

From the Bhavan's President
**A Noble Spiritual
 Teacher**

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Homage to Swami Sivananda. His
 40th Punya Tithi falls on July 14, 2003



My devotion to Swami Sivanandaji dates back more than five decades when I first met him at Rishikesh and came under his spell. His writings and discourses have left a deep impression on my mind. Thousands of Indians belonging to different parts of the country look upon Swami Sivananda as a sage and a *guru*. Swami Sivananda was one of the noblest representatives of *gurutva* or our unique tradition of spiritual teachers.

The term *guru* denotes something much more than its exact English counterpart, 'teacher'. A teacher is one who teaches; a *guru* is one who transforms. It is no ordinary

imparting of knowledge that is involved in the *guru-shishya* relationship. A basic change takes place that transforms the student into a disciple.

The institution of a *guru* in our society is both old and honoured. It has been an ancient practice with us in India, irrespective of our creed, to honour our sages, saints and our *gurus*. We, in fact, equate *gurus* with God.

*Gurur Brahma Gurur
 Vishnu*

*Gurur Devo Maheswarah
 Guruh Sakshat Param
 Brahma*

Tasmai Sri Gurave Namah.

Our culture, our philosophy and our religious traditions are

perhaps unique in the world for the place of honour that they assign to spiritual teachers. This tradition is not confined to any one Indian religious order. Every religious tradition in India has had a system of transmitting the essence of that religious belief

in an unbroken chain. Be it the Buddha speaking to Ananda, or Sri Ramakrishna speaking to Swami Vivekananda, be it Hazrat Nizamuddin Aulia speaking to Amir Khusrau or Guru Nanak speaking to Guru Arjun Dev, the *guru-shishya*

tradition has informed all our religious systems uniformly. A *guru* is not only a thoroughly proficient religious commentator, or an adept, but something of a Master who has himself travelled on the way that he recommends. The *guru*

requires and obtains from the *shishya*, not just attention but surrender, a surrender that is spontaneous and complete. The *shishya*, on his part, seeks and obtains not just instruction but acculturation.

In September 1887, the child

Kuppuswamy (as Swamiji was known in his *purva ashrama*) was born on the banks of the sacred Tamraparni in Tirunelveli district of Tamil Nadu. Even as a child Swamiji was endowed with keen intellect,

musical voice and a generous heart. His inclinations were towards service to the poor and he naturally chose medical education as a means to fulfil his object. Swamiji went to Malaya and served as a doctor among the poor plantation workers and



Swami Sivananda 1887-1963

soon won their hearts by his kindness, sympathy and devoted attention.

But the spirit of Swamiji could not be confined to service in a small area or to a small circle. He studied the teachings of Adi Sankara, Swami Ramathirtha, Vivekananda, the Bible and Theosophy and reached the conclusion that he should renounce the world.

He returned to India and after visiting a number of holy places, reached Rishikesh where he was initiated into *sanyasa* in 1924.

From then until he attained *Mukti* in 1963, Swami Sivananda was radiating light and wisdom to all parts of the world through his internationally renowned organization, the Divine Life Society.

Swamiji had an incisive mind and wrote profusely on various subjects--*Vedas, Upanishads, Brahmasutras, Bhagavad Gita* and so on. He was a master of both physical and spiritual yoga and wrote on all aspects from *yoga* in daily life to *Kundalini yoga* and *yogic and Vedantic*

sadhanas. Through the Divine Life Society, Swami Sivananda preached that the *atman* and *brahman* are the same and that one can realise it even when following the routine, ordinary life as a man. He thought that modern people had neither the time nor the patience to perform rigorous and austere *tapas* or religious practices and that in order to give the present generation the benefit of real *tapas*, it is necessary to reveal to them the concept of the unity of the divinity in man with the divinity of God.

To him it was immaterial whether one went to the Church or the Mosque or the Mandir for offering prayers since all the prayers are heard by only one Supreme Divine.

This concept of religious tolerance and mutual respect for other religions has been the basic culture of India. Unfortunately, today, we are blinded by ignorance and indulge in acts of violence in the name of religion itself. To quote the words of Swami

Sivananda himself:- "To behold the *Atman* in every being or form, to feel *Brahman* everywhere, at all times, and in all conditions of life, to see, hear, taste and feel everything as the *Atman* is my creed."

Sivananda did not preach to his disciples to remove themselves from the society and environment but insisted on their observing certain principles while carrying on their day to day normal life. He said: "It is my sacred creed to serve sick persons, to nurse them with care, sympathy and love, to cheer the depressed, to infuse power and joy in all, to feel oneness with each and everyone, and to treat all with equal vision. In my highest creed there are neither peasants nor kings, neither beggars nor emperors, neither

males nor females, neither teachers nor students. I love to live, move and have my being in this realm indescribable."

Sivananda devoted his entire life to raising the material man to the heights of a spiritual being. He tried to disabuse the minds of the people of the orthodox practices and obscurantist beliefs. He said:

"Mortifying the body is not divine life."

"Physical nudity and matted locks have nothing to do with Divine life."

"Divine Life is not rejection of life and its activities, but a transformation of it into the Divine Being."

Thus, he reinforced the basic doctrine of *Bhagavad Gita*, namely, "The path of duty is the path of righteousness."

Followers of Aryan Cult were called Aryans. There was no Aryan Race' says L. N. Renu in 'Indian Ancestors of Vedic Aryans' &

'Know ye this O Kunti-born. My devotee is never lost': N. C. Vaish in 'Musings on The Bhagwat Gita' Published by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan.