

GURUDEV SIVANANDA THE SOUL OF ANANDA KUTIR

by

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At the foot of the snow-clad Himalayas, facing the eastern, rising sun, lies in deep contemplation of the heavenly scenery Rishikesh, the holy abode of Sannyasins. Here, the sacred river Ganges with her nectarous flow of crystal water ripples down to the sweet note of the distant cuckoo or the occasional cry of the jungle peacock on the one hand, while on the other, the sight of an ochre-robed, half-clad recluse sitting cross-legged on a solitary stone on its bank in silent meditation, springs upon our mind the hallowed memory of the ancient Sages who gave out to the world for the first time its authorised scriptures. Aspirations and spiritual hopes of thousands since the creation of the world have left deep impressions on its soil, while its heart still throbs with the cold breeze, the surging hope of countless others.

Holier still is the celestial abode of our Swamiji—Ananda Kutir—overlooking the neighbouring countless Ashrams and Dharmashalas, standing aloof from the rest, and plying its own determined course in a world pulsating with life today, but at the same time unmindful of the uncertain morrow. Broad in its love for humanity, sincere in its aim for

spreading the divine Knowledge, steady in treading the path chalked out for itself, it stands as a centre of pilgrimage to many a weary soul who often stops under its roof to drink deep from the very fountain source of spirituality and regale himself afresh.

India has been proud of her galaxy of sages and seers who lived in God, travelled throughout the country, and worked incessantly for the spiritual uplift of the whole world. To this lineage belongs the Soul of Ananda Kutir, having descended from one of the saints of the south. If Ramakrishna Paramahansa was the ideal for mankind in the Nivritti Marga after Adi Sankaracharya, Swami Rama Tirtha of the practical Vedantin in daily life, Sri Swamiji stands for silently implanting the seeds of the teachings of the two in the hearts of one and all who came within the circle of his influence. His writings on all branches of Yoga, Bhakti and Vedanta have cast forth a new light, a new approach to Vedantic Sadhana, a novel understanding of the sacred literature that so far remained a sealed booklet to many an aspirant unlettered in the domain of Sanskrit, and a new dictum that the dissemination of spiritual Knowledge is one of the most unifying and elevating forces on the face of the earth to guide humanity towards the goal of perfection. His efforts at bringing a new heaven on earth through the pursuit of a life in the divine, lovingly termed by him as "Divine Life", reveal the cosmic and all-embracing vision he has on our spiritual regeneration, reassertion, and steady advancement.

His love for humanity or any living being is not mechanical and never external; for he has immense faith in the innate genius of every individual, whether he be a good man or a rogue or a thief, to harmonise the divine factor in him in the light of a loftier ideal. "*Satyam Jnanam Anantam Brahman*" is the one Mantra which he hammers on the mind of one and all, who chance to enter his abode—the saying which centuries ago, at the dawn of civilisation, issued forth similarly from the illumined consciousness of the great sages of India, whom he so aptly represents.

What was the motive force, the ideal, the goal and the vision behind his lifelong Sadhana? An inward joyful urge to tread the path of spirituality, silently and lonely, when his fellow-beings were torn asunder by sins and sorrows, tears and terrors, made Sri Swamiji to see beneath the misty veil of mundane sufferings and tribulations, the ever luminous soul of supreme purity, perfect goodness and universal kindness, and this brought him nearer to the goal of Self-realisation and face-to-face with the supreme Godhead.

Today, his ceaseless Sadhana, his ever increasing aspiration and love to serve the aspirant in the spiritual path—however slow and sluggish he be—his lifelong desire to put one and all in the right path, nay, his surging faith and hope in transforming the whole of humanity into Godmen, shine all the brighter.

Let us therefore pray to the all-merciful Lord that such a true spiritual guide be spared for our guidance, to cut asunder the thick veil of *avidya* that hangs before our vision and lead us safely to the immaculate seat of BLISS.

Siva the Great Organiser

Siva is a great organiser. He organised the Divine Life Society in 1936. He formed the All-World Religions Federation in 1945. He founded the All-World Sadhus Federation in 1946. He has suggested various methods for the organisation of Sadhus, Sannyasins, etc. His organising capacity is verily unique.

His organising Power is *Vilakshana*. He does not organise merely through constitutional, man-made, binding rules, bye-laws and platform lectures. His way is unprecedented. He binds all people through love, affection and goodwill. He first establishes a Divine Life Centre in the heart of man. This sprouts forth, blossoms and finds its expression in the establishment of a Divine Life Centre in a town, city or village. Other organisations may collapse, dwindle or fail. But

Siva's organisation can never fail as it is born of Divine *Sat Kama* and *Sat-Sankalpa*.

Siva's pen has exercised a tremendous influence on the minds of people. People who have not seen him even once are ardent workers of the Society. His letters goad them to open centres of their own accord. They get a spontaneous inner urge to take part in the Divine Life movement. His pen acts as a sword in conversion, not through bloodshed or brute force but through the cutting of their knot of ignorance or the tree of nescience and its branches, viz., selfishness, crookedness, hatred and the like.

His heart-to-heart talk with people in the language of sympathy, sincerity and inner feeling is another important factor which has made him a powerful and silent organiser. He is not a "tom-tom" trumpeting organiser. He is a silent organiser. Even his people who are in close contact with him are not fully aware of the silent work he is ceaselessly doing and the methods of his work in achieving the goal or the desired end.

He never says "No" to anybody. He never differentiates: "This is divine or spiritual work; this is worldly work." All work is worship of the Lord. The other day some people asked him to take up the Presidentship of the "Muni-ki-reti Band Construction Committee." He accepted it though he had no time at his disposal. He works hard. He is the first man to go to the meetings, and invites other members to attend. His punctuality is worth emulating. Had he remained in the plains, he would have become president of hundreds of institutions.

He never appeals for funds; sincere devotees themselves give donations voluntarily. They have requested him to keep them informed of the occasions on which they can serve. He never collects money by doing *Kathans* or delivering lectures. During his propaganda tours he always spent his own money. He met his railway fare. He never gave any hint even for collection of money. He says: "To go to a place with the sole object of collecting money is lowest form of begging. The

money will come by itself at the threshold if there is sincerity in the work. If money comes by itself I will work; otherwise I will keep quiet. Lakshmi dwells where there is sincerity in service.”

Whatever money devotees give him for his personal use, he has given to the Society for the furtherance of the work. He keeps no money for himself.

The other day he said to Sivanarayana and myself. “Why should we bother about the Ashram? I have done enough service. I have shown a “specimen” of the work that can be done. Let householders who are really interested in this Divine Life work, who are sincere, come here and run the Ashram. It is their duty. I will live on alms. I pray to the Lord: “Let all the work cease! Let me be free without any institution as I was in 1924.”

He has organised SankirtanMandalis to disseminate the Glory of Name and Sankirtan Bhakti Yoga. He has organised “Physical Culture Yoga Institutes” for the physical development of youth, as well as aged people and ladies. He has organised Yoga and Vedanta Centres for disseminating the knowledge of Yoga and Vedanta. He has trained students to continue the work.

May you all imbibe his good points and organise Divine Life Centres for the spiritual and material uplift of people! This is the real service you can do to him.

What more do you expect from him?

To know Siva (Gurudev Sivananda) is to know Brahman.

Siva – The Sthita-Prajna

I am fond of listening to anecdotes concerning Swamiji Maharaj from his older disciples. The other day, during a conversation with one such disciple, I learnt that sometime back, an admirer of Swamiji—an M.A., Ph.D., came here for permanent stay, but after a short period found nothing

impressive or solemn in the Kutir or in Swamiji Maharaj. He returned home. Previously, Swamiji never used to allow anybody near him even for any kind of service to be rendered, as he is now doing, and formerly he had fixed specific hours of the day for visitors to see him in his Kutir. He was reticent, very grave, and none dared to be too familiar with him. Everyone felt awed. But now a days he is free with everybody, and all feel at home in his presence. Perhaps this made the professor find nothing “flashing” about Swamiji, which disappointed him.

This made me think of what I should find in Mahatmas.

Swamiji is always at work with either his writings or conducting Kirtans or supervising the correspondence or other work of the Ashram, daily, like any other ordinary landlord. When such is the case, how can I distinguish him from an ordinary man? He is taking the same food as any other—rice, curry, fruit, milk and *dhal-roti*, without resorting to the practices obtaining in olden times, viz., living on air, water, dried leaves or in a mountain-cave all by himself. Let us see what Lord Krishna says about realised persons and find out for ourselves what we have to find in Siva as the distinguishing characteristic of a Mahatma. “He should be known as a perpetual Sannyasin who neither hates nor desires.” (Gita V. 3) “Devoted to the Path of action, a man of purified mind, one who has conquered the self, one who has subdued his senses, one who realises his Self as the Self of all beings, though acting, he is not tainted” (Gita V) “I do nothing at all, thus would the knower of Truth think; seeing, hearing, smelling, eating, going, sleeping, breathing, speaking, letting go, seizing, opening the eyes, and closing them—convinced that the senses move among the sense-objects” (Gita V. 8-9) Again in Sloka 10 of the same chapter, the Lord lays down “He who does actions, offering them to Brahman, abandoning attachment is not tainted by sin as a lotus-leaf by water.” “Yogis, having abandoned attachment, perform actions only by the body, by the mind, by the intellect and even by the senses for the purification of Self.” (Gita V. 11). Sloka 12 of the same chapter: “The harmonised, having

abandoned the fruit of action, attains to the Eternal Peace.” Mentally renouncing all actions and self-controlled, the embodied one rests happily in the nine-gated city, neither acting nor causing body and senses to act. (Gita V. 13)

In the slokas quoted above, the Lord defines the nature and ways of a Jivanmukta in a clear and direct way. We shall apply this standard for judging the distinguishing features of Swamiji. I have a strong conviction that Swamiji has moulded himself in the very model of the above Slokas. Even though he is taking the same kind of food as others, talking and behaving as a very ordinary man, a keen observer will certainly notice that Swamiji’s mind betrays no signs of annoyance, anger, discomfiture or any kind of change at such times when one would reasonably expect him to react in such a way. That shows clearly his mind rests in the Supreme Self quite unaffected by the dealings in the outside world. When he has attained the highest Realisation, why should he bother himself with the multifarious duties which he is shouldering? It is out of Pure Love for the struggling humanity, to open their eyes by his powerful and simple methods of teaching. As he has realised the Supreme Self, the *buddhi* will again and again try to be near the Supreme Self, as it has tasted the Bliss arising out of its proximity with the Atman. But Swamiji did not choose to shut himself out, to enjoy that state of Bliss which he could have done very easily; he chose to be of constant and unceasing service to the humnity at large, without any consideration of what others estimate him to be!

The All-Compassionate Siva

Sri Swamiji always keeps with him two bottles, one bottle containing sugar and the other containing rice—sugar for distribution to ants and rice for distribution to birds. Sometimes Swamiji keeps pots during summer for storing water for the birds.

One day in winter a wasp was shivering and struggling for life. Swamiji took it, basked it in the sunlight, fanned it dry

and placed a little sugar before it. After some time the wasp had warmth and it was able to move its wings that were wet. He had the *bhava* (feeling) that the wasp also was Lord Narayana. By such action he really did divine service to the Lord. One day he saw a small insect struggling for life in the latrine. It was caught up amidst the faeces. He slowly and carefully removed it with a twig, washed it with a little water and basked it in the sunlight. It was gradually brought back to life. Whenever he sees any insects or worms struggling for their life in a big vessel of water, he at once removes them gently from the water.

Sri Swamiji always takes great care to see while walking if any ants or insects are present on the way, so that no injury may be caused to them. So did Raja Jadabharata. Every aspirant should follow the worthy example shown by Sri Swamiji.

Though this incident may seem to be very trifling and ordinary in the eyes of a man, it is but these simple acts of mercy and compassion that go to develop the real inner man. This is the precept by practice which Sri Swamiji imparts to humanity at large. It is because ordinary people of the world, including even spiritual aspirants, neglect these smaller details, they fail to achieve anything grand in the spiritual path. Had they taken notice of these seemingly simple things and actively practised them in their daily life, they would have developed compassion to a very great extent, which would have made them spiritual giants. The rational man cannot understand the subtle moulding of character brought about by the practice of kindness, charity, and one's own Dharma as prescribed in the Shastras. He neglects them with an air of contempt or postpones them to old age. Drop by drop the mighty ocean is filled. Everyone has to bear this in mind and try to progress gradually in the spiritual path.

Every aspirant in the spiritual path should try to do noble, merciful acts of this description to purify the heart and render it soft. He should develop mercy and sympathy to a considerable degree. Mercy is a virtue that leads to Jnana and

Para Bhakti. Such little acts of mercy and sympathy, however insignificant they may seem to be, go a long way in attaining the goal of life. He who does such acts only can become a practical Vedantin and feel oneness with all beings. An aspirant should be ever alert and vigilant to do such acts. No opportunity should be lost. Simply shutting oneself from all beings, imagining that one would enter into deep meditation thereby, without developing the practical qualities of fellow feeling, compassion and universal love is sheer hypocrisy.

Generally, rich people who run after money have prosaic and unsympathetic hearts. Their hearts are filled with reinforced concrete. They have neither sympathy nor mercy. Even when people are in a dying condition in the verandah, they will be dancing and eating in restaurants. Even if they see sick persons on the roadside, they will never care to look at them and to ask them if they want water or anything. They have no eyes to see. It is only the real thirsting aspirant who wants to realise the oneness of all that will have a different eye to look into the sufferings of others. He alone will try his level best to alleviate the sufferings of humanity.

Without ethical training or moral discipline, there is no hope of even an iota of spiritual progress. Ethics and morality are the very foundation of Yoga or spiritual life. Let us all emulate the noble example set up by Sri Swamiji.