Centre for Brahmacharis at Belur Math, I was given the responsibility of escorting Swami Ranganathananda Maharaj, then the President of our Order, to the Training Centre. Maharaj was walking and I was holding the umbrella over his head. I had been cautioned again and again that under no circumstances should I allow Maharaj to hold the umbrella since it would surely cause severe pain in his hand. When we were taking a rightward turn in front of Sri Ramakrishna’s Temple, Maharaj became conscious of my holding the umbrella over his head. He immediately held the handle of the umbrella with his left hand and emphatically said, “Leave it, leave it. Why should you hold it over my head? I am quite accustomed to holding an umbrella.” I tried my best to resist him, but he finally almost snatched the umbrella out of my hand and continued walking as before – as if giving me the message, ‘So long as I am capable of doing my own business, why should I unnecessarily take the help of others?’

— Swami Tattwasarananda

Don’t find faults

Many times some sadhus and even devotees would criticise others in front of Swami Ranganathananda Maharaj. Sometimes they also complained to him. Maharaj solved this problem very tactfully. On a cardboard, he got printed Holy Mother’s last message and hung it on the wall of the dining hall. After the *Bramharpanam Brahma Havi* mantra, all the diners also repeated that saying in one voice: “If you want peace of mind do not find fault with others; rather see your own faults. Learn to make the whole world your own. No one is a stranger, my child, the whole world is your own.” After this message was put up, within no time everybody stopped complaining to Maharaj and tried to give up the habit of fault-finding.

— Swami Shrikantananda

Priorities

It was the late 50’s of the last century. Guwahati Ramakrishna Seva Samity (presently Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama) was located in the Chhatribari area of the city, with the temple in a make-shift structure. At that time, it was still a private Ashrama. It was decided by the Committee members and devotees to construct a new temple for Sri Ramakrishna. My father was responsible to find donors for the project. Sri Ramesh Saraswati, Commissioner Guwahati Municipality, agreed to donate a good amount for the temple. Another gentleman, Sri Muralidhar Saraf, a businessman by profession, agreed to sponsor the boundary wall.

Swami Ranganathanandaji was scheduled to visit Shillong. The Committee planned to invite Maharaj to lay the foundation stone for the temple on his return journey from Shillong. When on his way to Shillong, Maharaj stopped in Guwahati overnight, he was informed of the plans. He then came and saw the current temple, the home for the poor and orphan students, and the bathroom and kitchen of the Ashrama. He was saddened to see the very poor plight of these

facilities. He agreed with the plans for the boundary wall, but was not at all happy about the idea of constructing a new temple. To everyone's surprise he said the temple should not be built now. He advised the Committee members that the first thing they ought to construct was a toilet; second drinking water facility and bathroom; third, a good kitchen; fourth, a students' home; and if money permitted, a dispensary should also be built. Only after all these were ready, they should think about constructing a new temple! He said, the makeshift temple was far better than the poor condition in which Sri Ramakrishna used to stay at Kamarpukur. As a very young boy, I had the privilege to be present when Maharaj gave this wise counsel.

When the donor came to know about this, he was heartbroken that his money would be used to build a bathroom and kitchen. So, he was brought to meet Ranganathananda Maharaj. Maharaj convinced him with his sweet words about how when building a home, we first built kitchens and bathrooms, and rooms for our kids, before building the temple or puja room. Sri Rameshji, was not very thrilled, but still he agreed to donate the money for the construction of these facilities.

This is how the boundary wall and the bathrooms and student home of the Ashrama were built. The temple at Chhatribari was built much later. In 1968, Belur Math took over the Ashrama. In 1988, when the Temple was shifted to the new campus in the Ulubari area, the old temple was restructured into an outdoor hospital, which at present is a very active hub for patients from the low-income group. Thus the final dispensary idea of Ranganathananda Maharaj too became a reality.

— Sri Ajoy Kr. Dutta

Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Mysuru



Swami Gahanananda

In 1939, 22-years old Nareshranjan Roychoudhury joined the Order at the Bhubaneswar ashrama. The same year, he received mantra-diksha from Swami Virajanandaji who also later gave him sannyasa-diksha in 1948.

For over 27 years, he served at Seva Pratishtan, Calcutta, transforming it from a new-born children's hospital to a full-fledged general hospital. Elected a Trustee of the Order in 1965, he served as Asst. Secretary from 1979, and then as the General Secretary from 1989. He became one of the Vice Presidents of the Order in 1992 and then from 25 May 2005 served as the 14th President of the Order until his mahasamadhi on 4 Nov 2007. His life is encapsulated in his own words: "Work is the best form of spiritual practice, and service to man is the best form of worship — these are the two principles I have followed all through my life."



Truthfulness and faith

I was sent to serve in Seva Prathisthan, our general hospital in Calcutta. The financial condition of the hospital was very poor. There was no certainty about where the money would come for paying the monthly salary of the staff. By the 20th - 21st of every month we used to start worrying about it. During crisis situations, we would borrow a substantial amount from a well-wisher and return the same to him the next month. But how long could we be dependent on one person? I would sometimes tell Maharaj, "We should make some good arrangement for revenue." But he would reply, "It is okay. What is there to fear? Why are you worried? This Pratishtan belongs to Thakur, Maa, Swamiji. Why are you so worried"? In spite of Maharaj's assurance I had my worries. Under these circumstances, I faced the following incident.

It was the time when the Indian Government had imposed Emergency and announced a date for declaring all undeclared assets. One day a gentleman who was a Manager in one of the Birla Companies came to meet Gahananandaji. But as Maharaj was out of station, I received the gentleman in my room which was opposite to Maharaj's room. The man was carrying a suitcase full of cash. He said, "There is Rs. 50,000 in this. Please accept it." When I asked him for the

donor's name and address, he kept quiet. Then I suggested, "You please tell me. I will note it down." Still uneasy with my request, he asked, "Why? What is the problem?" He then started explaining the situation from his perspective. When I insisted that he had to give the donor's name and address, he said, "In that case, I will go to another organisation which is close by." In all humility I told him, "You can surely do so." Meanwhile, a hint of worry was creeping into my mind about the fact that, it was already past the 20th of the month and we had to arrange funds for the next month's salary. Finally, the gentleman exclaimed in an exasperated tone *Tum buddhu hai* "You are a fool." I listened to him without uttering a word and dropped him to his car. He had come in a fairly big car.

The next day, on Gahanananda Maharaj's return, I narrated the entire incident to him. He told me, "You have done the right thing. I have told you Thakur, Maa, Swamiji are there, so why do you worry?"

To run administrative affairs on the foundation of unflinching faith in God is not an easy task.

— Swami Prabhananda

Rogi Narayana

When I was at Seva Prathishtan, our multi-speciality hospital in Calcutta, I often noticed that speaking with doctors or while visiting patients along with the doctors, Swami Gahananandaji would tell the doctors, "Whenever you are examining a patient please think that the patient is related to you. You will see your diagnosis and treatment will be far more effective and the patient will also respond better." Though I heard Maharaj repeat these words often, they did not make any special impression on my mind.



Seva Prathishthan, Kolkata

Once, a gentleman working in a senior position in a Government Office was admitted and underwent treatment for quite some time. After recovery, when he was discharged, he came to meet me to express his gratitude. The doctor who had treated him happened to be sitting in front of me at that time. So, the gentleman expressed his gratitude to the doctor as well. While conversing so, it was revealed that the gentleman was a close relative of the doctor. They had not recognised each other because they were out of touch for a long time. The doctor then told him, "You should have introduced yourself to me earlier."

After the gentleman left, I asked the doctor, "What is the matter? If you had known about your relationship earlier, what would have you done?"

The doctor replied, "I would have taken a little more care."

"What a terrible thing," I blurted out.

I then realised the importance of Gahananandaji repeatedly asking the doctors to look upon all patients as their own relatives.

— Swami Prabhananda

Perfection in work

Swami Gahananandaji had then just joined Bhubaneswar Ashrama, and was known as Br. Naresh. The head of the centre Swami Nirvananandaji had given him the responsibility of serving Swami Shankarananda Maharaj who was at the Math on a visit.

One day Shankaranandaji returned from his morning walk and took off his shawl and kept it without folding it. Finding an opportunity, Br. Naresh folded the shawl and kept it on the dress-hanger.

The next day when Shankaranandaji came back from his morning walk and took off his shawl, Br. Naresh once again was about to fold the shawl. Just then Shankaranandaji in his usual serious voice said, "Leave it, you will end up creating more work for me." The shawl fell from the hands of a shocked Br. Naresh!

But this did not dampen his spirit. He closely observed how Shankaranandaji neatly folded the shawl maintaining its folds. The next day when Shankaranandaji took off the shawl, Br. Naresh, with great care, folded it to perfection. After that Shankaranandaji did not have any reservation in Br. Naresh folding the shawl.

The mind-set of Gahananandaji revealed from this shawl-folding episode could well be taken as the key to his life's success. When he set his eyes on any work, he would do it silently, with utmost patience and sincerity, and in spite of any obstacles, he would tenaciously pursue and complete it.

— Swami Shivamayananda

Discipline with love

Once, some workers were suspended from duty for misconduct. All formalities of suspension were followed. Just after a couple of days, Gahanananda Maharaj called us and told, "You rest satisfied after suspending them. Have you ever given it a thought how they will run their family? Their family didn't do any wrong." Therefore, the workers who were suspended for a month for valid reasons, were reinstated in duty within three days. Such was his concern for the workers.

— Swami Lokanathananda

To get or to give?

I joined Deoghar Ashrama as a brahmachari and during my stay there Swami Gahanananda Maharaj, who was then one of the Vice Presidents of the Order, visited Deoghar 2-3 times to give *mantra-diksha*. On one such occasion, while meeting all the swamis and brahmacharis at night, he asked each brahmachari why he had left his home and joined the Sangha. “For God-realisation”, “for seeing God face to face”, “for getting peace of mind”, “for the eradication of worldly sufferings” were the stereotype answers given by almost all of us. The scene is still vivid in my memory. After all of us replied to that question, Maharaj very seriously remarked, “I see, all of you have joined this holy order for getting something, not for giving something!!” That was a life-time message for all of us.

— Swami Tattwasarananda

Sarva deva devi swarupa

Before taking up any new responsibility, senior swamis would visit Swami Shantaswarupananda Maharaj, commonly addressed as Parvati Maharaj, at Lucknow Ashrama and seek his guidance and blessings. When Swami Gahanananda Maharaj was ordained as the Vice President of our Order, he came along with Swami Prameyananda Maharaj, the then Manager of Belur Math, to meet Parvati Maharaj. Something of my personal interest happened during their visit. One day, when Gahanananda Maharaj and Prameyananda Maharaj were chitchatting with Parvati Maharaj all the brahmacharis, including me, went to offer our pranams to the three senior swamis. As we offered our pranams one by one, Gahananandaji asked our names. My pre-monastic name was Devashis, which means ‘God’s blessings’. The moment he heard my name, Gahananandaji asked, “Which God’s blessings?” I was bit puzzled and didn’t know what to answer. To clarify he again said, “When your parents named you, they must have thought of some God by whose blessings they have begotten you. So who is that God?” I replied that I was not sure of it. He again asked with a mischievous grin, “So don’t you think that now there will be a fight between that God, whosoever it might be, and Sri Ramakrishna in whom you have taken refuge?” I kept quiet as I was not sure what to answer. And then came the answer from the questioner himself, “Well you need not worry about it. Whosoever may be the God to whom you were dedicated by your parents, it’s after all Sri Ramakrishna alone. For isn’t Sri Ramakrishna *sarva deva devi swarupa* – the divine incarnate manifesting all the facets of divinity? In Him has mingled diverse faiths and beliefs. He is *sarva-dharma-swarupa*.” What a wonderful revelation!

— Swami Sunisthananda

Accepting pranams

During my years as a brahmachari, i.e., before sannyasa, I was very conscious about not accepting pranams from anyone. One day at a Railway station some devotees who had come to see off the sadhus were offering pranams. But I was jumping around and fidgeting, trying to prevent anyone from bowing down to me. Gahananandaji Maharaj who saw all this later told me, “What is all this? Why are you overdoing this? You have become a sadhu; so it is obvious that devotees will offer pranams. Instead of jumping around, you should accept the pranam calmly and dedicate it to Him for whom the pranams are meant. No one is offering pranam to you. They are offering it to Sri Sri Ramakrishna who dwells inside you.” An illusion was immediately removed for good.

— Swami Tapanananda

Swami Atmasthananda

Satyakrishna Bhattacharya came in touch with many sannyasis of the Order in his youth. He received mantra-diksha from Swami Vijnananandaji in 1938. While pursuing M.A. in philosophy at Calcutta University he decided to discontinue his studies and join the Order in 1941 at Belur Math. Swami Virajanandaji gave him sannyasa-diksha in 1949.

He became the Order's Asst. Secretary in 1975, its General Secretary in 1992, and one of the Vice Presidents in 1997. From 3 Dec 2007 till his mahasamadhi on 18 June 2017 he served as the President of the Order.

He contributions to the TB Sanatorium centre in Ranchi, and the Rajkot ashrama were immense. He also developed the Order's hospital in Rangoon as the best in Burma before it was taken over by the military there. He executed huge relief operations across India. The acquisition and renovation of Swami Vivekananda's ancestral house was largely due to his efforts.



Saintly vibrations

When he was a Vice President of the Order, Swami Atmasthananda Maharaj once came to Rajkot. He was usually accommodated in a room upstairs. But for this visit arrangements had been made to accommodate him in a new room in the ground floor which was particularly prepared to receive him. There was also a waiting room just nearby where he could meet the devotees. But when he came and understood that he was being accommodated in a different room, he refused to enter it. He declared that he would stay only in that room upstairs. The in-charge swami and others tried to convince him that this arrangement was done for his convenience. But Maharaj was firm. He wanted to stay only in that upstairs room. So, that room was quickly prepared to accommodate him. All the swamis were wondering why Maharaj was so adamant. Later, Maharaj told his sevaks, "I know all the inconveniences of staying in this room upstairs. I have to climb up and down so many times. But in this room Vireswaranandaji, Gambhiranandaji and other great senior swamis have stayed. Wherever these great swamis stay,

that place becomes holy. Their vibrations are here.” This gave us a new perception about a place. Vibrations are more important than conveniences.

— Swami Nikhileswarananda

No compromise with principles

Atmasthanandaji Maharaj took charge of Rajkot Ashrama from Swami Bhuteshanandaji in 1966. While taking charge he asked what were the important things he should focus on. Bhuteshanandaji had started collecting funds for building a new temple at the cost of rupees 3 lakhs. He told Atmasthanandaji to complete this temple project. As Gujarat is known for its big temples, Atmasthanandaji decided that the temple of Sri Ramakrishna too should be of a grand dimension. He changed the plans and the temple construction estimate became 12 lakh rupees (when the temple was completed it cost more than 45 lakhs). It was a very big amount in those days.

Maharaj started collecting funds for the temple. Simultaneously, he undertook many relief activities. He wanted the temple to be a replica of Belur Math. Architects from Ahmedabad were hired. A newly joined brahmachari who had done Structural Engineering from USA was put in charge of the construction. This brahmachari collected the original plan of Belur Math from the company who had constructed it. Meanwhile, Maharaj wanted the general public of Rajkot to participate in the temple construction. So he printed one rupee coupons and sent the devotees, sadhus and brahmacharis across the city to sell them and collect funds.

At such a time one day a person came with 5 lakh rupees and said he wanted to donate it. The Ashrama had collected in 2-3 years only about 2 lakhs. So Maharaj was very happy to get 5 lakhs in one stroke. The man had come with cash. Maharaj asked a swami to count it. After the counting Maharaj asked the man in whose name the receipt was to be issued. But the man said “No, I don’t want any receipt.” Maharaj replied “No, no. Without issuing a receipt we cannot accept any money.” The money was immediately returned to the man. No compromise with principles.

— Swami Nikhileswarananda

With Sri Ramakrishna in the Temple

Atmasthanandaji Maharaj was in-charge of our Pre-probationers’ Training Centre (PPTC). He ensured that we would get up at 3:40 A.M. during summer and at 4:00 A.M. during winter and attend the morning mangalarati. He was very particular that sadhus and brahmacharins attend both *mangalarati* and *sandhyarati* in the main temple. He would say, “Master’s living presence can be felt very tangibly at the Main temple. Praying and meditating in the main temple both in the early morning and evening in the presence of our loving Thakur will solve all our problems ensuring the spiritual well-being of our holy Order.” Maharaj was the General Secretary of the Order from 1992 to 1997. During this period, he would attend evening arati at the main temple without fail. He would be found seated on his asana well before the commencement of arati. He would say, “Thakur is the centre of our life. Sadhan-bhajan and selfless work must go hand in hand to receive Thakur’s grace.” He was also very particular that we followed the routine strictly.

— Swami Satyeshananda

Who owns the ashrama?

Atmasthanandaji Maharaj had the strong conviction that Sri Ramakrishna is present in every ashrama of our Order. Many senior swamis — including one who had worked with him for several years at the Headquarters — told me that one thing about Maharaj was very much certain: He had a deep faith in Sri Ramakrishna. After joining the Order, I asked Maharaj how I could connect every activity of the ashrama with Sri Ramakrishna. It was relatively easy to do so when I was worshipping in the temple; but when it came to work like checking and replying emails in computer, I was finding it difficult to connect.

He then asked me, “Do you own the ashrama?” “No”, I replied. “Does the Swami in-charge own it?” I thought for a moment and again said, “No”. “Then, who owns it?” “Sri Ramakrishna”, I replied. “That is the answer to your question”, he said. There was such a directness in his answer that it at once touched my heart and head.

— *Swami Ishadhyanananda*

Incorrect correction

It was perhaps in the year 1995 when Atmasthanandaji Maharaj was the General Secretary of the Order. I was in the Order for nearly two decades and was all along serving at the Mission Headquarters where I constantly interacted with the senior-most swamis of the Order. I was quite free with them. This kind of freeness often not only removes fear, it also induces a kind of brazenness in our behaviour. I had a free approach to Maharaj. One day we were discussing something and Maharaj said something which was absolutely wrong. Immediately I corrected him. Maharaj just looked at me for some time and then said, “You see, we have become old. If we say something, even if it is not correct, can you not just tolerate? Should you correct us immediately?” That day I felt so ashamed of myself. It was not necessary for me to have corrected him so curtly. I could have very gently pointed out a little later that Maharaj was not correct. But, because of my impetuous nature I went to correct him at once. Once again it was a great lesson as to how to deal with very senior swamis. A little mistake here and there in mundane matters is hardly of any consequence. What one should be really correct at is in monastic vows and virtues.

— *Swami Shantatmananda*

Tangible spirituality

Swami Sarvapriyananda (the present Minister-in-charge of the Vedanta Society, New York) and I joined the Order at our Deogarh centre. On one occasion, we were sent by Swami Suvirananda Maharaj (the then Secretary of Deoghar Ashrama and presently the General Secretary of our Order) to Belur Math on some official purpose. Swami Atmasthananda Maharaj who was then the General Secretary, instead of sending us back to our centre after our work was over, asked us to stay in Belur Math for at least two weeks.

When we were about to take leave of him after two weeks, Maharaj told us with great feeling, “Do you know, why I detained you here? Because, here your *Ishta* is tangibly residing, Mother Ganga is here and moreover your guru is still here in Belur Math in his physical body. All these taken together is Belur Math. Belur Math does not mean some buildings. Moreover, even today you will get many sadhus here who are leading pure lives and have seen God. Living in this holy atmosphere, you will feel that subtle vibration which will be immensely beneficial for your sadhu life.” We were simply overwhelmed, by Maharaj’s concern for us.

— *Swami Tattwasarananda*

The self is all in all none else exists
and thou that art Sanyasin hold say Om Tat-Sat Om.

There is but one, the free, the knower - self
without a name without a form or stain
In Him is maya dreaming all this dream
the witness He appears as nature ~~and~~ Soul
Know thou that art Sanyasin hold say Om Tat-Sat Om.
There seeketh thou that freedom friend of this world
in books and temples

'Song of the Sannyasin' original manuscript in Swamiji's handwriting

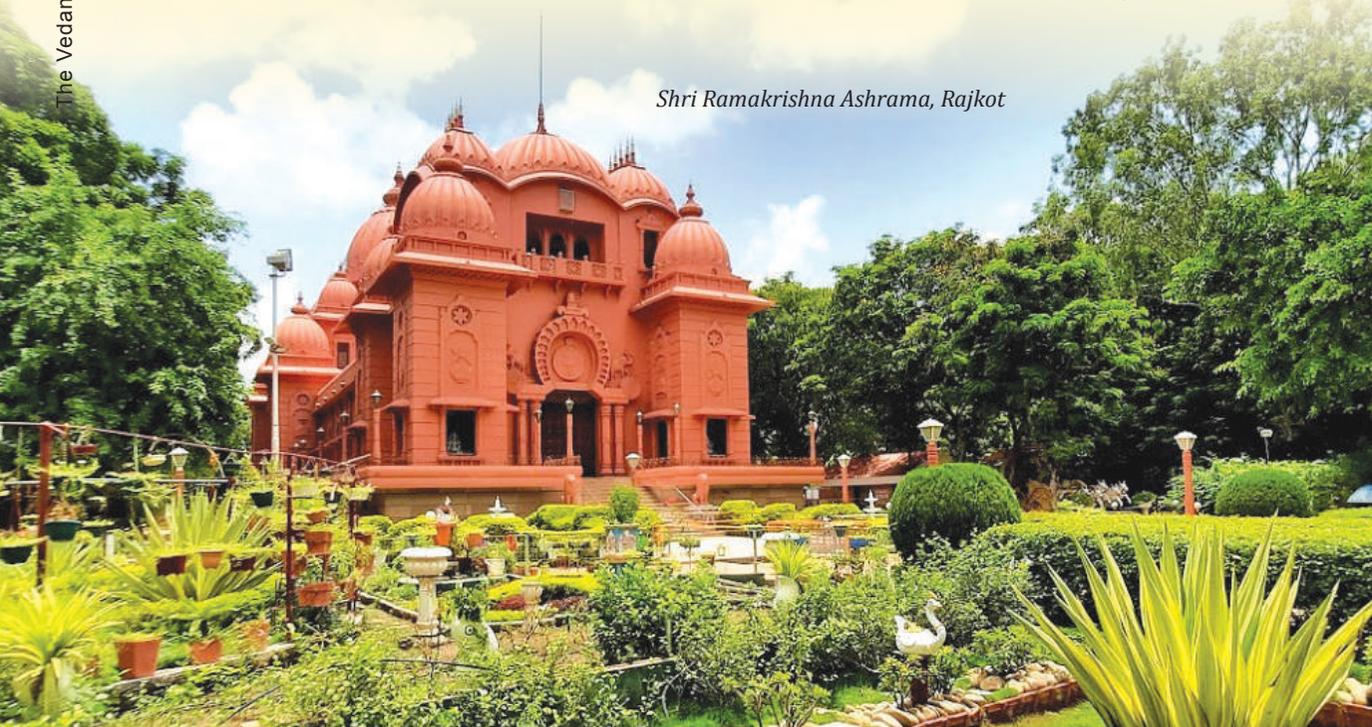
Song of the Sannyasin

One night, Atmasthanandaji Maharaj asked us to recite from memory Swami Vivekananda's poem 'Song of the Sannyasin'. When we couldn't do it, Maharaj flew into a rage and shouted at us, "I will send all of you back home if you don't commit it to memory. I don't want you here wasting Sri Sri Thakur's food and resources." I still remember that particular night. The whole night, all of us were trying to memorise that poem.

Maharaj would say that this poem contains highest spiritual ideals necessary for leading a pure and noble life, and is a powerhouse of inspiration for both monastics and householders. While Swamiji has presented his deep thoughts in wonderful English, the Bengali translation by Swami Shuddhanandaji, the Kannada translation by Sri Kuvempu and translations into other vernacular languages are also very good and powerful. Even now, every day I try to recollect the verses from 'Song of the Sannyasin' and derive great inspiration, strength and guidance by reciting it.

— Swami Satyeshananda

Shri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Rajkot

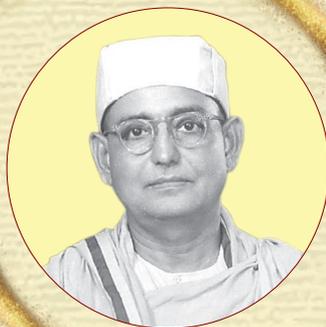


Swami Yatiswarananda

As a youth Suresh Chandra Bhattacharya chanced upon a copy of The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda's Raja Yoga and thus came into contact with the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. He graduated from Presidency College in Calcutta. In April 1911 he received mantra-diksha from Swami Brahmananda and joined the Order in Oct 1911. The same year, Brahmanandaji sent him to Madras Ashrama with the advice, "Struggle! Struggle! Struggle!"

He served as the head of Bombay and Madras Ashramas and then from 1933 to 1950 in Europe and American centres. He returned to be the head of Bangalore Ashrama in 1951. From 1962 he served as the Vice President of the Order until his mahasamadhi on 26 Jan 1966.

A spiritual dynamo, his talks and books have helped countless men and women on the spiritual path.



Dots and line

I had gone to Hyderabad ashrama as a volunteer. Swami Yatiswarananda Maharaj too had come there. One day, while strolling with him, I said I like to meditate but do not get joy in japa. Maharaj stopped, and with his walking stick placed dots in a row over the dust of the path we were walking, and said, "This is japa." Then, with the tip of the same walking stick, he joined the dots making a continuous line and said, "This is meditation."

— Swami Brahmeshananda

Lakshmi-Narayana

I vividly remember a touching incident of 1961. I had joined the Bangalore Ashrama a year ago. One day, after our lunch, a Bengali couple came to the Ashrama at Basavanagudi in Bangalore around 1.30 P.M. They were Swami Yatiswaranandaji's disciples. I informed him of their arrival. He came from his room and talked to them. On learning that they had not had their lunch, he asked me, "Is there any food left?" I said, "Yes, Swamiji." I was in charge of the kitchen.

He accompanied them to the dining hall. The guests were offered seats on the floor and I placed two plates before them and served them food. Swamiji sat before them on the floor and

watched them eat. It was summer. It was hot, and some flies were hovering around. Swamiji got a hand fan from me and started fanning away the flies. Now and then, he fanned the guests too. I told him, “Swamiji, please give it to me; I will fan them.” However, he continued to fan them. After their lunch, he spoke to them briefly and they took leave of him.

By this time, I was a little confused with the question: “This senior Swamiji, who is a guru of many, was fanning away the flies and fanning the couple as they were having their lunch. What to make of this?” Since I had grown up in South India, I had a few more questions, but lacked the courage to ask him. But Maharaj spontaneously said something that answered all my questions, “They are verily Lakshmi-Narayana!”

His words left an indelible impression in my mind: they were not just husband and wife, but veritably the Goddess Lakshmi and God Narayana— was this not the noble attitude of the ancient Rishis?

— Swami Purushottamananda

How to progress?

I joined the Ramakrishna Order in 1963 in New Delhi under Swami Swahanandaji, a disciple of Swami Vijnanananda Maharaj. I had the divine privilege of being with Swami Yatiswaranandaji for a few days only. He came to the Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi in 1964. He was giving mantra-diksha to a larger number of devotees. It was the time of Durga Puja and I received my mantra-diksha from Maharaj on the Mahastami day, 1964. As I was the pujari, I could meet Maharaj, only at night.

After night prasad many of us would sit at his feet surrounding him. Devotees and sadhus would then pose many questions and receive concise but clear answers to their spiritual problems. One such question was, “How to progress in spiritual life?” In reply Maharaj said that three things are essential for progress in spiritual life:

- 1) A deep and sincere desire for leading a spiritual life.
- 2) A pure and self-controlled life.
- 3) Constant self-awareness.

He said, “One cannot emphasise sufficiently the importance of self-awareness.” During one of his talks, one night, Maharaj explained, “One must be extremely alert and watchful (how alert one must be while driving on a busy road) of what one is doing. Most of the failures and falls we see in spiritual life are due to this one defect of being careless and non-observant. Most sadhakas lead their life half-asleep as it were. Many of us are not aware of the thoughts that are passing in the depths of our minds, the words we utter, and what and why we do what we do. When we develop the art of being aware of everything that happens in our life, I would say, we have made very good progress in spiritual life.” It is of utmost importance to be aware of everything that happens in our life.

— Swami Dayatmananda

Serve with courtesy

“First, be a *gentleman* if you wish to become a *sadhu* or holy man,” was Swami Yatiswaranandaji’s motto, and he himself lived up to it. I was then his secretary and the senior most brahmachari of the Ashrama in the Basavanagudi centre at Bengaluru; it was some status

in the eyes of visiting devotees! A small group of such people came to see Maharaj one morning. He was then walking about in the open field, in front of the office-building, in which both of us resided and worked. After talking with them when he was taking leave, he called me and asked me to give them prasada. I promptly brought some pieces of offered sugar candy in a plate, and standing on the raised verandah of the building, held out the prasada so that they could come and take. Suddenly, like a bolt came a sharp scolding from Maharaj who was watching from a slight distance; a scolding which I never could expect. With a stern face, he said, "Foolish fellow! *Come down and give it to them. Come down.*" This scolding, to the 'senior' brahmachari, in front of all the devotees... what a humiliation — enough to make one run away in fury or in shame. But, somehow through the Lord's grace, I could take it very calmly; it didn't even rankle in my mind after the episode was over. In retrospect, I could see it was a timely shot at an 'ego' which perhaps needed to come down. 'Come down! Don't stand on a high pedestal. *The devotees are to be served with great courtesy. Behave like a gentleman at least,*' was the obvious message, which dawned on me in retrospect.

— Swami Sastrananda

Importance of human relationship

I had just been given the responsibility of the bookstall in the ashrama. Since the annual celebrations were round the corner I had prepared a grand plan of decorating the bookstall for the occasion. My budget for it was Rs 25/-. It was quiet a big amount in December 1954. As the proposal was discussed in our night class [every centre of the Ramakrishna Order has a night class where the monastics gather for a reading and discussion], all the monastic brothers pooh-pooed it saying that even after spending so much money the sales would not go up. Seeing me downcast, Yatiswaranandaji asked how much money I needed. On hearing me say '*Twenty five rupees*', he immediately sanctioned it.



(Standing L-R) Swamis Nikhilananda, unknown, Abhayananda, unknown, unknown, (Sitting L-R) Vividishananda, Madhavananda, Yatiswarananda, Atmabodhananda, Atulananda at Mayavati in 1923

When I was going to his room, he suddenly turned towards me and said, with great emphasis, 'Whenever there is a conflict between a material object and a human relationship, throw away the material object and keep the human relationship!'

— Swami Harshananda

Talking with God

It was evening. Accompanied by N., Yatiswaranandaji was going for a small stroll in the ashrama grounds (Bangalore Ashrama). They first went to the shrine. There, standing before Sri Ramakrishna, Maharaj muttered something in his native Bengali and folded his hands in respectful namaskar. After coming out of the temple, out of sheer curiosity, N. asked him what he was muttering. Not appreciating this undue inquisitiveness, Yatiswaranandaji sharply rebuked him and they continued their evening stroll.

A few minutes later, Maharaj turned to N., and gently said, "Did you feel hurt by my words? You see, I was telling Sri Guru Maharaj that I am having a back-ache. Hence bending and saluting is rather painful. Please excuse me and accept my salutation, like this (in standing posture) itself. And you know, Sri Guru Maharaj smiled at me and accepted my pranams."

God was no imagination for him. And whatever is real, becomes palpable, tangible. He lived this idea.

— A Sannyasi

Sri Ramakrishna Math, Bengaluru



Swami Nirvanananda

At the Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service in Varanasi, a young brahmachari was serving a patient hailing from Tamil Nadu. As the brahmachari could not understand the patient's needs expressed in Tamil language, the angry patient gave a tight slap on the brahmachari's cheek. The young brahmachari calmly left the place and soon re-entered with an interpreter to cater to the patient's needs. Marked with this patience, forbearance and concern in service this brahmachari later became the most accomplished sevak of Swami Brahmanandaji.

After receiving mantra-diksha from Swami Brahmanandaji, he joined the Order at Varanasi Sevashrama in 1912 and received sannyasa-diksha from his guru in 1916. From 1966 he served as one of the Vice Presidents of the Order until his mahasamadhi on 6 April 1984 at the age of 94.



You will have Nirvana

Swami Nirvanananda Maharaj was a persona, who was always immersed in the bliss of Nirvana; he was literally worthy of the name i.e., Nirvanananda. Maharaj was popularly known as Surya (Brahmanandaji lovingly used to call him as 'Sujji') Maharaj. Swami Brahmananda, Sujji Maharaji's hallowed Master, once bestowed his grace upon him by saying, 'You will have Nirvana'. In his later days Swami Nirvananandaji used to say, "My Nirvana is not that one which people usually think it to be. My Nirvana implies that I shall seek refuge at the feet of Raja Maharaj and serve him for eternity. Raja Maharaj is the only disciple of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna who came with all the previous incarnations. Whenever Raja Maharaj descended on the earth, I came with him for serving him. In future also, if Raja Maharaj comes to this earth, I shall surely come to serve him."

In another context, Swami Nirvananandaji said, "Everybody speaks of Raja Maharaj's blessings on me. Everybody knows it because Raja Maharaj blessed me in the presence of others. But at first I was consecrated by Baburam Maharaj." Swami Premanandaji (also known as Baburam Maharaj) professed that Surya Maharaj would have Brahmajnana in due course of time. Swami Saradanandaji too bestowed his grace by saying, "You do not know about yourself! One

day you will have Brahmajnana.” Last in the row was Mahapurush Maharaj, who also blessed Swami Nirvananandaji saying, “Maharaj blessed you that you will have Brahmajnana. I also bless you that you will have Brahmajnana.” Thus, Swami Nirvanananda Maharaj was adorned with divine aura and belonged to that awe disseminating class!

— Swami Suvirananda

Reading the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*

Swami Nirvananandaji used to read *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* (translated into English as *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*) every day. In his late 60s, he even used to explain the purport of the *Gospel* to the novices of the Training Centre at Belur Math. On one such occasion, Swami Atmasthanandaji came to offer his pranams to Maharaj. But Maharaj was so absorbed in reading the *Gospel*, that he did not take note of Atmasthanandaji’s presence. Atmasthanandaji waited silently. After some time, when Nirvananandaji noticed the silent presence of Atmasthanandaji, he enquired when he had come from Rangoon. Swami Atmasthanandaji was then the head of the Rangoon Centre. After some time, when Atmasthanandaji was about to take leave, he asked Nirvananandaji, “Maharaj, even now you read Kathamrita every day so attentively?” Swami Nirvananandaji burst out saying, “What do you say? All through my life, I read the Gospel; but now only I have started understanding the real meaning of Sri Sri Thakur’s words.”

— Swami Suvirananda

Sri Ramakrishna Math, Bhubaneswar





Sri Ramakrishna's Will

After my Training Centre period was over, I was posted to Along (Aalo) Centre in Arunachal Pradesh. I went to Nirvanandaji Maharaj to offer my pranams and take leave. Seeing tears in my eyes, he asked, "Why do you have tears in your eyes?" I replied, "Maharaj, you are so aged, and I am going to Along — such a distant and remote place. I am not sure if we will meet again." Maharaj then affectionately murmured, "If Sri Sri Thakur wills, we shall certainly meet."

And by sheer divine destiny I happened to be by Maharaj's bedside on the day of his Mahasamadhi! At midnight, when the physician came out of his room, we anxiously enquired about Maharaj's health condition. The doctor said that clinically speaking he did not expect Maharaj to survive more than an hour. But the doctor was surprised that even in that critical state, Maharaj had asked him, "How are you?" The doctor had replied, "Maharaj, I have come to see you! How are you, Maharaj?" Pointing at the photographs of Sri Sri Guru Maharaj, Holy Mother and Swamiji, Maharaj had said, "Ask them." After that, the end came peacefully.

Even now, his words ring in my ears — "If Sri Sri Thakur wills, we shall certainly meet." We met each other on the last day of his mortal life. The rest is: "One who hath ears to hear, can hear, eyes to see, can see!" After this I did not have an iota of doubt that I had the privilege of sitting at the feet of a real *Brahmajnani*! Even now, someday at midnight I stand in awe and try to ruminate on those words of my revered and beloved *gurudev*: "If Sri Sri Thakur wills, we shall certainly meet!" I also remember how infallible was the word of his guru Swami Brahmananda Maharaj.

— Swami Suvirananda

The desired blessing

I joined the Order in 1970 at Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago and was there for some years under Swami Bhasyananda. Later I served in India for some years. At the end of 1981, after seven years, I went down from Mayavati to Belur Math to take leave of the authorities. By that time Swami Nirvananandaji was suffering from hardening of the arteries and a consequent loss of memory. I had always had a deep love for him, and so I went to him to make pranam and bid farewell. After prostrating I asked him to bless me that I be a good sadhu. He looked at me in the most loving way I had ever seen from him, though I knew he was suffering from memory loss, and said, "I bless you from the bottom of my heart, I bless you that Sri Ramakrishna ...". And then he said something which caused me to think, but not express in words or on my face, "I wish he would change the expression slightly: that would give me so much satisfaction." And at that he stopped mid-sentence, looked closer at me, and said, "No, I bless you ..." and he said exactly what I had just thought. And thus I knew that spiritually he was not affected at all by memory loss.

— Swami Atmarupananda

Swami Abhayananda

After his formal studies Atul Chandra Guha joined Anushilan Samiti, a group of revolutionaries fighting the British Raj. But after reading Swami Vivekananda's writings, he dissociated from the revolutionaries. He came to Belur Math in 1909 and charmed by the divine love of Sri Ramakrishna's disciples decided to join the Order. He received mantra-diksha from Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. In 1920 he received sannyasa-diksha from Swami Brahmanandaji.

Abhayanandaji served in Mayavati Ashrama for 16 years and from 1930 served as Joint Manager and then the Manager of Belur Math from 1966 till his end. He twice served as the interim President of the Order. His constant advice to the sadhus was: "Be truthful, inculcate purity and if possible, serve people." He attained mahasamadhi on 18 November 1989.



Concern for devotees

While I was in the Training Centre during 1968-69, I sometimes was called to write some letters for Swami Abhayananda Maharaj, generally known as Bharat Maharaj. He was very reserved and in general sadhus kept a respectful distance from him. Naturally I was a bit nervous. Anyhow, after visiting him frequently I became free with him.

Nirjharini Sarkar was a student of Sister Nivedita at Baghbazar. She was married to Ashok Sarkar, the Proprietor of Anandabazar Group. Occasionally they used to send garlands and flowers for Thakur and sometimes used to visit Belur Math. Probably they could not meet Maharaj for a long period. One night at 9 P.M. Bharat Maharaj asked me to contact Ashok babu on phone. I dialled and dialled and finally got the line. Maharaj told him. "Asoke, why are you not coming, you have not sent garlands for Thakur also for a pretty long period." Such was his concern for the welfare of the devotees.

— Swami Suhitananda

Charming lesson

I came to Belur math from a branch centre. The Head Quarters decided to post me in a centre and conveyed the news to me. I resented it because, once I had already served there during

some trying circumstances. But the authorities insisted on my going there and asked me confirm my acceptance within three days. I was in a fix. I told them that I was willing to go to any centre and take up any assignment, except the one they wanted me to do. But they were relentless.

Being desperate, one night I went to Bharat Maharaj's bedroom after dinner. He asked me "What's the matter?" I narrated everything. He gave a patient hearing and advised me to stick to my conscience.

Maharaj's support released all my tension and I naturally felt very happy. In a joyful mood I touched his feet and came out. While I was coming out, he said, "Come again tomorrow night." So, I went the next night and we conversed for ten minutes in a happy mood. Just as I was about to come out of his room, he addressed me by name and said, "Shall I tell you one thing?" I said, "Yes Maharaj." He then simply said, "Why not give up the ego.... and agree to their suggestion." I was already in a joyful light mood, and so I replied, "Yes Maharaj. Tomorrow I shall meet them." This was the charming manner in which he taught me a great lesson of recognising the working of the ego, and the importance of obedience in monastic life.

— Swami Suhitananda

Official correspondence

Before I left for the U.S. in 1971, Bharat Maharaj gave me some practical advice, "Spread the message of the Master and Swamiji, and make sure there is no hypocrisy. When you write to the headquarters, keep a copy of the letter for yourself. When you send us official correspondence, it should be devoid of emotion; otherwise we cannot make any decision. After you have written the letter, make sure that every word of it is true."

— Swami Chetanananda



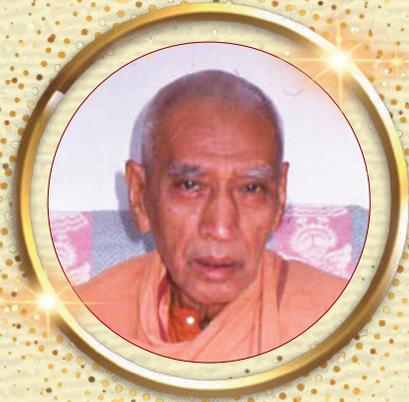
Belur Math old temple courtyard with Swamiji's bed room window on the first floor

Swami Kailasananda

Saileshchandra Bandyopadhyay, a young lad in British India, confronted a British officer whose horse had snatched his bananas.

When offered compensation, he sternly refused and only demanded that the rider and horse be kept in check. This physically slim and delicate, but strong-willed and courageous lad later became Swami Kailasananda.

After his post-graduation in History he worked as a lecturer in Dhaka University. Forced by his family to marry against his wishes, his spiritual aspirations got a fillip when from 1919 he came into regular contact with the swamis of the Order. He received mantra-diksha in 1922 from Swami Shivanandaji. Finally, he renounced family ties and joined the Order in Nov 1929 and with the special blessings of Shivanandaji received sannyasa-diksha the very next year. He served in Delhi ashrama, and then for 27 years at the Madras ashrama. From 1975, he served as one of the Vice Presidents of the Order until his mahasamadhi on 16 December 1978.



In every pore of my body

I joined Belur Math in 1976 and after some months was asked to serve as the sevak of Swami Kailasanandaji, who was one of the Vice Presidents of the Order. Though his health was not good, he would do japam for long hours many times in a day. His guru bhakti was extraordinary. He was specially blessed by Mahapurush Maharaj who gave him sannyasa much before the stipulated time. Moreover, the sannyasa ceremony was scheduled on Kali Puja day instead of Sri Ramakrishna's Janma Tithi Puja day as was the custom. When sadhus in the Math started commenting about Mahapurush Maharaj breaking the Math rules, he went to Mahapurush Maharaj and submitted that he would wait the stipulated period of years before receiving sannyasa. For some reason, Mahapurush Maharaj was firm about his decision. He forcefully told him, "One who can make the rules can break the rules also. Will you take sannyasa or not tell me." He immediately agreed. One day before sannyasa-diksha, Mahapurush Mj said, "So, tomorrow you are going to receive sannyasa. What name shall I give you? I am Shivananda, so you will be Kailasananda. Is that okay?"

Kailasanandaji was so imbued with guru bhakti that when he spoke, almost every sentence began with “Mahapurush Maharaj used to say...” Once or twice he told me “In every pore of my body is Mahapurush Maharaj.” He would every now and then look at the photograph of Mahapurush Maharaj in his room. Every time he went out or came in and even when he went for bathroom he would offer pranams before the photograph.

— Swami Nikhileswarananda

Mahapurush Maharaj used to say...

“Mahapurush Maharaj used to say...” If you found any swami of the Ramakrishna Order begin almost each one of his sentences with the above words, and say that with such feeling and conviction bordering almost on a passion, you could tell that it was Swami Kailasanandaji. He hardly had any personality or individuality of his own except the personality of his guru, Mahapurush Maharaj. Imagine an extremely fair and handsome, tall and well-built swami, with inward but beaming eyes, pouncing upon you the moment you enter the precincts of the Ramakrishna Math at Mylapore, Madras, greeting you with severe admonition for what at that time you would feel for nothing of what you did or said, his rebuke prefaced passionately almost always with “Mahapurush Maharaj used to say...”. Be it a new comer or a fairly well-known devotee, the treatment was almost the same. A new comer would be left wondering who this blessed Mahapurush Maharaj was, and what wrong had he done to deserve such a severe rebuke under the seal of approval and authority of one Mahapurush Maharaj whom he has never seen or heard of! Interestingly, that would seldom put the new comer off although it would initially irritate him. The sheer conviction of the tone which said these words would infect the new comer with a similar conviction that what was being said was true and intended *only* for his own spiritual welfare. What was the great offence of the new comer, by the way? It was apparently simple and too innocent to deserve such a severe rebuke. But *nothing* in spiritual life is insignificant to be ignored as too small. It is this meticulous care of ‘small’ things, this profound attention to ‘little’ details that shapes one’s character on which the edifice of one’s spiritual life is built. The offence was this. Soon after entering the precincts of the Ashrama, one is required not to turn left or right, much less to greet or talk to anybody one may happen to meet or bump into, but make straight for the shrine (*Thakur-ghar* as it is usually called) where lives Sri Ramakrishna in his subtle body, and first bow down before this Presiding Deity and report your entry to the Ashrama. For it is Sri Ramakrishna, and he alone, is the Head, the Presiding Deity, the Supreme Refuge, the Lord and the Witness of all that is happening in the Ashrama—again Mahapurush Maharaj’s words, quoting from the Gita (9.18): गतिर्भर्ता प्रभुः साक्षी निवासः शरणं सुहृत् ... So, first go straight to the shrine, report to him, and *then and then alone*, you are permitted to do anything else, transact any other business like exchanging greetings, meeting people and so on. Even this would not fully satisfy Swami Kailashanandaji. Once again severely rebuked with sentences beginning as usual with “Mahapurush Maharaj used to say...”, this time for simply bowing down to Sri Ramakrishna in the shrine and walking away immediately thereafter without sitting down quietly for some time and meditating and doing japa. The lesson learnt then gets indelibly imprinted on the mind of the devotee: first make it straight to the shrine, bow down to Sri Ramakrishna, the Presiding Deity of the Ashrama, report to him about your coming, then sit down quietly in his divine presence, pray and meditate and do japa for some time before you go

about attending to other things. All this lesson was imparted in all its severity through rebuke and reprimand, but always with the words: “Mahapurush Maharaj used to say...”

— Swami Atmapriyananda

Bow down to Me...

The Gita sloka beginning मन्मना भव मद्भक्तो मद्याजी मां नमस्कुरु I... is extremely important for at least two reasons: 1) The first line of this verse occurs twice in the Gita, at the end of the ninth Chapter (9.34), and again at the end of the eighteenth and the very last chapter (18.65) which is considered by all the commentator-Acharyas as the essence and summary of the entire Gita; 2) Bhagavan Sri Krishna says that this and the verse following it in the eighteenth chapter are the greatest spiritual and mystical secrets in the Gita among all the esoteric and secret doctrines in the world of the Spirit—*sarva-guhyatamam*. Hence the supreme importance of the two Gita verses: 18.65 and 18.66. The simple meaning of the above quoted line uttered by Bhagavan is as follows: *Have your mind and heart absorbed in Me, be devoted to Me, worship (or sacrifice for) Me, bow down (or surrender) to Me.*

There are four components here: (i) absorption in the Lord, (ii) devotion to the Lord, (iii) worshipping or sacrificing for the Lord, (iv) bowing down or surrendering to the Lord. The first two are undoubtedly difficult and the third one in the sense of worshipping and the fourth one in the sense of bowing down appear to be relatively easier. But the effects of these two, namely, worshipping and bowing down, are enormous in spiritual life. Cultivation of the habit of repeated worship and repeated bowing down to the Lord’s image has been recommended in the Bhakti Shastras as a great sadhana and potent means of receiving God’s grace. These acts bring the sadhaka closer to God. One could learn the truth of the above simple but most effective spiritual practice from Swami Kailasanandaji’s life. On the night of Kali Puja, Swami Kailasanandaji would sit through the whole night, silently doing japam with his fingers (we have never seen him use a japamala or rosary). It was a joy for us to watch him meditating and doing japa. Interestingly, he would keep bowing down again and again with folded hands in the midst of his japa and continue doing japa. When I studied the Gita in later life, I remembered this incident of his repeated bowing down in the context of Sri Bhagavan’s exhortation *mam namaskuru*. In fact, this act of bowing was so characteristic of Swami Kailasananda and several other disciples of Sri Ramakrishna’s direct disciples that we began to understand the importance and beauty of this simple sadhana. Swami Kailasanandaji Maharaj would bow down before the photograph or murti of Sri Ramakrishna before leaving the Ashrama on any tour and again bow down first to Sri Ramakrishna immediately on return to the Ashrama from outside. This is a tradition in Ramakrishna Order followed by all the sannyasis. But an interesting phenomenon, in fact an extension of the above tradition, that we have observed in Swami Kailasanandaji was the habit of bowing down to Sri Ramakrishna’s photograph in his room before leaving the room even for a short while, as if taking permission from the Lord and informing Him of his leaving. Again on return to the room, he would bow down as if to report to the Lord his return. This *mam namaskuru* sadhana thus became a vivid experience in his life and some of us have been ‘infected’ with this habit to our immense spiritual benefit.

— Swami Atmapriyananda

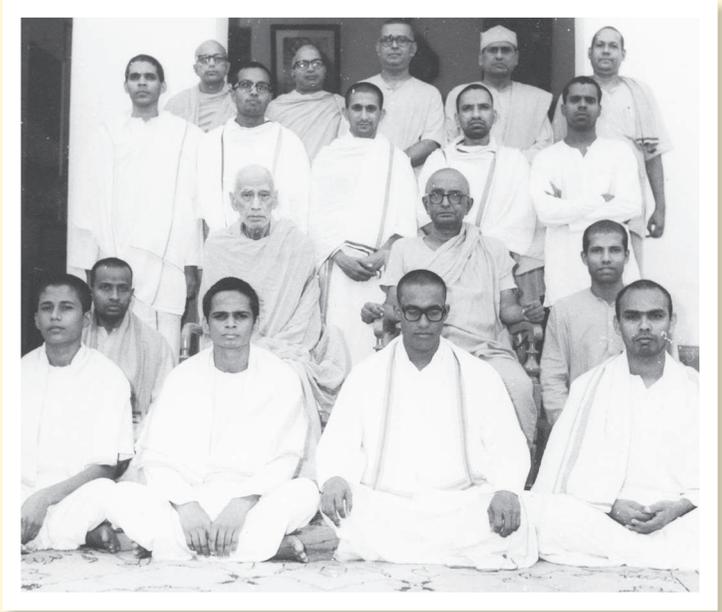
Always with the Guru

I was blessed to receive Swami Kailasanandaji's guidance when I started my monastic life as a novice at Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, in 1965. I served Maharaj for three years. Our scriptures lay stress on devotion to one's guru. The Shvetasvatara Upanishad says, 'Yatha deve tatha gurou', "You should have as much devotion to guru as you have for God." Kailasananda Maharaj's devotion surpassed the idea proposed in this statement. His devotion to guru was a notch above his devotion to God. Let me explain. There was a small photo of his guru Swami Shivanandaji hanging on the wall in his room. Every time he came out of his room, he would touch the feet of Mahapurush Maharaj with his forehead and just smile. Again whenever he returned to his room he would automatically go to the photo and bow down once again. I noticed that this routine would take place at least twenty to thirty times a day. There was something charming and spontaneous about the habit. Not once did I see him forget. Not once did he seem to make an effort to remember. For him the picture was so real and his salutation to his guru, was so organic.

— Swami Raghaveshananda

Poison called gossip and newspaper politics

Swami Kailasanandaji was a strict disciplinarian and came down heavily on monastics as well as devotees violating, according to his standards, any norms of spiritual life. Two big impediments to spiritual life that Swami Kailasanandaji carefully warned the monastic inmates and the devotees about were: 1) idle gossip and, 2) newspaper politics. There is an interesting incident that illustrates Swami Kailasanandaji's extreme strictness about brahmacharins not paying even the least attention to newspapers. We heard about this incident from a very senior sannyasi, Swami Bhavaharanandaji, who was a brahmachari (called Sudhansu, his premonastic name) at Mylapore Ramakrishna Math in Madras under Swami Kailasanandaji's watchful eyes during his initial period of training. Brahmachari Sudhansu was in-charge of electrical maintenance in the ashrama and he had to, on one occasion, replace a fused bulb in the courtyard. Newspapers used to be kept on a large round table in that courtyard and when this brahmachari was getting on a chair nearby to be able to reach out to the bulb to be replaced, his eyes accidentally fell on the huge political headlines on the front page of the newspapers. No sooner than this happened, about which the brahmachari himself was



*Monastic members in Chennai Math. On the chairs:
(L) Swami Kailasananda, & (R) Swami Tapasyananda*

not quite conscious, there was a huge roar like that of a ferocious and angry lion roaring at its prey. Thoroughly shaken by this unexpected sound and out of sheer nervousness the brahmachari dropped the new bulb that he was holding in his hand and it broke to pieces. Before he even realized what had happened and could come to terms with the situation, Swami Kailasanandaji was seen directing at him some of the choicest expletives, rebuking him severely for eyeing the newspapers, his sentences interspersed with his favourite phrase “Mahapurush Maharaj used to say...”. Swami Bhavaharanandaji told us how in later life he reaped immense spiritual benefit from those few years of training under Swami Kailasanandaji during the formative period of his monastic life. Swami Kailasanandaji used to say that most of the direct monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna were very hard taskmasters, harsh in their training albeit with a deeply loving heart. He used to remark funnily, “Most of these great disciples of Sri Ramakrishna whom we now admire and worship were almost impossible to live with! It is good that you have all never met them, for who knows you might have dropped out after receiving their harsh rebukes, in the form of some of the choicest expletives to boot!” We have seen that many of the disciples of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna—Swami Kailasanandaji was one glorious example—were trained in this unique art!

— Swami Atmapriyananda

Not fruits, it is *prasad*

I was then (1958-60) a brahmachari in the Probationers’ Training Centre, Belur Math. Swami Kailasanandaji was staying in a room on the first floor of the Math building. He had come from Madras to attend the Trustees’ Meeting. One day in the afternoon, as directed by one of the swamis from the Math-kitchen store, I went to Kailasanandaji’s room with some consecrated fruits and sweets for him. After keeping the *prasad* packet on the table, I bowed down to him and said “Maharaj, the fruits and sweets are kept here”. Immediately, with great force he said, “Not fruits, it is *prasad*.”

That phrase is still ringing in my ears. I have observed many a times the vivid picture of his intense devotion and faith in Sri Ramakrishna from the way he used to pronounce the word ‘*prasad*’. Indeed, in spiritual life, such firm faith is very essential. Swami Vivekananda has repeatedly mentioned about Nachiketa’s *shraddha* or conviction. J. Arthur Thomson has said: “The longer I live, the more obvious it is to me that the most sacred act of a man’s life is to say and feel, ‘I believe such and such to be true’. All the greatest rewards and all heaviest penalties of existence cling about that act.” As I’m growing old, I’m clearly feeling that the life’s holiest deed is to be able to believe something to be true.

— Swami Tathagathananda

After darshan do japam

At Madras, Kailasananda Maharaj would go to have darshan of Mother Durga again and again during the autumnal worship of the mother at the Madras Bengali Association. I accompanied him a couple of times. We used to carry flowers, fruits, and sweets for the Divine Mother. I noticed that even amidst the heavy crowd, Kailasanandaji would just sit in front of the Mother’s image and do japam. On being asked why he did that, his reply was, “Mahapurush Maharaj always used to tell that after having darshan of gods and goddesses we should sit at that place and do japa for some time. So, I do it.”

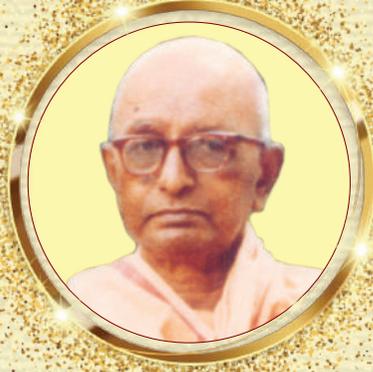
— Swami Tathagathananda

Swami Tapasyananda

When Swamis Brahmanandaji and Shivanandaji came to Madras in 1921, 17-year old Balakrishnan Menon's mother and some devòtees came from Calicut to meet them and also receive mantra-diksha

from Brahmanandaji. While returning, the mother prayed to Brahmanandaji that one of her sons should become a sannyasi. Thus, offered by his mother to the Order, Balakrishnan received mantra-diksha from Swami Shivanandaji in 1924 and after completing his post-graduation, joined the Order in 1926. Shivanandaji gave him sannyasa-diksha in 1932.

He was editor of The Vedanta Kesari for 8 years, and then from 1940 served for 31 years to develop the dispensary at Trivandrum Ashrama from a shed to a huge multi-speciality hospital. In 1971 he became the head of Madras Math and from 1985 also served as one of the Vice Presidents of the Order until his mahasamadhi on 3 Oct 1991. An erudite scholar he translated a number of scriptural texts into English and contributed to the philosophical understanding of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda's message.



Importance of sadhana

Swami Tapasyanandaji was a Trustee of the Order and hence every four months he had to go to Belur Math for the Trustees' Meeting. In those days there was only one train – the Howrah Mail – which on the return journey reached Madras at 4:30 A.M.

Maharaj's instruction was that nobody should go to receive him before 6:30 A.M. He insisted that no monastic should go out of the ashrama before 6:00 A.M. for that would mean missing the morning spiritual practices. So Maharaj preferred to wait at the platform for two hours till 6:30 A.M. I once still went to the railway station at 4:30 A.M. to pick him up. He chided me for missing my spiritual practices. At last, the arrangement was made that the driver alone would go to pick him up at 4:30 A.M.

— Swami Raghaveshananda

Conduct of a sannyasi

Once Swami Tapasyananda Maharaj came to meet Swami Gambhirananda Maharaj. When he was leaving after some discussion, Gambhirananda Maharaj asked me to go with him carrying

a plate of sweet prasada and keep it in the Trustee Building room where he was staying. On reaching his room, Swami Tapasyanandaji saw many monastic brothers waiting to meet him; he distributed the sweets one by one to all of them. The last piece he gave to me without taking even one for himself. I then told him that I would report the incident to Gambhirananda Maharaj. Thereupon Swami Tapasyanandaji took a bit out of what he had given me and ate it. I returned to Gambhirananda Maharaj and narrated the whole incident. He simply remarked, "We did what we should do to a sannyasi and he did what a sannyasi should do." What a wonderful perception!

— Swami Satyapriyananda

Treatise on trusteeship

To the unperceptive eye, Tapasyanandaji Maharaj appeared to be miserly; but those who knew him closely understood and appreciated his frugality. The following incident throws some light on it. There was a devotee-friend by name Sankarlinga Nadar. He knew Maharaj from his Trivandrum days. He used to come regularly every Sunday to meet Maharaj and spend some time with him. He also used to donate liberally to the Math. Nadar told me on many occasions that I should not hesitate to ask money for Maharaj's personal expenses as well if need be. But such occasions never arose because Maharaj never spent money on himself.

One day Nadar was in Maharaj's office. Maharaj's new book *Shankara Digvijaya* had just been published. I went to his office and gave Maharaj a copy. Showing it to the devotee he remarked, "See, they have published one more book." The devotee respectfully received it and requested Maharaj to autograph it. But Maharaj replied, "No, no, I have no right to present this to anybody. I am only a caretaker of the property of Sri Ramakrishna and not the owner. If you want a copy for yourself you will have to buy it from the sales section and then I will sign on it." I was embarrassed. I wondered why a book costing Rs.20/- could not be given free to a donor and that too by the President of the Math. But look at Maharaj's humility; he never considered himself the owner but only a caretaker. The devotee purchased the book. A day or two later he wrote a letter saying that he was convinced that every paisa donated to the Math was indeed being utilized properly for the particular cause for which it was given.

— Swami Raghaveshananda

Peerless commitment, peerless detachment

Once Swami Jnanadananda and I had gone to Bangalore for a book exhibition where we had put up a stall. When we returned after 10 days Tapasyananda Maharaj made a detailed enquiry of the book sales. He was keen to know which books were sold. For nearly two hours we explained everything in detail and in the end I said that there was a great demand for the English translation of Srimad Bhagvatam along with the original Sanskrit slokas. There was no such book available in the market then. And that it would be a valuable addition to our publications if Maharaj took up that work. He brushed aside my idea saying he was too old for that kind of work; he was 75 years old then. Swami Jnanadananda added that it would be very well received and the public expects such books from Ramakrishna Math. Hearing this Maharaj said that he would think it over.

After a week he called us and said that if he took up this work it would take him two years to complete it. We said, "Time is of no significance Maharaj; but we are concerned about your

health.” He didn’t reply. His mind was set on it. The next day, he called me and asked me to fetch him good quality paper blank on one side (He never used fresh white paper for his work, but used to write on papers blank on one side lest Sri Ramakrishna’s money was wasted). I gave him a bundle of such papers. He summoned me again for a slate and some chalk pieces. I wondered what he would do with it. His answer astonished me; he said, “Many times the translation is not accurate; why waste paper? If I have a slate I can erase and rewrite it on paper when the translation is accurate.” He actually did so. The work progressed slowly. After a few days he called me and said, “Look, the progress of the work is very slow as I am not finding enough time, so I think I should get up by 3 in the morning and translate till 5 after which I can do my spiritual practices.”

I did not like this idea. I felt, at his age, Maharaj needed sufficient rest. But he insisted and said that if his body did not co-operate then he would not exert too much. Since I knew his nature I felt it was futile to argue with him. After a month or so he called me and said, “The electricity department has imposed ‘pay as per slabs’ on power usage. The user has to pay double the amount per unit for the units exceeding the allocated quota.” This worried him very much and he did not want to use electricity unnecessarily. I was momentarily happy when I thought that at least now Maharaj would be forced to take rest in the early morning hours. But I had a surprise in store. He asked me to get him a lantern so that in its light he could work in the early hours of the morning. I protested strongly saying it would affect his eyes. But he said that he was habituated to using the lantern as there was no electricity at home back in his school days. I had to oblige. Just imagine the scene, an elderly sannyasi sitting at a table with big books and with a lantern; all for the sake of Sri Ramakrishna’s work. Fortunately this ordeal ended soon as the electricity board revoked the restriction of usage.

After laborious efforts, Tapasyanandaji completed the translation of the *Srimad Bhagvatam* into English. He called me and handed over the big manuscript bundle with childlike joy on his face. He heaved a sigh of relief when the work was complete. But what happened next was very interesting and revealed his non-attachment. He called Swami Jnanadananda and asked for an estimation of the cost to print the book. After two days he gave an estimate that came up to around Rs.2 lakhs (in those days) to bring out the book elegantly in four volumes. Tapasyanandaji called me and said, “It is futile to spend so much of Sri Ramakrishna’s money on this work.” He asked me to pack it properly and keep it aside. It was unbearable for us as we had seen him work on it for two years! We tried to convince him that it would not be a waste and that we would recover the money through the sales of the book. But he was adamant and wanted to scrap the publication of the book. At last we suggested that we would make a pre-publication offer and raise the Rs. 2 lakhs necessary for printing the book. Very reluctantly, he agreed.

— Swami Raghaveshananda

Tyaga immortalised

Tapasyanandaji Maharaj suffered from various ailments for more than a year prior to his demise. It was the month of May and the heat was severe. Hence the doctor suggested that an air-conditioned room be provided for Maharaj at the Math. We knew that it would be impossible to convince Maharaj to agree. However we requested a devotee to broach the subject with him. Maharaj was unwell at the time. The devotee went to him and with joined palms made the

following suggestion: “Maharaj, I have a new air-conditioner at my home which is yet to be installed. It will be a great blessing for me if you use it for a month or two till you recover from your illness.” Even in his illness Maharaj’s reply was an eye opener for us. He said, “My dear friend, just walk behind our ashrama and you will find people living in slums. Among them there are people more aged than me. Can you provide air conditioners to all of them? I am a sannyasi and a beggar. Sri Ramakrishna, out of compassion, has provided me a room, a cot, a fan and what not. I am quite happy with whatever Sri Ramakrishna has provided.” The devotee returned with tears in his eyes admiring Maharaj’s renunciation.

— Swami Raghaveshananda

A petty desire was curbed.

Swami Tapasyananda Maharaj was well known for his English translation of Hindu scriptures. Among such translations, *Srimad Bhagavatam* was highly appreciated by eminent scholars in India and abroad.

Once some foreigners had come to meet Maharaj and they appreciated his translation and gifted him a gold plated bookmark. It was good looking and I felt a small desire to have it. The golden bookmark was wrapped in an attractive cover on which ‘Bookmark’ was printed.

After the devotees left, Maharaj removed the paper cover and started using it. He just ignored the bookmark made of gold. I then told him, “The golden plate is the real bookmark.” But Maharaj replied, “You can use the golden one, but for me the paper page-mark will do.”

Strangely, seeing his spontaneous rejection of gold, my mind too gave up the desire for the bookmark.

— Swami Vimurtananda



Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama Charitable Hospital, Thiruvananthapuram

Swami Gitananda

By the time Basudev Mukhopadhyaya, from Dacca district of present day Bangladesh, completed his bachelor's degree in Mathematics in 1946, he was strongly attracted to spiritual life. He joined the Ramakrishna Order in May 1946 at the Madras Math. He received mantra-diksha from Swami Virajanandaji in 1947 and sannyasa-diksha from Swami Shankaranandaji in 1956.

यज्ञानां जपयज्ञोऽस्मि, "Of sacrifices, I am the sacrifice of Japa" says Bhagawan Vasudeva in the Gita. Gitanandaji practiced this sacred japa yajna his whole life. He served as the head of Ranchi Sanatorium, Varanasi Home of Service and Kankurgachhi centres, and for over four years was actively involved in the Centenary Celebrations of Swami Vivekananda. After serving for some years as Asst. Secretary of the Order, he was chosen as one of the Vice Presidents of the Order in April 2003. He attained mahasamadhi on 14 March 2014.

He was adept in ritualistic worship, and was a thoughtful writer.



Sacred tears

I was travelling with Swami Gitananda Maharaj from Jamshedpur Ashrama to Ranchi Sanatorium Ashrama. His Personal Secretary Swami too was with us. For some years Gitanandaji had served Ranchi Sanatorium Centre as its Secretary. As I was the current Secretary I often conveyed to him the pranams of the old employees, especially of the tribals, for whom he had great love. I knew that Maharaj was fond of stories connected with Bhagawan Sri Rama. So, I picked up the subject of his then recently released Bengali book on Sri Rama, titled *Sri Ramer Anudhyan*. The discussion was on the relationship between Sri Rama and Sri Hanuman. I asked him whether he knew that once Sri Rama was about to 'kill' his greatest devotee Sri Hanuman.

I was watching his face reflected in the rear-view mirror. When I asked this question, his face became pensive. "Tell me, tell me" he asked, and also loudly exclaimed how Sri Rama could even think of killing his servant-devotee Sri Hanuman! It was impossible!

I then dramatically narrated the story and came to the climax scene when Sri Rama had strung the *brahmastra* onto his bow and was ready to aim on his 'dearest' target. As I described

this scene, tears welled up in Maharaj's eyes and he could not stop sobbing! His Secretary and I were amazed at Maharaj's power of empathising with the condition of Sri Rama and Sri Hanuman. Of course the story, as usual, had a happy ending with Sri Rama embracing Sri Hanuman. Maharaj was deeply relieved at the final turn of the story and greatly appreciated the story.

— *Swami Vimokshananda*

Truthfulness in work

When Gitananda Maharaj was serving in the Headquarters Office at Belur Math, he would train new sannyasis and brahmacharis on how to work. Once a brahmachari who had just finished his training at the Probationers' Training Centre, was posted to serve in the Headquarters Office. He went from one swami to another seeking their blessings. When he came to Swami Gitanandaji, Maharaj advised him, "You will be working in the General Section of the Headquarters Office. Often, many people will ask you about confidential matters. It will not be proper for you to disclose such matters. At the same time, you should not tell that you do not know, for it will be a lie, because you know everything. So, you should rather say, 'Kindly do not ask me about it.'"

— *Book on Swami Gitananda published by Belur Math*

Self-reliance

Once Swami Gitananda Maharaj, before becoming a Vice President of the Order, had come to Deoghar on the occasion of the unveiling of Swami Vivekananda's Statue. I was given the

Belur Math



opportunity to render personal service to him like carrying his food, spreading his clothes under the sun for drying, and massaging the upper part of his back with ayurvedic oil (as he suffered from rheumatic pain). But he washed his clothes and even the cup-plate after taking tea. When I prayed to him for allowing me to do these things, he consoled me by saying, “See, let me do things that I am able to do till now, whatever I am unable to do myself, you can do those things for me.” It was a lesson to me in self-reliance.

— *Swami Tattwasarananda*

Seamless transition

Swami Gitananda Maharaj was then Assistant General Secretary of the Order. He lived in a room on the ground floor of the Trustees’ Building. Maharaj was very sincere in his practice of japa and dhyana; and when he sat for japa he would keep his door closed but not bolted. As the Treasurer, he had to sign many cheques. Once, I was present when an office staff member brought many papers for his signature. The staff knocked on the door and entered the room. Maharaj kept his japa *mala* on the table, signed all the papers and cheques, and then resumed his japa even before the staff could leave the room!

— *Swami Devapriyananda*

Power of empathy

Gitananda Maharaj was once residing at Udbodhan. It was winter and he had just returned from Belur Math after finishing some work. When he got down from the car, he saw some old ladies standing there shivering in the cold. Maharaj simply glanced at them and did not utter a word. He entered his room and began to remove his socks, sweater, etc. His monastic attendant asked him, “What is the matter? Why are you removing them? You will catch cold.” Maharaj then replied, “Is it enough if I alone am protected from cold? Go below and see how many old ladies are shivering in the cold.” The attendant said, “We shall provide them with shawls. We have shawls in stock.” With great feeling Maharaj asked, “Do we have?” Maharaj was immensely pleased when the attendant gave the shawls to those old ladies. He thereupon agreed to wear his woollen clothes.

— *Book on Swami Gitananda published by Belur Math*

Prayer is what I can do

Once Gitananda Maharaj was travelling from Digboi Ashrama in Assam to Narottam Nagar Ashrama in Arunachal Pradesh. On the way the vehicle had to pass through the village of Mapaya inhabited by many adivasis. As soon as Maharaj’s vehicle entered that village, people standing on both sides shouted victory slogans with folded hands and showered flowers. When this caught the attention of Maharaj, he looked at them for a short while and then closed his eyes. The senior swami in Maharaj’s company felt that if Maharaj looked at the assembled devotees for a while and waved his hands in benediction, the devotees would derive immense satisfaction. Maharaj’s attendants too entreated Maharaj to look at those people or to wave his hands. But Maharaj continued to sit with eyes closed, counting his beads. Later the senior swami asked Maharaj if he was then praying to Sri Ramakrishna for the good of the villagers. Maharaj simply replied, “I cannot do anything other than that.”

— *Book on Swami Gitananda published by Belur Math*

Swami Shantananda

Even in his school days, Khagen came in contact with devotees of Sri Ramakrishna and frequented Dakshineswar, Kankurgachhi and other such places associated with the Order. In 1907 he went to Jayrambati where Holy Mother gave him mantradiksha and also ochre robes. He joined at the Varanasi Advaita Ashrama where Swami Shivanandaji gave him his sannyasa name. Later in 1921, he received the formal vows of sannyasa from Swami Brahmanandaji.

He was a Trustee of the Order from 1930 till his end. He spent more than two decades in retirement at Ranchi Sanatorium and Belur Math. Highly respected for his spiritual qualities and dearly loved for his sweet nature and simple habits, he attained mahasamadhi on 17 Jan 1974 aged 90.



Divine innocence

When I was in the Training Centre for Brahmacharis at Belur Math, I would go to Shantananda Maharaj's room which was in Premananda Bhavan ground floor (just opposite to Swami Vivekananda's Temple). One afternoon, when I was in Maharaj's room, Swami Chidatmanandaji who was one of the Assistant Secretaries in the Head Quarters' Office came to meet Maharaj. He had brought with him a respectable looking gentleman. After pranams, Chidatmanandaji introduced the gentleman as a judge in the Supreme Court of India.

Shantananda Maharaj was so innocent of worldly matters, that he asked the gentleman, "How much salary do you get? Can you manage your family comfortably? When do you have to go to office?" The judge replied tactfully, and was so moved by Maharaj's innocence and concern that he again and again prostrated before Maharaj.

When I read in the newspapers about Jawaharlal Nehru's death, I conveyed it to Shantanandaji. Maharaj then asked me, "Who was he? What was he doing?" I managed the situation. Such was Maharaj's disinterest in worldly matters!

— Swami Suhitanandaji

Seek Mother's advice

I had the good fortune to be the sevak of Swami Shantananda Maharaj. When he contracted tuberculosis, he was in our Kashi ashrama. I slept on the floor next to his cot. Maharaj was not

told about his having T.B. There was no cure for T.B. in those days and he was given only calcium tablets and a special diet including Horlicks. Santanandaji would tell me, “You are doing work whole day. So take this Horlicks. He would take some and give me the rest as prasad. I also partook of some other food items in this manner. Finally, when his health deteriorated. it was arranged to take him to the T.B. Sanatorium at Shimla in Himachal Pradesh. Maharaj was puzzled at this unforeseen transfer to a new place. At the King Edwards the Seventh Memorial T.B.Sanatorium, we had separate rooms and the forest scene was very beautiful. Maharaj understood his condition and asked me, “Oh! I am a T.B. patient! That is why I am having a separate room?”

He became very grave and indrawn and did not answer the doctors’ questions. I wondered if he was afraid of death and thought of writing to Belur Math. On the 5th day, he received me with a beautiful smile. He asked me, “How do you like this place?” I was astonished to hear his happy voice. I asked in a casual manner, “Maharaj, what happened to you these past few days?” He replied, “Will you believe me if I told you?” “Of course” I replied. Then he said, “When I knew that I am suffering from T.B. I was worried about you. How foolish I was. I never thought about your health. We were in the same closed room and you drank Horlicks from the same cup. If you get T.B. I won’t have peace even after my death. You are very young. So, I called Mother incessantly ‘Ma, I don’t have anyone. If I have at least a little bhakti grant me a boon.’ Yesterday Mother came and asked ‘Now what do you want?’ I told her, ‘I am going to die soon. But this boy must not die of this disease.’ Mother replied ‘Let it be so.’”

Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi had once told Shantanandaji how to receive her advice: “If there is any crisis in your life, remember me. Isolate yourself from others for a few days, and practise japa and meditation intensely. Pray wholeheartedly and ask me ‘Mother what shall I do?’ During that period, eat less and keep your body and mind pure. Try to maintain silence and speak only if it is absolutely necessary. Don’t let other people know what you are doing. Continue your prayers and sadhana in this way with a one-pointed mind. Never lose patience. If you see that you are not receiving my command, still you should not give up. If you find that no response is coming, then know for certain that your mind has not risen high enough to receive my advice. You will definitely receive my advice if you call on me with a wholehearted faith and devotion.”

— Swami Sridharananda

Ajapa japa

Once Swami Shantananda Maharaj told me , “I see that you remain so engaged on attending on me that you are unable to carry out the spiritual instructions of your guru. I will teach you a means that will help you achieve the very thing for which your guru’s instructions are meant.” By guru’s instructions were meant such acts as remembering God, and establishing God in one’s heart etc. So what was that method? Maharaj told me, “Salil – please try doing japam along with your breath.” It sounded easy to practise , but the catch lay in often forgetting to do it. I was a novice and the mind was yet restless. So Maharaj would often ask, “Salil, are you doing the japam?” A little taken aback and ashamed I would answer , “No Maharaj , I forgot.” He would then say, “Initially there will be such forgetfulness. But keep on doing japam as you breathe.” And sure enough I had to own up to such forgetfulness a number of times. One day he scolded me saying, “Why is it that you keep forgetting to remember the name of your Ishta? Are you not ashamed?”

How long will this go on? I do not want to hear any more of your apologetic ‘Maharaj, I’ve forgotten.’ Do try seriously.”

Then onwards, my heart would tremble if he were to just call my name, fearing he would ask, ‘Salil – are you doing Japam?’ It went on like this for a while. Then one day hearing him just utter ‘Salil’ I spontaneously responded ‘Yes, Maharaj’. Maharaj was visibly excited and, getting up from bed said to me, “You have made a good start – do not give it up. It’s already become a habit. By doing this continually, your japam will be automatically synchronised with your breathing and you will hear the ‘Anahata’ sound. You’ll get to know about this by reading *shastras*.” Finding him in such joy I forgot about myself. Indeed, his joy made my motivation deeper and stronger. From then on, I did not have to say ‘No’ to him in this regard. As my daily routine was intimately linked with his life, Maharaj was very vigilant about my daily spiritual practices and provided the impetus in getting me established in ‘ajapa japam’. Such is the great gain of having come in touch of great souls.

— Swami Sridharananda

Power of prayer

Devotional literature lays stress on the efficacy of prayer. We find Sri Ramakrishna too time and again asserting the power of praying with intense longing. He would say, “Pray to God with a longing heart. He will surely listen to your prayer if it is sincere.” One day, in the holy association of Shantananda Maharaj, we were most fortunate to witness a living validation of these divine words of Sri Ramakrishna.

One day, a little before evening, Swami Santoshanandaji, Secretary of Belghoria Ramakrishna Mission, came to pay respects to Shantananda Maharaj. Santoshanandaji too was a disciple of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi; he was junior to Shantanandaji both in age and in sannyasa-diksha. After offering his pranams Santoshanandaji said, “Maharaj, West Bengal is now in the grip of a terrible drought. If there is no rainfall soon, the poor people solely dependent on agriculture will starve to death. Why don’t you pray to Mother for rainfall?” Hearing these words, Shantanandaji, with a smile on his face, turned to Santoshanandaji and sweetly replied, “You too are a child of Holy Mother. Why don’t you pray to her?” And then something extraordinary happened. These two sannayasi-children of Holy Mother started praying to Mother with the heartrending cry ‘Maa’, ‘Maa’; tears streamed down their faces. Speechless, we sat drinking in those divine moments of prayer. As the evening wore on I came back to the hostel and went about the usual evening routine. As I was finally preparing to go to bed that night – lo and behold! – rain started pouring down in torrents! It rained the whole night. All along, I felt that the tears of those two senior sannyasis were verily coming down as streams of rainwater.

Later I came to know about a similar incident in the life of Holy Mother. On a similar occasion of severe drought, the farmers of Jayrambati village narrated their difficult plight to Holy Mother. Holy Mother, seeing the desiccated fields all around, was moved to great pity and, with tears, she prayed to Sri Ramakrishna, “Oh! Thakur, why did you do this? Will they all die of starvation?” On that occasion too, there was a heavy rainfall all through the night and the harvest of that year far outstripped that of other years.

— Swami Divyananda,

Consulting Holy Mother

Once, Swami Vedantananda (Anukul Maharaj), the Head of Ranchi Sanatorium centre was disturbed by the strained resources of the Hospital and the increasing difficulty in running the Sanatorium. Shantanandaji Maharaj was then staying at the Sanatorium centre.

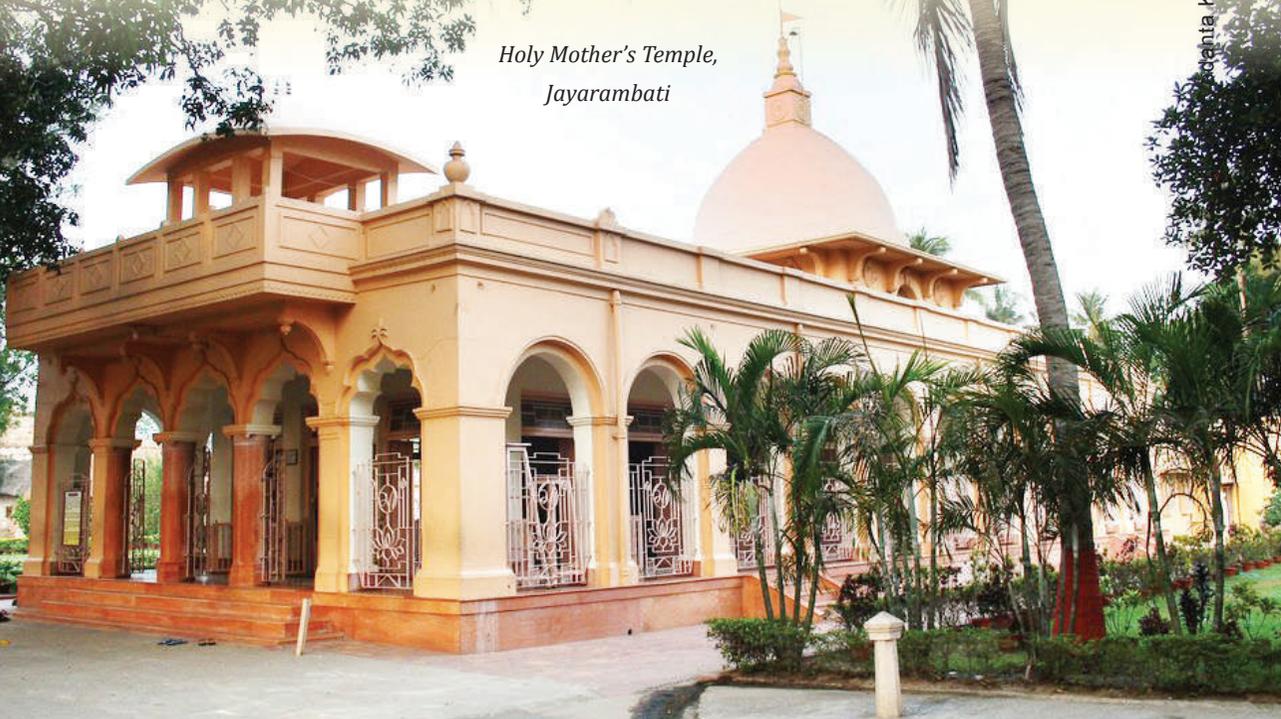
One day, Swami Shantanandaji, standing on the veranda of his Kutia (now known as Shantananda Kutia) asked Anukul Maharaj why he was looking so despondent. Anukul Maharaj then explained the utter paucity of funds to carry out the medical activities and hence his thought of recommending to Belur Math authorities to close down the Sanatorium.

Swami Shantananda instantly admonished him for thinking so. He said that he would 'converse' with the Holy Mother and would let him know her opinion in this matter. After three days or so, when Anukul Maharaj was walking along the Kutia path, Swami Shantanandaji came out of his room and shouted from a distance, "Come quickly Anukul, I have happy news for you!". Anukul Maharaj heard him with rapt attention. Shantanandaji said that he had talked to Holy Mother and she had said the Sanatorium need not be closed down and the required funds would come soon!

Within a short time, in a miraculous manner, a Bengali gentleman living in London expressed his interest in donating a substantial amount to Ranchi Sanatorium on his visit to India. Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj was then the Assistant Secretary of Ranchi Sanatorium. He was there from 1952 – 1958. So, he went to Belur Math and from there to a hotel in Calcutta where he met the gentleman and his wife. The gentleman gave a cheque for 15 lakhs rupees! It was a huge sum in those days and it resolved the financial problems of Ranchi Sanatorium!

— Swami Vimokshananda

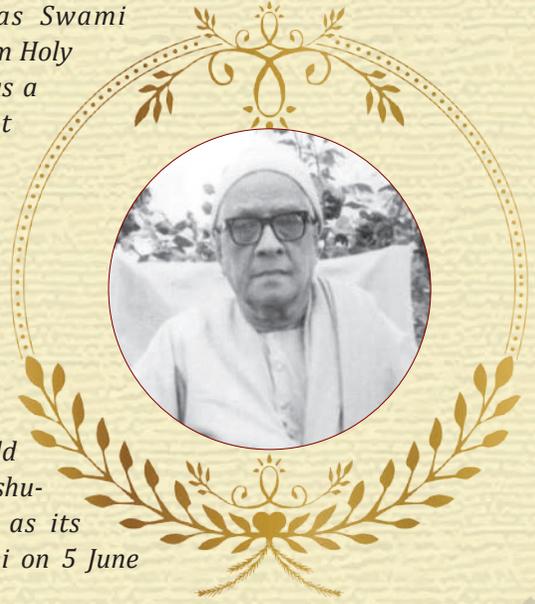
*Holy Mother's Temple,
Jayarambati*



Swami Dayananda

Vimal Chandra Basu, a student of Physics (hons) at Presidency College, Calcutta, was greatly inspired by his elder brother who had joined the Ramakrishna Order and later came to be known as Swami Madhavanandaji. He received mantra-diksha from Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. When he was serving as a volunteer on Swami Vivekananda's Tithipuja at Belur Math in 1915, Swami Brahmanandaji recognised his potential and immediately gave him the brahmacharya-diksha. Brahmanandaji also gave him sannyasa-diksha in 1921 at Varanasi ashrama. While working at Udbodhan he had the opportunity to serve Holy Mother.

After serving in Vedanta Society, San Francisco for some years he returned to India with the intent of establishing a maternity and child welfare centre in India. In 1932 he founded Sishumangal Pratishthan in Calcutta and served as its Secretary until 1963. He attained mahasamadhi on 5 June 1980 at the age of 88.



All three are one

I served in Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan from January 1970 to March 1981. So, I was able to watch Swamis Dayanandaji and Gahananandaji from close quarters. Dayanandaji had retired from active service by then. He used to stay in his own room in the Monks Quarters of Seva Pratishthan. Though he was the Founder Secretary of Seva Pratishthan, once he handed over the charge to Gahananandaji, he never interfered again in any way. If anyone asked his views on any matter, he would simply say, "Consult all and decide."

Within a few days of my joining I felt a strange attraction towards Dayanandaji Maharaj and started rendering personal service to him. I used to request him to tell me incidents from Mother's life. But he was very reluctant. Then one day, on his own, he said, "I was then the priest in Udbodhan (where Holy Mother lived). After finishing the morning worship, I went to Holy Mother to offer pranams. Pointing to the photographs of Sri Ramakrishna and Divine Mother Kali and then keeping her hand on her own chest, Holy Mother said, 'All three are one. They are not separate entities.'"

— Swami Lokanathananda



Good out of bad

Once Dayanandaji, Nityashuddhanandaji and I were taking a stroll in the evening. At that time, the hospital staff were on a strike and regular work was badly affected. All of a sudden, Dayanandaji stopped and said, “Your discussions about the strike are not correct. How do you know that something good is not going to come out of this strike? It is not in our lot to decide what is good and what is bad. Good may come out of what is seemingly bad. Always remember, only he, in whose name you are running this hospital, knows what is good and what is bad. Neither you, nor I know anything at all. Light comes out of darkness.”

— Swami Lokanathananda

A mother’s pain

The primary objective of Swami Dayanandaji was to ensure loving service for the mothers and children of Bengal. Only by seeing Maharaj we could understand how one can so empathise as to keenly feel the pain of others. His personality was a combination of a strong personality on the exterior and a soft, child-like heart inside. Once Dayanandaji was in the ground floor of Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan hospital when the labour cries of an expectant mother reached his ears. He rushed outside, called me and roared, “Can’t you hear the desperate cries of the mother? Why aren’t you doing something to ease her pain?” I immediately rushed to the third-floor labour room and did whatever I could to lessen her pain. I came down to find Swamiji waiting. He returned to his room only after making sure that the matter had been properly addressed.

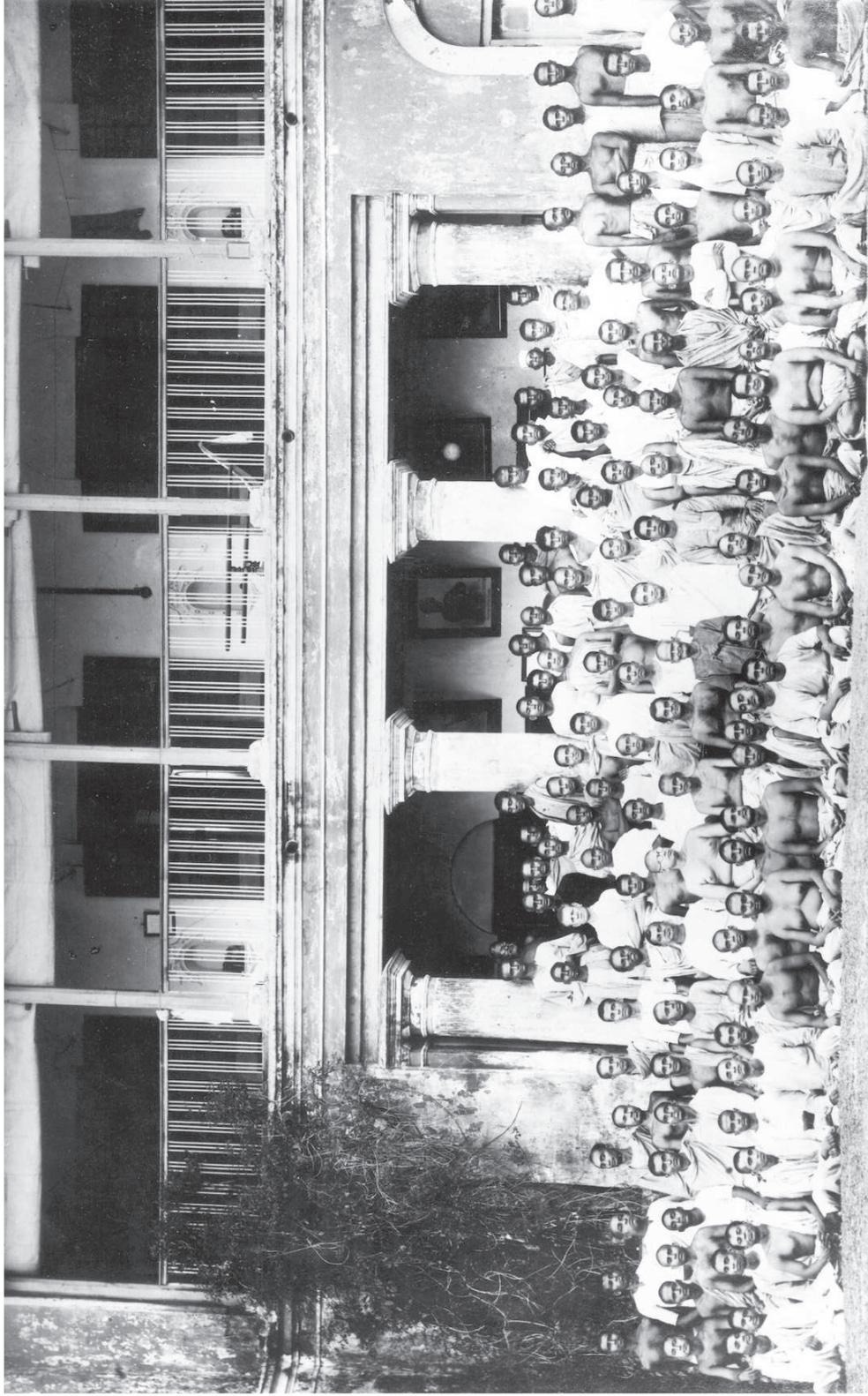
Another incident involved a mother of seven daughters delivering her eighth child, a son. Unfortunately, because of our mismanagement, the newborn baby became severely sick. If one witnessed Maharaj’s anxiety and urgency at that point, they would think that the responsibility of saving the child rested squarely on him and him only. But even after taking all possible steps, the baby-boy decided to slip through our fingers leaving the world behind. The pain of losing a near and dear one was unmistakable on Maharaj’s face that day. Even the parents of the departed child were overwhelmed by the anguish displayed by a sannyasi who had renounced everything.

— Dr Piyush Kanti Roy

A taskmaster

In matters of principle, Dayanandaji was uncompromising and firm as a rock. Once, when I made some grave mistake and couldn’t meet his high standards, I faced his scathing words: “The gate is open. You can leave.” I left the hospital premises in tears and sitting in the Doctors’ Quarters, lost track of time going over the events that had just transpired. He summoned me back and when I reached him shivering inwardly, he was a different person altogether. He stroked me lovingly and said, “I scolded you a lot. Go and take some rest.” His discipline, mingled with love encouraged and inspired me to love my work.

— Dr Piyush Kanti Roy



*First Monks Conference at Belur Math 1929.
Photograph taken behind the Old Belur Math building facing the Ganga*

Swami Sukhananda

Swami Sukhanandaji was a disciple of Swami Brahmanandaji. He received his brahmacharya-diksha and sanyasa-diksha on the same day in 1921! It was in Bangalore Ashram. After giving sannyasa-diksha Brahmanandaji told him, "Whatever you will offer to Sri Ramakrishna will be accepted by Him."

Sukhanandaji was the head of Kanchipuram centre for a long time. He attained mahasamadhi on 29 April 1972 aged 82.



Tea cup and saucer

Once Swami Sukhanandaji visited Madras Math. I was then a young brahmachari. I offered my pranams to him and started conversing. He was childlike in his behaviour. I asked him straight forward whether it was true that Sri Ramakrishna accepted whatever he offered. With a childlike simplicity he nodded his head in agreement. Then I asked, "What do you offer every day?" In a very casual manner, he replied, "Whatever we eat, the same thing is offered. Morning we take idly or dosa and it is offered to him. And in the noon rice and rasam. Night, a cup of milk." His manner convinced me that he is speaking the truth and truth alone.

The next morning, when I met him, I said, "Maharaj I want to present you something. Please ask whatever you want. Of course, I don't have money but Swami Kailasananda Maharaj, who is the head of the centre, will surely grant my request." Sukhanandaji laughed and thought for a while and said, "Look Sankar, Swami Vireswarananda Maharaj, the head of our Order always drinks hot tea in a cup and saucer. If I have a tea set, I shall offer hot tea to Guru Maharaj." I was taken aback for his simple, guileless mind. The cup and saucer used to cost just 25 paise in those days. I went and reported everything to Kailasanandaji. He heartily laughed and said, "I shall arrange for it." Next day he called me and gave a small box which contained six cups and saucers. He too came with me to Sukhanandaji's room. When he received it, one cannot imagine the joy he expressed. He said. "Oh! Why did you spend so much money on this? It must be very costly." Swami Kailasanandaji laughed and said, "Maharaj, you don't understand the worldly matters. So, don't bother about it."

Sukhanandaji then became restless to return to Kanchipuram. Even though he was to stay for three more days, he excused himself and left the same day. We all could understand that he was very eager to prepare tea and offer it to Guru Maharaj in the new cup and saucer!

— *Swami Raghaveshananda*

The bite that cures

Swami Sukhanandaji was very humble and had a childlike simplicity of the kind Sri Ramakrishna describes. Once, when he came to Madras Math, we brahmacharis served him. One day he said, “Ay, we are all bitten by that cobra (he meant Sri Ramakrishna). We all will be saved, protected; his grace will be showered on us.” He said this with such conviction and in such a way that we all were stunned. It filled us with the strong faith that the grace of Sri Ramakrishna is flowing unbounded, and will protect us just like a mother protects her children.

— *Swami Tanmayananda*

The silent blessing

Swami Sukhanandaji, was then the head of the Ramakrishna Math in Kanchipuram. I had spent many happy days taking the bus from Madras in the morning on a Sunday and coming back at night. He was a person of few words and needed a lot of persuasion to talk at all. Once he did talk about his guru Swami Brahmananda. Here are his words:

“When I was in the high school, I came across Swamiji’s works and became very interested. My interest in studies waned. At that time, I met Tulasi Maharaj (Swami Nirmalananda) for the first time at Tiruvalla. He impressed me very much. I began to contact him often. At that time Prabuddha Keralam (the Malayalam magazine of the Order), was started. They wanted full time workers for the publication. I left home and joined the Mission, assisting the editor of Prabuddha Keralam, looking after subscriptions, accounts etc. In 1916, Swami Brahmanandaji came to Southern India. He came to Quilon accompanied by a big party. He went to Kanyakumari and stayed there for 12 days. Tulasi Maharaj was kind enough to take me along with the party.

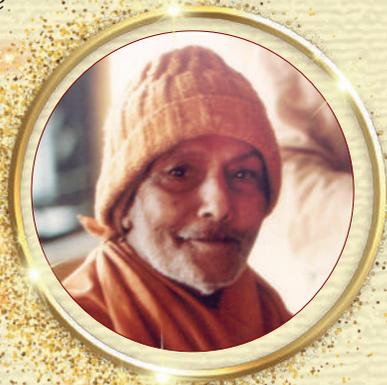
What a personality Raja Maharaj was! He seldom spoke. At Kanyakumari, Maharaj would go to Mother’s temple daily morning and evening to offer worship. Swami Durgananda would sing for a while at that time. Once Tulasi Maharaj was conducting a question and answer session. Maharaj had gone out for a drive in Dr Tampi’s car. The Q & A session was going on as Maharaj returned. It was a three storeyed building, and Maharaj stayed on the 1st floor. Maharaj got down from the car and walked along the west of the verandah to the east where the stairs were located. In the east verandah was a raised platform where Tulasi Maharaj was sitting. The audience were seated on the ground within the building compound. As Maharaj passed by, Tulasi Maharaj stood up as a mark of respect. The audience became restless for Maharaj’s darshan. Tulasi Maharaj requested him to give darshan to the assembled devotees. Maharaj turned towards the devotees and stood still. Tulasi Maharaj had a chair brought there for Maharaj to sit. Maharaj sat on the chair. Ten minutes passed, Maharaj did not speak a word, he only smiled at the devotees. It looked as though everyone there was lifted to a different plane. Everyone felt that one’s heart was full of divine fervour for the time being. After that Maharaj got up and slowly went upstairs. This scene is fresh in my mind even now.”

— *Sri Raghu Raman*

Swami Saradeshnananda

In his youth, Gopesh Chandra Chakravorty became close to Indradayal Bhattacharya, later Swami Premeshananda, who introduced him to the Ramakrishna Order. He met Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi in 1915 and in the very first meeting she gave him mantra-diksha and the brahmacharya vows. He served her for five years and formally joined the Order in 1923. Swami Shivanandaji gave him sannyasa-diksha. He served in Jayarambati, Dhaka, and Bangalore centres, participated in many relief works, spent many years in austerities in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, and from 1960 stayed at Vrindavan Sevashrama centre until his mahasamashi on 11 Dec 1988.

Popularly known as Gopesh Maharaj, his life was a perfect blend of keen pragmatism and deep spirituality; this and his unconditional love enabled him to guide innumerable monastics and devotees on the spiritual path.



The ideal in simple words

Once when a devotee prayed for some advice, he said: “There are two important things in spiritual life—one is the worship of God and the other is the spirit of altruism. It is not actually altruism, rather, it is service, “service to man is service to God”. Wherever you find Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, you find these two things running side by side. One is the service of humanity and the other is the worship of God. All the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna should cast their character in this mould. Their houses also should resemble this grand ideal. Sri Ramakrishna came to teach these two things.’

— Swami Shuklatmananda

Mindfulness in the midst of action

When a devotee asked him about the spiritual path that was suitable for business people, as they were preoccupied with the running of their business, Saradeshnanandaji said:

“What if you manage a business? If one can get God while one is engaged in warfare, then why won’t one reach him if he does business? The Lord himself has said in the Gita: “Think of me at all times and fight.” If not always, at least remember him in the beginning of work and at the end. Who wants him sincerely? We merely say that we want him. If we are eager for his vision,

we can feel his presence even while doing work. Make it a habit to read *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* before going to bed, no matter how late you are. Even reading a page will do."

On another occasion, I was seated, doing japa beside his bed. He called me and said, "I am having severe knee pain. Please massage a little." After massaging a while, I said, "Well, Maharaj, you instruct us to sit for japa in the evening, but today, on the contrary, you asked me to massage your knees!" To that he replied, "I did not forbid you to do japa. Massage with your hands and continue doing japa in your mind. What's the problem?"

— Swami Shuklatmananda

Twin imperatives

Probably in 1975, a year after my joining the Order, I had the opportunity of seeing Saradeshanandaji. I was then serving in Saradapitha centre which is just beside Belur Math. On his way from Agartala to Vrindavan, Maharaj was visiting Belur Math and was invited to Saradapitha. He came in the evening and directly went upstairs to the shrine. When he came down all sadhus and brahmacharis began to offer pranams bowing down at his feet. He was wearing a knee length dhoti and half sleeve shirt, and was carrying a stick. Maharaj was accepting their pranams and also replying to their questions.

When I bowed down to offer my pranam, the Manager Swamiji of Saradapitha introduced me to him saying, "This boy has newly arrived to become a sadhu. He is doing the worship and other odd jobs." Instantly, Saradeshanandaji told me, "See, I am pleased with the way you have maintained the shrine. Always keep two things in mind: punctuality and cleanliness. Your devotion is an internal matter; others cannot see it. Maintain punctuality and cleanliness while serving Sri Ramakrishna." His words made a deep impression on me.

— Swami Alokanda

Truthfulness

Sometimes, on request, Maharaj used to sign copies of his books *Sri Sri Chaitanya Dev*, *Sri Sri Mayer Smritikatha*, and so on. One of the swamis, who was very close to him, once requested me to get a book signed by him, with a line like, 'Presenting this book to ...' added to it. I got Saradeshanandaji's signature on the book. As he finished, he said to me, "Give him the price for the book." I said, "Why? He will never take it." To this he replied, "Don't you go beyond the domain of truth. I explicitly wrote on the book that I was giving that to him, and now it cannot be that he buys the book himself."

— Swami Shuklatmananda

Reading *The Gospel* to Mahatma Gandhi

Once Saradeshanandaji went to see the distress relief conducted during the fierce communal violence in Noakhali in 1946. Mahatma Gandhiji was also there for the same purpose. Coming in contact with the swamis of the Ramakrishna Order, he took an interest in reading *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. Saradeshanandaji used to read the *Gospel* to him every day. It was discontinued after a few days though, as Gandhiji had to leave the place under the pressure of Muslim League leaders.

If the swamis and Gandhiji happened to go together to any place, the swamis would always want Gandhiji to be in the front; however Gandhiji would never agree to this. With all humility, he would always follow the swamis.



Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Vrindavan

One day when Saradeshanandaji went for the usual reading of the Gospel, Gandhiji's secretary, probably Nirmal Bose informed that Gandhiji was very busy that day; so, Maharaj had to come back. But, when Gandhiji came to know of this, he expressed regret and said, "Was that also not part of my busy schedule?" In other words, the reading of the Gospel was among his priorities. Swami Yuktananda, who was a student of Nirmal Bose in the university, later recounted this to Saradeshanandaji. When we requested, Saradeshanandaji to tell us more about that episode, he declined to say anything. He said "You see, talking about such things amounts to self-praise. Gandhi was such a great man!"

— *Swami Shuklatmananda*

Fruit of eternal vigilance

One day I was discussing about sadhu life with a senior sannyasi. He remarked, "We all left our hearth and home because of our renunciation. Same was the case with Gopesh Maharaj. Later we did not take proper care of our middle age life. But Gopesh Maharaj took care and so he was able to take the boat ashore, while we failed."

— *Swami Jagannathananda*

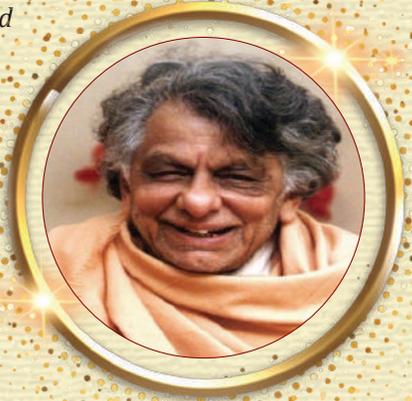
Spiritual consolation

When I was serving in our Delhi ashrama, I would often visit Gopesh Maharaj in Vrindaban for inspiration and guidance. I remember once I asked him what kind of consolation I could offer to the bereaved. He replied, "It is not the words of consolation that are effective. You have lived a life of meditation and renunciation, and have acquired some measure of calmness and serenity. These will go to the bereaved person subconsciously." That gave me confidence and helped me understand what it is to be truly helpful.

— *Swami Swahananda*

Swami Aseshananda

The swami received mantra-diksha from Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi in 1917 and joined the Order in 1921. He was given brahmacharya diksha by Swami Brahmanandaji in 1922 and sannyasa-diksha by Swami Saradanandaji in 1923. From 1921 to 1927 he served as the Secretary of Swami Saradanandaji. He then served at Varanasi centre and the Students' Home in Madras. In 1947 he went to USA and dedicated the rest of his life in guiding the spiritual aspirants there never visiting India even once. From 1955 he served at the Vedanta Centre in Portland until his mahasamadhi on 16 Oct 1996.



Perception of truthfulness

A husband and wife invited us to drive down and take a ride in their private plane. Most of us boys, I think all, jumped at the chance, though I am sure I had some qualms. Swami went along. But when the time for rides was offered—and we took turns going up (including a fly over the monastery)—he demurred and said he would not take a turn. Cajoled, begged, accused of fear, he would not budge. At last the truth came out: “You see, while leaving, I went to the shrine,” (as he always did) “and told the Lord where I was going. I didn’t realise we were going up in a plane, and I didn’t tell Him I would; so I cannot do it.”

— Swami Yogeshananda

Holy Mother’s cat

When the cat was first brought to the center, dying of leukemia, Swami nursed it with Ganga water and mahaprasad, which literally means “great sanctified offering.” Mahaprasad is an offering from the Jagannath Temple in Puri and is considered to be very sacred and very purifying. Needless to say, the cat recovered.

Swami always addressed the cat as “kitty” and made sure it was present for all his lectures and classes. He used to say that kitty was his best student, because it simply was not necessary to verbally understand the meaning of his classes and lectures on religious topics. The cat could imbibe the tanmatras, or subtle vibrations, from the sacred subjects that were being expounded in the lecture hall. That was enough for its spiritual progress—such was Swami’s conviction. And such was Swami’s dedication to his pet “student,” that he later mentioned that he’d even given the cat a Shiva mantra!

Holy Mother's cat lived for quite a few years before it finally passed away. Swami asked that the cat's body be brought into the shrine. There he knelt with the cat in his arms before the large shrine photo of Holy Mother. Swami stayed in that position for a very long time, silently kneeling before Holy Mother's photo. We watched from the shrine doorway for what seemed like 10 or 15 minutes before he finally got up and left the shrine. Then he announced to those of us present that we would hold a memorial service for the kitty, and that everyone must attend and offer a flower. The ceremony took place out in the garden, next to the shrine. A little grave was dug, Swami chanted, said some prayers, and we each offered a flower on the grave itself. About a dozen people attended this simple, but touching ceremony.

— *Pravrajika Brahmaprana*

Relationship with household items

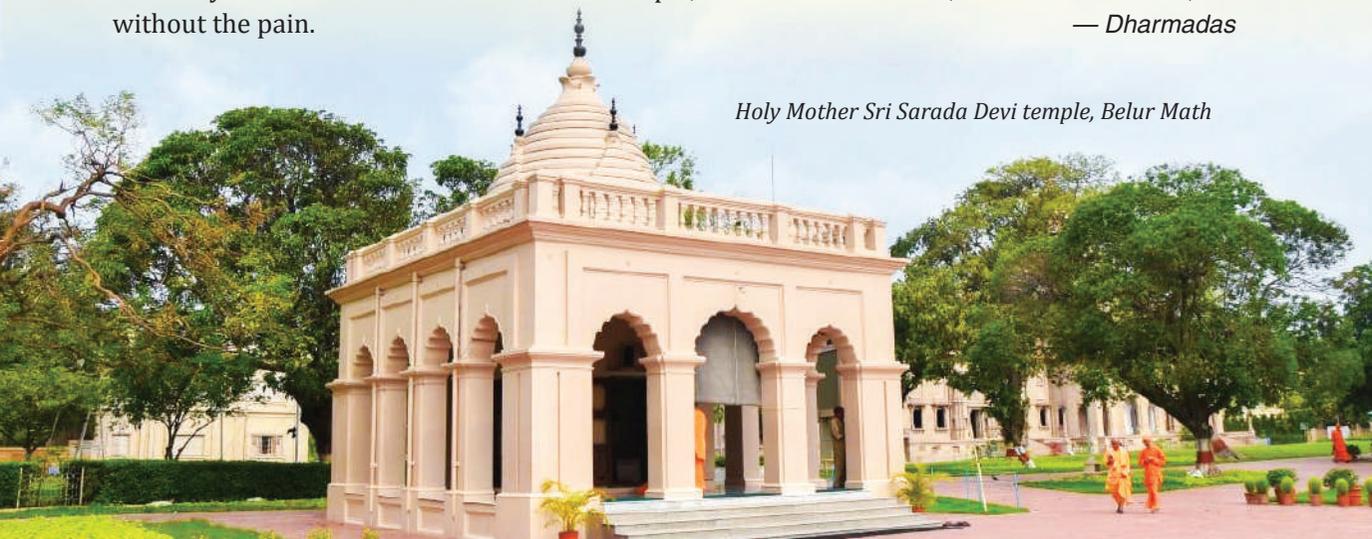
The mandate for anyone visiting the Portland Center was to absolutely follow every instruction given by the Swami, exactly. And before initiating anything, you'd better ask permission. This was Holy Mother's center and Aseshanandaji was a strict caretaker. He could let loose a withering barrage in a loud voice, listing your errors and mistakes. Maybe even throwing in a "Useless Americans..." once in a while.

On one visit, I watched as Swami Aseshanandaji came in from watering the garden, with his pants soaking wet from the leaking hose, which had been repaired so many times it was leaking badly. He was even grumbling about the hoses. I thought, here's my opening. So I drove to a hardware store and bought several hundred feet of very good garden hoses, brooms, and rakes. I was feeling great – but... Aseshanandaji lit into me, in full throated voice, "When you come here, you must do exactly as I say. You have no right to do these things. You are not welcome if you won't obey me." It left me shaken to my core. I really did feel as if I violated his rules, I had crossed a line. For the rest of the day, Swami gave me no relief, and we were leaving the next morning. As I was waiting for the time to leave, I sat on my bed in a room in the monastery with my suitcase packed. Near tears, I feared that this was going to be my last interaction with Swami.

Just then, Swami came into my room, full of love and sweetness and said, "You see, Dharmadas, these things, the hoses, the brooms, all of it – they are like old dear friends, and you can't just throw them away." I fully and deeply apologised and took the dust of his feet. His anger was truly like what is talked about in the Gospel, like a mark on water, the lesson remains, but without the pain.

— *Dharmadas*

Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi temple, Belur Math



Swami Ishwarananda

An initiated disciple of Swami Shivanandaji, he joined the Order in 1920 and received sannyasadi-ksha from his guru in 1923. Besides serving in many centres, he was head of Kanchipuram, Mysuru, Chengalpattu, and Trichur centres. He attained mahasamadhi on 29 April 1976 at the age of 81.



Has Sri Krishna made a mistake!

I joined the Ramakrishna Order at Trissur Ashrama in 1973. Though I was from Karnataka, the main reason for joining there was the presence of Swami Ishwaranandaji who was leading a retired life there.

A few months after joining, one afternoon I approached Ishwaranandaji with a doubt. In the Bhagavad Gita Sri Krishna says मामनुस्मर युध्य च “Think of me at all times and fight.” This confused me. We are told to concentrate on one thing at a time. But here Sri Krishna is asking us to do two things at the same time. After presenting my doubt before Maharaj, I also foolishly declared, “It seems there is a mistake”.

Ishwaranandaji looked at me with eyes wide open, smiled and said, “Ooh! Krishna has made a mistake!?”

Embarrassed, I haltingly replied “No, no, maharaj, I mean.... I do not understand how it is possible”

Pointing to the small hall where he was sitting, maharaj asked me “It is not clean. Can you clean it?”

“Yes, Swamiji. When shall I do it?” I asked.

“Now, if you are free.”

I went out thinking Maharaj might have been displeased with my foolish remark and hence did not answer my question. I came back with a broom, mopping cloth and a small bucket and soon cleaned the room. In the meantime, Maharaj had gone out for a walk.

Similarly, I cleaned the room the next two days. On the fourth day, when I was cleaning the small hall, Ishwaranandaji was walking in the corridor outside the room. Soon, I noticed that every time he came near the hall, he paused at the door for a few seconds, without entering the hall. Though I didn't turn around to look at him, I felt, that on walking every round across the corridor, he was observing me cleaning the hall. This made me a little self-conscious of my work and I gave more attention to cleaning even the window sill, the table top and legs, etc. The next day, i.e., the fifth day, the same thing played out, Maharaj would pause at the door every now and then and I also cleaned with full attention. But as I finished cleaning that day, Maharaj came inside, looked around and asked, "Yesterday and today I have noticed, there is a difference in the level of cleaning. The window sills are cleaner, all the corners are cleaner, the table is cleaner. What happened?"

I then replied, "Maharaj, I felt that you were watching me every time you came walking this side of the corridor. So, I put more effort and attention in cleaning."

"I was walking outside, did I come in and stand in front of you, watching you cleaning?" asked revered Maharaj.

"Though you were not here in the hall looking at me or visible to me, there was a *feeling* in me that you were observing me cleaning," I replied.

With a gentle smile Ishwaranandaji said, "Yes. Similarly, remember that God is always watching you, even though He may not be visible to your eyes. If you have this feeling that He is watching, your work also becomes perfect. Remembrance and work can go together. That is the meaning of 'Think of me at all times and fight.' Do you understand now the words of Sri Krishna?"

A new light flashed in my intelligence.

Then he asked me "Do you know the story of Kanakadasa and the banana?"

Though I knew it, I wanted to hear the story from him, and so replied, "What is it? Tell me Maharaj."

Then he related the well-known story. Kanakadasa, a shepherd, was a great devotee of Sri Krishna. He was accepted as a disciple by Sri Vyasaraya Swami. The other orthodox disciples did not like their guru giving so much attention and love to the lower-caste man. To show them the greatness of Kanaka, once Vyasaraya Swami gave them all a banana each and asked them to eat it secretly at a place where nobody would see them. The next day, Kanaka came back with the banana. While the other disciples were laughing at him, the guru asked Kanaka to explain the matter. Then Kanaka replied, "I could not eat the banana in secret because, everywhere, and at all times, my Krishna is watching me."

After narrating the story, Ishwaranandaji told me, "Remember, God is always watching you, even when you are asleep."

— Swami Jitakamananda

Offer all actions to Sri Ramakrishna

It was 1974-75. I was reading Swami Vivekananda's Karma Yoga, and there was a discussion among the brahmacharis about Karma and bondage. Swamiji explains in the book how the law of Karma works. One Karma leads to another, and it also affects the mind and our personality.

Then the fruits of action lead to another birth. It appeared to me like a vicious cycle. How to come out of it?

Swami Ishwaranandaji was sitting in an easy chair. I approached him and expressed my thoughts. How to come out of this cycle of Karma?

After looking at me for a few seconds, Maharaj said, “Do one thing. Before going to bed, mentally take a handful of flowers and offer it at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna as an offering of fruit of all your actions of the day.”

A nice idea. But how can a mere mental offering destroy Karma phala?. I was expecting something profound from Maharaj. I felt the answer was very simple. I was not satisfied with this simple method.

So I asked again, “What after that?”

He replied gravely, “Do it, and you will understand.”

I thought for a minute and again asked, “Maharaj, while doing puja, we offer only the good flowers and good fruits to God. Similarly, should I offer only my good deeds?”

“No, no. Offer all your actions, both good and bad. If you keep bad deeds to yourself, you will not be able to digest it,” Maharaj earnestly replied.

He then said, “Listen to this story from Mahabharata.”

“After performing the *Rajasuya Yajna*, the priests came to Yudhistirah and told him “the *yajnam* has come to an end, only one thing is pending; it is *yajna phala samarpanam* to the Yajamana, or offering the fruits of the sacrifice to the owner who performed it. If you kindly come with us we will complete that ritual”. Then Yudhistirah thought a while and replied, ‘No, not me. Our grandfather Bhishma is present. He is the senior most in our family. He should receive the fruits of the Yajnam.’ When they all went to Bhishma Pithamaha with this request, he declined saying, ‘No, I’m not fit to receive it.’ ‘Then how will this Yajnam be completed’ asked Yudhistirah. Then Bhishma replied, ‘Only one person has the capacity to accept Yajna Phalam in this world and that is Sri Krishna.’ During Rajasuya Yajna, Sri Krishna was given the responsibility of receiving the guests and looking after their needs. Now Yudhistirah and others went to Sri Krishna and explained the whole matter and begged him to come and save the situation. Sri Krishna then smilingly accepted the Yajna Phalam.”



Ramakrishna Ashrama, Trichur

Narrating this story, Swami Ishwaranandaji told me “Good actions are like golden chains, and bad actions are like iron chains. If you want to come out of the entanglement of both the chains, then offer the fruits of all your actions, good and bad, to the Lord. Only He has the power to accept everything.”

Next day during his walk, Swami Ishwaranandaji came and stood next to me and said, “Yesterday, you asked me ‘What after that?’ If you offer all your actions every day to the Lord, then after some time there will awaken in you an inner perception that you are not the doer of action, God is the doer, you are only *Nimitta*, an instrument in the hands of God. Your ego will then become a ‘ripe ego: thereby you will be free from bondage”

— Swami Jitakamananda

His personality

Sri Mannath Padmanabhan, the founder of the Nair Service Society and the great social reformer of the State, said of Ishwaranandaji: “When I first met Swami Ishwaranandaji, I sat in front of him without his asking. When I met him for the second time, I sat before him when asked to do so. But, when I met him for the third time, I couldn’t sit before him even after he asked me to do so!”

— Sri Sudarsanam Sukumaran Master

True respect

The scene was Poonkunnam Ashram, Thrissur. A discussion was in progress. One of the speakers vehemently criticised the sannyasis in general. All the sannyasis present in the hall left the place in silent protest, except Ishwaranandaji, who continued to remain unperturbed till the end. Later, when he was questioned about it, his disarming answer was, “Just as I have my right and freedom to maintain and preserve my ideology, he too has the same right and freedom for his ideology.”

— Sri Sudarsanam Sukumaran Master

An atheist in the ashrama!

Once an atheist came to the Ashram and began arguing with Maharaj, denying the existence of God and criticising sannyasis. Without the slightest resentment, Maharaj politely asked him to stay for a couple of days in the Ashram. He stayed for three days and all these days Maharaj found time to interact with him. When he was leaving the man prostrated before Maharaj! He was transformed.

— Sri Sudarsanam Sukumaran Master

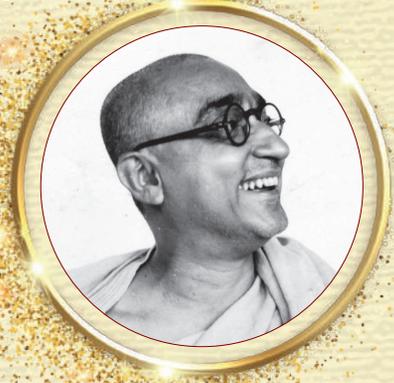
Brahman and the Avatara

Even as a young boy, Ishwaranandaji was in close contact with Swami Nirmalanandaji. In later years while reminiscing about this association, Ishwaranandaji said, “Once when we were together in the office of *Prabudha Keralam* (Malayalam monthly magazine of the Order) in Trivandrum, I asked Nirmalanandaji whether Sri Ramakrishna was really an avatara. Nirmalanandaji replied, ‘Swami Vivekananda was the avatara. Sri Ramakrishna is the Absolute Truth, the Absolute Principle and the Absolute Splendour, which has occasioned the advent of that avatara.’ After saying so, he kept quiet for some time and tears trickled down his eyes.”

— A Sannyasi

Swami Nirvedananda

After graduating in Physics from Presidency College, Calcutta in 1913 Surendranath due to financial constraints shifted to Arts and did his Masters in English in 1916. He started a coaching centre which became a second home to many students. In 1919, this coaching centre was affiliated to the Order and evolved as Ramakrishna Mission Calcutta Students' Home (Vidyarthi Ashram), Belgharia. In the same year Suren joined the Order. He received mantra-diksha from Swami Brahmanandaji in 1918 and sannyasa-diksha from Swami Shivanandaji in 1923. He was also closely involved in the establishment and management of some other educational institutions of the Order. He attained mahasamadhi on 15 Nov 1958 aged 65.



One life for Swamiji's work

Once Surendranath visited Swami Adbhutananda, a monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna in Varanasi. After hearing about the work of the Student's Home Adbhutanandaji remarked, "What you are doing is very good work; many will be benefitted by it. But you will not attain God by it. For God-realisation you have to be a beggar on the street (i.e. possessing nothing)." These words raised a storm in his mind and he even thought of not returning to Calcutta, and instead go away to the Himalayas. But the next day Adbhutanandaji told, "See Suren, Raja (Brahmanandaji) is foremost among us; do what he says."

With an agitated mind he returned to Calcutta and decided to leave the Student's Home and join Belur Math. When he came to Belur Math to finalise his decision he met Swami Shivanandaji. Without being asked Mahapurush Maharaj told him, "After seeing you I feel you should carry on the work you are doing. It will do good to many." Suren questioned, "Are you saying so observing my poor eagerness to visit the Math?" Shivanandaji assured him saying, "No. It is not so. You have taken up a work well-suited to your nature. You will surely be blessed by this work. This is the kind of work after Swamiji's own heart. Due to lack of man power we could not initiate such work till now. God willing you have started it, stick to it. It will bring welfare to many people." When Premanandaji heard of Shivanandaji's advice he said: "Accept Mahapurush's words as *daivavani*—divine oracle."

On another occasion Surendra again came to Belur Math desiring to leave the Student's Home and be an inmate of the Math. When he expressed his desire to Swami Brahmanandaji, Brahmanandaji sent him to Shivanandaji for his guidance. Shivanandaji exhorted, "Carry on what you are doing. Listen, I say, stay there. It will bring welfare to many. Your 'spiritual progress' will not be hampered by this work; I assure you, it won't be obstructed. And even if it is obstructed slightly— I assure you that won't happen — even if marginally hindered, can you not 'sacrifice' one life for Swamiji's work?" Surendra could not speak a single word.

— Swami Viswashrayananda

Spirituality and science

It was 1937 or 38. The book *Sri Ramakrishna and Spiritual Renaissance* had already been written by Nirvedanandaji. The Ramakrishna Mission Calcutta Students' Home was then located at Gauripur. Some eminent and scholarly personalities, who were friends of Maharaj, had come for a visit. After lunch, when they were chatting, Nirvedanandaji briefed them about the analysis and discussion he had made in his book on the findings of the physical science. Everyone supported his views.

In course of the conversation, Maharaj said, "Our ancient saints and sages assert about spiritual truth, that they have had direct realisation of it, and following the required process we too can realise it for ourselves and become fulfilled. Now we should believe in their words or test it for ourselves. Even you scientists say the same thing."

Dr. Meghnad Saha, the noted India astrophysicist and a close-friend of Maharaj, who did not care for so-called religion, disagreed and said, "But Swamiji, there is a lacuna in what you have said. If you don't agree with what we say, we will take you to the laboratory and demonstrate before you. Whereas you (implying spiritual practitioners) cannot do that."

"Nor can you, Meghnad," said Maharaj.

Hearing this unexpected reply, Dr. Saha was startled and asked, "What do you mean?"

Pointing to the field in front of them where an illiterate farmer was tilling his land, Maharaj said, "Tell me, can you take this farmer to the laboratory and make him understand your latest theory of Astrophysics?"

"That I cannot do Swamiji; he requires training for that," replied Dr Saha.

Maharaj then said, "Similar is the case with spirituality. Mental discipline is needed."

— An alumni

One thing at a time

One evening during World War II, Swami Nirvedananda Maharaj and we students were sitting with a map spread out in front of us. Intense discussion was going on about the progress of the war along with map pointing—marking with pins the places conquered by the Axis powers and by the Allies.

After some time Brahmachari Priyalal came and said, "Maharaj, it is already dusk and the bell for evening prayers has been sounded."

Immediately Maharaj got up, went to his room, sprinkled some Ganga water on himself and sat down for japa. The brahmachari was amazed! Is this possible? A person, who was engrossed

in a discussion on war just a moment ago, has now sat down for japa? Is japa and meditation so easy?

Later the brahmachari expressed his doubt to Nirvedananda Maharaj. What Maharaj said in reply cleared all his doubts! Maharaj said, "See, when I was doing the map pointing I was thinking only about the Second World War. I did not think about japa or meditation. So when I am doing japa and meditation why should I think of other things?"

— Swami Chandrananda

Value of two annas

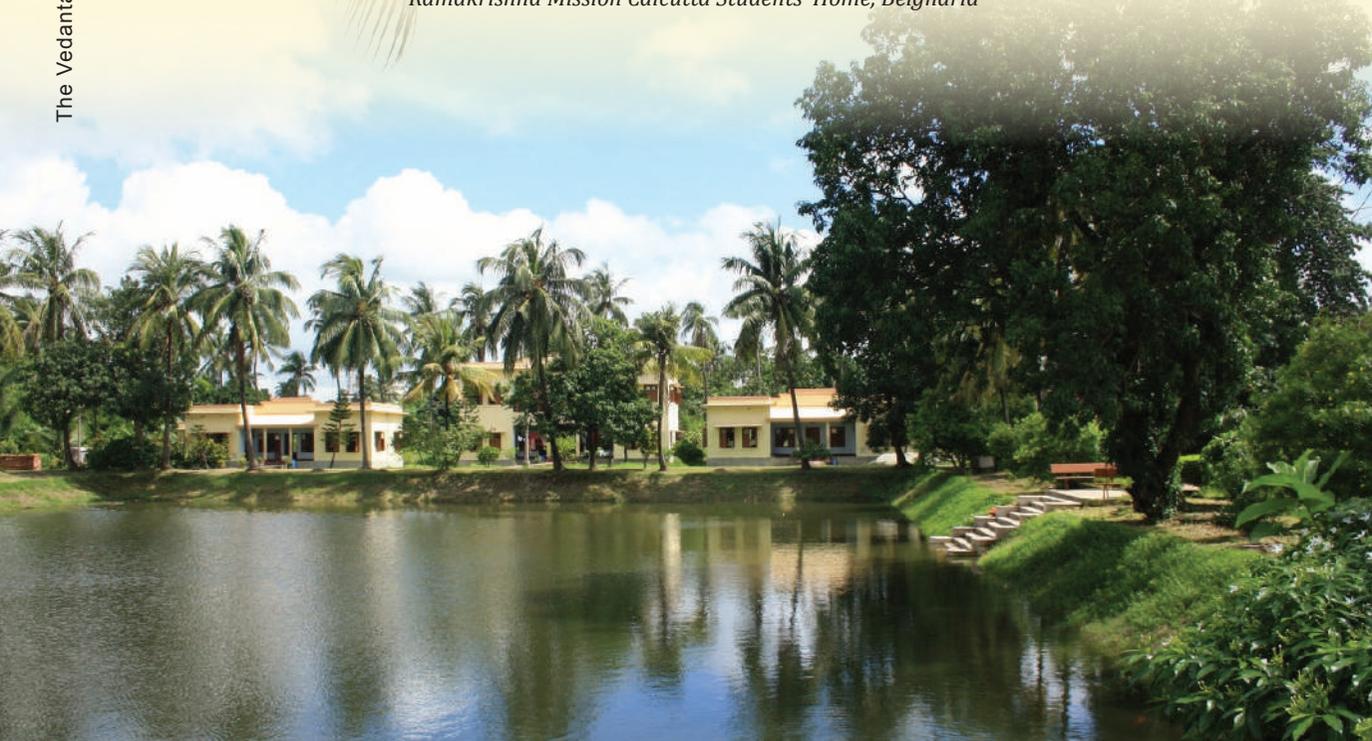
"Have you made us work throughout the year just for two annas?" I asked Swami Nirvedanandaji . Maharaj replied, "I would have done it even if it meant loss. When you return from college, you carry in you an ounce of poison of pride— 'I am doing higher studies, I am superior than the common masses.' But when you return and take up the garden hoe in your hand, that poison is neutralised. That's why this arrangement."

We were talking about our vegetable garden. Upon returning from the college we had to work either in the vegetable garden or in the flower garden till the sports hour. In our times in Gouripur in 1934, each student was assigned with a small plot in the farm. This increased our enthusiasm. Even if it was a winter evening after we returned from college, we irrigated the plots using lanterns. Sometimes on our way to college we used to sell the vegetables which were in excess after the ashrama's use. At the end of the year it was found that we profited only 2-annas from the farm after all the expenditure. That prompted my remark.

This was our Vidyarthi Ashrama and its method of education. Every work was consciously and meticulously designed for the physical, mental and spiritual developments of the students.

— Swami Viswashrayananda

Ramakrishna Mission Calcutta Students' Home, Belgharia



Swami Siddheswarananda

Gopal hailing from the Cochin royal family, was introduced to Ramakrishna-Vivekananda by his school Headmaster. While studying at the Presidency College in Madras in 1914, he came in touch with Madras Math and in 1917 received his mantra-diksha from Swami Brahmanandaji and joined the Order in 1920. Swami Shivanandaji gave him sannyasa-diksha in 1924. For some time, he was in the editorial team of *The Vedanta Kesari*, then for 10 years served as founder-president of the Ashrama in Mysore, as head of the Ashrama in Bangalore before leaving for Paris in 1937. After overcoming the challenges of World War, he established the Vedanta Centre at Gretz and attained mahasamadhi on 2 April 1957 at the age of 60.



Who won the bout?

When I was at the Madras monastery I had heard about Swami Vijnananandaji, one of the monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. In 1922 I went to Belur Math. As a young sannyasi and coming from South India, with just a basic understanding of Bengali language, I waited impatiently for an opportunity to listen to Vijnananandaji tell his reminiscences of Sri Ramakrishna. Soon I had the opportunity ... [and] I asked him, "Maharaj, would you be so kind as to talk about Sri Ramakrishna?"

He answered after some silence, "I'm going to ask you a question. How do you think of Sri Ramakrishna?"

"I think he is a Divine Incarnation", I replied.

"My poor boy, is that all that you think of him? So, don't you see that it is he who sends the incarnations, that he is the Divine Mother Herself?" Seeing me embarrassed, he did not ask me any further questions.

He then told us this reminiscence. "One day when I went to Dakshineswar, I saw him walking back and forth in the veranda. He had a very happy air and when he saw me, he imitated the gestures of a wrestler and asked me, 'Do you want to wrestle a little with me?' I too felt playful, but at the same time I said to myself, 'How puny he looks and I am so big and strong, while he is so tiny and fragile!' I went forward towards him and in a few movements I had him pinned to the wall, thus asserting my victory."

Swami Vijnananandaji became grave and silent. The atmosphere created by this silence was extraordinary. Only those who have been in contact with great spiritual personalities can understand the power of such a silence. I had the impression that he was about to speak again. His monastic attendant signalled to me, however, not to ask any more questions at the moment. Several minutes went by in this way.

Then, Vijnananandaji turned towards me and asked, "In your opinion, who won this fight?"
"You won, Maharaj. There is no doubt about that."

"Idiot! You haven't understood anything. It is *he* who conquered me."

"How is that, Maharaj?"

"Don't you see, then, that I have become his slave? When I fought with him, he took into himself all my strength."

Then, in a few words, he taught us how we should do japa: "When you repeat his name, imagine that you are grappling with him as I did. Let all your strength be absorbed in his name. It is in this way that he will grasp you and there will no more be you, but he, your Master."

There is no difference between the Lord and his name, and the power of the divine name can overcome the influences of *avidya*, ignorance. We suppose that it is we who act, but grace can dispel that illusion. What do we notice, ordinarily, in the course of our spiritual practices? That we are lacking in love, in faith, or even in the simple faculty of concentration. Under such circumstances, we don't make any progress. Many thoughts, like parasites, impose themselves upon us. We must pit the thought of the Lord, completely concentrated on his name, against the vagaries of our mind. It matters little if the influence of God appears too feeble in us compared to what is resisting him. Let us enter into the Divine play that Sri Ramakrishna had offered to Swami Vijnananandaji. The Lord, in struggling against our wayward thoughts is going to bring together in him their scattered forces and absorb their energy just as he, from that moment, lives in us.

(Collected and translated from French by Swami Yogeshananda and published in Prabuddha Bharata, Oct 2018)

*Centre Vedantique Ramakrishna,
Gretz, France*



Swami Tyagishananda

While doing his post-graduation in Sanskrit and then graduation in Law at Madras, Krishna Menon came in touch with Swami Ramakrishnanandaji at the Madras Math. In 1917 he received mantra-diksha from Swami Brahmanandaji. After a brief Law practice, he did another degree in Education and worked as the Headmaster of Vivekodayam School in Thrissur. One of the first in India to serve the Harijans, in 1927 he started two schools for Harijan boys and girls. He had a warm friendship with Mahatma Gandhi.

He joined the Order in 1924, and received his sannyasa-diksha from Swami Shivanandaji. In 1938 he became the Head of the Bangalore Ashrama, where in 1943 he started Vidyarthi Mandiram, home for college boys, where many poor boys were accommodated. His extraordinary scholarship is revealed in his commentaries on some Upanishads, Narada Bhakti Sutras, and writing on Vedanta. He entered into mahasamadhi on 6 August 1951.



Renouncer and householder

Once a devotee named Rao, who always saw Maharaj engrossed in normal chores like cooking and tending cows, asked in a lighter vein, "Swamiji, what is the difference between a householder and you? We worry about our children and you worry about your cows". Maharaj promptly replied, "Rao, there is an important difference. If tomorrow the Headquarters sends me a postcard asking me to leave to another Centre, I just take my loin-cloth and leave." He then made a gesture of wiping his hands sideways, implying finishing with a task for good (and not even taking the dust of that place). "Can a householder walk out of his home in this way?" he asked.

— Swami Harshananda

A stray desire

One day Tyagishananda Maharaj told us, "Just see, how funny! Yesterday a stray thought crossed my mind, just a simple stray thought! It was rather chilly, and I thought: How nice it would have been if I had a shawl to cover myself with! Unbelievable as it is, today did bring a shawl. I was frightened. This was an innocent, harmless desire; what if some bad thought had come to my

mind, an evil desire, and it was fulfilled immediately! Then and there, I prayed, “No, no, O Lord! Fulfil my desires only if they are good, only if they are helpful in my spiritual development and progress. Otherwise not!”

— Swami Kirthidananda

Accounts up to the last minute

I knew Swami Tyagishananda Maharaj quiet well as he had been my father’s colleague. As headmaster of the Vivekodayam school, Trichur, he drew a salary of Rs.125. He would take Rs.5 for his personal expenses and donate Rs.120 to the school.

Once when he was writing accounts I approached him to clear a doubt. He asked me to wait. After closing the accounts book he raised his head and told me, “I am particular about keeping the accounts up to the minute. Who knows when I may pass away!”

— C.S. Ramakrishnan

Do not tempt

I joined the Ramakrishna Order at our Basavanagudi centre in Bangalore. Tyagishananda Maharaj was the head of the centre. There were no servants and we brahmacharis did all the work of the ashrama—cooking, looking after the dairy, keeping the ashrama premises clean, washing the cooking vessels, and the dining hall, and performing worship in the shrine, etc. by turns. At that time, it was my responsibility to cook, wash the vessels, and clean the dining hall. Another brahmachari was helping me in this. This brahmachari had taken on himself the task of teaching a boy of six or seven the three R’s. We slowly relieved ourselves of the duty of cleaning the dining hall and washing the vessels, by entrusting it to this boy. After some days, leaving the boy alone to finish the tasks, I went to have an afternoon nap. After finishing his work, the boy, not knowing what else to do, started riding the ashrama cycle in the premises. Hearing that sound, Tyagishananda Maharaj came out of the room, woke me up, and cried out, “What is this going on? Why have you left the boy all alone like this? See what he is doing.” I most casually replied, “Oh! He is a nice boy!” Immediately Maharaj replied, “He is a nice boy, all right, but why do you make him bad by tempting him? You have no right to do that.”

The truth of it dawned on me some thirty years later, when I was in charge of the Students’ Home in Madras started in 1905 by Swami Ramakrishnananda. The institute has separate hostels – one for the senior boys, the other for the junior boys. The general rule is that the boys of the one section will not mix with the boys of the other hostel. However, as anyone who has dealt with children knows, as far as children are concerned, rules are there only to be broken. This rule was no exception.

The students found some excuse or other to circumvent this rule. One smart fellow, studying in Standard VI or VII would go to the senior hostel under the pretext of seeing late Anna N. Subramanian, who spent his day-time in a room specially reserved for him to study and write books. ‘Anna’ was the name by which people addressed him out of reverence and also affection. He was in his eighties then. This boy would go to him every day, and pretend to do little bits of service to him. Thus he gained his confidence so much so that Anna would leave the room in his hands and go out sometimes to the bathroom or toilet. But, then, Anna found things, including some coins he kept in the drawer missing now and then. He did not, however, suspect the boy.

One day, a senior boy who was crossing that way found this boy opening Anna's drawer, he entered the room to find out what the matter was. No sooner had he entered than the boy took to his heels. The senior boy ran after him and when he finally caught him, nothing incriminatory was found on him or later in his trunk or book-safe. However, around Rs.30/-, big amount in those day, was missing from Anna's drawer. Anna started cursing and blaming the boy. I narrated to him the incident that had happened years back at Bangalore and what Tyagishananda Maharaj had told me on that occasion: Anna had to blame himself and not the boy. Anna agreed. He said, "Yes, yes, that is correct. Mahapurush Maharaj (his guru Swami Shivanandaji) had told me the same thing - 'Don't put temptations before others. You yourself are to blame if someone becomes bad because of your negligence.' All these years I did not realise the truth of what he had said. Swami Tyagishananda Maharaj has told you the same thing."

We finally found out what was the matter. The other boys in the hostel, though poor, would buy ice-cream whenever the street ice-cream vendor passed that way out of the pocket money given to them by their parents. This boy was poorer than others, and his widowed mother could not afford to give him anything. The other boys, seeing that he had no money to purchase the ice-cream, would buy it for him, putting him to shame. So he started stealing small amounts from Anna's room, out of which he would buy ice-cream for himself and the others, too. That restored his self-respect somewhat among his classmates, who, knowing fully well what he was doing, encouraged him in his misdeed. Who was to blame for all his crime? Anna definitely, as he himself accepted. Yet, the boy was brilliant and talented, and could entertain others by beautifully reciting the stories from the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and other books, which he had learnt from his mother. What Tyagishananda Maharaj taught me is a great lesson for all, for all time.

— Swami Kirthidananda

Information and permission: The difference

One of the monastics, who had not yet 'officially' joined though residing in the ashrama, had undergone surgery at a local hospital. His mother was looking after him in the hospital. After discharge, he was taken home for recuperation. I planned to go to his home and look him up. It was morning and Tyagishananda Maharaj was pacing about in the verandah. I told him, "This evening I am going to see him at his home." He heard what I said and just kept quiet. In the evening, as I was about to go out riding on the bicycle, I saw him again in the verandah. As a matter of courtesy, I wanted to take his permission and asked, "May I go to his place now?" Instantly came an unexpected response, "No!"

I was taken aback and said, "But, Maharaj, in the morning I informed you about it and then you didn't say anything!" Perhaps I was trying to point out an obvious contradiction. But he gravely rejoined, "In the morning you said, 'I am going to see him.' It was your decision and I had nothing to say. Now you are asking 'May I go?', which is seeking my permission. I say 'No'; it is not good for you."

— Swami Sastrananda

Everything belongs to Sri Ramakrishna

Once, one of the monastic probationers wanted his visiting friend to have lunch at the ashrama. Lunch had already started and while laying the plate for the unexpected visitor, it was

found that there was no curd left to serve him also; the 'cook' informed accordingly. Perhaps the probationer did not like it and said, "All right, here is my portion; you can take it and give it to him."

At this, Tyagishananda Maharaj remarked sharply, "In the ashrama, there is no 'my' share or 'your' share. It is all Sri Ramakrishna's. Either it is there, or it is not!" He would also tell us that, as a sannyasi, "You have no right to ask for something. But you have the right to decline and say 'no' if offered."

— Swami Sastrananda

The contrast

Tyagishananda Maharaj did not like pretensions or showing off, whether it concerned himself or others. He did not care to be appreciated or admired by others. In fact, he took special measures to avoid such admiration. Once, Mahatma Gandhi who was travelling in South India and had come to Bangalore, had expressed a desire to meet Swami Tyagishanandaji who, in his earlier period of life, had done remarkable and pioneering work for the uplift of the 'Harijans' or 'untouchables'. Tyagishanandaji went to the railway station to meet Gandhiji who was staying in the railway compartment. They had the talks as planned. But something else also happened. Just then, an Austrian lady – a painter – had also come to interview Gandhiji; but she at times kept on interrupting him, even when he was to speak. At this, Gandhiji playfully stretched his hand, held her nose between his index and middle fingers and pulling it, said, "Let me speak!" The unorthodox remedy worked. Meanwhile she was somehow greatly attracted to the appearance and personality of Tyagishanandaji. She introduced herself to him and expressed her desire to paint his portrait. It was not surprising, for he had a tall and well-built figure, a fine coppery-golden complexion and flowing white hair and beard, somewhat like Tagore. She declared she

Vivekodayam

VIVEKANANDA BLOC



would come to the ashrama next morning to do the painting and asked him to be ready. She was happy that she had now a magnificent 'subject' to express her painting talents.

True to the agreement, next morning, Tyagishanandaji was 'ready' after bath etc., and was, as usual, pacing up and down in the verandah, with his staff in hand. She also arrived as promised, and after looking up at him in a puzzled way for a while, asked, "Where is Swami so and so, whom I am to meet?" Tyagishanandaji promptly replied, "Yes, here I am!" But she was not convinced and stood for some time confused. This person says he is Swami Tyagishananda, but he is not the one whom she had met! Wherein lay the mystery? The mystery was due to the fact that early that morning Tyagishanandaji had called the barber and had a complete shave – all his silvery hair and beard had gone! And to those who did not know that, he did indeed look a different person. Even to some of us, the difference was quite striking. Anyway, when the confusion was cleared and it became confirmed that it was Swami Tyagishananda Maharaj himself, the very person whom she had met earlier, a deep disappointment came over her. No Tagorean hair and beard! She went back without doing any painting.

— Swami Sastrananda

A solid foundation

Every day Swami Tyagishananda Maharaj used to take regular classes for us monastics. While we sat at the table, he would pace up and down, explaining the texts. In some classes he purposefully dictated notes – I myself have a thousand or more pages of them – and we would be taking down. Towards the end of his life he took up the *Isha Upanishad*, a very brief upanishad; but in about 10 months, and after about 400 pages of notes, only 2 verses had been covered! One of us, who was more impatient than the others once complained, "Swamiji, it is going on so slowly... when will it be finished?" Sharply and gravely he replied, "So you want me to finish soon? All right, I shall rush through all the Upanishads in 3-4 months, and then you can go and boast before others that you have studied all of the Upanishads – is it not? Look here, I am not interested in that. I am interested in giving you all extensive and authentic general foundation material, by properly utilising which you can, in future, study the various scriptures yourself." What a deep and valuable approach. Time proved the validity of his assumption in my own life at least, to a great extent.

— Swami Sastrananda

Faith in Sri Ramakrishna

One day I requested Swami Tyagishananda to permit me to collect some donations for the ensuing birthday of Sri Ramakrishna. He forbade me; so I kept quiet. After some days, one evening a jatka (horse driven cart) came to the ashrama with groceries and vegetables. A devotee was with Maharaj at that time. Maharaj asked him to enquire the details from the jatkawala (cart man). He was informed that the goods were sent by the owner of a grocery store to the ashrama. However, Swami Tyagishanandaji thought that I might have arranged it. So, he asked the devotee to go to the store and find out the truth. The owner of the store told him that the goods were his donation in kind for the birthday of Sri Ramakrishna. He did not know me. The gift was spontaneous. All were surprised. Swami Tyagishanandaji had tremendous faith in Sri Ramakrishna. He knew that the Lord was the doer and all others were only instruments.

— Swami Sastrananda

Swami Vipulananda

Mylvaganam, hailing from a small village in Ampara, district of Eastern Sri Lanka, was a teacher who inspired by Swami Vivekananda's message would visit slum children to teach them. He received mantra-diksha from swami Shivanandaji and joined the Order at Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, in 1922.

He was a polyglot and was proficient in Tamil, Hindi, Bengali, Sinhala, Sanskrit, English, Latin and Greek; he translated many dramas from Latin and Greek into Tamil. He was associated with the setting-up of 26 schools in Sri Lanka, which however, were taken over by the government after his demise.



Special work timings and special salary

When Rajah Sir Annamalai Chettiyar offered Vipulananda Maharaj the Tamil Chair in the Annamalai University, Maharaj said that he would accept it on two conditions: (1) he would not conform to the timings, and (2) he wanted a one-rupee higher salary than that received by the Vice Chancellor. The Rajah though puzzled at first, readily agreed, but many people who heard about it criticised in private Maharaj's conditions. But they were dumbfounded when they saw Maharaj coming to the campus early in the morning, cleaning the facility, watering the plants and making arrangements for classes. He left the campus only after dusk. It was only after a time that people realised the greatness of Vipulanandaji—the fact that he wanted to work longer and hence he would not adhere to the timings.

At that time, when Vipulananda Maharaj came to Mylapore Math in a car, a brahmachari who was present there ignored him and did not make *pranams* as per tradition. Maharaj noticed this strange behaviour, and after a while, he called the brahmachari and asked, "Are you annoyed with me?" The brahmachari vented his displeasure, "Are you a householder? Do you have any children to look after? If that is not the case, why do you earn money for your living? Why did then you become a sannyasi? I heard that you asked for a salary higher than that of the Vice

Chancellor.” Hearing this, Maharaj gently remarked, “I have a big family—not one, but thousands, nay, even millions. I have several hundreds of children throughout Sri Lanka who depend on me. I need to educate them and improve their economic condition. Therefore, all these things are necessary.” Hearing this, the brahmachari felt ashamed, fell at Maharaj’s feet and begged his pardon. Maharaj too forgave him.

— Swami Nilamadhavananda

Offering Biriyani

Swami Vipulanandaji took great care of children and students. Once, he found a few students belonging to Muslim faith standing outside his room. When enquired, one of the boys said, “We have to observe our Islamic festival, but we don’t have biriyani to eat!” Maharaj lovingly assured them, “Oh, don’t worry about that. I will make arrangements for it.” He then hired a Muslim cook, and the food was prepared. Abdul Majid, who was one of those students, later became the Education Minister of Sri Lanka, and he introduced Vipulanandaji’s writings in Sri Lankan education system.

— Swami Nilamadhavananda

Service in slum

During his stay at Annamalai University in Chidambaram, Swami Vipulanandaji would visit a nearby slum to teach the children living there. He would carry puffed rice, biscuits, chocolates, nuts and other foodstuff for the children. Some boys from the locality where Maharaj lived in the town, would accompany him on these trips. But the parents of these boys did not want them to mix with the slum children. Once, a mother angry with her son for following Maharaj into the slum, poured a bucketful of cowdung on her son! Maharaj’s neighbours in the town also severed his water connection with the intention of forcing him to leave the place. But Maharaj remained unfazed, and drank the saltwater from a nearby pond.

The people, who opposed him, slowly realised his simplicity and greatness and repented for offending a sannyasi. One of the boys who accompanied Maharaj to the slum, would carry a lantern and escort Maharaj while returning home at night. In later years, this boy, with Maharaj’s blessings came to be recognised as a saint and a Tamil scholar ‘Kundrakkudi Adigalar’.

— Swami Nilamadhavananda

Belur Math



Swami Bodhatmananda

Popularly known as Bhav Maharaj, he received mantra-diksha from Swami Shivanandaji and joined the Order at the Deoghar centre in 1924. His guru gave him sannyasa-diksha in 1929. At different times he served as the Head at Deoghar, Gadadhar Ashrama, Kankurgachhi Yogodyan, and Nivedita Girls' School. He served as the Principal of Probationers' Training Centre, Belur Math, since its inception in 1956 till his mahasamadhi on 28 July 1974.



The real Guru-dakshina

Swami Shankaranandaji blessed me with mantra-diksha on 31 March 1961. Prior to that Swami Bodhatmanandaji, who was my advisor and mentor, had told me, “Note down the details of your initiation in the same way that M., wrote the Gospel so that this precious memory will never be lost.” I did write it down and occasionally read it.

When I went to Bodhatmanandaji and told him about my initiation, he asked, “Did you offer guru dakshina?” I replied, “Yes, Maharaj. Since I did not have any money, and funds from Advaita Ashrama could not be spent on anything ritualistic, a brahmachari friend of mine gave me two rupees. I used one rupee to buy fruits and sweets for the offering and one rupee for guru dakshina.” Bodhatmanandaji commented, “No, you did not offer anything.”

Surprised, I again said, “Maharaj, I really did offer a rupee.”

Then Bodhatmanandaji said, “No. Do you know what real guru dakshina is? The seed mantra that your guru sowed in your heart today, that will germinate and grow into a tree in due course. That tree will bear leaves, flowers, and fruit. When you offer that ripe fruit [God-realisation] to your guru, that will be the real guru dakshina. That is what the guru wants from his disciple.”

— Swami Chetanananda

Three types of sadhus

Swami Bodhatmanandaji was indeed a sannyasi's sannyasi. He would always remind us how to develop our spiritual life. One day, he jokingly said, “See, there are three types of sannyasis—those fried in cheap oil, those fried in ghee (clarified butter), and those fried in clarified butter and then soaked in a sweet syrup. Those fried in cheap oil have outgoing tendencies. They are always looking for good food, nice clothing, and other comforts. Those fried in clarified butter are

indrawn. They spend their time in scriptural studies, prayer, and meditation; they are full of renunciation. Those belonging to the third category are well-versed in scriptures and are genuine seekers of God. They fry themselves in intense renunciation and then bathe in the sweet syrup of devotion. They remain inebriated with the bliss of knowledge blended with devotion and share that joy with others. Now, you decide which one of these categories you want to belong to.”

— *Swami Chetanananda*

A true teacher

A scholar like Swami Bodhatmanandaji is rare. Not only was he knowledgeable in scriptures, but he was also an ascetic. While teaching scriptures he would always point out their application—for example, how those truths were reflected in the lives of Sri Ramakrishna and his disciples. He used to teach with great feeling, and he knew the trick of communicating the substance to the students.

He suffered from chronic diabetes and high blood pressure. One day I saw he was really sick and yet he was studying Vedantasara before coming to our class. I took away his glasses and said, “Maharaj, you have been studying and teaching Vedanta for forty years. Why are you still preparing for the class?”

Bodhatmanandaji said, “Give me my glasses. Listen, I know the meaning of the texts, but if I deeply think and meditate on the subject before the class, I still find many new insights. Those new ideas and new light inspire me and my students. Superficial knowledge is not good for a teacher. It only exposes your lack of understanding before the students. In the future, never give a talk or a class without proper preparation.” I still follow Maharaj’s precious advice.

— *Swami Chetanananda*

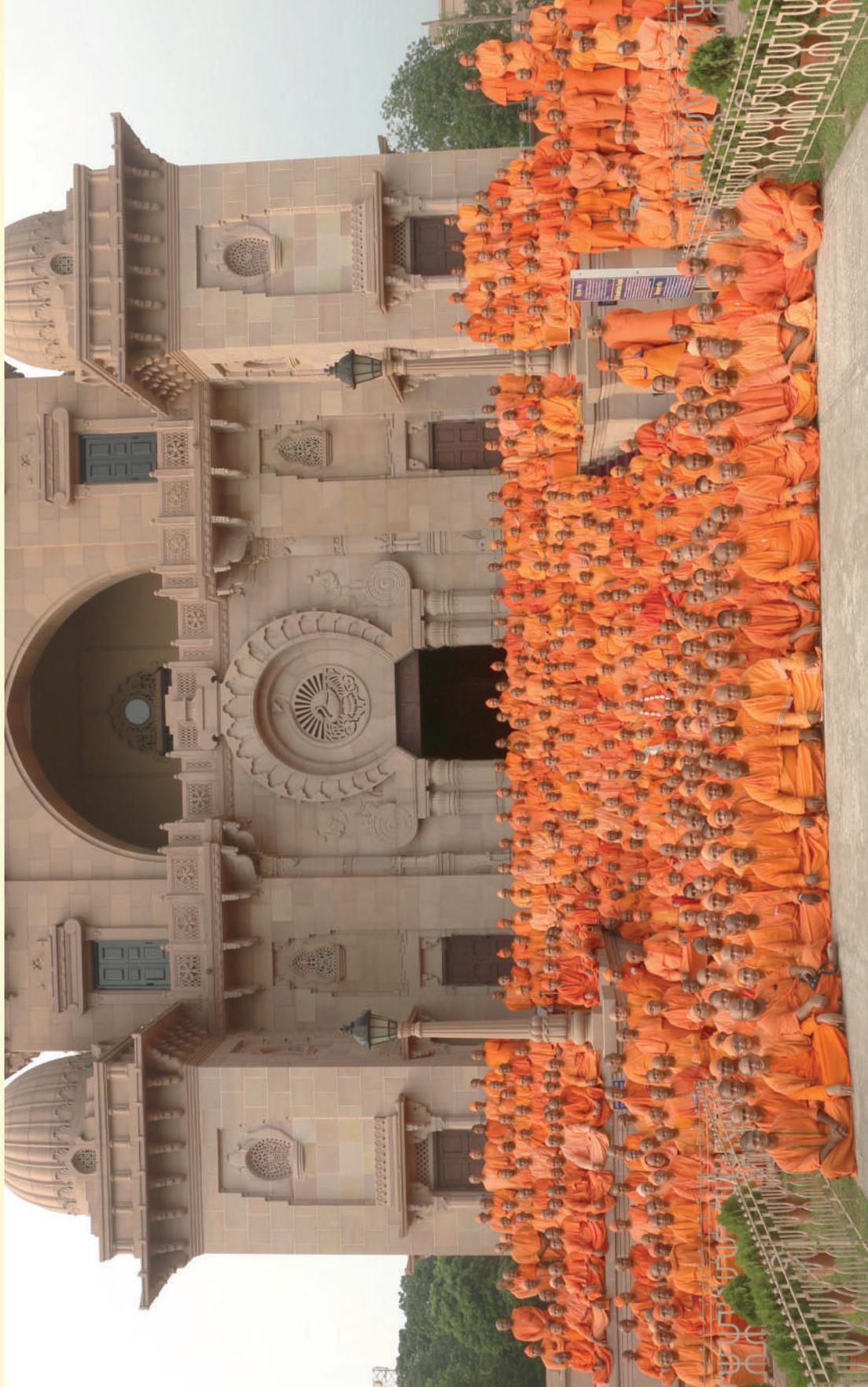
Building a sadhu’s life

One day I saw Swami Bodhatmanandaji get upset in the Dining Hall. He sat in the first seat in the third row, and Swami Gangeshanandaji sat opposite to him. We brahmacharis used to serve the food. One day, Gangeshanandaji commented upon a brahmachari to his face. Hearing that, Bodhatmanandaji said, “Maharaj, these boys are not orphans. They do have a guardian.” I do not remember what else he said. The whole Dining Hall became silent. Gangeshanandaji kept quiet and finished his meal. Bodhatmanandaji used to protect the brahmacharis like a mother bird.

The following day, I witnessed a beautiful scene. Gangeshanandaji used to stay in a room on the first floor of the Monks’ Quarters. At about 9:30 A.M. Bodhatmanandaji went there, stood at Gangeshanandaji’s door, and called him. When the latter came out, Bodhatmanandaji fell at his feet and said, “Maharaj, please forgive me. I should not have spoken like that at the Dining Hall yesterday. Since then, my meditation has been disturbed. I want your forgiveness.” Gangeshanandaji embraced him and said, “Oh, that was such a trivial matter, Brother. Forget about it.” This incident took place before my eyes. Sri Ramakrishna said that the anger of a holy man is like a mark on the water.

Regarding this incident, Swami Bodhatmanandaji told me later, “See, while living together, sometimes there may be disagreements—but never nurture any ill-feeling because of that. It is better to resolve any misunderstandings sooner than later, otherwise your meditation will be disturbed. It is by subduing the ego that a sanniyasi’s life is built up.”

— *Swami Chetanananda*



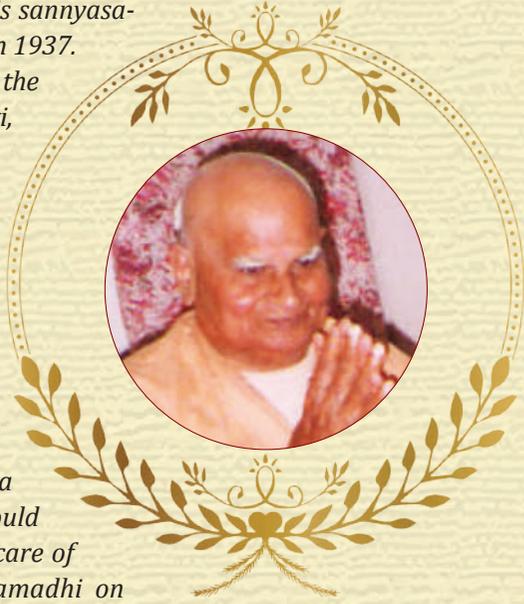
Group photo in front of Sri Ramakrishna's Temple in Belur Math taken during Monks' Conference of the Ramakrishna Order, 2018

Swami Muktananda

After receiving mantra-diksha from Swami Shivanandaji Maharaj, he joined the Order in 1926 and had his sannyasa-diksha from Swami Vijnananandaji in 1937.

Swami Shivanandaji told him "Stay here and serve the Narayanas (patients). This itself will get you bhakti, mukti and everything else." He was popularly known as Ban Baba or Banbihari Maharaj.

To undergo some treatment, Ban Baba was at the Order's then hospital centre at Rangoon from 1929 - 1932. There he learnt the art of dressing and medicines for curing wounds. Then, from 1932 for about 35 years he dressed nearly 40 - 50 wounds every day at the Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service, Varanasi. People, and even senior surgeons, believed that a patient would be cured if Banbihari Maharaj would but take up the dressing of the wounds and the care of the post-operative period. He attained mahasamadhi on 15 June 1996 at the age of 93.



Mahamaya darshan

Early 1930, one morning, Banbaba came face to face with a beautiful young lady (aged about 16-17 years) in front of the old OPD building. Wonderstruck, he kept gazing at her heavenly beauty in astonishment. "What are you gazing at?" she asked Banbaba and saying "Look" removed the cloth from the upper part of her body. What a ghastly sight! Her whole chest had a putrid smelling wound with maggots wriggling in it. Terribly shocked Banbaba just shut his eyes. Recovering from the shock in a few seconds, he requested her "Mother kindly wait. I shall get the keys of the dressing room and dress the wound." He returned in just two minutes with the keys only to find her missing. Searching the whole premises and all enquiries failed to locate her; nobody had seen such a woman near the hospital. Later, on many occasions, his sevak had tried to ask Maharaj for further details about the incident, but to no effect. It is presumed that Mahamaya herself had come in that form to show Banbaba the impermanence of the material world that we experience, and had once for all taken away the gender difference from his psyche.

This was reflected in Banbaba's later life, when men and women, young and old, equally and without inhibition would speak with him and get their wounds dressed by him without hesitation. Soothing and endearing were the words he spoke as he dressed the wound of the patients in order that they may forget their pain. Some even used to smile with the pain.

— Swami Aprameyananda

My father is sick!

Banbaba's dedication made him adopt any means to serve the *rogi narayans*. Here is a report of a hot summer afternoon's happening. That particular day, it was Banbaba's turn to be in the ward while other monastic members had gone for their afternoon rest.

A person brought an unconscious well-built elderly man and dropped him in the veranda and moved on to complete his other engagements. Banbaba saw him lying uncared for. He was smeared with dirt and was stinking. This apart, he was running a high temperature. Realising that it would be impossible for him to single-handedly rescue the man, Banbaba struck at a plan and started crying loudly in order to draw the attention of his co-monastic members. "Oh! Where are you all? My father who had come here as a pilgrim contracted high fever and has now become unconscious." In no time necessary help arrived!

Through the helping hands of other monastic members, cold sponging and necessary first aid the fever was brought down, the dirt was washed off and necessary medications were administered. As the *rogi narayana* was gaining consciousness, one of the swamis observing that there was no similarity between Banbaba and the man, questioned him "Tell us the truth. Is this person really your father?" Very humbly Banbaba answered, "If he is not my father, who else is he? If I had not cried out as my father, I would not have received any help from you all."

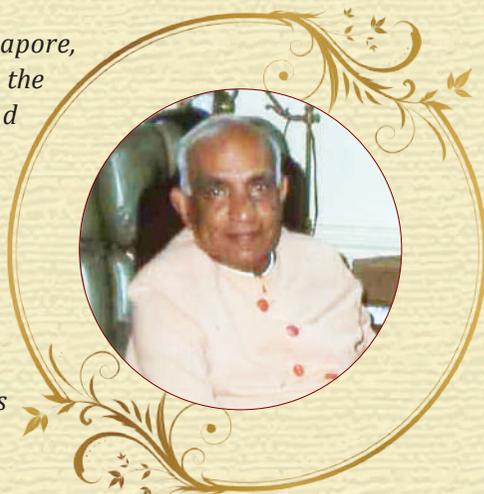
— Swami Aprameyananda

*Old out-patient building where Ban Baba treated patients,
Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service, Varanasi*



Swami Ritajananda

Swami Ritajananda grew up in Mylapore, Madras and at the age of 25 joined the Order at Belur Math in 1932 and received mantra-diksha from Swami Shivanandaji. He was given sannyasa-diksha by Swami Virajanandaji in 1940. After serving in Deoghar, Colombo, Students Home in Madras, and as editor of Ramakrishna Prabha, the Order's Telugu magazine, he was sent in 1954 to serve in USA. In 1961, he took charge of the centre in France and served there till his mahasamadhi on 22 Jan 1994.



Surely she/he will change

I first met Swami Ritajananda in 1969 when he was the head of the Centre Védantique in Gretz, France. He was quiet, self-contained and seemed (to me at least) a bit stern. I spent several happy weeks at the ashrama. Five or six years later, I spent another three weeks in Gretz. In that short interval, Swami Ritajananda seemed to have been transformed into another person altogether. It was as if a tight rose bud had suddenly fully bloomed, revealing its soft, fragrant nature. I was so shocked by the change that I asked him, "Why are you so *different*?" He smiled and simply said, "Sri Ramakrishna was kind to me."

I was friends with his physician, Dr. Bourdeix, and his wife so I asked them what had happened. Dr. Bourdeix said that Swami Ritajananda seemed to have had a heart attack—his heart had stopped and they thought they had lost him. To their amazement, he regained consciousness with all his faculties intact. But in some inexplicable way, he had been transformed.

Swami Ritajananda was now as loving and indulgent as a mother with a brood of undisciplined children. Many more people now visited the ashram and stayed there for extended periods of time. Some of them could present problems. One woman in particular created a daily uproar for months together. Of all the many people I've known in my long life, she is certainly

high on the list of difficult, demanding, impossible people. Even the saintly devotee Christa, who lived at the Center and who had routinely endured impossible, demanding people, was at her wit's end and approached Swami Ritajananda to intervene and to ask her to leave. But Swami Ritajananda had become so much like Holy Mother that he simply said, "But don't you see that she is just a child?"—even though the woman was at least 65. Christa was a bit ashamed by this, because she could see that yes, this woman was very difficult, but that is the way children behave. "Can't you be patient with her?" was his final reply. And so she was and eventually the woman left on her own. One of Swami Ritajananda's oft-repeated statements was, "Surely she/he will change." Eventually every person would become a better, kinder human being, and he fully believed that every person was doing the best they were capable of. He always took the long and high road.

— *Pravrajika Vrajaprana*

It is all true

One of our Boston devotees, Nina, was a French teacher, and when she met Swami Ritajananda in the summer, she felt an indescribable attraction to him. She knew he was meant to be her guru. She went to Gretz with her husband Archie and was blessed to receive initiation from him. Swami Ritajananda said to Archie, "If you want, I can initiate you as well." Archie replied "No, Swami, I don't think..." And Swami Ritajananda immediately said, "No, Archie, you are right. After all, who knows? Who knows if all this is true?" Archie was hardly expecting such an open-minded response from a swami, so Nina was initiated while he remained uncommitted. But the cobra had already sunk his teeth: by December Archie had to fly from Maine to Gretz, because he couldn't stop thinking about that wonderful, loving, open-minded swami and he desperately wanted to have initiation from him. Even if he had to fly halfway across the world to do so, in the bitter cold of a French December.

Archie and Nina remained two of his most devoted disciples. Just days before Swami Ritajananda passed away, he was lying in bed, very ill, and Nina and Archie were on either side of him. Swami Ritajananda turned his head to Archie and said, "Archie, it is all true. It is *all true*." And until the day he died, Archie wept every time he recounted that story. Take it from someone who has known the truth, Archie: It is all true. *All true*.

— *Pravrajika Vrajaprana*

How not to fight?

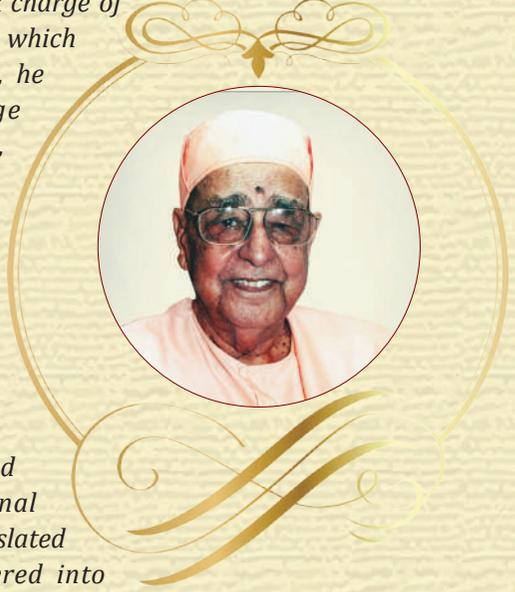
Try as I did, I could never manage to involve Swami Ritajananda in personal or vocational problems. Any complaint was turned aside blandly: "Moods change." His policy when he was himself scolded or complained against was to remain silent. Just to sit silently until the other had run out of words. No self-defense, just silence. This response had the effect of disarming the assailant and finally forcing him to desist, defeated. The Swami thus was hard to quarrel with. Once, however, when I was really irritated about something he had done, I made up my mind to "have things out" with him. He listened in silence to my angry words and then answered calmly: "You know you are angry. So your reason is disturbed. We'll wait a little while for the emotion to go, and then we'll discuss the matter like the good friends we are."

— *Swami Vidyatmananda*

Swami Lokeswarananda

Shivapada Bandyopadhyay received mantra-diksha from Swami Shivanandaji and joined the Order in 1933. Swami Virajanandaji gave him sannyasa-diksha in 1944.

In 1946, Lokeswaranandaji took charge of the Students Home in Pathuriaghata, Calcutta which sheltered destitute boys. In the next 27 years, he transformed this small Home into a huge educational complex with schools, college, technical education, and rural development units, now known as Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur. Then for 25 years from 1973 till his end he served as Secretary of Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Golpark, Calcutta. He developed it into a world-class centre for cultural affairs and started a school for Indian and foreign languages. He played an important role in the Ramakrishna Movement in Russia and represented the Order at various international conferences. He authored several books and translated the major Upanishads into English. He entered into mahasamadhi on 31 Dec 1998.



May your parents be Gods unto you

According to the Hindu tradition, children start their day offering pranams to their parents by touching their feet. The parents, in turn, bless their children by placing their hands on their heads or kissing them on the forehead.

Swami Lokeswaranandaji told us that his father used to start his day by offering pranams to his parents. Once he had to go on a week-long trip. His father had passed away by then and his mother was alive. Realising that he would not be able to offer his daily pranams to his mother while on tour, Lokeswaranandaji's father chalked out a plan. He collected some wet earth, took an impression of his mother's toes on it, wrapped it in plastic cover and put it in his tour bag. During the tour he would take out a piece of clay from the plastic cover, mix it in a glass of water and drink it while paying mental obeisance to his mother. Such was devotion to parents in the older generation.

— Swami Somatmananda,

Surrendering to the Lord

I first came in touch with Swami Lokeshwarananda Maharaj in June-July 1947 when I joined as a brahmachari at the Students' Home of the Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Pathuriaghata, Calcutta. Maharaj was the Secretary of the ashrama. Later, how this ashrama was shifted to Narendrapur and developed into a big educational complex, comprising institutions of residential school and college education, technical education and training for the blind, mass education and departments of rural welfare and development, etc., is an amazing story of his imagination, initiative and tireless efforts.

It was 1952 or so. Among other duties I had to look after the cash and accounts of the ashrama. Maharaj's standing instruction was that I should inform him sufficiently in advance before any upcoming big expenditure, for it was not easy to arrange for money at a short notice. Accordingly, probably in the month of July, I informed him that in the following week, food grains had to be purchased from the ration shop and it would cost around Rs. 1400/-. But the cash and bank balance was very meagre. It was not sufficient even for the daily purchases of vegetables etc.

Maharaj asked me to check my accounts book and see whether there was, among the regular donors, any big donor/ donors whose contribution for the year fell due at the time. Evidently he thought of approaching him or them for contribution. In those days, big donors or subscribers who were a handful of benevolent friends would regularly donate Rs.360/- per year to meet the maintenance cost of one student, worked out at the rate of Rs. 30/- per month. I examined the account books and informed him that there was no such donor. However, there was one gentleman who used to pay yearly Rs. 360/- on his behalf and another Rs. 360/- on behalf of one of his close relatives. That donor made these donations in September/October every year. Maharaj then telephoned the gentleman and expressed his wish to visit him at his residence. The gentleman cordially responded and said, "Maharaj, I was also thinking of you for some time. Please do come." So Maharaj went to his home. After Maharaj returned, I learnt the gist of their conversation.

The gentleman said, "Maharaj, I am shortly going to England for a long time on an advanced study programme. It is good that before I leave Calcutta I could meet you today." Maharaj felt disappointed at heart. He thought that the gentleman would himself require a big amount for his foreign trip. Under such embarrassing circumstances how could he now raise the topic of his donation to the ashrama. But presently the gentleman said, "For this trip a lot of expenditure is being incurred, but I shall feel bad if I cannot now give some amount to the ashrama." Maharaj then said, "You need not worry. When you will return, you will earn more and will be able to contribute more in future." But the gentleman replied, "No Maharaj, I shall really feel very bad if I cannot now give some amount to the ashrama. So let me do something." He took out his cheque book and handed over to Maharaj a cheque for Rs. 1400/- which was roughly the amount of his and his relative's contribution for two years. On his return Maharaj gave me the cheque and narrated quietly his feeling of how Sri Ramakrishna himself was running the institution using him and us as his instruments. This was not a solitary incident. Several times he encountered such situations when his prayer to and faith in Sri Ramakrishna saved him and the institution. Swami Vivekananda has said that if we have love, sympathy and deep feeling for other's

sufferings, and if we are pure and sincere to the backbone and pray to the Lord for help, help is bound to come. By seeing Lokeshwarananda Maharaj's life we are led to believe that Swamiji's words are perfectly true.

— Swami Mumukshananda

Sweet refusal

I was then working at the Office of the Students' Home. It was the time of admitting new boys. Applicants were many and only a few could be selected. I drafted a cryptic reply to those who were not selected for admission. My draft reply for a guardian was something like this: 'Sorry to let you know that your ward was not selected for admission etc.' Lokeshwarananda Maharaj called me to his side and said endearingly, "See, the gentleman applied to us with great hopes. He will be certainly very aggrieved getting the news that his son or ward has not been selected. Can we not write a little politer letter so that he may feel that we have sympathy for him although we are unable to help him in the matter of his ward's admission?" Then he rewrote the letter. He wrote something like this: 'Dear Sri....., We could have been very happy if we could concede to your request and admit your ward. But owing to extreme shortage of accommodation we are sorry to let you know that your ward has not been selected. Please excuse us for this inability', etc, etc.

— Swami Mumukshananda

Update yourself

I always looked forward to interact with Swami Lokeshwarananda Maharaj. But there was a danger! He would enquire: "What are you reading?" That is to know if I was up-to-date with the recent publications. I'm talking of 1987-88 and I was serving in our higher secondary school in Purulia Ashrama in West Bengal. Internet had not come yet, and everything was limited to books. So, whenever I visited Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Golpark, where Maharaj served as its Secretary, I always came prepared after referring some books.

Swapan Bandopadhyay and Shaktiprasad Mishra were teachers in our school. We three were ex-students of Narendrapur Ashrama. I used to discuss with them before making a visit to Maharaj. However, I could not always manage to read some books. Shakti-da found a way out. He would make cut-outs of the book reviews in the newspapers and tell me to go through them before a visit, so that based on those reviews I could say something if Maharaj asked. And he would definitely ask. When I mentioned the names of one or two books, he would further inquire, where in the book I was reading, for he would have finished them by then. So there was no chance of a loose reply.

Once I visited Golpark. As I met him, Maharaj told, "Take rest for 1-2 days here. You seem to be overburdened— take rest." Then came the inevitable query, "Which book have you read?" I had not read any book. So, I expected some scolding. Instead, Maharaj made an insightful statement. He said, "See, you are working in a school and dealing with students, who are youth and are building up their lives. As a teacher you will not do justice towards them if you are not conversant with current books. Also, you will thwart your self-development. So you should keep yourself engaged with studies. Go through the books and keep yourself updated. You should do it. The students, with whom you have to stay, will notice if you are in touch with studies. And you have to study to develop close connection with them. Why should you connect with them?"

Because, it is through this connection that you will impart to them something beyond the syllabus. That is love for an ideal. At this age, the boys try to embrace it, cling to it. By observing you they will try to understand Sri Ramakrishna. Your life and conduct, the scope of your learning and depth of your knowledge, the broadness and warmth of your thoughts should animate them, inspire them. This is precisely why you should keep yourself updated.

— Swami Shivapradananda

Handling failure

1961, Narendrapur Ashrama. One day I went to Lokeshwarananda Maharaj, when a student who had failed the exams came there weeping and shivering. Maharaj asked him with great concern, “Tell me what has happened; tell me.” “I have failed the exams, Maharaj,” he replied. He feared Maharaj might scold him that he was good for nothing and ask him to leave the ashrama. But Maharaj began to comfort him saying, “You have failed an exam, why bother so much? Why are you getting unnerved? This is trifling and incidental in life. You have so much work to do and you will do it. This is a trivial matter; it can happen to anyone. Maybe your health was not good. Sometimes the mind does not get focused; perhaps we did not provide you with better teachers and so the subject appeared tough. I am telling you, that you will surely do well in the next attempt, maybe a thousand times better. Had you passed this year, it would have been just an ordinary success. You will perform so well next time that you will get seat in any university you want for your M.A. Work hard. To break down so much for this matter! Go and play. Enjoy your time. Hey (calling someone) give him something to eat. (After it was served) Eat, eat! Don’t be so morose, it pains me.”

— Dr. Prashanta Giri

Seeing behind the deed

At Ramakrishna Mission, Narendrapur, the rule of law implemented by Swami Lokeshwaranandaji was the rule of love. One night as I was returning to the hostel through the vast acres of property, barely populated, I saw a man stealing jackfruits and caught him red-handed. We took away the jackfruits and kept him captive. We eagerly waited for the morning when we could present the thief before Lokeshwarananda Maharaj and boast of our bravery. We secretly wished that Maharaj would hand him over to us and we could thrash him properly. When we brought the thief with all the stolen jackfruits before Maharaj, he said, “Since you have brought him to me, I should give the judgment, isn’t it? So, you please go.” We had to come out; but we decided to hide and see what Maharaj would do.

We heard him asking the thief, “Do you have a family?” “I have my wife and sons, Maharaj.” “And what is the means of your livelihood?” “Maharaj, I am a daily-wage labourer. But when there is no work available, I struggle to run the family.” At this reply, we could see a deep strain of pain on Maharaj’s face. He then asked, “What will you do with these few jackfruits?” “I will sell them and with whatever little money I get I will buy some provisions for the family.”

Maharaj stood up, and sent him off with some money along with all the jackfruits and something else which we could not make out. He also said, “Whenever you are in need, come to me. But do not steal.”

Seeing this, I walked up to Maharaj and asked, “What did you do Maharaj?” He replied, “Did you not hear that he struggles to feed his family? What suffering!” Maharaj’s expression revealed his intense sadness.

— Dr. Prashanta Giri

Swami Sarvagatananda

Narayan, hailing from Andhra Pradesh, joined the Order in 1934 and received his mantra-diksha from Swami Akhandanandaji in 1936. Akhandanandaji challenged Narayan to walk a thousand miles to the Order's centre at Kankhal in Haridwar and serve there. The 22-year old youth did just that on barefoot and for the next 9 years served at the Kankhal hospital. He received sannyasa-diksha from Swami Virajanandaji in 1944. After serving at the Karachi and Vishakapatnam centres in India, he went to USA in 1954 and served at the Vedanta Society of Boston and Providence till his mahasamadhi on 3 May 2009.



Him only know

On meeting Swami Sarvagatanandaji for the first time I said, "Maharaj, I have heard so much about you." He replied, "There is only one person you need to know and that is Sri Ramakrishna. Once you know Him, you know everyone." His words still resonate after 45 years.

— Amrita M Salm

Take what you can

In 1972 after coming east to Pennsylvania, I began coming occasionally to the Vedanta Center in Boston. I remember on one visit, I bought a copy of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. I was on my way out with it when I heard Swami Sarvagatanandaji say, in his loud voice, "Who has bought a copy of the 'Gospel'?" I answered that it was me, whereupon he broke into a broad smile and said, "Well, take what you can use and leave the rest!" Then he turned around like any sensible person and went to lunch.

I cannot express how wonderful that concept is to me! How beautiful to hear, "When you can, I'd like to hear from you" coming from one who stands so very close to everything I hold dear. No lies, no pressure, no salesmanship. Simplicity, and understanding that the truth will call to its own at the right time.

— Carolyn T. Amory

This ideal will be attractive one day

In 1963 I graduated from college and came to Boston, a rebellious child of ‘the sixties,’ but Swami Sarvagatanandaji was here waiting for me— a steady influence...Our big ‘sixties’ principle was to question everything about society, our parents, our teachers, and here was a man who encouraged that approach. He said a real devotee, challenges his teachers very rigorously. “An honest doubt,” he said, “is a stepping stone to the truth.”

Swami’s celibacy troubled me—in the light of my 1960’s ideal of the free and sexually fulfilled human being. One day, I got up the courage and asked him, “Swami, you took a vow of chastity, but didn’t you ever have a desire for women?” He smiled, obviously welcoming that question very much. “Yes, Bob, I did, but I wanted something else much more. I wanted God.” Now that was an answer that impressed me, a man in touch with and totally committed to his deepest desires. And then he said something that seemed highly improbable, “Bob, someday this ideal will become very attractive to you as well.”

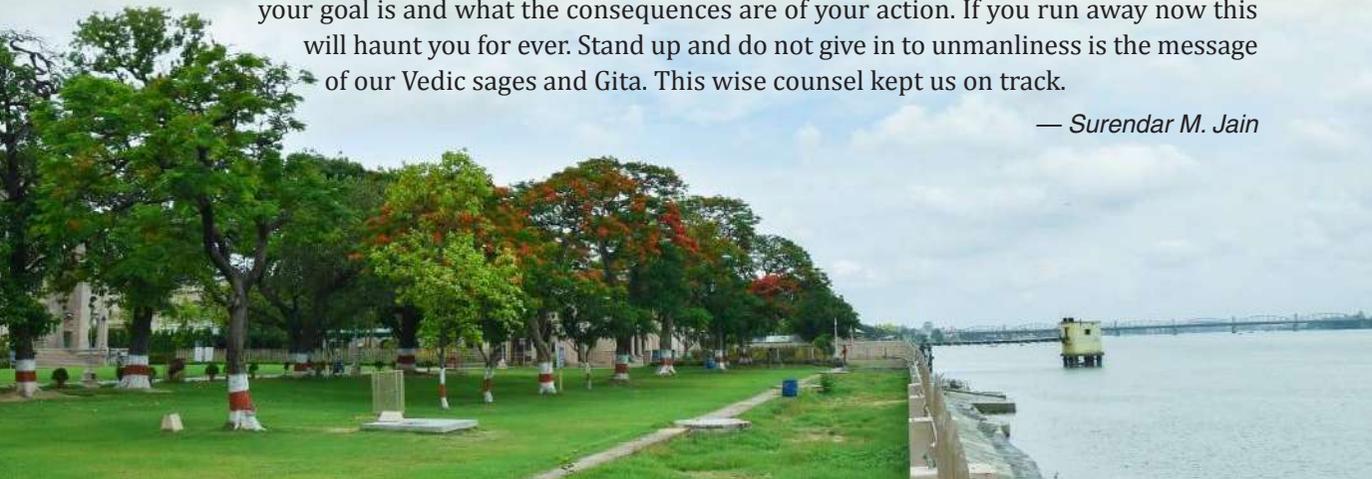
— Bob Doolittle

No compromise with truth

I remember one day he told us about an incident when he was sponsored to come to the States and he went to get a visa from the US Embassy in Delhi. During those days it was required that the applicants sign an oath that they will never side with (or have sympathy towards) Russia or her other allies. Maharaj crossed out that clause and was questioned by the consul general for this noncompliance. Maharaj said, “If you can give me in writing that your country will never be friends with Russia and always remain enemies with Russia I will be agreeing to that clause.” Thousands had agreed to this clause and none had asked this question before. The consul was simply shocked by this honest answer. An American who was accompanying the Swami explained to the puzzled consul general that these swamis are men of God and truth and will not sign a pledge for life that they do not believe in. Needless to say the consul general waived that clause and gave the visa with his compliments!

In student life sometimes disappointments with exams or very frequent tests makes one think that all this education is of no real use and therefore it is best to drop it all and lead a spiritual life! Under Maharaj’s guidance, nothing like this could escape and I was made to see that I was using it as an escape from duties. He would quote often Socrates: “An unexamined life is not worth living,” or “Check what motives you have when you want to give up like that.” See what your goal is and what the consequences are of your action. If you run away now this will haunt you for ever. Stand up and do not give in to unmanliness is the message of our Vedic sages and Gita. This wise counsel kept us on track.

— Surendar M. Jain



Swami Niramayananda

Vibhuti received mantra-diksha from Swami Akhandanandaji in 1935 and joined the Order at Deoghar Ashrama in 1938. Swami Virajanandaji gave him sannyasa-diksha in 1946. He served as Head of Manasadwip, Cherrapunji, Asansol, Yogodyan, Bombay, and Udbodhan centres. He also served as editor of Udbodhan, the Bengali magazine of the Order. He attained mahasamadhi on 26 Nov 1984.



Receive more without asking

Swami Akhandanandaji was ill at Sargachhi. Swami Niramayanandaji his disciple was his Secretary. A young man from Varanasi, a student of science at Benaras Hindu University, had volunteered to serve Swami Akhandanandaji during vacation. His name was Golwalkar, later the Sarsangchalak of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). His devotion and efficiency in serving his guru astonished everyone in the Sargachhi Ashrama. No one knew when this volunteer would take his bath and food, because he was found always near his guru, ready to serve him. One day, standing outside the door of Akhandanandaji's room, Niramayanandaji (Vibhuti Maharaj) saw young Golwalkar kneeling before his guru and seeking Brahmajnana, or God-realisation. He also heard Akhandanandaji blessing him, "Yes, you will get it. *Tera Brahmajnan ho jayega.*" Niramayanandaji thought within himself, "I should also ask for a blessing like that." When Golwalkar left, Akhandanandaji got up and coming outside paused before Niramayanandaji. Then looking at Niramayanandaji he simply said, "Vibhuti, those who ask will get. Those who do not ask anything will get more." The meaning was clear. If you don't ask for Brahmajnana, you will get Brahmajnana certainly and along with that, the great enjoyment of serving God in man through the Mission's welfare activities here and now.

— Swami Gautamananda

Where does God live?

Swami Niramayanandaji's Sunday classes were very interesting. The various examples and anecdotes which he used to narrate from his observations of day to day life, especially of Bombay people, were very apt and lively and they used to drive home the point he intended. Sometimes his talks were also replete with a tinge of humour and sarcasm.

In one of the classes, he was trying to explain how life should be God-centered. For this he said, you should make the interior physical features of your home also God-centered. That is why in earlier days God's shrine, where all the family members worshipped everyday, occupied the central best location in the house. As it was considered a dwelling place of God in the house it was beautifully designed to look like a mini temple. Then Maharaj said with a smile, "Nowadays in Bombay, even in luxurious apartments, do you know what is the most luxurious and highly sophisticated section of the home? – It is the toilets. It is the type of luxurious toilet that determines the status of the home and not the shrine. A wall-hung cupboard tucked in the corner of a kitchen or dining hall is assigned as the place for God." This is how he sarcastically used to explain the typical lifestyle in the present-day homes. If life is not centered in God, and our homes are not God-centered then how can we develop devotion and receive the grace of God? His lectures were very inspiring, realistic, full of intuitive flashes, and wit.

— Swami Muktidananda



*Swamis Akhandananda, Shuddhananda, Virajananda and others
in front of Swami Brahmananda's Temple
in Belur Math*

Swami Budhananda

An initiated disciple of Swami Virajananda Maharaj, Swami Budhananda (Bhavani Maharaj) joined at the Madras Math in 1944. He received sannyasadiक्षा from Swami Shankarananda Maharaj in 1954.

He served as editor of *The Vedanta Kesari*, joint editor of *The Prabuddha Bharata*, as Assistant Minister in two centres in USA, and as head of Chandigarh, Mayavati, and Delhi centres. He was a good speaker and a forceful writer. He attained mahasamadhi on 11 June 1983 at the age of 66.



Excessive mirth

Swami Budhanandaji was a man of serious demeanour who always tried to connect things to scriptural teachings. The following incident will make it clear. As the secretary of Delhi Ashrama, he lived in a room on the ground floor in the Office Building. In those days, in 1980s, the secretary's room, ashrama office and small booksale section were all situated on the ground floor, adjacent to each other. Any loud sound in the office and the booksale counter was audible in the secretary Maharaj's room. And it so happened one evening that the brahmachari in-charge of the booksale, while discussing something with someone, laughed aloud, almost filling the room with his laughter. The sound naturally reached Swami Budhanandaji's ears. He came out of the room and asked who was laughing so loudly. When told, he called the brahmachari and asked him quietly, "Have you read Swami Vivekananda's *Bhakti Yoga*?" "Yes, Maharaj". "Please read the section The Method and the Means (of Bhakti), again. Especially when Swamiji quotes Sri Ramanuja's ideas on *Anuddharsha* and *Anavasada*." The brahmachari understood his mistake. He recalled what Swamiji says (*Bhakti Yoga*, p.61):

"... The next means to the attainment of Bhakti-yoga is strength (*anavasada*). 'This atman is not to be attained by the weak', says the Shruti. Both physical weakness and mental weakness are meant here. . . the person who aspires to be a Bhakta must be cheerful. . . It is the strong mind that hews its way through a thousand difficulties. . . Yet at the same time excessive mirth should be avoided (*anuddharsha*). Excessive mirth makes us unfit for serious thought. It also fritters away the energies of the mind in vain. The stronger the will, the less the yielding to the sway of

the emotions. Excessive hilarity is quite as objectionable as too much of sad seriousness, and all religious realisation is possible only when the mind is in a steady, peaceful condition of harmonious equilibrium.' In a few words, Swami Budhanandaji drew attention to the message of self-regulation and effectively corrected the young novice's way.

— Swami Atmashradhdhananda

Character of Tulasi

An hour-long discourse in Hindi on *Ramacharitmanas* of Goswami Tulasidas by Sri Trilok Mohan, a well-known speaker on this holy text, was a part of the weekly discourses conducted by Delhi Ashrama since 1956. In 1982, or so, as part of this weekly event, a Tulasi Jayanti was organised. It was meant to pay homage to the great saint-composer of *Ramacharitmanas*, Goswami Tulasidasji. Swami Budhanandaji was invited to give a benedictory address and he prepared a talk in Hindi, perhaps first time in his case! However, as he began to speak, he could not continue as his knowledge of Hindi was rudimentary. As he was not comfortable with reading out the Hindi talk that he had prepared, he switched over to English. As he spoke of Tulasidas, he spoke of his greatness, and then referred to the holy plant Tulasi, and pointed out: "The sacred status of the tulasi plant remains the same irrespective of where it grows; it is worshipped wherever it sprouts. In the same way, our character should be such that we should be respected wherever we are. Our life and personality should be always pure and spotless." While saying this, Swami Budhanandaji became very emotional, and burst into tears and yet continued speaking. All those present in the hall too were deeply moved by his intense feelings.

Sri Trilok Mohanji, the organiser of the event, unprepared for this unexpected turn of events, and unable to decide how to respond, took a flower garland from the picture of Sri Tulasidasji and put it around Swami Budhanandaji's neck. Slowly Maharaj calmed down and returned to his room. No one knew what to say but all were impressed with his analogy of Tulasi plant and purity of character being respected everywhere. His yearning for purity of character expressed through his emotions was powerfully conveyed.



Old Temple, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai

— Swami Atmashradhdhananda

Swami Sundananda

The swami received mantra-diksha from Swami Virajanandaji and joined the Order at Madras Math in 1946. Swami Shankaranandaji gave him sannyasa-diksha in 1956. He served at Mangalore centre from 1951 to 1981 as a monastic assistant and then onwards as the head of the centre till his mahasamadhi on 2 March 1998.



Count the blessings

Once a professor of philosophy from Mysore came to Mangalore Ramamkrishna Math to see Swami Sundanandaji. The professor was closely associated with Maharaj, and used to come occasionally to be with Maharaj and have some lively philosophical discussions with him. On that particular visit the professor was travelling to Mangalore by a government night bus which was scheduled to arrive at the ashrama late in the morning. Unfortunately for him, the bus broke down on the way. Since it was night and in those days there was no mobile phone services, the bus could not make any alternative arrangement to transport the commuters to their destinations. The passengers had to request vehicles plying towards Mangalore to pick them up seeing their predicament at the dead of the night. The professor somehow reached the ashrama totally exhausted both mentally and physically. He was so much obsessed with the difficulty he had to face on the previous night, that throughout the next day he was talking about it, making scathing remarks and abusing the drivers, the bus company, the government and so on.

After listening to his train of negative emotion, Sundanandaji coolly remarked, "See Professor, you have come to Mangalore several times earlier by the government bus comfortably without facing any difficulty. Forgetting all those comfortable journeys, you are only harping of the difficulties you had to face this time; you are simply hurting yourself thereby. Does it befit you being a professor of philosophy?"

Since I was present when this event took place, the above observation of Maharaj has been strongly etched in my memory. It taught me the great lesson of developing a positive attitude towards life. We normally have the tendency of complaining that life is full of miseries, forgetting

to “count the blessings”. By fending off this attitude, one can remain unperturbed even in worst situations.

— Swami Nityasthananda

Grafting with love

On weekends and holidays, Swami Sundanandaji used to involve us in special projects. One of his passions was grafting trees. We had many mango trees which were not very tall. He explained how a branch of a tree could be cut and a similar shaped and sized branch from another mango tree could be grafted on to it. When he observed the way we were working, he stopped us remarking that this was not a mechanical job to be done routinely without application of mind. He emphasized on the sensitivity of the task and the care and caution to be taken. Trees have life and emotions like humans and they suffer pain when cut. We need to handle the job with the precision and care that a surgeon would take while performing a complex surgery on the human body. He directed us to identify the tender branches and cut them softly to the minimum extent required, with speed and accuracy. “Put your heart, mind and soul into this process. Do it lovingly like you would treat a baby. When you put your best efforts, the branches heal faster, graft better and they produce hybrid mangoes. Best efforts fetch always the best results.”

Soon, we witnessed the value of his teachings as these trees gave bountiful tasty mangoes of different varieties. It was a sheer delight to watch bunches of mangoes hanging from several trees, just a little above the ground. Labour of love always brings us sweet results. This golden mantra of Sundanandaji has helped me in various situations as I have realised that if one puts his heart and soul into an effort, the results are bound to be a resounding success. Therefore, every task should be done with passion and with ownership, and not with a detachment which makes the exercise dreary and uneventful.

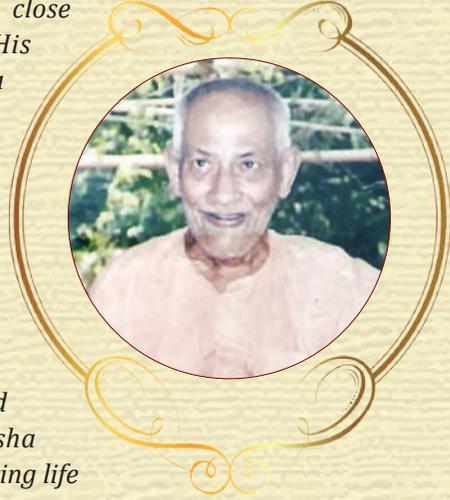
— Sri Ramesh Shenoy

Sri Ramakrishna Math & Mission, Mangalore



Swami Anamayananda

When young Saroj Bhattacharya became a member of the Library run in a small centre in Berhampur by the Sargachhi Ashrama, he slowly came into close contact with the swamis of the Ashrama. His orthodox Brahmin family considered the Ashrama as unorthodox, and so when Saroj partook prasad on some festival in the Ashrama, his grandfather ordained as expiation a bath in Ganga and 1008 times japa of Gayatri mantra! But by the will of Sri Ramakrishna, the boy shifted to Berhampur centre while studying in class 9 and after his studies became a teacher in the Sargachhi Ashrama's school. He received mantra-diksha from Swami Virajanandaji and joined the Order and received sannyasa-diksha Swami Shankaranandaji in 1959. His entire working life was in the service of Sargachhi Ashrama.



Why were you stopping me from worship?

I had just joined the Ramakrishna Order at the Sargachhi Ashrama. There was a big courtyard in front of the building where I was staying. One Saturday afternoon I saw Swami Anamayanandaji, popularly known as Saroj Maharaj, sweeping this courtyard with a broom stick. He was then the Assistant Secretary of the centre. Those days the ashram suffered from lack of resources and hence there were very few workers. So, Maharaj himself was sweeping the courtyard. I was a novice and thought that it was my duty to take the broom from him and clean the area myself. He heard my proposal and asked, "Why shall I give you my broom?" But as I was persistently requesting him to let me help him sweep the area, he said, "If you really want to help me, bring another broom and sweep. I am not going to part with my broom." I did accordingly. Later on, while having puffed rice, Maharaj said, "If any day you see me worshipping in the shrine, will you force me to get up and do the worship by yourself?" I replied, "No. why should I do so? I will help you as much as I can - by preparing the offering or arranging the flowers." Maharaj said, "You people go on uttering Swamiji's words - 'Work is worship!' I was not sweeping, I was worshipping. Why were you trying to deprive me of my chance to worship?" Thus began my basic training! Henceforth every Saturday, I used to sweep the courtyard along with him.

— Swami Devarajananda

For the brotherhood

Once, during Monks Conference, Swami Virajananda Maharaj told that the easiest way to develop brotherhood among the sannyasis is to lend a helping hand at times of need. The sadhu who has lots of work in his hand, should be helped by other sadhus. We have very often seen Saroj Maharaj following this advice. I started teaching in the school and at the same time I also had to do the entire work in the shrine single-handedly, as there were no brahmacharis at that time. Sometimes at night, I would be too tired to wash the shrine vessels. Next morning, I used to find that Saroj Maharaj had already washed the vessels and had gone out to collect the flowers. It became his habit to help others in whichever way possible – silently and gladly! His helping nature extended to all the workers in various departments, because he was thorough in every single work of the ashram!

— Swami Devarajananda

Keep your doors open

In the initial days of my joining the Order, I had duty in Saroj Maharaj's office. One morning, during our working hours, a local gentleman arrived and started narrating his personal problems to Saroj Maharaj. After a little while, Saroj Maharaj told him, "See, this is your family problem. We cannot interfere in this." Still, the gentleman went on with his tales of woe for an hour. Saroj Maharaj silently heard him out. Then the gentleman told him, "Maharaj, you have already told me that you cannot help out. Yet, I am feeling free and relieved by pouring out my problems to you." After his departure, foolish and immature that I was, I told Maharaj, "The gentleman wasted so much time! When he knew that you couldn't help out, there was no point in his wasting your time. You didn't do right in indulging him thus!" Without getting irritated at my audacity, Saroj Maharaj gently said, "Didn't you hear the last words of the gentleman? It is true that I was not in a position to help him. But I was able to lighten his mental burden by hearing him out. In this way I was able to serve him. And our motto is to serve people. We must find out in which way we can serve them. I will clear up the backlog work in my free time."

Years later, when I was posted as the Principal of Probationers' Training Centre, Swami Bhuteshananda Maharaj echoed this same attitude of service. He told me, "Keep your doors open at all times. The brahmacharis have many issues. Somebody must be there to hear them out. Ensure that they can approach you any time."

— Swami Devarajananda

Support through opposition!

Although I was much younger to Saroj Maharaj, he was so friendly that I never hesitated to speak with him on various matters. As the Head Master of the school, I used to make plans to improve the standard of studies and discipline of the school. Strangely, Saroj Maharaj always used to oppose my plans. Initially I thought that Saroj Maharaj was against any progressive measures and hence, he was opposing my suggestions. At the same time, his arguments would make me think deeply. I would make certain changes in my plans. The result would be beneficial for all! One day, Saroj Maharaj himself made it clear. He told me, "I am not opposing your plans for the sake of obstructing your ideas. Whenever you try to implement something new, you have to face opposition from the students, teachers and parents. I just spread before you their likely questions

so that you may make the necessary alterations and face their opposition with ready and rational answers. Your vision is one-sided. You have to consider their perspective as well. I am asking questions on their behalf so that your plan becomes wholesome.” This was another dimension of his love!

— Swami Devarajananda

Accepting a scolding

Swami Anamayananda Maharaj succeeded Swami Sukhadananda Maharaj as the Secretary of Sargachhi Ashrama. Once Sukhadanandaji was scolding Anamayanandaji in a very harsh manner. Though Sukhadanandaji was not at fault, he kept quiet without uttering a single word in his defence. I was then a student in the Ashrama’s school studying in 9th or 10th class. I was a witness to this severe scolding. Anamayanandaji was also my teacher in the school. So, later I asked him why he remained silent and accepted the scolding when he had done nothing wrong. Maharaj then gave me a wonderful piece of advice which I try to follow even today. He told me, “Nitya, when some senior person, be he a sadhu or a householder rebukes, don’t enter into any argument with him. If you do so, he will become more annoyed and angry and you will continue to be scolded left and right. This will only make the situation more complicated. On the other hand, if you remain silent without any protest the person who is scolding you, will get tired of doing so and will himself gradually cool down.” Much later I was able to connect this advice with Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi’s teaching: “There is no virtue equal to fortitude and no treasure equal to contentment.”

— Prof. Nityaniranjan Kundu



Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Sargachi Temple constructed by Swami Akhandananda

Swami Atmananda

Inited by Swami Virajananda Maharaj the swami joined the Order in 1951 at Nagpur Ashrama and had his Brahmacharya in 1957. He left the Order in 1959 to establish an Ashrama at Raipur. After he achieved his purpose, he was readmitted into the Order and the Raipur centre became a branch of the Mission in 1968. He received sannnyasadiksha from Swami Vireswarananda Maharaj in December 1967. He was the Secretary of Raipur Ashrama till his last. He undertook extensive tribal development work in Abujmarh. An erudite scholar, a forceful writer and a versatile speaker, Swami Atmananda spread the Ramakrishna Movement in the Hindi-speaking regions. He passed away in a road accident on 27 Aug 1989.



The man of action

In 1987, I was in our Raipur Ashrama serving in the shrine as a pujari. Swami Atmananda Maharaj was the head of the centre. He was an impressive personality both by his abilities and by his physical appearance. He was always energetic, cheerful, smiling and affectionate.

It was he who started the Ramakrishna Mission Tribal Project in the Narayanpur district. In those times Abhuj Mar, the tribal area was still untouched by modernity and men and even women remained scantily dressed.

One afternoon after lunch, Atmananda Maharaj, Swami Srikaranandaji, Sri Shyamal Mukherjee, myself and one more swamiji from outside our Order, were travelling from Raipur to Narayanpur in our medical van. The journey was joyful with everyone cracking jokes and laughing. But after some hours we reached a place called Kesh Kaal which has a steep climb and hair pin bends. As the van took steep turns at the bends, I developed vomiting sensation.

It was a medical van with a washbasin. Atmanandaji who was sitting near the wash basin seeing my condition, immediately got up and made me sit near the wash basin and also sat next to me. Very soon, I vomited more than once into the washbasin. As the van was not in use for 3 months, the water vent pipe of the wash basin was blocked and all the things I vomited stayed floating and splashing in the basin. I myself could not stand the sight of my vomit — curry leaves,

tomato skin and other food stuff. I was afraid that the vomit would spill over and dirty the van. Suddenly Atmanandaji got up from his seat, pushed me to his place and sat in my place. He was wearing a half sleeve shirt. He placed his broad and big hands over the edges of the washbasin creating a dam. As the vehicle was moving, the swaying vomit matter was hitting his hands. He appeared least bothered; but I was deeply touched by his feelings and immediate response. He knew that if the vomit spilt over, it would spray all over him and the van. Sensing this possibility, I felt very uneasy. But, fortunately within a few seconds, the vent pipe got cleared and with a oozing and sucking sound all the vomit quickly went down the wash basin. And Atmanandaji started laughing. Within a few minutes, we reached the spot where we were scheduled to have tea and snacks.

Atmanandaji got up as if nothing had happened. He did not utter a word of reproach or regret. He got down and just washed his hands and was in his jovial mood again cracking jokes; he told me to take a lemon. I stood marvelling at his generous heart. The situation called for unselfish action, and he promptly did it; after that he simply moved on with a cheerful mind.

— Swami Veerabhadrananda

Truthfulness

During the period of 1960-70, the Government of Madhya Pradesh had opened Panchayat Raj Prashikshan Kendra in all districts to train members of the Gram Panchayats and Janapada Panchayats. These centres used to be managed by different service organisations. In Raipur district the Prashikshan Kendra functioned from the campus of Sri Ramakrishna Seva Samity, Raipur (Vivekananda Ashrama). There were some rooms to lodge the trainers and a hall for conducting training programme. Some amount was also given by the government for the maintenance of this infrastructure. This incident happened when I was working there as a trainer. Once Swami Atmanandaji asked me to purchase three hinges to repair a broken window of the training centre. In those days there was no vehicle in the Ashrama and we used to go on bicycle for marketing. When I reached the market and ordered for three hinges, the shopkeeper advised me to purchase a packet of six. I did so. When Atmanandaji saw the cash memo he demanded an explanation for purchasing more number of hinges than specified. I argued that the extra pieces

Ramakrishna Mission, Vivekananda Ashrama, Raipur



could be used elsewhere in the ashrama. He looked at me and said, “You see, this is government money and it should not be wasted like this. You go immediately and return the three extra hinges and bring a fresh cash memo.” I was pleasantly surprised to see the truthfulness, honesty and moral working principles of both Swami Atmanandaji in particular and the Ramakrishna Order in general. Though those were hot summer days I did as Maharaj asked me to do. People usually have no qualms in misusing, vandalizing and burning the government property but this incident deeply affected me and taught me a great lesson.

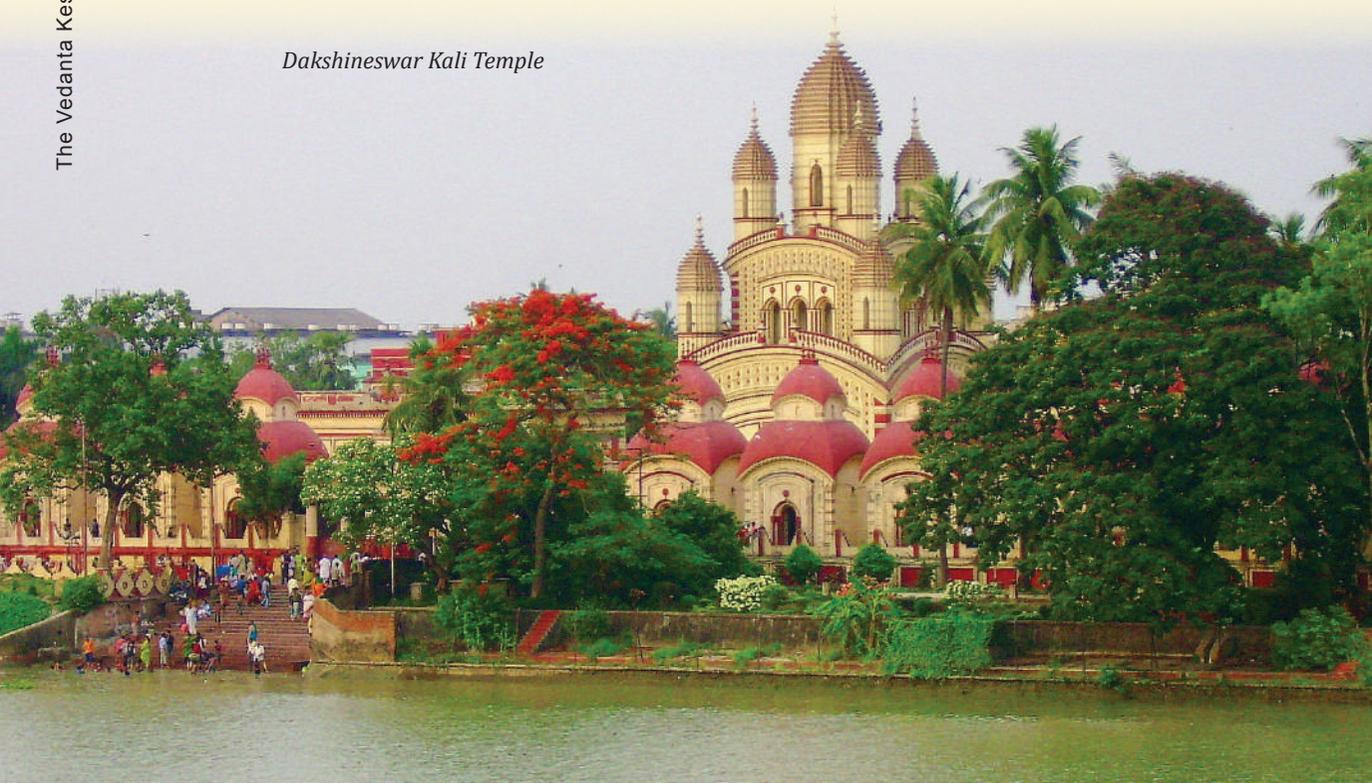
— Sri Laxminaraian Indoria

Pragmatic punishment

Another incident took place when I was working as the Principal of the Panchayat Raj Prashikshan Kendra. A peon of our institute had somehow made a duplicate key and used to steal money received from the sales of Vivekananda literature. One day the man was caught red handed. When Swami Atmanandaji was informed about this incident, he sent for me. Upon hearing the news after reaching the ashrama, I thought Maharaj would get angry with me. When I reached Maharaja’s room, he was busy writing something. I said, “Maharaj, we will remove that peon.” Without even looking towards me he said, “You will not get a man like Mahatma Gandhi to do the work. Whosoever you appoint, will have some weakness. Go and ask him how much money he has stolen and deduct that amount in small installments from his salary. Don’t stop giving him full salary.” I was surprised to see his pragmatism and magnanimous heart which could think sympathetically even for the family of a thief. I was also overwhelmed to see the difference between an ordinary man and a real sannyasi and felt privileged to have worked with such a saintly person.

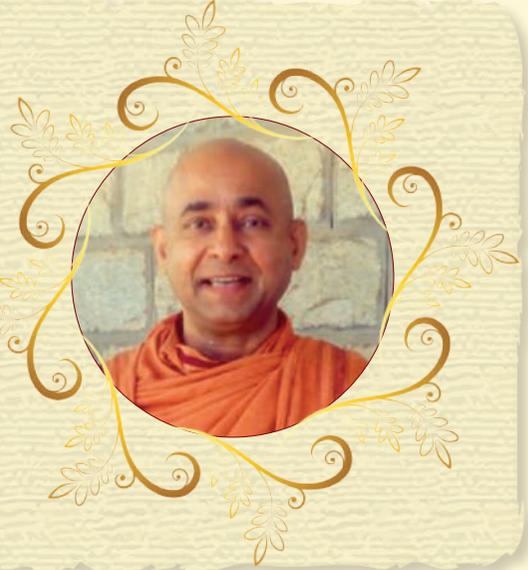
— Sri Laxminaraian Indoria

Dakshineswar Kali Temple



Swami Purushottamananda

Ramachandra received mantra-diksha from Swami Yatiswaranandaji and joined the Order at Bangalore Math in 1960. Swami Vireswaranandaji gave him sannyasa-diksha in 1969. After serving in the Bangalore Ashrama for around 33 years, he served as head of Ponnampet and Belgaum Ashramas. He built up the Belgaum centre and its temple. He was an acclaimed singer, speaker, and writer and he inspired many young men and women to tread the path of renunciation. He attained mahasamadhi on 25 Feb 2005.



Better luck next time

When we do something wrong, the world immediately reacts with criticism. When I was in the Balaka Sangha, we used to play volleyball in the Bangalore Ashrama. If any one erred while serving, immediately the others would react negatively. Then Swami Purushottamanandaji would say, “You should rather encourage him saying ‘Better luck next time’, so that he can improve his game. There is no use in scolding for mistakes.” This idea of saying ‘Better luck next time’ helped me in my later years. It is such a wonderful ‘mantra’, and it gives many people hope and strength.

— Swami Bhaktikamananda

Be a humble representative

We were collecting funds for the new ashrama under construction in Belagavi, Karnataka. Swami Purushottamanandaji was the head of the centre. I had voluntarily taken a receipt book from the ashrama and was submitting accounts every weekend. Since I was a little aggressive in trying to convince donors to contribute, one doctor had called and told Purushottamanandaji that he was not happy with my approach for fund collection. After some days when I met Maharaj, he asked me how the fund collection was going on and if I was happy doing it. Then he said, “While collecting funds, I want you to keep in mind some points, which I forgot to tell earlier. These are:

- 1) You are going as a representative of Ramakrishna Mission, not as an individual.
- 2) A person who donates Rs. 10,000/- and one who donates just Rs. 100/- — both should be acknowledged with the same sense of gratitude.

- 3) Don't have any targets for collections. What matters to me is your efforts and approach; not how much you collect.
- 4) People serve Sri Ramakrishna according to their capacity and attitude; and above all it is Sri Ramakrishna's Will whether he will accept their contribution or not.

— Sri Ramesh B Umarani

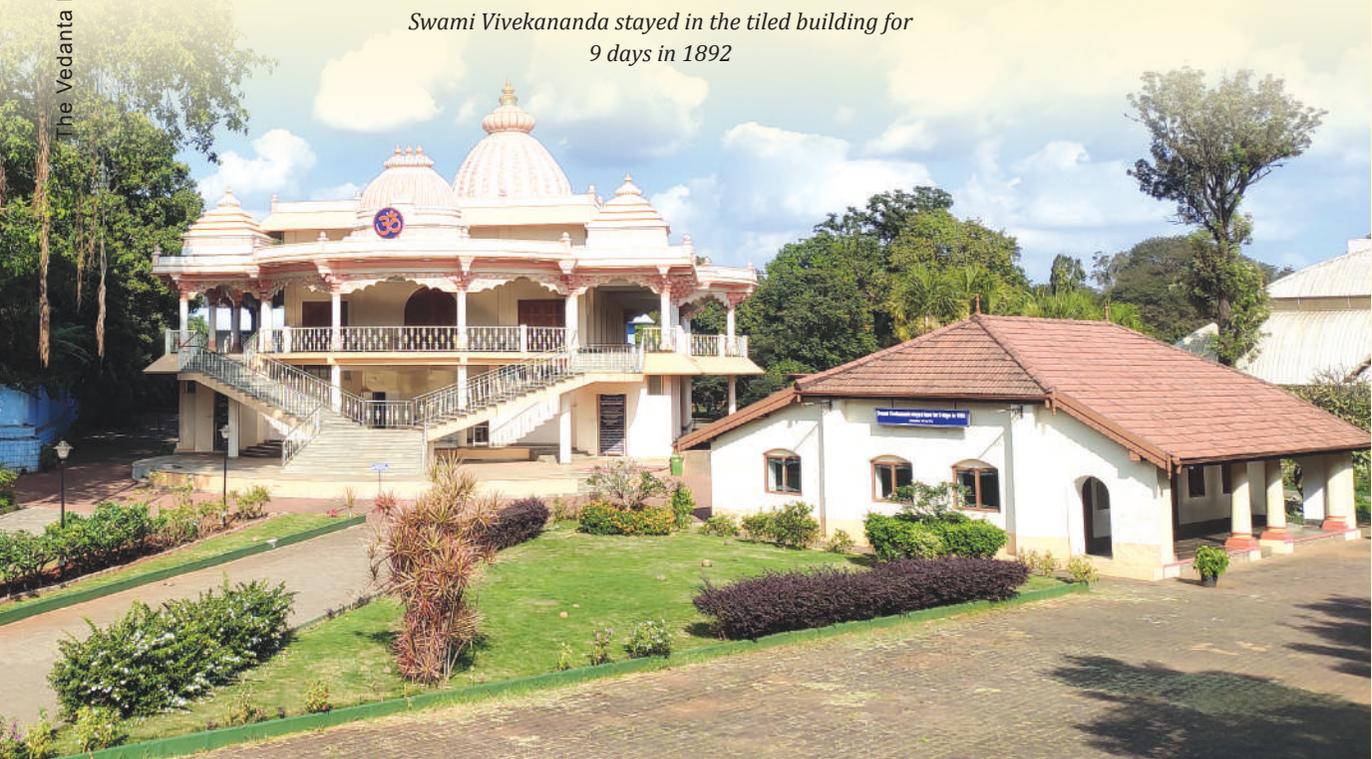
Sri Ramakrishna's Will

A man aged around 60 had lost all his family members and was working for one of my friends. When this man died from some disease, my friend called me over to his place and handed over the dead man's purse to me. Surprised, I asked him why he was giving it to me. My friend replied that he saw the photograph of Sri Ramakrishna in the purse and knowing my connection with the ashrama thought it fit to give it to me; he had not even bothered to see all the contents of the purse. I straightaway took the purse to Purushottamananda Maharaj and told him the whole story. Maharaj, asked me to offer it to Sri Ramakrishna in the Shrine and then bring it back. He then told me to see the contents. I found a decent amount of money in it. Maharaj told me to take it into the Temple Construction Fund and prepare a receipt in the name of 'A Devotee'. Then Maharaj wanted to know if I had ever approached this dead man for donation. When I replied "No", Maharaj remarked, "The other day I told you we don't know from whom Sri Ramakrishna will take his service. Now do you understand."

I realised that in serving the Lord, we need to be just instruments, because Sri Ramakrishna knows how to get his work accomplished. From then onwards all my efforts have been to just become a suitable instrument in the hands of the Holy Trio for their mission.

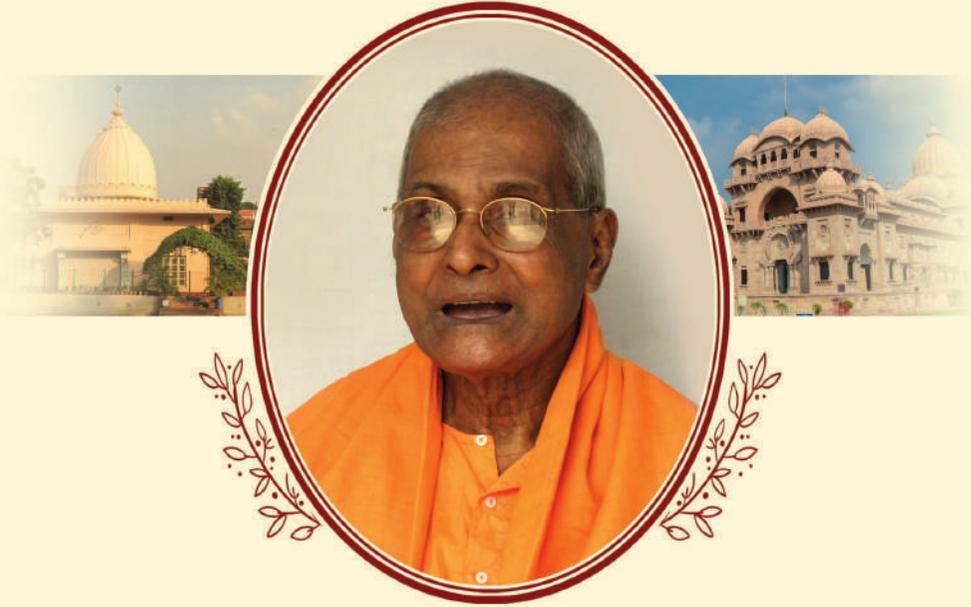
— Sri Ramesh B Umarani

*Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Belagavi
Swami Vivekananda stayed in the tiled building for
9 days in 1892*



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“You only need one thing: God’s name. Keep it with you always.

You may not see him, but you can be close to him (through His name). There are many other things in the books that may help some people but I don’t know about these things,

I just know God’s name.”

Swami Gitananda

An appeal to the Sannyasis of the Ramakrishna Math, the Sannyasinis of Sri Sarada Math and the devotees and admirers of Srmat Swami Gitanandaji Maharaj to share reminiscence, photos, videos, letters or any relevant material on Most Revered Maharaj with the Birth Centenary Celebration Committee at this email id: swgitananda100@gmail.com

Contact persons

Dr. Kalpana Sarkar : +91 9830110449

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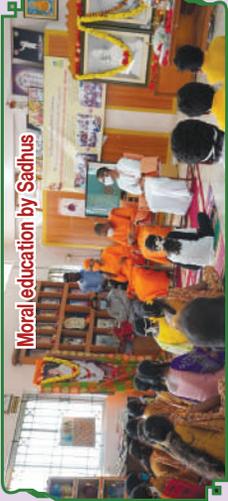
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Offering to Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna: An Appeal

Dear Devotees & Friends,

Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math declared open a Math centre at Uttarkashi, an ancient holy town in the Garhwal Himalayas on 20 Oct 2017. There was already an ashrama, named "Ramakrishna Kutir", on a small piece of land since 1963. It was maintained directly by the Belur Math, and sadhus of our Order used to stay for intense tapasya in the traditional monastic way, begging food from outside and living a simple austere life. The same tradition continues till date.

In view of expanding Swami Vivekananda's ideal of service and spirituality among the masses we plan to purchase some land measuring at least one acre around Harsil Valley, near Gangotri. Along with retreat centres for sadhus and devotees, some welfare activities for the benefit of the poor and underprivileged will be taken up after acquiring and developing the land.

An estimated cost of **Rs. 2 crores** is required to set up and develop this additional unit of our Math. We request our friends and devotees, trusts and corporate bodies to contribute liberally to complete this project of welfare and spirituality at the earliest.

Donations can be made by NEFT/RTGS to the account given below:

A/C Name : **Ramakrishna Math, Uttarkashi**
Bank Name : **Union Bank of India**
Branch Name : **Uttarkashi Branch**
A/C No. : **601802010006696**
IFSC : **UBIN0560189**

Foreign contributions may kindly be sent through the headquarters at Belur Math (Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, Howrah-711202; email- accounts@rkmm.org) requesting it to credit the fund in Uttarkashi Math A/c.

Kindly send us email (to uttarkashi@rkmm.org) or SMS (to **9447051231**) after the transaction intimating the purpose of your donation as "**Donation for purchase of land and development of the Math.**" Please also send your PAN and full postal address.

Donations towards our Math are exempted from IT under 80G Act.

May Sri Ramakrishna, Ma Sarada, Swami Vivekananda bless you all.

Yours in the Lord,
Swami Amaleshananda
Adhyaksha



Ramakrishna Math (Gadadhar Ashrama)

(A Branch Centre of Belur Math)

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Phone: 033 24554660 Email: gadadhar.ashrama@rkmm.org

Website: www.rkmgadadharashrama.org

Centenary Celebration 1920 – 2020

Dear Devotees of Ramakrishna Sangha,

Gadadhar Ashrama, is a unique branch centre of Belur Math. It was founded on 17 November 1920 by Swami Shivanandaji, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. This ashrama has been blessed by the visits of four other direct disciples: Swamis Brahmanandaji, Saradanandaji, Subodhanandaji, and Vijnanandaji. Sri M., (Mahendranath Gupta) author of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* too would stay in this ashrama and practice japa and meditation.

Furthermore, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi was very happy with the establishment of this ashram because it is situated close to Adi Ganga and Sri Sri Kali Temple of Kalighat. Above all, the holy relics of Sri Ramakrishna is treasured in this ashrama.

Sri Jogesh Chandra Ghosh, a local resident and a relative of Sri Balam Bose (a close householder devotee of Sri Ramakrishna) lost his only son Gadadhar at a young age. In the memory of his son, he gifted his house to Belur Math to begin a branch centre in the name of his son. As Gadadhar was also the childhood name of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother recommended that Belur Math should accept the proposal. Thus came into existence Gadadhar Ashrama.

The ashrama activities include daily worship, regular discourses by eminent speakers, and charitable activities like free coaching centre for students, Computer Training Centre, a good library, and a Homeopathy Charitable Dispensary.

This year Gadadhar Ashrama is celebrating the completion of 100 years of its existence.

As it is not possible to organise any big celebration due to the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions, it will be our endeavour to celebrate this occasion in a befitting manner as soon as the outside circumstances become normal. For now, a Centenary Souvenir titled 'GADADHAR' will soon be released.

We appeal to all the devotees to donate generously towards the upcoming Centenary Celebrations.

May Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda bless you all.

Donations can be sent by cheque/DD favouring.

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SWAMI VIVEKANANDA & OKAKURA TENSHIN,
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SWAMI MEDHASANANDA

The Story of India-Japan Relationship by Swami Medhasananda, head of the Vedanta Society of Japan, explores with great detail the friendship between Swami Vivekananda and Okakura Tenshin, including their meetings and mutual influences.

Swami Vivekananda was a staunch admirer of Japan for various reasons, and so was Okakura an ardent admirer of India. The study of their chemistry makes for an illuminating understanding of Indo-Japan relationship, especially in the nineteenth and early twentieth-century contexts.



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Shivaji was one of those national leaders whose stature can be compared with only a few in human history. His name evokes in us the spirit of valour, fearlessness, and energy, and above all, love for one's Motherland and Dharma. Swami Vivekananda had great admiration for him. His legacy as an ideal human being, an ideal king, a relentless nation-builder, and an ideal servant of his subjects will inspire generations of humanity to come. Deeply rooted in his own Dharma, and yet with widest sympathies for other religions, he was duty bound to protect his Dharma against the onslaughts of bigoted invaders. This was the striking feature of his character. He became a legend during his lifetime, and this legend keeps growing, even after three centuries. *Shivaji the Great* presents to us Swami Vivekananda's views about this great national leader. Advaita Ashrama is pleased to bring out this book and hope that it will inspire the youth of today with pride in their motherland.



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A truly religious man should think that other religions are also so many paths leading to the Truth. One should always maintain an attitude of respect towards other religions.

—Sri Ramakrishna

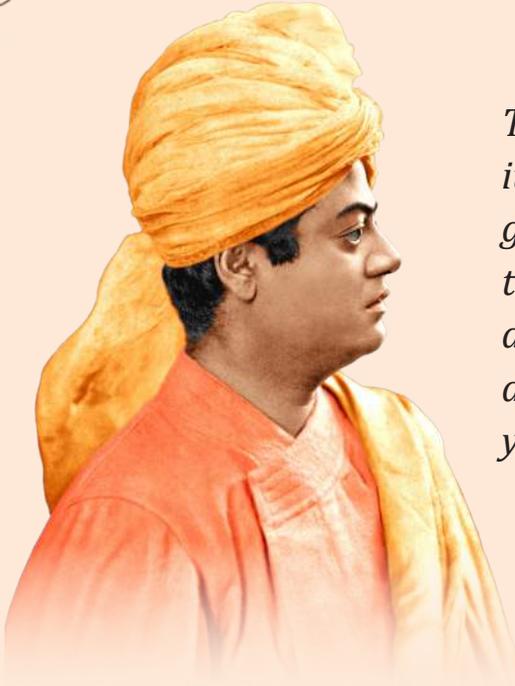
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One who makes a habit of prayer will easily overcome all difficulties and remain calm and unruffled in the midst of the trials of life.

—Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi





The Vedanta recognizes no sin, it only recognizes error. And the greatest error, says the Vedanta is to say that you are weak, that you are a sinner, a miserable creature, and that you have no power and you cannot do this and that.

— Swami Vivekananda

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If you practise spiritual discipline for some time in a solitary place, you will find that your mind has become strong, and then you can live in any place or society without being in the least affected by it. When the plant is tender it should be hedged around. But when it has grown big not even cows and goats can injure it.
Spiritual practices in a solitary place are essential.

—Sri Sarada Devi



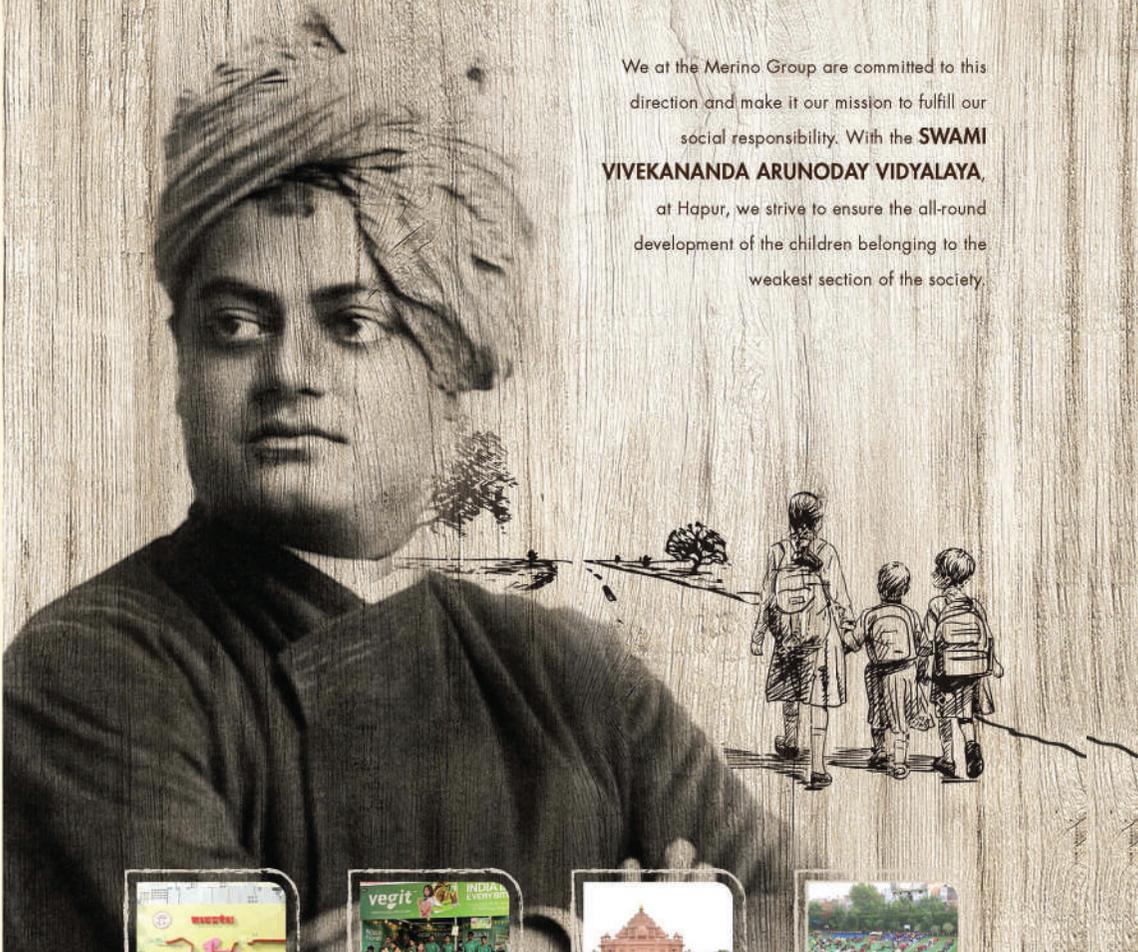


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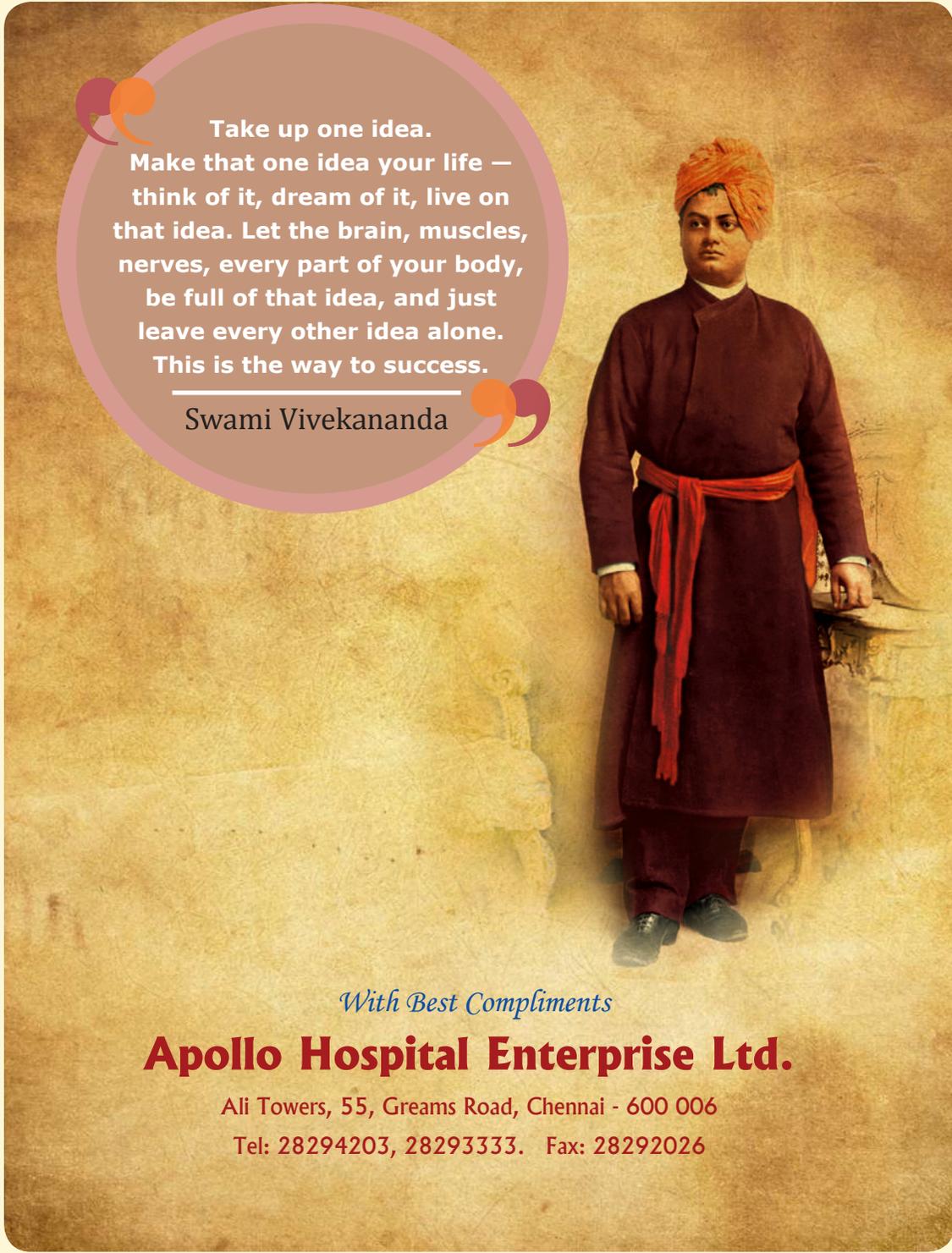
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Man finds faults in others after bringing down his own mind to that level. Does anything ever happen to another if you enumerate his faults? It only injures you. This has been my attitude. Hence I cannot see anybody's faults. If a man does a trifle for me, I try to remember him even for that. To see the faults of others! One should never do it. Forgiveness is Tapasya.

—Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi



Take up one idea.
Make that one idea your life —
think of it, dream of it, live on
that idea. Let the brain, muscles,
nerves, every part of your body,
be full of that idea, and just
leave every other idea alone.
This is the way to success.

Swami Vivekananda

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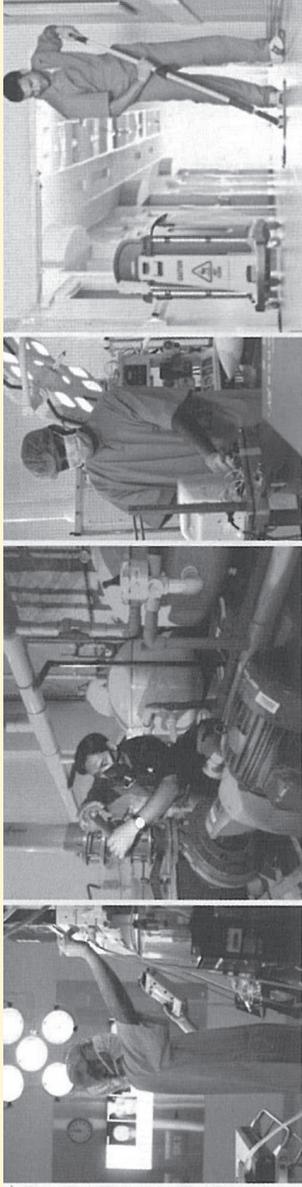
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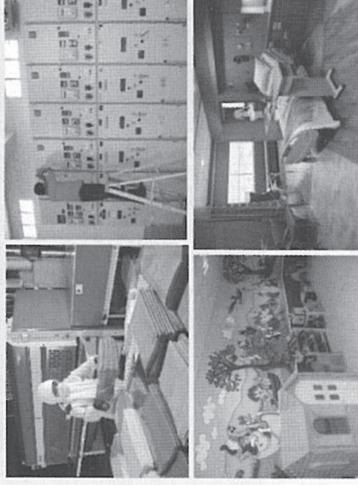
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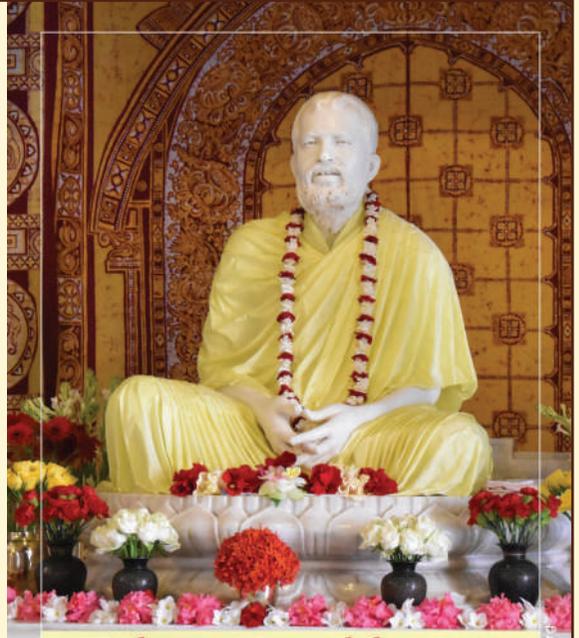
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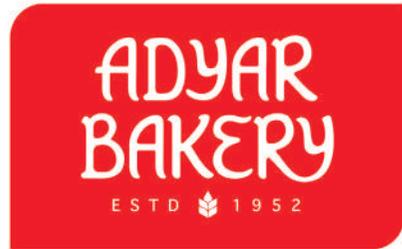
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You must not throw cold water on anybody's project. Give up criticism altogether. Help all as long as you find they are doing all right, and in cases where they seem to be going wrong, show them their mistakes gently. It is criticising each other that is at the root of all mischief. That is the chief factor in breaking down organisations.

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**Let people say whatever they like,
stick to your own convictions, and
rest assured, the world will be at
your feet. They say, 'Have faith in
this fellow or that fellow', but I say,
'Have faith in yourself first', that's
the way.**

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