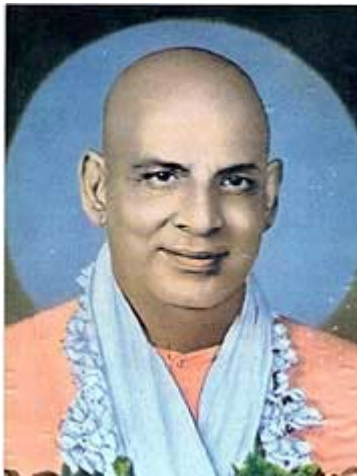


SWAMI SIVANANDA

A MODERN SAGE



Sri Swami Sivananda
Founder of
The Divine Life Society



SERVE, LOVE, GIVE,
PURIFY, MEDITATE,
REALIZE
So Says
Sri Swami Sivananda

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Friends,

Moksha is freedom from births and deaths. It is the attainment of eternal bliss. It has neither space nor time in itself; nor is there in it any state, external or internal.

You are born to attain Moksha or the final emancipation. Moksha is your goal.

Kill this little “I” or egoism through enquiry of Who am I? You will attain Moksha and shine as an Emperor of this world.

May you attain Moksha in this very birth.

OM TAT SAT,
Sivananda

SWAMI SIVANANDA—A MODERN SAGE

“With the mind harmonised by Yoga he sees the Self abiding in all beings and all beings in the Self; he sees the same everywhere.”—Bhagavad Gita (VI. 29).

Such a Divine Seer was the great Master, His Holiness Sri Swami Sivananda. A study of his life will reveal to us the experiences of a man who rests in Universal Consciousness.

THE EARLY YEARS

Kuppuswami was his name. He was born on the 8th of September, 1887, in Pattamadai, near Tirunelveli in the Tamil Nadu state of South India.

The future Swami Sivananda was born into a family of saintly people. His father, Vengu Iyer, was a great soul who performed daily worship and became immersed in the bliss of communion with the Lord.

Piety and goodness flowed from father to son. Each morning the little boy, Kuppu, would go to the garden and fetch flowers and Bael leaves for his father’s Siva Worship. Kuppu would listen attentively to Vengu Iyer’s Vedic recitations and scriptural readings, and would join his parents in their prayers and Kirtan.

From childhood, Kuppuswami displayed selfless tendencies. If his mother gave him a cake or sweetmeat, he would at once rush to find friends to share the delicacy. He rejoiced in giving. He distributed snacks to servants, to cats and dogs, crows and sparrows. Kuppuswami took beggars into the house and fed them. But Kuppuswami’s greatest pleasure was in serving Sadhus and Sannyasins.

THE EARLY YEARS

In his teens, Kuppuswami enjoyed physical exercise. He took keen interest in exercising on the parallel and horizontal bars, much to the displeasure of his parents. Even before the rest of the household awoke, Kuppuswami would slip away for his physical exercises.

“I have to confess,” he once said, with a reminiscent twinkle in his eyes, “that many a time I used to place a pillow on my bed and cover it up carefully with a blanket to give the appearance of my innocent self sleeping soundly.”

EDUCATION

Kuppuswami completed his general education in his teens. On passing the Intermediate Examination in 1905, he entered the Tanjore Medical Institute, where he worked like one possessed. He utilised his leisure hours studying medical books of every description. After two years of study of medicine he possessed the knowledge of a fifth year student. Because of this, he was freely admitted into the operation theater and dissecting room in the very first year. Professors, finding him to be intelligent, industrious and promising, took him into their confidence and engaged him as their assistant. Kuppuswami utilised this privilege diligently to acquire knowledge of surgery. He always kept a notebook and pencil in his pocket to note details of experiments or record useful thoughts.

A JOURNALIST

When Kuppuswami was half way through his medical course, his father died and his mother fell ill. The family was thrown into difficult circumstances. To support himself, Dr. Kuppuswami started a medical journal “AMBROSIA”. He served as editor and initial financier for the journal. The first issue came out in 1909 as a 32-page monthly.

Kuppuswami himself wrote many articles under different pseudonyms. He received articles on the ancient system of Indian medicine from Ayurvedic physicians. Though the journal was in English, he reserved a few pages for prescriptions in Tamil.

Through his journal, Kuppuswami strove to dispel people’s ignorance in matters of personal hygiene and public health. He laid the emphasis not on remedial prescriptions, but on health building and disease prevention. Health, hygiene and dietetics received special notice. Readers felt a significant spiritual touch in the pages of “Ambrosia”.

The magazine gained in popularity. Income remained low, but Kuppuswami was able to give money to his aged mother Parvati Ammal.

Maintaining a journal was difficult. Literacy level was low, readers few and advertisements were not many. Even a full-page display in “Ambrosia” fetched only Rs. 3/-. Kuppuswami had no assistant. He, himself, was editor, manager and dispatcher. The journal ran for four years.

In 1913, Dr. Kuppuswami was presented with an appealing opportunity for service. Thousands of Indian workers on the rubber plantations in Malaysia were living in deplorable

conditions with little medical attention. Dr. Kuppuswami decided to cross the seas to serve the needy.

At a farewell party, the young doctor told friends: “Book knowledge will not take us far. I studied anatomy. I dissected the human body. But I could not find the Atman (Soul) within (the human body)!”

“The Atman can be seen only when the ego is destroyed,” interjected a friend.

“True” agreed Kuppuswami, “And selfless service is the most potent weapon to thin out the ego. Every day I shall do some charitable act. Side by side I shall think of God with a yearning heart.”

DOCTOR IN MALAYSIA

Arriving in Malaysia, Dr. Kuppuswami met the manager of the rubber estate, which had its own hospital. He asked the young Doctor, “Can you manage a hospital all by yourself?” Back came the reply: “Yes, I can manage even three hospitals”. He was appointed at once to the Senawang Estate Hospital. Dr. Kuppuswami had to dispense medicines, keep accounts and attend to patients. In his work, Dr. Kuppuswami was methodical, painstaking and conscientious. He exhorted his helpers to keep the place clean, because cleanliness was the greatest medicine the hospital could offer. Medical history sheets, temperature charts, admission cards and other documents were kept current and complete.

Dr. Kuppuswami had a private practice as well. There were many doctors in Malaysia, but few were sympathetic to the patients. Generally, they ran after rich clients. Dr. Kuppuswami sought out the poor who needed his services the most. Other doctors charged fees for a mere consultation. Dr. Kuppuswami gave pocket money to his patients to cover their immediate expenses on discharge from hospital.

He cheered patients with his humour and spoke encouraging words to raise their spirits. At once, sick persons felt greatly relieved. The doctor’s merciful glance, his sweet words, the earnestness of his voice, the soft tones, the one-pointed attention with which he spoke to a suffering person together produced such a tremendous impression that the sufferer forgot his worries, in the security and love of the doctor’s company.

Dr. Kuppuswami always prayed while attending patients. Every Friday he held a prayer meeting in the hospital, at the end of which he distributed the Lord’s Prasad. Then he toured the wards, stopping at the bedside of those who lay too ill to attend the prayer, putting a little Prasad into their mouth with his own hand.

Dr. Kuppuswami would wait patiently in the cottage of a helpless, afflicted person during the night and leave the place only when the patient was relieved of suffering. His life in the Malaysian States was highly inspiring and elevating. In charity he was like Karna of old. Like a banyan tree which gives shelter to anyone and everyone, he would refuse none who came to him for any help.

PREPARATION FOR SANNYASA

Religious tendencies and instincts slowly developed in the young doctor. He sought the company of Sannyasins and Sadhus and began to study religious books. His shelves were filled with books on philosophy and a variety of other subjects. He was a voracious reader and would often sit up late with his books.

Such was his devotion to Sannyasins and Yogis that if one was passing his station he would hasten to him with rich presents. He often kept them with him for a number of days and sent them to their destination with due respect, securing for them first-class train tickets.

Abundant charity, sympathy, mercy and service of the poor became his prominent traits and it is these traits that helped his spiritual growth and sustained his spiritual life.

RENUNCIATION

Service of humanity, study of spiritual literature, association with saintly souls and devotional practices at home—all these brought about a gradual change in the doctor's outlook on life. They purified his heart and turned his mind inward. Kuppuswami became more introspective. He wrote at the time: "Is there not a higher mission in life than the daily round of official duties, eating and drinking? Is there not any higher form of eternal happiness than these transitory and illusory pleasures? How uncertain is life here! How insecure is existence on the earth-plane—with various kinds of diseases, anxieties, worries, fears and disappointments! The world of names and forms is constantly changing. Time is fleeting. All hopes of happiness in this world terminate in pain, despair and sorrow."

Everywhere around him the doctor found people distressed, physically and mentally. His heart bled for the poor, the sick and the suffering. The human tragedy rent the doctor's heart.

In the hospital, Dr. Kuppuswami had to battle with human pain. Though he healed some, many died before his eyes. Death remained an eternal mystery to him.

At this critical point in his life, there came to him an itinerant Sannyasin. Staying with him for a few days, the Sannyasin fell ill, only to be nursed back to health by the doctor. The Sannyasin became captivated by the loving treatment, and presented Kuppuswami with valuable books. One was the "*Jiva-Brahma Aikya Vedanta Rahasyam*" by Cuddapah Satchidananda Swami. This was Kuppuswami's first lesson in Vedanta and the positive aspects of life on the earth plane. The real aim of human life became apparent.

Kuppuswami developed an ardent desire to tread the path of the wise and unlock the realms of immortality. This desire grew in intensity until in 1923, the spiritual sparks which Kuppuswami had nurtured coalesced and burst into a burning flame. As though struck by lightning, worldly desires left him. Materialistic civilisation was impotent and disgusted him. He spurned wealth, position, titles, status and the world that could offer no lasting solution to suffering. He had reached a stage where he could no longer perform his duties in the hospital. He left his job, gave away belongings, and left the shores of Malaysia.

With God as his guide, carrying no possessions, the erstwhile doctor began his Parivrajaka (wandering) life. He passed through village after village.

Kuppuswami had no experience of begging. He who always gave could not easily bring himself to ask. He would go to a village house, quietly approach a man and whisper into his ears, “I am a Madrasi Brahmin. I am hungry. Can you give me some food?” Those whom he approached thus were surprised, for his noble countenance gave him away.

Sometimes a hospitable man took him in and served him good food. After eating, Kuppuswami would bow low to his hosts and pray that God might bless them and then go on his way. He would not visit the same house again. Sometimes a pious family would request him to stay on, but Kuppuswami would slip out to the next village for fear he should prove to be a burden on the good folk.

Bareheaded, barefooted and scantily clothed, the novice wandered on. At times he had to go without food and walk mile after tiresome mile. Forced by hunger, he would then eat the wild figs and Amalaka fruits fallen from wayside trees. Often he would sleep on the earth underneath these trees.

Parivrajaka life (the life of an itinerant monk) helped Kuppuswami to develop forbearance, equal vision, and serenity of outlook in pleasure and pain.

INITIATION

In his wanderings, Kuppuswami came to know about Rishikesh, an obscure place in the Himalayas little known to the outside world save for the few who hungered for God-realisation. He felt that this was the place he was thirsting for, a place where he could do intense Sadhana and Tapas.

Arriving in Rishikesh on the 8th of May, 1924 the young pilgrim was charmed by the magnificent heights of the lofty mountains and the cool refreshing waters of the holy Ganga. On the 1st of June, as he was taking a bath in the Ganga there came His Holiness Sri Swami Vishwananda Saraswati, who belonged to the Sringeri Math of Sri Sankaracharya. The novice and the monk were attracted to each other. The novice saw a Guru in the monk and the monk saw a disciple in the novice. Swami Vishwanandaji took Kuppuswami to his Kutir. After resting a while, Kuppuswami went to Kalikamlwala Kshetra (an alms-house for Sannyasins). Alms were refused him as he was not a Sannyasi. As he retraced his steps, Swami Vishwanandaji again met him. After exchanging a few words, Kuppuswami was initiated into the Sannyasa order by His Holiness Sri Swami Vishwanandaji. (The religious rite of Viraja Homa was done later by Sri Swami Vishnudevanandaji Maharaj at Kailash Ashram.) He cast off his secular Dhoti and put on the Gerua cloth (traditional orange cloth of the Sannyasin) presented by the Guru. He was taught the secrets of Kaivalya (liberation) and the mysteries of the Mahavakyas (great sentences). The former Dr. Kuppuswami became Swami Sivananda Saraswati of the Sankaracharya order.

INITIATION

Asked whether he would follow Swami Vishwananda to Haridwar and Benares, Swami Sivananda decided to stay, and plunged himself into Sadhana. The Guru wrote to him giving instructions about Sannyasa. Further light comes from Swamiji's own autobiography:

“In search of a Guru I reached Rishikesh and prayed to the Lord for His grace. There are many egotistic students who say: ‘I need no Guru. God is my Guru’. They change their own robes and live independently. When difficulties and troubles confront them, they are bewildered. I do not like violations of the rules and regulations of the scriptures, sages and saints. When there is a change of heart, there should be an external change also. The glory and the liberty of a Sannyasi can hardly be imagined by the timid and the weak.

“A personal Guru is necessary in the beginning. He alone can show you the path to attain God, the Guru of Gurus, and obviate the snares and pitfalls on your path. Self-realisation is a transcendental experience. You can march in the spiritual path only by placing implicit faith in the words of sages who have realised the Truth and attained knowledge of the Self.

“Wearing the ochre-coloured cloth is very necessary for one who has a changed mind. Due to the force of habit, when the senses move among the sense-objects, the moment you look at the coloured cloth that you wear, it will remind you that you are a Sannyasin. It will give you a kick and save you from vicious actions. It has got its own glory and advantages. Only a real Sannyasin can cut off all connections and ties and completely get rid of attachment. His friends and relatives will not trouble him. The robe is of great service when one appears on the platform for preaching. It has got its own sanctity in the minds of Hindus. Common people will easily receive the ideas from a Sannyasin. Some hypocrites say: ‘We have given colouring to our minds. We need not change the clothes.’ I do not believe these men. Even the famous Mandana Misra, Avatara of Brahma who fought with Sri Sankara, became a Sannyasin. The great Rishi Yajnavalkya became a Sannyasin. Only those who have cravings, passions and attachments who are timid, dread to change the cloth, and thus bring forth false, ingenious, unsound arguments.”

SADHANA

Swamiji took his abode near Lakshman Jhula. Being a Sannyasin, he wanted to abstain from worldly activity but found he was powerless to resist the temptation to go to the bedside of sick Mahatmas in the neighbourhood. In him the spirit of service burned brighter than ever. Walking through the gullies of Lakshmanjhula, Sivananda saw many Sadhus suffering from extreme cold and malnutrition, with frequent attacks of fever and dysentery. Swamiji could not bear to see the helpless plight of those holy men, but he had no money for the necessary diet and medicines.

A thought flashed in Swamiji's mind that money itself was not evil. It could be put to good use as much as bad. And he remembered his savings in the insurance company. A lawyer friend helped him to salvage about Rs. 5000/-. Vowing not to touch any for his personal needs, he put it into a Post Office Savings account. Thus equipped, Swamiji started his daily pilgrimage to the huts of sick Mahatmas. Mere food and medicine are not all, he would also disperse a word of cheer, encouragement and a splash of delightful humour. Without a word Swamiji would take aside the sick man's soiled clothes and they would be back in their place in a few hours, washed and neatly folded. He would not leave the water pot unfilled, nor the floor unswept.

One of the Mahatmas in the neighbourhood, Swami Kalikananda, watched with interest the service that the doctor from Malaysia rendered the Sadhus. The opportunity, he thought, should not be lost.

He approached Swamiji with a proposal to run a charitable dispensary. Satya Sevashram Dispensary came into being. Housed in a small room a few yards to the north of the Lakshmanjhula bridge, the dispensary lay at the entrance to the popular pedestrian route used by pilgrims to the famous Himalayan shrines of Badrinath and Kedarnath. It was a unique location to reach the maximum number of pilgrims, Sadhus and people of the surrounding villages.

One evening a pilgrim enroute to Badrinath came to see him. Later it occurred to Swamiji that he should have given a different medicine which would have been more helpful. The thought filled his mind that he had not done his utmost. So, early the next morning, even before the dawn, he took the medicine and started at a steady uphill run to catch up with the traveller. When he reached the next halt, he found that the pilgrim was an even earlier riser and had already proceeded on his way.

Undaunted, Swamiji pressed on until he caught up with the pilgrim near the fifth mile and there gave him the precious medicine.

Swamiji's persistent interest was to fill the entire day with good turns. Service was his motto.

“Ever be on the look-out for an opportunity to serve; never miss a chance. You must be like a watch-dog, alert and keen to grasp at once any possibility that presents itself of being useful... you must create opportunities to do something for others. Do not wait for a chance but create means of making yourself useful and helpful. Do it in whatever way you are particularly suited by temperament, talent and natural disposition.

“On rare occasions you must even be aggressive in your service. Sometimes helpless persons in need of aid will foolishly refuse it. In such cases do the required service in spite of their hesitation.

“Service is ‘love in expression’. This coupled with a strong positive desire for universal weal, becomes an effective and higher sort of service. By generating a current of helpful and healing vibration, it will contribute to common welfare in a subtle but powerful way especially if you use the power of prayer.”

Swamiji himself was very emphatic in his convictions about the efficacy of prayer that is earnest and genuine. He once said, “Prayer has tremendous influence. It can do anything, provided you are sincere. It is heard at once and responded to. Do it in the daily struggle of life and realise for yourself its high efficacy. Pray in any way you like. Become as simple as a child. Have no cunningness or crookedness. Then you will get everything.”

From the very beginning, Swamiji followed his own innate tendency with regard to Sadhana. He imitated none in this respect, service being a natural part of his nature. He attended to

the needs of the sick Sadhus with added zeal; for him work itself was worship. Deep meditation, austerities such as fasting, standing in the ice cold waters of the Ganga during the early hours of the morning—all of these he combined with his daily round of service to the sick and needy mendicants and Sadhus.

SAMADHI

As Swamiji advanced further in the practice of meditation he would deny himself all food, company and talk. He plunged deeper and deeper into Samadhi (superconscious state) and kept himself within closed doors for many days at a stretch. His fellow-Sadhus were awed—they wondered what he was made of. Not a day's relaxation did he permit himself.

“I paid special attention to simple living, high thinking, light food, deep study, silent meditation and regular prayers. I loved seclusion and observed the vow of silence. I did not like company and idle talk. From the Rama Ashram library in Muni-ki-Reti I used to get some books, and devoted some time to study every day. Rest and relaxation gave me enough strength to carry on intense Sadhana. I moved closely with some holy men but I never indulged in discussion and debates. Self-analysis and introspection were my guide. I spent time in meditation and practised various kinds of Yogas in my Sadhana, and my experiences have all come out in many books as advice to aspirants. It was usual for even great mystics to keep their rare knowledge as a secret and teach only a chosen few, but I quickly sent out my thoughts and experiences to help the world and struggling seekers after Truth.”

Swamiji's original and extraordinary Sadhana culminated ultimately in the grand experience of merging in the Divine, and being freed once and for all from all limitations and fetters. When questioned about the salient features of his inner life he said, “I made deep meditation the keynote of my Sadhana. I had no obstruction within or without. This leads to the ultimate experience.”

Swamiji used to keep a small pocket notebook—“The Whip”—in which he would record what he wanted to remind himself of. It gives a glimpse of the intense and integral austerities that he practised in those days.

“More time (eight hours) should be spent in meditation and meditation alone, even 12, 16 hours daily. Even study and medical treatment should be given up for some time—pure meditation alone.

“Winter must be utilised. That is the best time for meditation. For a month or fifteen days leave Swarg Ashram (the place he was living) without informing anybody. Take two clothes and one blanket. Roam about along the banks of the Ganga canal. Live on begging from house to house. Do not talk with the villagers. Observe vow of silence on these days.”

To keep the bodily functions in a state of health, Sivananda religiously maintained his daily routine of Asanas, Pranayama and other Hatha Yogic Kriyas. This he supplemented with a little physical exercise, mostly running. He often repaired to a lonely part of Swarg Ashram, past the bend of the river, and sprinted vigorously a good mile or two.

Regular Pranayama conferred on Swamiji inexhaustible energy, a phenomenal memory and a powerful voice. It also helped him to bring about rapid healing in his patients through transmission of Prana Shakti to the diseased parts. In his later Tapasya period, when he became an expert in this art of psychic healing, Sivananda always insisted on shampooing the patients' legs after administering medicine.

Sivananda maintained a rigorous routine. He used to be up at 4 a.m. and plunging into the icy Ganga, stand waist-deep in the holy river and commence his Japa, continuing it till sunrise. Only after invoking the Deity through the sun and worshipping It would he clamber out of the cold waters. Returning to his Kutir, Swamiji would go into meditation. At 9 a.m. when he came out, there would be some sick persons waiting for him. After attending on them, he would take a quick bath. Then he would cover his head and go to the Kshetra (where food was distributed) by an unfrequented pathway, to avoid crowd and gossip, and return with his Bhiksha with the least possible delay, again unnoticed. Even while he walked thus, Sivananda kept himself busy with mental Japa or a variety of Pranayama.

Leaving his own Bhiksha in his Kutir, Swamiji would then go out to distribute special food to the Lakshmanjhula Sadhus. After this service, he would return to his Kutir and take food.

In the afternoons, Swamiji often would cross the river by boat to get to the Rama Ashram library. (During the rainy season, when the river flooded and the boats stopped, he was compelled to take the long route via the Lakshmanjhula bridge). Sitting there, Sivananda would pore over the books and take notes. He always kept a dictionary by his side to look up the meaning of difficult words. Of the many books he read his favourites were the Upanishads, the Vivekachudamani, the Bhagavad Gita, the Bhagavata, the Yoga Vashishta and the Avadhuta Gita. Vedanta was his delight. Swamiji allotted time in the day for recording his thoughts, ideas and experiences, but since most of the little money he had was spent on the sick, this posed a few difficulties. Needing paper for writing, it was necessary to search waste heaps for discarded sheets and used envelopes. There were times, Swamiji could not get ink. Even when both paper and ink were available he would often have to give up writing after dusk for want of a light. Either there would be no oil in the lantern, or no match to light it.

Once a devotee gave Sivananda Rs. 5/- and begged him to use it to buy milk for himself. Swamiji had different ideas. He felt the money was a direct gift from God Himself. His jottings were waiting and Sivananda at once used the money to have his first pamphlet printed. Its name was "Brahma Vidya". It was immediately distributed to all who came to him. Readers liked the pamphlet so much that they urged Swamiji to give more of his ideas and volunteered to print them. This led to a second tract, "The Metaphysics of the Inner Man" and a third and a fourth.

At first Swamiji did not know any publishers, but he had a novel way of getting his early articles published. When he had written an inspiring article in his home-made "notebook" he would send it to "The Postmaster, Madras" (or Lucknow or Calcutta) with a covering note saying: "These are the thoughts that occurred to me yesterday. I think they are inspiring. So please have a small leaflet printed. You can distribute them. Print as many as you like but please send me 100 copies."

One postmaster sent the 100 copies with a note: “I admire your confidence!” As Sivananda became more widely known, publishers sought him.

On days when too many callers posed a threat to his spiritual routine Sivananda would disappear into the rocky ledges along the Ganga and the bushy forests on the Manikoot hill slopes. A favourite spot was a rock almost midstream where the current was strong. On many evenings Swamiji went there for his meditations. He used to hide himself in the hollow angular cut of the rock, and after sunset, steal back to his Kutir.

Sivananda’s meditation became very intense. Gradually he increased the time spent in daily meditation and, in due course, he began to meditate for eight hours a day... and then, when winter came, for twelve and sixteen hours. For some time he even gave up study and medical service and engaged himself solely in pure meditation. In meditation he churned his own soul. Truth began to manifest.

The daily visit to the Kshetra interrupted this meditation practice. Sivananda therefore arranged with the Kshetra authorities to let him have four or five days’ ration of cooked Rotis, at a time. Each day at meal time, he powdered the stale and dry Rotis and mixing that powder with the Ganga water, ate the paste and quickly returned to his meditation.

There was not one idle moment in Swamiji’s life. Time was precious. Not a single minute was to be wasted. Swamiji stuck to a definite routine for the day. This practice he recommended to people in all walks of life, so as to maintain serenity and eliminate all aimlessness and distraction.

Many who came into personal contact with Swamiji were inspired by his example and adopted this course of using every moment profitably. There is no doubt that it changed their lives for the better. Assiduously cultivated, it wrought astonishing results. Swamiji felt that one should cultivate the same jealous parsimony with regard to time as displayed by the vigilant individual who exclaimed: “Alas! I have just lost one golden hour set with sixty diamonds”. This great emphasis laid by Swami Sivananda on the conservation and profitable utilisation of time resulted in the use of the Spiritual Diary. It will act as an effective “Cerberus” to keep guard over the elusive factor of “Time” by keeping out the thieves—idleness, aimlessness and procrastination. Referring to the incalculable benefits of maintaining the diary, Swamiji stated, “There is no other best friend and faithful teacher or Guru than your diary. It will teach you the value of time and you will be able to know how much time you are spending for worthy purposes. If you maintain a daily diary properly, without any fault in any of the items, you will not like to waste a single minute. Then alone will you understand the value of time and how it slips away.”

In his valuable work “Sure Ways for Success in Life,” Swamiji writes: “Time is indeed most precious. It can never come back. It is rolling on with tremendous speed. When the bell rings, remember that you are approaching death. When the clock strikes, bear in mind that one hour is cut off from the span of your life.”

“Life is short and time is fleeting. Arise, awake, realise the Self”—these are terse maxims which Swamiji never failed to present to those who sought his guidance. To one who spoke of “turning over a new leaf” on some date in the near future, Swamiji spiritedly exclaimed, “Don’t say

that. Tomorrow is for fools, it will never come. Days, months, years, even life itself will pass away. Exert yourself from this very second.”

SEVA YATRA

On September 9, 1950 Swami Sivananda set out, with a band of disciples, on a two-month tour of India and Sri Lanka, to bring new hope into the lives of millions.

The tour was a Seva Yatra, a service tour, to disseminate spiritual knowledge, to spread the glory Of the Lord’s Name, to awaken the masses from the slumber of ignorance and to teach the younger generation the methods to maintain a high standard of health through the practice of Asanas, Pranayama and Yogic Kriyas. Swamiji wanted to make personal contact with students who had been corresponding with him for years, and were thirsting for his Darshan.

He enjoyed every moment of the 61 days. In his own words, he “bathed again and again in the ocean of the multitudes’ devotion to the Lord”. He rejoiced heartily that the Almighty gave him an excellent chance to serve Him and His children by undertaking the tour.

Only a day before he started from Rishikesh, Sivananda entered his 64th year, but he felt like one half his age. He had so much zest for living. He valued life greatly as a rare opportunity to serve the Lord.

During the tour, Swamiji travelled 8,000 miles by train, plane and steamer, horse-drawn carriage and bullock cart. He addressed public meetings and press conferences, broadcast radio talks, offered worship at sacred Tirthas (pilgrimage places), and himself received worship and conducted Satsangas in the homes of devotees. Wherever he went, he carried with him a liberal supply of spiritual literature for free distribution.

At almost every railway station enroute hundreds of people came to have his Darshan, and wherever the train halted he conducted Kirtan on the railway station platform. Even as the train entered the station the loudspeakers fitted onto the Tourist Car filled the place with his recorded Kirtans and songs and attracted a crowd. Leaflets and pamphlets were distributed.

Swamiji was joyously greeted by large crowds, and often the platform itself was converted into a Satsanga hall. He proceeded immediately to shower his welcomes with spiritual advice and would sing his “Song of Instructions”:

Radhe Govinda Bhajo Radhe Govinda
Radhe Govinda Bhajo Sita Govinda
Hari bolo, bolo bhai Radhe Govinda
Hare Krishna Hare Ram Radhe Govinda

Get up at 4 a.m. Brahmamuhurta
Get up at 4 a.m. Japo Ram Ram
Get up at 4 a.m. do Brahma Vichar
Get up at 4 a.m. enquire “Who am I?”

Get up at 4 a.m. practise Yogabhyas
Observe Mauna daily for two hours
Fast on Ekadasi, take milk and fruits
Study daily one chapter of Gita
Do regular charity, one-tenth income
Rely on your own self, give up servants,
Do Kirtan at night, have Satsanga
Speak the truth at all costs, preserve Veerya
Satyam Vada, Dharmam Chara, observe Brahmacharya
Ahimsa Paramo Dharma, love one and all.
Never hurt others' feelings, be kind to all
Control anger, develop divine love
Keep daily spiritual diary, you will evolve quickly.
(Hare Krishna Hare Ram...)

The audience repeated it enthusiastically. Then he said: "This song is not only for repetition. You have to practice the instructions. Then only will you realise the benefits". In his very first speech in Westernised Sri Lanka, Swamiji struck a new note in his discourse: "You admire the little electric lamp on your table; have you learnt to admire the sun who sheds light on the whole universe?"

"You admire a bottle of French perfume; have you learnt to admire the scent of rose and jasmine?"

"You admire the paintings of artists and the little toys made by craftsmen; have you ever thought of the beautiful creation of the Lord, this earth itself which is only an infinitesimal part of His creation?"

"You glorify the little man who digs a small swimming pool. Can you glorify the Lord enough for His creation of oceans, lakes and rivers?"

"You deify the sculptor who carves some figure on stones. You deify the scientist for his superficial knowledge of the inner human mechanism. Think of the exquisite creation of God—the human being. Can all the scientists in the world make Man?"

"The intelligence with which the scientists have invented so many things is itself a spark of the Divine. Man is a drop in the ocean of consciousness. His ego is a point in the limitless Truth of Existence..."

Wherever he went, Sivananda stressed the essential unity of religions.

At one stop he began running high fever. The next programme was about to be abandoned. But Swamiji insisted, "We must go on. Start immediately." When they reached the destination, Swamiji's fever vanished. The Master offered an explanation, "It was the feverish anxiety of these thousands of devotees awaiting me that manifested itself in me as fever. Now that I am in their midst, I share their joy and the fever has left."

DISSEMINATION OF KNOWLEDGE

The habit of giving was ingrained in him. When Sivananda advanced in his spiritual practices and tapped the mine of spiritual wisdom at greater and ever greater depths, he shared the wealth of his spiritual experience with others through conversation, lectures, letters, leaflets and articles in periodicals.

Pilgrims who met Swamiji began to correspond with him when they returned home. Others who read his tracts wrote to him. Sivananda replied to those letters and gave spiritual advice.

Swami Sivananda considered the gift of knowledge, as the greatest gift.

For this, Swamiji felt the printing press to be more important than the platform. What was heard might be forgotten in a day, but recorded knowledge would be of lasting benefit.

Everyone who wrote a letter to Swamiji or sent the smallest donation got some leaflet or pamphlet. Whenever Sivananda went out on tour, he made it a point to have spiritual literature printed for free distribution.

But Swamiji was not quite content with this method of leaflet distribution. With the growing of the Society, he felt that something must be mailed regularly to his correspondents. In September, 1938 was born “The Divine Life” the monthly magazine of the Divine Life Society.

Then in 1939, Sivananda got his first book published. “Practice of Yoga—Vol I” was printed in Madras. For more than two decades, Swamiji had to have his books printed by outside presses. Even after the Ashram press was started, it could not at first cope with all the production jobs that he wanted undertaken.

Swamiji attached so much importance to this work of dissemination of spiritual knowledge that even when there was a financial crisis in the Ashram, he refused to slow down the tempo of work on the publication side. He was willing to shut down the kitchen, but not the press. “We can all go to the Kshetra and live on alms” he would say, “but the Jnana Yajna must go on”.

The speed with which Sivananda brought out books was phenomenal. Generally he worked on three or four volumes at a time. Between his first publication in 1939 and his Mahasamadhi in 1963, he wrote over three hundred books. They included commentaries on the Bhagavad Gita, the Principal Upanishads, the Brahma Sutras, Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras, Sandilya Bhakti Sutras and Narada’s Bhakti Sutras; scores of books on the practice of Yoga and Vedanta, and many volumes on health and vigour.

Questioned as to how he found time to write so much with his tight daily routine, Swamiji told a disciple:

“You should allot one hour to each subject every day or once in two days. Then in six months, you are amazed with the progress you have made in all these works.

“There should be a system and method first arranged in your mind. Then the action proceeds smoothly.”

Swamiji had an extremely facile pen. Effortlessly, sentences became paragraphs, paragraphs turned into pamphlets and pamphlets into books.

Ashram workers sometimes delayed the return of the manuscript notebooks entrusted to them for typing. Swamiji had to use more and more notebooks. He kept some in the writing room and some in the office, so that any moment he would be able to write. He kept several pens ready. He kept a pair of spectacles in the writing room, another in the almirah, a third in the office. No time should be lost in searching for them, work was of paramount importance. He kept several flashlights too—one near the bed, one near his writing desk, one near the easy chair on which he rested. Even at dead of night, if a good thought came, it must at once be recorded. It must not be lost to the world.

Sometimes Swamiji did the typing himself. The entire book “Sure Ways for Success in Life and God-realisation” was typed by him directly onto a machine without draft. For Sivananda, moments of inspiration were not interspersed with moments of depression. It was all a chain of inspired moments for him. His knowledge welled up from within. His difficulty was that he did not find time to express all his thoughts. Once he said to a student: “I cannot stop writing. I will write till I become blind. If I become blind, I will dictate and somebody will write for me. Thus I will continue my mission of dissemination of spiritual knowledge till the end of my life.”

Sivananda did not look to grammatical perfection or high literacy standard. His main concern was to disseminate as much spiritual knowledge in as short a time as possible. “I believe in maximum spiritual good to the public in a short space of time” wrote the Master, in a letter to his disciple.

Sivananda wrote to serve. The pen was his weapon, and he used it lovingly. He did not criticise; only coaxed. He wrote with both spiritual depth and intellectual persuasion. He did not condemn the scientific mind of the Space Age, but interpreted Patanjali Maharshi and Bhagavan Krishna in the spirit of the Age of Science.

He used every form of literary expression to convey his point to the reader. Poetry and drama, letter and essay, story and parable, aphorism and lecture—all media were adopted by him to spread knowledge of Divine Life.

Swamiji’s style was aphoristic and his language simple. His writings were lucid, sparkling and pure like a mountain stream springing from a mighty rock.

To the earnest spiritual aspirant who asked, “What should I do now? When I get up tomorrow morning, what do you actually want me to do?” To such a Sadhaka, Sivananda’s books were like manna dropping from heaven. They were 100% practical.

TRAINING OF DISCIPLES

“To be a Guru you must have a command from God,” says Swami Sivananda in his “Voice of the Himalayas”. Did he have a command from God then? Judging from the supreme sacrifice he made in leaving behind the comforts of the world for a hard life of service and renunciation, it appeared so. In one of his poems, Master gives a clear hint that he had received God’s injunction:

“I heard a Voice from Within, ‘Siva, wake up and fill the cup of your life with this nectar. Share it with all. I shall give you strength, energy, power and wisdom.’ I obeyed His command. He did fill the cup and I shared it with all.” As a teacher, Sivananda enjoyed the distinct advantage of knowing his subject well. He was a past-master in the Science of the Self, an adept in the spiritual techniques which he taught his students. He was moved by a sense of commitment to the task that God had entrusted to him. This personal involvement made him take an almost paternal care of his disciples.

When a student failed to show at classes Sivananda chided him: “With all the physical ailments that I have, I get up at 3 a.m., finish my morning work and remain waiting for the bell to ring. As soon as I hear the bell, I rush to the Bhajan Hall. I sometimes get giddy while walking. So I am carrying a walking stick even though I do not use it”. The gentle admonition had the desired effect and the student began to be more regular.

Swamiji never said, “I am your Guru”. Occasionally he used to say, “You are my disciple”, or “He is my disciple”, and to his early disciples he wrote: “I have accepted you as my beloved disciple, I shall serve you and guide you”. When he said: “I have accepted you as my beloved disciple,” the disciple felt that he had a claim over Swamiji and could write to him more freely. That is what Swamiji wanted. The Guru/disciple relationship was for the disciples, not for him.

Sivananda thus inspired his students by the force of his own personal example. His life was an open book, all could see him humble, simple, serving, praying, singing Kirtan, bathing in the Ganga, prostrating to everyone, remembering God always, cheerful all the time, not attaching importance to worldly happenings and living in the spirit of the “Tat Tvam Asi” Mahavakya (“Thou Art That”—one of the “Great Phrases” of Vedanta). His students learnt many things just by observing their Master.

He often told people: “I know no rest. I am always alert and occupied. You should try to look upon life in this manner—as an eternal student. Be ever on the look-out for learning something new each day, even each hour. Be like me—an intellectual scout. You can learn something from everyone. Everything in this universe has some lesson to give to one who is receptive. Do not pass by any experience lightly but draw instruction and inspiration. Extract something from everything and treasure it up in your mind.”

Swamiji often stated that there is no miraculous short-cut or magical formula for concentration. It comes naturally to the man who makes it a practice to do even the smallest act with attention and interest. To execute little tasks in a slovenly and careless manner renders the mind weak and causes it to lose all acumen and capacity for concentration. Never would he utter any word in a loud tone indicative of anger or even annoyance. If a situation required a hard word, then

the most he was capable of was a reprimand followed at once by a pleasant joke, like candy administered close upon a dose of medicine.

Then there was the method of encouragement. If Swamiji found an individual making earnest efforts to improve, he at once gave his attention to him, encouraged him and gave him strength to carry on the inner battle with greater vigour. His method had the power to uplift struggling spiritual aspirants.

Sometimes Sivananda would shock disciples into spiritual wakefulness, into realising their follies. It was a bitter method which the compassionate Master used but sparingly to whip the mind of the aspirant onto the right path. During this period, or when Swamiji appeared indifferent to a disciple, the Sadhaka was left in a mental furnace. But once through it, he emerged purified.

There was one Swami in the Ashram who was a heavy smoker. One day he did not have cigarettes. His brain did not function! Swamiji noticed this, so he at once gave money to another Ashramite to purchase a packet of cigarettes. When this was brought he instructed that the packet should be put beneath the Swami's pillow in his absence.

Some felt that Swami Sivananda was encouraging this Swami against his own principles. But, when the man came to know how Swamiji had gone out of his way to fulfil his cravings he felt ashamed and automatically gave it up. Obviously Swamiji was not unaware of the great and urgent need for a spiritual aspirant to practice self-control.

The most fascinating method which Swamiji employed was to work on the Sadhaka's mental plane. A time came when the disciple began to feel that the Guru was actively manipulating his very thoughts, leading him step by step. This was the most important phase in the Sadhaka's spiritual evolution. The more the disciple surrendered his mind to the Guru, the more actively did the Master operate on it. This was Swami Sivananda's subtlest method of influencing his disciples.

With Swamiji's several methods operating on him, the experience of the disciple was sometimes sweet, sometimes bitter; sometimes laden with bliss, sometimes maddening; sometimes shocking, sometimes thrilling. But, he knew that what the Master did was for his own ultimate good. The first Annual Report of the Divine Life Trust Society gives an interesting account of the ways in which resident-seekers were trained by Swamiji himself:

“Seven full-time aspirants who have renounced the world and who are treading the path of Nivritti Marga (renunciation) were admitted in the year 1936. A beginner is trained in all branches of Yoga under the direct guidance of Swami Sivananda. Here there is a great field for aspirants for purifying the heart through service to many Sadhus and Sannyasins, sick people and others. This is a wonderful field for developing mercy, cosmic love, tolerance, adaptability, Atma-Bhava and various other virtues. Young people should combine service and meditation. A practical knowledge of selfless public service in all branches is an essential qualification for every aspirant. Sometimes one may have to do cooking, washing, and other work also when he lives alone in seclusion. Aspirants who come to Swamiji for practising Kundalini Yoga and awakening the Kundalini are stunned when they are posted to serve the sick and other aged people. They show wry faces in the beginning, later realise the importance of service.

“When the heart is purified by the prescribed methods, the Kundalini is awakened. The aspirants learn and practice Asanas, Pranayama, Mudras and Bandhas, concentration and meditation. Sri Swamiji clears their doubts and explains the knotty points in Yoga and Vedanta philosophy. He gives the essence in a few sentences.

“Sri Swamiji trains the aspirants according to their temperament, capacity and taste. He does not administer the same medicine to all, as some do. A Vedantic student gets lessons in Vedanta; a student of Raja Yoga is given lessons in Raja Yoga; a Bhakta is trained in the path of devotion. Those who are advanced in meditation are not given any kind of work at all, but plunge themselves in deep meditation only. Every aspirant is trained in first aid, nursing of sick persons, dispensing, compounding of mixtures etc. Common meditation is held in the Rama Ashram premises at 4 a.m. Short lectures in Gita and Upanishads and practical Sadhana and meditation are given by Sri Swamiji at the end. Outsiders also join this function.”

Sivananda gave Sannyasa liberally. In India’s religious history, no other saint ever turned so many into monks. Swamiji gave Sannyasa to men and to women. He gave the ochre robe to older people with a few years left to live and to teenagers about to start their adult life. He gave Sannyasa to Indians and to foreigners. He gave Sannyasa in person and by post. To some who had worldly responsibilities still to discharge, he gave mental Sannyasa. Sivananda coloured their mind. He told them to live in the world, but be not of it. Swamiji wanted “Fiery young men, brave, dispassionate and wise, with iron will and ferro-concrete body and nerves, who can pulverise the Himalayas, and sip the waters of the ocean, who can devour death like a pickle, and swim across the Pacific, who can uproot Mount Everest, who can swallow a bag of fire! Glory to young Sannyasins who have dared to defy the worldly temptations and embrace Sannyasa...”

Sometimes it happened that a person who was initiated by Swamiji swerved from the path and behaved in a manner which brought disgrace to the Order. At other times, a Sannyasi threw away his Gerua cloth and went back to the world and married. People criticised Sivananda for initiating too many youthful Sannyasins. One person asked the Master: “Are you sure that these young initiates have really understood the duties of this Ashrama and that they will adhere to the principles?” He went on to cite examples of young Sannyasins going astray. Sivananda laughed gently. “Why! I myself can give you many examples of this type”. Then Swamiji added seriously: “Yet, they are worthy of your veneration. For, at least one day they were Sannyasins. They had the courage to throw up their hands and say, ‘I renounce the pleasures of the three worlds.’ They had the boldness and daring to stand up against the greatest forces of Nature, the forces that maintain this Samsara—those of self-preservation and procreation. They stand there as the masters of Nature... Because one man had failed to live up to Sannyasa you should not think that the Order itself is unsuitable for the youth. As a matter of fact you will find that most of the noteworthy Sannyasins renounced the world while they were youthful. What can an old man achieve? It is mock-Sannyasa if he embraces the holy order.”

To casual visitors, Sivananda often gave spiritual instruction in tablet form. Such advice was rarely forgotten. For instance, if the visitor was an engineer, Swamiji advised him to build the Bridge of Immortality; if an auditor, to audit his own Antahkarana and have a stock-taking of the Vrittis and Vasanas; if a doctor, to do the “Ego-dechtomy” operation on his ego. Sivananda asked the businessman to do business with God, the military officer to fight the “inner battle”. He asked

the mothers to give their children God Liver Oil; and if he saw a puzzled look on their face, hastened to explain, “Sri Ram, Sri Ram.... Sri Ram is God Liver Oil”. Swamiji did not treat all people alike; he did not give the same pill to all patients.

THE PERSONALITY OF SIVANANDA

Swami Sivananda was about six feet tall, with a shining copper red complexion. He had broad shoulders and long arms. His head and face were clean shaven. His countenance was child-like. No guile, no gall in it. His eyes sparkled.

In the simplicity of a monk, Sivananda seemed like a monarch. He was a picture of serenity and youth. Swamiji had a vibrant, powerful voice. Often at a meeting, he would gently push aside the microphone, saying, “I don’t need it”. His stentorian voice could reach an audience of thousands without the need for amplification.

His walking made no sound. There was poise in his every move. When he spoke, the flow of language was steady and natural, and tongue-slips were conspicuous by their absence. His appearance was quite simple... no colourful marks on the forehead, no matted locks or flowing beard, no rosaries round his neck, no beads, bangles or earrings... just enough clothing to protect his person from the weather and to ensure decency in society.

So it happened that one day in 1956, an elderly lady walked into the Ashram office to have Darshan of “Swamiji”. Sivananda greeted her with an Om and folded palms, showed her a seat, and made kind enquiries about her health and her Yatra (pilgrimage). When he resumed his work, the lady quietly walked out. Near the dispensary she asked an Ashramite, “Where is Swamiji? When can I see him?” “Swamiji is in the office. Aren’t you coming from there?” said the Ashramite, visibly amused. “That man with a coat and spectacles, sitting there? Is he Swamiji? I thought he was only the Ashram manager!” With tears in her eyes, the old lady went back and prostrated at the Master’s feet.

Master never assumed manners or put on airs. He spoke to everyone, referred to everyone in terms of respect. Swamiji always tried to greet a person in the latter’s mother tongue. He was always eager to please people and put them at ease. Thus, besides Tamil, English, Hindi and Malay, which he knew well, he learnt words of greeting, proverbs, poems and songs in many languages, all of which he used to advantage in his contacts with people.

It was a habit with the Master to carry three bags wherever he went. One would contain spiritual literature, another fruits and sweets, and the third medicines and utility articles like candles, matchbox, scissors, thread and needles.

Another form of service which Swamiji strongly recommended was prayer. Prayer was not so much praying for yourself (not even for your salvation) but it was recommended as a form of service, of charity. So to pray—not only for the peace of all in a general sense, but in a specific sense—was part of his life.

Swamiji always insisted on his disciples praying for all. At Satsanga and other times he would often ask all to pray for someone who was sick, or for the peace of the departed soul of someone who had died, or for someone whose birthday it was. Then he himself would conduct the congregational chanting of the Lord's Names and conclude with a two-minute silent meditation and prayer. This prayer has literally wrought miracles.

Swamiji had great faith in healing through prayer and through utterance of the Lord's Name. He called it Namapathy.

In the early days another service was performed by the Ashram. Swamiji had great faith in the Maha Mrityunjaya Mantra:

*Om tryambakam yajamahe
sugandhim pustivardhanam
Urvarukamiva bandhanan
mrityor mukshiya mamritat.*

“We worship the Three-Eyed One, fragrant (with energy), increasing strength and prosperity (of those who adore Him); may I (we) be freed from death for (the sake of) immortality, as a cucumber is freed from its hold (of bondage to the creeper).”

This wards off all kinds of accidents, bestows health and long life and ultimately confers immortality. This prayer was not confined to human beings. An injured dog or monkey would invariably invoke from him the Maha-Mrityunjaya Mantra. Even a dead lizard on Swamiji's path would earn this Mantra for the peace of the soul. To Swamiji all beings were equal and prayer universal.

Sivananda's compassion was not confined to beings on the earth plane. On January 13, 1949, he confronted the Ashramites with a suggestion: “From now, the first of every month will be observed here as the All Souls' Day. We should offer special prayers for the peace of all departed souls.” Swamiji said: “When you pray for the health, happiness and peace of others, you become a channel for the flow of divine grace. The water that is collected in a pond may become dirty sometime or the other, but the water that flows along a pipeline never does, because it is flowing all the time. So, if one continues to be the channel for the flow of divine grace, one's heart is always pure and filled with divine grace”.

This is the beautiful and soul-elevating Universal Prayer which he composed:

O Adorable Lord of Mercy and Love!
Salutations and prostrations unto Thee.
Thou art Omnipresent, Omnipotent and Omniscient.
Thou art Satchidananda (Existence-Consciousness-Bliss Absolute).
Thou art the Indweller of all beings.

Grant us an understanding heart,
Equal vision, balanced mind,

Faith, devotion and wisdom.
Grant us inner spiritual strength
To resist temptations and to control the mind.
Free us from egoism, lust, greed, hatred, anger and jealousy.
Fill our hearts with divine virtues.

Let us behold Thee in all these names and forms.
Let us serve Thee in all these names and forms.
Let us ever remember Thee.
Let us ever sing Thy glories.
Let Thy Name be ever on our lips.
Let us abide in Thee for ever and ever.

Sivananda was a man of unrestrained and spontaneous generosity. Just as he gave himself to others, he gave a myriad of things too; money, food, clothes, books, flowers—whatever offerings the devotees brought him—found their way to others. Swamiji acted as a centre for collection and redistribution. He knew who needed what and always made sure that the right gift reached the right person.

Once it was decided that instead of Swami Sivananda, he should have been called Swami Givananda (Give-Ananda)—he who rejoices in giving. He knew that the supply came from the Source, and to the Source it returned. Material considerations of accounting did not bother him at all. He proved in his own life that in such generosity there was no bankruptcy. He used to say very often, “Giving has never made a person poor.”

The Master often bought fruits, peanuts and ice-cream from roadside vendors. The pilgrim who lost his purse, the convict just released from jail, the penniless Sadhu needing a blanket, the poor student wanting money for his school fees—all of them found a ready helper in Swamiji. And the Master gave without embarrassing the recipient. What mattered more than the money was the heart. Sivananda had a large heart.

The Master believed in a life of hardship and endurance. When on tour, as soon as he stepped down from the train, Swamiji immediately, without waiting for a coolie and without giving a chance to his devotees, would carry his bedding or trunk on his own head and come out of the station. “Rely on your own self,” he would say. “Be humble. Do not be puffed up with pride of Gurudom”. Often he told students his formula for Realisation which he called, “SB40” (standing for “shoe beating 40”). “When people glorify me, especially on birthdays, I return to my Kutir and I beat myself with a shoe. As I do it I say to myself, ‘What are you? You wretched flesh-blood-excreta made body? Do you want garlands? Can you not wear torn clothes? Do you think that you are great? Do you want to be prostrated to? Here, take these garlands’.”

Experience was Sivananda’s greatest Guru. From every experience that he passed through and saw others pass through, Swamiji drew the lesson.

Renunciation was the key to the Master's personality. To Swamiji, renunciation meant renunciation of the ego, of "I" and "mine". It meant giving up of attachment. True renunciation belonged to the mind.

His view of renunciation, no torturing of the body was involved. On the contrary, Swamiji took pains to keep his body always healthy so that it could be put to efficient use in the service of God's children. In the early years of his mission, Sivananda used to go for a long evening walk. In the winter months, he used to play Badminton in the Ashram itself. When work increased, he could not find sufficient time for these. So he got a tennis ball and racket and played against the wall for a few minutes whenever he felt the need for relaxation. After those few minutes, Swamiji would be ready again for another spell of work. As he grew old, the Master did some simple exercises in the bed itself. He never missed his Asanas and Pranayama. These things kept his body fit for work.

Talking to a visitor in the Ashram one day, Swamiji showed him his many notebooks, pens, watches. "People think that a Sannyasin should not have this or use that," he said, "But I have no such notion. Service is the thing. Work, work and work for the welfare of humanity. Keep the instruments—body and the mind—in a fit and healthy condition for the work. I am a different Sannyasin. I like to serve. People imagine that a Sannyasin should always be grave and should always sit like this (here, Swamiji actually closed his eyes and sat erect) and thus give the impression to them that he is a Jivanmukta (liberated soul). But I am of a different type. Work should be your meditation. That is my method". With regard to work too, Sivananda was guided by certain principles. D.I.N. was the first, DO IT NOW. When Sivananda wished to do a thing, he would do it straightaway.

Swamiji was the greatest and perhaps the only recent exemplar of Vibhuti Yoga (the Yoga dealing with the glories and the manifestations of the Lord) as described in the 10th chapter of the Bhagavad Gita. Those who heard his inspiring lectures, could not fail to notice how he laid the greatest emphasis on this practice. He exalted it, putting it on a par with Raja, Bhakti, Karma and Jnana Yogas. It is a dynamic Jnana-Bhakti Yoga. To the list of Vibhutis (glories or manifestations) given by Lord Krishna in the Gita, Swamiji added quite a few of his own. He sang the Song of Vibhuti Yoga.

Soham Soham Soham Soham
 Om Om Om Om Om Om Om Om Om Om
 I am neither mind nor body, immortal Self I am
 I am witness of three states,
 I am knowledge absolute
 I am fragrance in jasmine, beauty in flowers
 I am coolness in the ice, flavour in the coffee
 I am greenness in the leaf, hue in the rainbow
 I am taste bud in the tongue, essence in the orange
 I am mind of all minds, Prana of all Pranas
 I am Soul of all souls, Self of all selves
 I am Atman in all beings, apple of all eyes
 I am Sun of all suns, Light of all lights.
 I am that I am, I am that I am,

I am that I am, I am that I am.

An American philosopher, Dr. Thompson, asked Sivananda a straight question: “Have you seen God, Swamiji?” “I see nothing but God”: replied the Master, “in the food I take, in the water I drink, in the people I greet, in the animals I meet—and in you, Dr. Thompson, I see nothing but God”.

By his constant eagerness to serve all and to relieve the suffering of all, Swamiji won the hearts of all. He became spiritually one with the whole of Mankind, constantly radiating supreme joy, peace, life and light. In his very presence, therefore, people enjoyed healing vibrations and peace-giving light emanations. His very look elevated, transformed and sublimated everything it alighted on.

Godliness waited around him; the darkness of atheism, worldliness and undivine elements vanished from the heart which the light of his grace penetrated. Meditation had imparted lustre to his countenance, power to his eyes and an irresistible magnetism to his entire personality. His aura was such that people who approached him with a hundred complaints were silenced and enmity fled his very presence. He demonstrated wonderful miracles through his soul-elevating divine songs in a day when fashion reigned supreme and educated people were shy to repeat God’s Name.

Listening to Swamiji was the remedy that many people needed. They began to sing the Divine Name. Swamiji was such an embodiment of supreme devotion to the lotus-feet of the Lord that anyone who came into contact with him received the waves of devotion in spite of himself.

To recruit everyone with the least inclination and lesser qualification into his fold and to transform everyone into a saintly personality without the rigours of austerity or regimented life of Sadhana, is a miracle of the highest order. To sit in his simple Kutir on the banks of the Ganga in a corner of the Himalayas and to spread the light of divine knowledge to the four corners of the world is the greatest miracle.

UNIVERSALITY OF TEACHINGS

Swamiji recognised that through the English language he could reach the maximum number of people throughout the world. He thought, talked, wrote and sang in English. (Not only Westerners benefited from this, but also the modern Indian youth who had lost touch with their culture and religion in their desire to emulate Western civilisation. On reading Swamiji’s books they were reawakened to their spiritual heritage.) The rational questioning minds of both Westerners and Western-oriented Indians were won over by Swamiji, who adjusted his approach to the exact level of every person he met.

Christ was as much honoured at the Sivananda Ashram as Krishna. At Christmas, Europeans were requested by Sivananda to stage the event of Christ’s birth. Another method adopted by Swamiji was the holding of “Sadhana Weeks”. During the Easter and Christmas holidays he gathered at the Ashram earnest seekers after God, who came from all parts of the country to undergo intensive training in the various spiritual practices. An elaborate programme of Sadhana including Japa, meditation, Likhita Japa (Mantra-writing), Yoga Asanas, observance of

Mauna and selfless service—was drawn up. Lectures by Swamiji himself and senior aspirants were arranged to give a good-theoretical background to sustain the spirit created by the week-long training. Participants returned from Rishikesh infinitely richer for coming.

THE LAST DAYS

“All who want Sannyasa should take initiation on the next Sivaratri day.” This pronouncement was made by Swamiji at an evening Satsanga early in 1963. In view of his increasingly frequent references to his Mahasamadhi, many saw this invitation as a sign of his imminent passing—particularly when he added, “Who knows what may happen next Sivaratri?”

Swamiji, who had always kept spending and giving, teaching his disciples and residents of the Ashram to trust in God and to give and give and give, suddenly began to manifest a different attitude. He started an economy drive—a thing unheard of for him—slashing Ashram expenditures and talking of taking more care.

Early in May Swamiji began a rigorous session of tape-recordings. Each morning he would read from his books and printed sheets, forcefully and inspiringly—his voice ringing with authority and sincerity—while a disciple recorded. He did this for hours, unmindful of the strain. Every few days he would ask “How much matter have I given?” or, “How long will it run?” Once during these sessions he said: “The sight is getting dim; take whatever you want now. The hearing is getting dull; tell whatever you want to tell, now itself. The tongue is getting inarticulate; ask whatever you want to ask”.

“Happiness comes when the individual merges in God”, this was the last sentence dictated. The peerless teacher had summed up his teachings in that one sentence. And he was soon to practice what he preached. He was to merge in God, totally, within weeks of the above utterance.

On July 12, a devotee named Devaki Kutty gave a paper and pen to Swamiji. The master wrote: “Remember. Forget”. The pad was raised to enable him to write more, but he gestured so as to say, “That is sufficient”. Handing it back to the lady he said, “Remember you are Devi... and not Devaki Kutty.” First a piece of written Upadesh, and then a verbal explanation of that Upadesh to ensure correct understanding. It was the Master’s way of love heaped upon love!

On the evening of July 14th he developed a fever. For some time he had difficulty in swallowing even a few mouthfuls of water. His disciples wanted to give him barley water, as was the usual practice, but he insisted on Ganga water. It was brought to him and he had no difficulty in swallowing half a glassful: and with that he departed from the body. It was 11:15 p.m.

The time that Sivananda chose to merge with the Supreme proved to be a holy Muhurta of extreme auspiciousness. It presented an exalted planetary position on the last limit of Uttarayana and just before the commencement of the “Southern Path”. An expert horologist, who was also a capable astrologer, had mentioned only upon the morning of that fateful Sunday that around midnight there was going to be such an unparalleled and auspicious planetary conjunction that any Yogi who was getting ready to depart would never wish to miss it. The prediction proved correct and Sivananda chose that moment.

THE LAST DAYS

Swamiji's body was placed in the lotus posture. Dazed and tearful disciples and devotees softly chanted the Maha Mantra on the verandah of his Kutir, while one by one the Ashramites went in, to bow before the beloved form in silence.

The next morning, through the newspapers and radio, the world learnt of the Mahasamadhi of this great saint. Messages of sympathy and condolence from all over the world kept the post office working at full pressure. The residents of Rishikesh streamed into the Ashram. All the following day and far into the night devotees came from everywhere for the last Darshan.

Sivananda lives still. He lives in his books, he lives in his disciples, he lives in the very atmosphere of his own Ashram in Rishikesh.

Sivananda was a prince among men, a jewel among saints. Service and love were the weapons with which he conquered human hearts. His humility and his love endeared him to all.

Did Sivananda create a new religion? No. Did he build a new Church? No. Did he evolve a new code of conduct and morals, behaviour? No. Did he prescribe new rules and rituals? No.

Sivananda helped the Hindu to be a better Hindu, the Christian to be a better Christian, the Parsi to be a better Parsi, the Muslim to be a better Muslim. Hindus, Christians, Muslims, Parsis—all loved him. All claimed him as their own.

Swami Sivananda did not go on global tours, but students, devotees and admirers flocked to him from everywhere. He did not deliver long sermons, but thousands of doubters were transformed by a mere word or phrase that fell from his lips or was seen in his books.

There was a power in Sivananda—in his thoughts, in his words, in his deeds. It was the power of Truth. It was the power of Purity. It was the power of Service and Love. It was the power of God, the power which lies hidden in everyone, but which Sivananda manifested in its full majesty.

Sivananda's life was a moving panorama of success through struggle, of noble attainment through selfless effort. The sage's life is a pointer and an assurance. It points the way to supreme blessedness and assures success to those who would care to follow his lead. It has a message to offer strife-ridden humanity—a message of service and love, of hope and courage and burning optimism. A message for today.



1st June 1947.

Blessed aspirants,

Be true. Be sincere. Be earnest. Be vigilant. Be hungry. Be thirsty. Equip yourself with four.

I shall give you the bread of eternal life. I shall give you the nectar of immortality. I shall clothe you with the garment of everlasting Peace. I shall give you rest. I shall comfort you. I shall cheer you up. I shall take care of your body and soul.

Doubt not. Delay not. Tarry not. Leave your bag and be. Ye come to me. Be quick.

Sivananda



18th January 1946.

To raise the fallen, to lead the blind, to share what I have with others, to bring solace to the afflicted, to cheer up the suffering are my ideals.

To have perfect faith in God, to love my neighbour as my own Self, to love God with all my heart and soul, to protect cows, animals, women, and children are my aims.

My watchword is Love. My goal is Sahaja Samadhi Avastha or the natural, continuous, Superconscious State.

Sivananda