

ABHISIKTANANDA SOCIETY

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OCCASIONAL BULLETIN No. 7

November 1983

"Everything was so wonderful during those first two weeks [i.e., after the heart-attack of 17 July]. Later came the stripping away of all thought, meditation, contemplation. Now it is simply being there and being awake without any of the poetry of the awakening. I cannot send you any poetry in reply... Often I knew joy with marvellous poetry; now there is joy without any poetry, and that is even more true." (Letter to his sister M.T., 22.10.73)

"... I am totally incapacitated. All I can manage is to write a few words of news or business. But all mental concentration is beyond my strength. After two weeks of bliss at the beginning when I had my attack, these four months of helplessness have been a marvellous lesson. It is so delightful to write in the abstract—about nakedness of the spirit. But then the Lord makes you at your word, removes every fine thought and leaves you lying there, capable of no more than simply being there! And that is what is most real. That is what I needed, charitably as I was! (Letter to a Carmélite at Lisieux, 30.11.73).

THE STUDY WEEK

With deep regret we have to announce that the proposed Study Weeks, which was to have been held at Raipur (Dehra Dun) from 14 to 10 December, 1983, has had to be cancelled. The organizers made great efforts to secure speakers from the great traditions who would either present or respond to papers. However, almost all of those who were approached found it impossible for various reasons to accept the invitation. And so, finally, as time was running out, it became clear that the projected Week must be abandoned.

Abandoned—or at least, postponed; for the Committee still retains the conviction that a further attempt should be made in more propitious circumstances, perhaps in a less ambitious form; for the corporate study of vital aspects of the spiritual life, following up the lines pioneered by Abhishiktananda, is surely a work to which our Society is called.

A number of friends in different parts of the world had expressed interest in the Study Week. As far as possible we informed them by letter as soon as the decision to cancel the Week had been taken. But there may be others who have waited until now for further news, and to them we send our apologies for leaving them in uncertainty.

AFTER TEN YEARS

To mark Swamiji's tenth anniversary, a number of his friends have each contributed a paragraph for the *Bulletin*, in which they sketch their own perception of him, now that ten years have passed since he was taken from us.

(1)

Man needs historical perspective to recognize true values and true greatness. This is especially true of today, when mass-media and propaganda can inflate almost anything into uncommon proportions. We require the sifting power of history for a clear vision.

Ten years is not yet an historical period, but it is something startling to recognize that Abhishiktananda is probably more alive today than when he was in his mortal flesh a decade ago. This fact, for me, defies rational explanation. We have today more exciting ideas, more daring theories, more spectacular lives. And yet Swamiji is beginning to take on an importance out of proportion to all those factors. What emerges is the power of his life, of a life lived authentically and in fidelity to the Spirit against allurements of all sorts.

The Abhishiktananda Society wanted to celebrate this tenth anniversary with a Study Week on Renunciation. We have learnt about renunciation by having to renounce it on account of technical reasons.

Soon the Diary of his personal notes will be published.

In it we witness his struggle both with Hinduism and with Christianity. It was only in fighting for and against them that he arrived at a certain peace, both intellectual and existential. Here we have the story of two apparently incompatible loyalties: the Catholic Church and Advaita Vedanta. His life is the effort to do this "impossible thing". People will discuss in time to come about the validity of his expressions. But there can hardly be any doubt about the validity of his experience.

R. Panikkar

(2)

We first met in 1959 through a common friend, Vivek Dutta. After that we met off and on, whenever he visited Delhi.

From our talks on different occasions and from his writings written at different periods of his life, I got the impression that he was a growing soul. He was growing from a believer into a seeker. This is a difficult journey, and not unexpectedly this caused him much inner conflict, questioning and agony. But in his case it was not exactly the struggle of a disillusioned believer, the struggle of a man "whose God had failed"; but the struggle had to do with the birth-pangs of new Gods waiting to be born in his soul. He found new vistas of spirituality in a religion he was taught to regard as inferior. His received teachings were in conflict with his personal findings. We Hindus find it difficult to appreciate the intensity of feelings this conflict can cause in persons so differently conditioned and taught, but the agony can be real.

While he bore his personal cross, he could find no help in the immediate missionary environment of which he was a part. In fact, he found this environment quite ungenial to his new experience. He could not look upon its preoccupation with proselytizing with sympathy.

Father Abhishiktananda's life would be sufficiently rewarded if it taught his fellow-clergy to see truth in Gods other than their own, and if his example deepened and broadened their faith and sympathy. May God guide his *sadhana* and give him *shanti* and *ananda* in whatever plane of existence he may be!

Ram Swarup

(3)

I saw him standing near my desk as I raised my head. He had walked in unobtrusively. I rose and touched his feet and made him sit in my cushioned chair, which he did, although quite reluctantly. He mentioned the friend who had given him my name and address, but did not introduce himself. Quite like a *sannyasin*, I thought. I was meeting my second white man in ochre robes. The first one—an Austrian—whom I had met a few years earlier, had been full of himself and had left a bad impression on my mind. This one promised to be different. His eyes were soft and his face was full of compassion. He had a copy of Jacob's *Concordance of the Gita and the Principal Upanishads* in his hand. So our talk turned spontaneously to Hindu spirituality. I found out very soon that he had made a deep study of the subject which I knew only superficially. An hour or more passed. As he stood up to leave, I asked him, "Swamiji, what is your *sampradaya* (sect)?" I had assumed that he had taken to Hinduism. He smiled and said: "You see, I am a Catholic monk. My name is Abhishekteshwarananda, that is one who is devoted to the Lord of the Anointed Ones, which is Jesus Christ." I was somewhat surprised. But I reflected on what he had said about Jesus. In our next meeting after a few months (or a year), I blurted out: "Swamiji, we have had thousands of sants and sages in this country. Jesus, as we know him from the gospels, provides only a pale reflection of that spiritual seeking and vision which has been native to India for ages untold. How, then, do you say that Jesus is *abhishekteshvara*?" The reply he gave was the usual one provided by Christian theology. I was far from being satisfied. I had a mind to pursue the enquiry when we next met. But he warned me against wandering away into theology. The silent communion of hearts, he said, was more rewarding. I agreed with him and obeyed him in our subsequent meetings, which were quite a few, between 1961 and 1972, because he made it a point to call upon me whenever he happened to be in Delhi. I cherish those meetings with a man of unmistakable mystic leanings. His book on *Arunachala* has since given me a new measure of the earnestness of his seeking which had drawn him to India and to Hindu spirituality.

Arundhati

Sita Ram Goel

(4)

Swamiji's "Myth"

"Don't turn me into a myth," was Swamiji's warning during his life-time. Some of us who admire him may still be in danger of doing so, even more so after his disappearance, because his very human nature was a constant corrective.

But apart from the "myth" that Swamiji himself may be in the eyes of some, there was another myth in which he believed and which gave him such an astonishing consistency in spite of opposition from all sides and also from within himself. Others may prefer to call it an ideal, but I prefer to call it a myth. What was the content of this myth? Swamiji believed in the spiritual potential of India in spite of being aware of crisis and decadence, he believed in the purity of *sannyasa* in spite of seeing so much hypocrisy in the garb of *sannyasis*, he believed in the spiritual nature of the Church in spite of the disappointing and misleading appearance of the institution, he believed in the mystical reality of Christ in spite of the superimpositions or *upadhis* with which he has been clothed—and thus veiled—by Christians, he believed in human beings as friends, to the point of being cheated and disappointed. Disappointments on all these levels did shake him at times, but afterwards they only strengthened the purity of his myth. He was a true spiritual man, in that he was able to see through appearances, to pierce the crust covering all our human ideals and endeavours. Thus his life is a true encouragement for all those who are themselves struggling to discover the hidden treasure in the field of our human reality, as the Upanishad says.

Bettina Baumer

THE MEANING OF RENUNCIATION

As a contribution to the Study Week on Renunciation, which he would have been unable to attend in person, Shri P. Y. Deshpande sent us a paper of which the following is a short extract. Shri Deshpande is the author of an original study of the *Yogasutras*, called *The Essential Yoga* (B.I. Publications, New Delhi).

To understand the mystery of existence as a whole demands renouncing, rejecting and negating everything accepted without critical questioning. This is Renunciation, or *Sannyasa* in the

right sense of the word. Such renunciation, born of serious questioning, never becomes irrelevant at any time, because it has a vital role to play in the matter of understanding the ever-changing human situation. In order to understand anything vitally living, one has to negate all that has been and all that may be. To negate or renounce the past and the wishful, past-propelled future is to be in a state of mind totally free from everything and therefore, to be totally empty. This emptiness is the womb of all creation.

The Indian or Vedic tradition speaks highly of Sannyasa. Yet this tradition, like every other religious tradition, has two aspects: the external and the internal. The latter reaches down to the very source of Life, which is always hidden from view because it lies at the innermost core of the being.

The external manifestations of the traditional Sannyasa are invariably misleading and confusing. It is always forgotten that the external trappings of Sannyasa do not represent even the visible tip of an iceberg hidden in the depths of the ocean. This is so because it is like a seed which holds the potentiality of a mighty tree within its tiny confines. This seed lies hidden in the inner core of man. It comes to view only if man turns his attention within as a result of a passion for self-discovery. And, when the seed is thus discovered, it has to be extricated from the wild weeds of the psychological hunger for more and more, and replanted in the emptiness of the mind. This replanting of the seed is the act of Sannyasa.

Swami Abhishiktananda saw this truth—an insight accessible only to an authentic sannyasi. He says,

Sannyasa should not be regarded as a fourth *asrama*, or state of life, which follows after the three stages of being a student (*brahmachari*), a householder (*grihastha*) and living in retirement in the forest (*vanaprastha*); rather it is *ayasya*, beyond (*ari-*) every state of life. It belongs to no category whatever, and cannot be undertaken along with anything else. It is truly transcendent, as God himself transcends all, being apart from all, beyond all, and yet immanent in all without any duality." (*The Fire in the Stone*, p. 4)

Ayasyama implies a total break with the past and the past-

propelled future, which is the movement of mechanical continuity or entropy—a one-dimensional movement of temporality and thought. Even modern science and technology have not broken through this continuity. Changes brought about by them, and social reforms determined by their impact, however radical, constitute no more than a modified continuity of the hunger that is death.

Continuity is death. Discontinuity, through renunciation, opens the door to immortality, which takes death in its stride as a medium through which it brings about the miracle of ever new creation.

A film on Abhishiktananda is being made by 'Le Jour du Seigneur' for showing on French TV. Its producer, Patrice Chagnard, came with his team in April-May for the shooting, first in the South, and then in the Himalayas, where Ramesh Srivastava (a disciple of Swamiji) helped greatly in finding and interviewing people who remembered him. The film script will be as far as possible in Abhishiktananda's own words.

NEWS

The work of preparing the text for the press together with introduction and notes is now almost complete, and publication in French is expected in 1984.

The unexpected, but very welcome, provision by Mme Montagnon (Swamiji's eldest sister) of copies of his letters to his family from 1948-1973, has involved much revision and re-writing, and so delayed the appearance of this book.

The title of a translation of *Les yeux de lumière*, published in U.S.A. by Dimension Books, Denville, NJ.

A revised edition is being printed by I.S.P.C.K. (Delhi) and will be ready this year. Also an Italian edition, translated by A Chierigatti, is announced by E.M.I., Bologna.

Prayer has been translated and published in Portuguese in Brazil by A. Domingues. In addition, a Swedish edition (translators, Inga Heiké) is to be published by Proprius Fg.

Donations to the Abhishikhananda. Society have been received from Inga Heikel (twice), Br. Arulanandam, Prof. K. Swaminathan, Shri Dharm Paul, Rev. L.N. Childs, Dr. David C. Scott, Mme R. Lefebure, Br. Wayne R. Teasdale, Mrs. Mark Ledico, Fr J. Dujarrier, Fr R. Stephens. We acknowledge these gifts with gratitude.

We must record the passing of two much appreciated friends of Abhishikhananda. May Light perpetual shine upon them! *Mother M. Theophane, C.M.A.*, died 14.10.1982 at the Roberts Nursing Home, Indore. Swamiji first met her in 1957, and she nursed him during his last illness.

The Revd James P. Alter died 7.11.1983 in the U.S.A. He was the first Director of the Rajpur Centre, where Swamiji was often welcomed by him and his wife Barry. Our deep sympathy to her and their family.

The Bulletin. The Secretary is always glad to send the Bulletin to anyone who would be interested to receive it.