

ABHISHIKTANANDA SOCIETY

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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 middle 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 an 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 train 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 sisters 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. — the lesson 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 universal Immanence 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 use are we? The contemplative is not one who has enclosed 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'.
[Extract from a letter to a Carmelite, 14.1.62]

Organized by Vandana Mataji of Jeevandhara Ashram,

the "Abhishiktananda Saptah (Week)" took place in Jaiharikhal

(Himalayas) from December 2nd to 7th (8th for some). Apart from about eight Ashramites (including guests), and a few local friends, five of us came from outside, among whom were the Rev. Murray Rogers from Hong Kong, and Mrs. Odette Baumer from Switzerland. Since it was not an academic seminar, but a week of *reshikha*, combined with *pratiksha*, sharing and discussion centered on Abhishiktananda, it is difficult to give an objective account of it. I may therefore be forgiven for the unavoidably subjective, coloring, 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 there be any 'objective' image of Swamiji? बाबा के अस्तित्व में As Murray Rogers, Swami, Magni, Ram Acharya, 96, Bhakti Chatti, and myself were on our way to Jaiharikhal, experiencing the *tapas* of U.P. Roadways buses, we were asking ourselves what would be the purpose of this gathering. Was it to glorify Swamiji, to make him, in a *mantra* to be worshipped or, was it to bear a critical appreciation of his merits, in our presence situation? Was it to be a week of *reshikha*, taking Swamiji as our Guru? गुरु के प्रति श्रद्धा के साथ

On the 3rd morning (since we missed the opening session on the 2nd), Vandana Mataji, explained to us the purpose of organizing this Week, inviting us to share in what we have received, and to see how we should carry on this message, for ourselves and for others. It should be a kind of, stocktaking, both individually and collectively. In the afternoon, session we started by sharing our memories of Swamiji, the man—as a necessary background for his message. Not many of the group had known Swamiji for a long period, and most were (as Fri Sepp said) 'second generation'; for whom we of the first generation were the 'witnesses'. Odette Baumer's account of Swamiji 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 'names' and forms; he was so respectful and delicate towards the Sisters of the Nursing Home, and also disregarded his own well-being for the sake of being 'disponible' (readily available) to others.

Murray's account of his first meeting with Swamiji in 1959, and of several aspects of his nature, was very moving. The anecdotes he recalled brought Swamiji back to us in flesh and blood—of an isolated, ascetic monk, but a wonderful human being, full of contradictions, but above all full of love. He, also hinted at the way in which Swamiji's spiritual consciousness grew through his contact with Jyotiketan. At first, but not least, he depicted his way of celebrating the Liturgy when he gave himself completely, assuming 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 Murray the next morning with the (text almost) prepared by Swamiji himself (the 'Jyotiketan Liturgy') was a vivid expression of the fullness—*parahit*—so dear to Swamiji. In fact, each of the Liturgies during the Week reflected that fullness in its own way. बाबा के अस्तित्व में

Sisters Sara and Vandana each gave an account of how they met Swamiji and what he meant for them; especially in connection with the G.P.S. Ashram at Pune. बाबा के अस्तित्व में I myself tried to tell my story with Swamiji, starting with the first stay at Sphatyanam in 1963, and later his frequent visits to Varanasi, which were always occasions of great joy and inspiration to me. बाबा के अस्तित्व में

The only witness from a Hindu friend was given by Swami Magni, Ram, which was all the more revealing. Though he hardly even talked to Swamiji on account of his inborn shyness and maybe Swamiji's difficult Hindi, his observation was very true. He had often seen Swamiji and Marc during their stays at Panchajanya, and noticed that their faces showed the intensity of their search and their sincerity. He felt from their presence that they were actually diving into the Upanishads, and not merely studying them; that they had an inner buoyancy, a firmness. On the 4th morning, I gave a talk on Swamiji and the Upanishads. The starting point was an entry in his *Journal* of May, 1972, which contains an extraordinary experience in the context 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 three upanishadic mantras which were dear to Swamiji, for he realized their truth in himself:

Now that peaceful (Person), when he arises out of the body, attains the supreme light and is manifest in his own form. He is the *atman*, immortal and fearless, this is Brahman. The name of that Brahman is Truth. (Chândogya VIII, 34)

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. (Svetâsvatara III 8)

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

He discovered the inner correspondence (*upamâna*) (between the Ascension of Jesus and the mystical ascension of the Purusha of the Chândogya (as also, the yogic ascension to the *sahasrâra*), which are related to the transcending of death.

It was felt, by some participants, that the *Journal* (especially the more 'experiential' parts) would need a kind of exegesis of this type in order to be understood. This may be a task for the future, after the difficult task of translating 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—what he spoke was itself 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.

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 fixing him again in some name and form, in some institution, and of using him and his ideas for our personal glorification, instead of being shaken and transformed by his example. The very fact that Swamiji spent eighteen

years in his monastery before coming to India, and that here he lived a renounced life of hardship and *tapasya* must not be forgotten. His mystical flights and illumination were only possible and real on the background of his renunciation and could not be had at a cheaper price.

On the 5th morning Odette Bamer read her paper on the Our 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 ascension of the soul, culminating in the fullness of the 'Void'—and the silence of the listeners was total.

In the afternoon satsang Prof. N.K. Negi, Shastriji, who teaches Sanskrit at the local College and is a faithful friend of the Ashram, gave a talk in Hindi on *âimadasham*, or self-realization in the upanishadic tradition. With his good sense of humour he made us laugh, in spite of the seriousness of the subject. His presence during most of the sessions was indeed precious. It was that of Swami Magni Ram. Among other things he said that any true Gurmats, not limited to a particular time or place, he is universal. This could well be applied to Swamiji as Murray stressed: we should not even limit Swamiji to India, where he had taken such deep roots.

On the 6th morning Sr. Sara, Acharya of the C.P.S. Ashram Pune, posed some of the burning questions which Swamiji puts to us today, so that we should come down to the practical application of his insights, instead of being lost in the vision of the 'peaks'. Here are some of the questions which still require further reflection:

1) Swamiji's own question: Is there any place in Catholic Christianity (or in any institution) for people who have gone beyond name and form? The danger of becoming once again immersed in name and form is great. But does the 'explosion', to which Swamiji was led and wants to lead us, allow fidelity to an institution? On the other hand, are institutions really ready to allow the freedom of the Spirit?

2) Then Sr. Sara showed some of the metaphysical implications of *advaita* and the relation of Shankara's *advaita* to Christian doctrine. There is really no contradiction, but in practice those who have lived the *advaitic* dimension of Christian faith have been regarded with suspicion (e.g. Meister Eckhart).

3) Another important question for people who want to follow in Swamiji's footsteps is whether traditional *sannyāsa* is really the only way or the way par excellence? This impression is given by Swamiji's last writing on Sannyāsa (in *The Further Shore*). It was felt that Swamiji's myth of sannyāsa, to which he remained faithful to the end, has recently been demythologized by fake spiritual movements, making use of the ideal of sannyāsa, but distorting it. Therefore the external signs of sannyāsa are more easily misunderstood, and internal sannyāsa seems to be more important. A life of simplicity and utmost sincerity, in whatever situation we are, Swamiji personally recommended such a way of life to many. *For further details see*

4) Another important and realistic point raised, made by Sr. Sara, that we should not try to imitate Swamiji, whatever is any how not possible (and he himself warned against it when he said to Murray: "One clown is, although you should rather be ready to accept the truth of our own being for we cannot go beyond the gates that is given to each one of us. This comes close to the ideal of realizing one's *svatīpā*, of essential being. It means also that we should not aim too high—compare the smiles of the Himalayan peaks: we are enchanted when we see the snowy peaks from a distance, and forget how many valleys lie between us—and these peaks are us only by walking on the stony paths, sometimes losing sight of the peaks, that we actually reach them. *For further details see*

Also, our spiritual path is a responsibility and not a private luxury, as Swamiji demonstrated with his life. *For further details see*

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

The rest of the day was spent mostly in silence. On December 17th was the 26th anniversary of Swamiji's *nishāsamādhi*. It was decided to celebrate it by meditation and Liturgy, sitting on the roof of Hindārshān, 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—red, orange, gold and yellow—and finally, when the sun managed to appear, white light, just like the stages of inner illumination! We greeted the sun with the Gayātrī mantra and then started the Liturgy.

A reading from *The Mountain of the Lord* on the celebration of the Eucharist at Gangotri came first, followed by the Kathā Uparishad and by 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 Eagle". The silence during the celebration and the presence of the mountains made it all the more impressive. Was not the Himalaya Swamiji's chosen abode? *For further details see*

After a last session—the sincere sharing of our experience during the Week and how we envisage its influence on our lives—some of us had to leave. The 'fruits' of this encounter cannot be known yet. But one thing is certain—we were vividly 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 'flow'. *For further details see*

NEWS

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

A reprint of the French edition of his book *Prayer*, called *Eye of soul—œil d'âme*, has been brought out by the same publishers. Again we do not know the price.

An Italian version of *Les yeux de l'âme*, called *La contemplazione cristiana in India*, was published by EMI, Bologna, in 1985. *For further details see*

Articles relating to Abhishikhananda

On the 10th anniversary of Swamiji's *nishāsamādhi*, the Centro Interreligioso Henri Le Saux (Piazza S. Sempliciano 7, 20121 Milano, Italy) held a conference on the meaning of 'Holiness' in different Faiths, organized by Miss C. Conio. She has published the papers in *Quadranti* n. 5 (1985)—*Santità a*

confrenta. The contribution by Abbot C. Tholens draws on the writings of Abhishikhananda.

"The Spirituality of Swami Abhishikhananda" by G. Giffert Sauch, SJ, in *Ignis Studies*, No. 10 (1985:2), pp. 41-47, is obtainable from Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, Catholic Church, Anand, Kaira District, Gujarat-388 001.

"The Language of Mysticism" by George Gillespie, *Indian Journal of Theology*, Vol. 32, Nos. 3 & 4 (1983), pp. 45-62, obtainable from 224, Acharya J.C. Bose Road, Calcutta-700 017.

Forthcoming publications:

An Italian translation of *The Secret of Anmakhala* has been made by Pater Mathias Venenq of Salzburg, who twenty-five years ago translated Swami's first book, *Emires*. Arrangements are being made for its publication.

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

Vardana Mataji is preparing the papers read at the Abhishikhananda Week in Jaiharikhal (Dec. 1985) for publication under the title *Swami Abhishikhananda: 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 Dharm Paul, Mme C. de Greef, Fr M. Basil Pennington, Mrs Sue Delaney, Mrs S. Harton, Mr Anthony E. Gilles, Fr Armand Veilleux, Sr Vaidhana, the late Miss Rose Massey, Mme J. de Wulf, Mme A. Andrieu, Rev. A.W.J. Walker, Shri S.K. De, Rev. G. Gillespie, Fr Fern W. Groff, Fr Parmanand Diwarkar, Mr Maurice Saleh, Miss M. Mehnert, Mr Stuart D. Kustermann.

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