

## In Memoriam of Swami Dayananda's Mahasamadhi

Namaste. I have just received news that Swami Dayananda Saraswati Ji of Arsha Vidya Gurukulam has attained Mahasamadhi tonight (according to Bharatiya time) at his Rishikesh Ashram on the banks of mother Ganga. It was his desire to leave his body near Ganga Ji.

Those who came in contact with him would readily agree that he was a teacher par excellence of Vedanta. He established Arsha Vidya Gurukulam in Saylorsburg, PA in early eighties and made it into a gigantic institution to distribute knowledge/Gyan of Vedic traditions in a true Gurukul style.

I had known that Swamiji was at his Arsha Vidya Gurukulam on August 25th of this year, when he left for Bharat in an air ambulance. Though he was on a stretcher and had to labor to speak, he spoke at a length; his words were peppered with his usual humor and wit. In that halting message, he had expressed a desire to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi (himself a spiritual aspirant) before giving up his body. As soon as Swamiji reached Bharat, Modiji had a Skype conversation with him. At Modiji's request, Swamiji agreed to take two more treatments of dialysis and as God would have wished, on September 11th, Modiji made a trip to Rishikesh and met Pujya Swamiji. Swamiji blessed Modiji, which is for the good of the nation.

In my personal life, he was at a "thinkers meet" in Hyderabad, India back in 1999, which was a gathering of many of the important writers on Hinduism and Vedic culture, primarily those of India, but also a number of us western writers and scholars were there. Swamiji was a key proponent for the idea of starting an

organization for western writers to work together, which became the Vedic Friends Association, for bringing western teachers, writers and students to work cooperatively to help spread Vedic culture to as many other westerners as possible. We are still working in the Vedic Friends Association, a small group, but with continued focus to keep our work of spreading Vedic dharma going.

I remember when some of us westerners were in Guahati, Assam for a conference on preserving the traditions of the indigenous tribes in Northeast India back in the year 2000. I shared the stage with him as one of the speakers there. Later, we attended a cultural program wherein the different tribes would perform traditional dances while wearing the customary outfits. I was sitting near the front in between Swamiji and Sheshadri, one of the elder RSS men. They were both taking turns explaining to me what each of the tribal dances meant. I remember thinking I had the best seat in the house, watching the traditional dances, and these two great men were explaining everything to me.

At another conference in the northeastern India, I remember he had lunch with some of us westerners and we would talk and joke about the various ways that would be effective in spreading Vedic dharma. He always had ideas, and he was never one to be intimidated by what is now called "political correctness". He called things as he saw them, and spoke boldly about the needs of the hour to protect Vedic dharma, especially against the conversion tactics of some religions in the region. He also seemed to appreciate that same spirit of

boldness that some of us westerners exhibited.

He knew I was a Krishna bhakta, a disciple of A. C. Bhaktivedanta, but, like me, he was quite non-sectarian when it came to dealing with others on the path of Vedic Dharma. In fact, he formed the Acharya Sabha, an organization made of the top 200 spiritual leaders of all the important Vedic organizations across India, composed of all kinds of lineages and schools of thought. I thought this was one of the best ideas he had. In that organization they would work together on a common basis to deal with the challenges to preserve and protect Vedic Dharma, whether it was from conversion tactics, challenges from the government, and so on. They meet every year. In fact, I had one Vaishnava Swami friend call me one time to thank me for letting him attend one annual meeting. I asked how did I do that. He said that he went to it and said that I was his friend, and based on my name alone, they let him inside to attend it.

I also remember one of the first conferences the Vedic Friends Association had at his Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, in which he would let us meet there and use his facilities for free. Once he was going to speak on meditation, and he called for me, and would not start his talk until I was there. Once I sat down near him, only then did he start to speak about the importance of meditation, how he performed his meditation, and then chanted several mantras, including the Hare Krishna mantra, as we sat in his upstairs room.

One of the most important memories was nearly 14 years ago when we had another small conference at his ashrama in Saylorburg, and my house in Detroit had just been burglarized, and I had lost my computer and several other things that were important to me in doing my writing and other Dharmic work. I mentioned that it may take some time to remain in contact with everyone at the conference since I no longer have a computer, and it may take

some time for me to get the money to get another one. Within minutes, he went around the room and did a fundraiser for me and raised nearly \$3000, plus one of the volunteers at the ashrama said he could give me one of their computers, and Swamiji also made arrangements to send me a monthly stipend. After that I had a computer, and funds to pick up and continue my work of writing and so on. He simply liked the work I did and the intentions I had. That stipend was sent to me every month from his own organization and kept my rent paid for five years so I could work and write without that worry. No one had ever shown me that kind of support before.

He was greatly influential, and was well-known all across India. In fact, he had written and signed a letter of reference for me, stating that I was a sincere Hindu and should be treated with the respect that I deserve. That way when I would go to certain temples in India, I could show that letter to get in, if they were not allowing certain people inside. So one time when I went to the Meenakshi temple, the priests would not allow me into the sanctums because of being white-skinned. So I showed the management that letter from Swamiji, and after they had some discussion about it, they arranged one of their priests to take us into all of the sanctums and do pujas, taking us to the head of the long lines of India pilgrims, who were watching and wondering why I and a friend of mine got to go to the head of the lines while everyone else had to wait. It was like we were shown special privileges that even the locals did not receive. I still have that letter.

For these reasons Swami Dayananda Sarasvati will always have a place in my heart and a special regard from me, and I will always honor what special attention he gave me, and pray for his well-being.

*Jai Sri Krishna,  
Stephen Knapp (Sri Nandanandana dasa)*