March 1933

I am afraid I can't give you practical directions for living an interior life in the midst of work. Personally I don't succeed in doing it myself—better to be frank! However, the fact that we find it difficult to be recollected in the midst of a crowd does not mean that we should withdraw to the desert. Life in the desert, like life in a crowd, is one of the Church's assignments. In himself the Lord is everywhere. There is no being, no situation, which should not be a wonderful manifestation of His Being. We don't succeed in being recollected while at work, because we have made for ourselves the IDEA of God, and imagine that we can only find God by means of this idea that we have formed of Him. Thus we suppose that we have to think of Him in a particular way. And if we have to correct proofs, or prepare some soup, or drive a taxi on the Underground, it is impossible to keep in mind this IDEA of God. As if God was not just as much in the making of a good soup for your sister or in the careful handling of a railway train as he is in our most beautiful speculations! This is precisely the lesson of the modern world—materialist, communist, etc.—that God is giving us through this world. We have identified God, the Church, Christ, with the ideas that certain past generations have constructed of them. So 'God' is no longer the 'Transcendent One.' But when God has truly been realized as the Transcendent, then his transcendence is simply overwhelming, for there is nothing that does not cry aloud his presence.

And if we, whose essential calling is to contemplation, do not know this, and do not tell it to others, then what are we? The contemplative is not one who has concealed himself in the idea that he has constructed of God and takes pleasure in it. The true contemplative is he who has allowed the Spirit to carry him off and to deprive him of every support, even of that which he called his 'contemplation.'
ABHISHIKTANANDA WEEK

December 2-3/3, 1963 described by Dr. Stefa Bramer

Organized by Vanvid (a Jain) of Jeewanathara Ashram, the “Abhishikitanaadu Shrooth (Week)” took place in Jai Harikhal (Himalayas) from December 2nd to 7th (8th for some). Apart from about eight Americans (including Stenae) and a few local friends, five of us came from outside, among whom were the Rev. Murgan, Balam from Idena, Kinsman, and J. M. Orela, a nun from Switzerland. Since it was not an academic seminar, but a week of spiritual combining with spiritual reflection and devotion centered on Abhishiktananda, it is difficult to give an objective account of it. I may therefore be forgiven for the unquotable, subjective, evaluating state of this report. As we realized in the case of our understanding and experience of Swamiji himself, each one has his or her own way of seeing, which naturally goes with the personal nature of spirituality. Could share here a critical and understanding state of Swamiji

On the 3rd morning (since 9am, the opening session on the 2nd), Vandana, Malani, explained it to the purpose of organizing this week. Inviting us to share with each other’s ideas, and to flow freely, she should carry on his messages to ourselves and for others. It should be a kind of stocktaking, both individually and collectively. In the afternoons, we started by sharing our memories of Swami, the man (as a necessary background for his message). Not many of the group had known Swami for a long period, and most were (as I'm sure said), ‘second generation’ for whom we of the first generation were the ‘witnesses.’ Odette, Bramer’s account of Swami’s work at the Nursing Home in Indore, not long before his death, was very revealing. Though at that point, he had himself become totally free with regard to traditional habits and forms, he was a respectful and delicate towards the Sisters of the Nursing Home, and also disregarded his own well-being for the sake of being ‘dispassionate’ (readily available to others).

Morgan’s account of his first meeting with Swami in 1959, and of several aspects of his nature, was very moving. The anecdotes he recalled brought Swami back to us in flesh and blood, not just as an isolated cosmic monk, but a wonderful human being full of contradictions, but above all full of love. He also hinted at the way in which Swami’s compassion of love towards all grew through his contact with Buddhists. Last but not least, he depicted his way of celebrating the Liturgy, how he gave himself completely, engaging everything in this act, which remained for him central even to the end of his life, though the external forms changed and became more flexible and silent. The Liturgy celebrated by Morgan the next morning with the text usually prepared by Swami himself (the Jnanadhan Liturgy) was a vivid expression of the fullness of his gift—so dear to Swami in life in fact: each of the Liturgies during the week reflected this fullness in its own way.

Sisters Sara and Vandana each gave an account of how (they) knew Swami and, what he meant for them, especially in connection with the G.P.S. Ashram at Dunlop. I myself tried to tell my story with Swami, starting with the first stay at Shantinarnam in 1963, and later his frequent visits to Varanasi, which were always occasions of great joy and inspiration and sometimes even tears. In particular, the only invitation from a Hindu friend was given by Swami Mani’s Bhanu, which was shocking and revealing. Though he hardly talked to Swami on account of his shyness and Swami was difficult, he found his observation very true.

He had often seen Swami and Mani during their stay at Allahabad, and noticed that their faces showed the intensity of their search and their sincerity. He felt from their presence that they were actually living the Upanishads, and not merely studying them, but that more and more moved toward them.

On the 4th morning, Vandana talked about Swami and the Upanishads. The starting point was the difference between the Upanishads, which contain an extraordinary experience, and the Upanishads, of which he was convinced of the truth of the Upanishads.
I tried to show the upanishadic background of this mystical outburst. The main focus was on the three upanishadic mantras which were dear to Swamiji, for he realized their truth in himself:

The Upanishads

Now that peaceful (Pison), when he arises out of the body,... 

He is the amman, immortal and fearless, this is Brahman. 

The name of that Brahman is Truth. (Chandogya VIII, 3, 4)

I know him, that great Purusha, of the colour of the sun, beyond darkness. 

Whoever knows him passes beyond death. 

There is no other way to the goal. (Svetasvatara III, 1)

The wise man should surrender his words to his mind, and this he should surrender to the knowing Self, and that he should surrender to the Great Self, and that he should surrender to the Peaceful Self. (Katha III, 13)

He discovered the inner correspondence (upamana) between the Ascension of Jesus and the mystical ascention of the Purusha of the Chandogya (as also the yogic ascension of the adварда), which are related to the transceding of death, and faith.

It was felt by some participants that the journal (especially the more “experiential” parts) needed a kind of editors, and of this type in order to be understood. This may be a task for the future—after the difficult task of transcribing the text into English and German. 

The afternoon satsang started with the question of the practical aspect of Swamiji's teaching of the Upanishads. Actually Swamiji did not give any techniques or methods of meditation, apart from the attention to breathing, which is common to Zen. His was a total approach—that he spoke was a meditation, and the meditation he inspired. (Rather than directed) led to a transformation of life itself, which could be felt in small instances in daily life. The question was: does it mean that one must do nothing? One of the questions which came up again and again was: Swamiji's going beyond name and form, and its implications for us. We are in danger of mixing him again in some name and form, in some institution, and forgetting him and his ideas for our personal glorification, instead of being aspirated and transformed by his example. The very fact that Swamiji spent eighteen years in his monastery before coming to India, and that he always maintained his life of hardship and asceticism must not be forgotten. His mystical flights and illumination were only possible because of the background of his renunciation and could not be had, at a cheaper price.

On the 8th morning Odette Buhrer read her paper on the One Father as a way of initiation, illustrated with a collection of Swamiji's words from different sources (it is already published in French and German). It was a beautiful meditation on the spiritual ascent of the soul, culminating in the fullness of the Word, and the silence of the listeners, was total.

In the afternoon satsang Prof. Neer, R. Shastri, who teaches Sanskrit at the local college and is a faithful friend of Swamiji, gave a talk in Hindustani and advar darshani or self-realization, in the upanishadic tradition: With his good sense of humor he made us laugh. In spite of the seriousness of the subject, his presence, during most of the session was...
Another important question for people who want to follow in Swamiji's footsteps is whether the traditional sanātana is really the only way or the only way to excellence. This impression is given by Swamiji's last writing in Sanātana (in The Further Shore). It was felt that Swamiji's 'life of wisdom' in which he remained faithful to the end, has recently been demystified by the spiritual movement, making use of the idea of sanātana, but distorting it. Therefore, the external signs of sanātana are more easily misunderstood, and internal realities seem to be more important. A life of simplicity and earnestness, in whatever situation, may be swamiji personally recommended such a way of life to many.

Another important and realistic point was made by Sr. Sasa: that we should not try to imitate Swamiji which is anyhow not possible (and he himself warned against it when he said to Murray: "One clown is enough"). We should rather be ready to accept the truth of our own being for we cannot go beyond the grace that is given to each one of us. This comes close to the idea of realizing one's own path, a constant being.

In meeting also, that we should not aim too high—compare the view of the Himalayan peaks, it is embellished when we see the snowy peaks from a distance, and forget how many valleys lie between us and these peaks. It is only by walking through the stony paths, sometimes losing sight of the peaks, that we actually reach them.

Also, our spiritual life is an individual task not a private luxury as Swamiji demonstrated with his life and work.

The discussion on these and other points was long and lively and brought us down to the practical implications of Swamiji's ideas, whether in communities or individually.

The rest of the day was spent mostly in silence, with a December 17th new year's celebration of Swamiji's mahāsammāna. It was decided to celebrate it by meditation and Liturgy sitting on the roof of the mandir, facing the rising sun. We all came with our blankets, but it was still very cold. That day there were clouds above the peaks, but what a wonderful reflection of the rising sun on the clouds—white, grey, blue and yellow—and, finally, when the sun had rose, white light just like the stages of inner illumination. We greeted the sun with the Gayatri mantra and then started the Liturgy.

A reading from The Mountain of the Lord on the celebration of the Eucharist at Gargoti came first, followed by the Katha Upavishtha and the Gospel of the Resurrection—Jesus's encounter with Mary Magdalene in the garden. The main point in Murray's homily was this: "Don't cling to me." We also should not cling to Swamiji's limited personality, but let him go on—"to the Father." The silence during the celebration and the presence of the mountains made it all the more impressive. Was not this the Himalayan Swamiji's truest labdha?

After a last session—the sincere sharing of our experience during the week and a half envisaged its influence on our lives—some of us had to leave. The 'fruits' of this encounter are not yet known. But one thing is certain—we were greatly reminded, not only of Swamiji himself and of the challenge that his life and thought presents to us, but also of the need and responsibility to carry it further, not to stop the 'flood.'

NEWs

Publications

Under the title Le Journal du Monastère Le Saux, Swamiji's Diary will be published in May by O.R.L. 12 rue du Dragon, 75006 Paris. The price is not yet known. It has been edited with Preface and introductions by each year by Professor R. Panikkar.

A reprint of the French edition of his book Prayer, called Beyt a soli—Beyt a Dieu, has been brought out by the same publishers. Again, we do not know the price.

An Italian version of Les yeux de feu, called La contemplazione cristiana in India, was published by EMI, Bologna, in 1985.

Articles relating to Abhishiktananda

On the 10th anniversary of Swamiji's mahāsammāna, the Centro Interreligioso Henri Le Saux (Piazza S. Simpliciano 7, 20121 Milano, Italy) held a conference on the meaning of 'Holiness' in different Fasts, organized by Miss C. Gando. She has published the papers in Quaderni 5 (1985).—Santita a
confront... The contributions by Abh. C. Tholen are drawn on the writings of Abhishiktananda.


For most publications, a complete list is available free for mailing and posting.

A German translation of The Secret of Amnacal is being made by Patz Matthias, Verlag der Salzburg, who twenty-five years ago translated Swamiji's first book, Eternity. Arrangements are being made for its publication.

An Italian version of Swamigurum and a Swedish version of Prayer are to be published soon.

Vandana Mataji is preparing the papers read at the Abhishiktananda Week in Jaiiheartal (Dec. 1985) for publication under the title Swami Abhishiktananda: the Man and his Message, by some of his friends and disciples.

Donations

Since the last Bulletin (Dec. 1984) the Society has gratefully received donations from the following: Shri Dharini Paul, Mme C. de Grieff, Fr M. Basil Pemington, Mrs Sue Denney, Mrs S. Harton, Mr Anthony E. Gilles, Fr Armand Veillette, Sr Vandana, the late Miss Rose Mowsey, Mme J. de Wull, Mme Antifio, Rev. W. J. Walker, Shri S.K. De, Rev. G. Gillespie, Fr. John W. Groff, Fr. Pramander Diwakar, Mr Maurice Salem, Mmes M. Mehnert, Mr Stuart D. Kustermann.

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