

Swami Pratyagbodhananda Saraswati

A Tribute By V.Swaminathan ¹

Birth: October 20, 1950 Sannyāsa: March 2, 1992 Samādhi: September 20, 2020

Swami Pratyagbodhananda Saraswati, a disciple of Pūjya Swami Dayananda Saraswati of Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, attained *samādhi* on Sept 20, 2020. He was a simple *sadhu*, truly fitting the definition of the word, *para kāryam sādhnōti iti sādhuḥ*. His simplicity was devoid of any pretense and it came to him naturally. He was most endearing to whosoever came into contact with him. Not only he had no boundaries for love, but his presence also had such a dynamism that others dissolved their boundaries before him. His love for Śrī Kṛṣṇa, his love for Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, his love for his teachers - Pūjya Swami Dayanandaji, Pūjya Swami Chinmayanandaji, and Pūjya Swami Akhaṇḍānanda Maharaji, permeated every pore of his personality. That unifying Guru *bhakti* came through splendidly in his discourses and inspired the audience.



Swami Pratyagbodhananda Saraswati, ‘Swami P’ as he was affectionately referred to by his students and devotees, adopted a lifestyle of endearment and sharing, commensurate with his personality. He was a *maitraḥ*², one had the disposition of a friend, a *karuṇaḥ*, one who was compassionate, towards all who came into contact with him. Some of the following eulogies by his students³ assert to the traits of Swami P:

“He was a gregarious person, always smiling and greeting everybody”,

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² अद्वेष्टा सर्वभूतानां मैत्रः करुण एव च *adveṣṭā sarvabhūtānām maitraḥ karuṇa eva ca* | Bhagavad Gītā, 12:13

³ P.K. Govind, Ashok, Rupa, Sundar, Bhavani & Mouli, respectively.

“He was always very humorous while conveying the deeper significance of Advaita Vedanta”,

“He was always so approachable, compassionate to everyone with a smile on his face”,

“I always enjoyed and appreciated his humor, affable nature and insightful lectures”,

“We will always remember his unique style of humor and his remarkable exposition of Bhāgavatam”.

Swami P’s teaching style was simple and yet profound. His communication method was always direct and imbued with an abundance of humor. The humor in fact, broke the barrier of timidity in the listener and made him/her at ease in tuning oneself to the subtleties of the subject matter. He was always at ease with himself and that ‘self-comfort’ lightened a person in his presence. This was a testament to Pūjya Swami Dayanandaji’s dictum that one should be ‘lightened’ before becoming ‘enlightened’. Whenever Swami P met a newcomer to the Arsha Vidya Gurukulam in Saylorsburg, Pennsylvania, his priority would be one of unrestrained welcome without any judgement. He amicability was unabashed. His congeniality was contagious. By his actions he would inspire the newcomer to come back to the Gurukulam, enroll in a family camp, join or start a Pūjya Swami Dayanandaji’s Bhagavad Gītā home study program. Thanks to Swamiji, many became regular attendees of the classes in the Gurukulam. He was tireless in promoting the Gurukulam’s outreach program and travelled to far and near places to give a *satsangas*, Vedantic talks, conduct Bhāgavata *Saptāhas*, initiate Bhagavad Gītā home study programs or promote Vedic Heritage Programs for children. Numerous Gītā home study groups were formed by his outreach and Swamiji would invariably reach out to the different groups during his annual visits to Saylorsburg and inquire about their progress. By his committed outreach Swami P was an *āpta* for numerous spiritual seekers.

Swamiji summarized karma yoga in one phrase, “be prepared for surprises in life”. He maintained that if one has a sense of humor, then ‘common’ sense will prevail. This enduring philosophy defined his life till the day of his *samādhi*. Swamiji’s teaching style was in perfect alignment and harmony with that of his teacher, Swami Dayanandaji. Before teaching the weekend Gītā classes at the Gurukulam in Saylorsburg, he would refer without fail to Pūjya Swami Dayanandaji’s Bhagavad Gītā home study program. He revered Pūjya Swamiji’s method of communication of the vision of the *śāstras* and often pointed out to his audience the inimitability of Pūjya Swamiji’s teaching style. An insightful feature of Swami P’s unfoldment of Vedantic vision was his use of precise definitions of the Vedantic technical words. I was particularly inspired by this approach since knowing the etymology of the words helped to apprehend their meanings without the reliance on inadequate English translations.

Madhusūdana Sarasvati, one of the greatest exponents of Advaita philosophy, in his commentary on the Bhagavad Gītā, known as *Gūḍhartha-dīpikā*, added a few verses of his own. In introducing Chapter 13, Madhusūdana writes:

ध्यानाभ्यासवशीकृतेन मनसा तन्निर्गुणं निष्क्रियं ज्योतिः
किंचन योगिनो यदि परं पश्यन्ति पश्यन्तु ते ।
अस्माकं तु तदेव लोचनचमत्काराय भूयाच्चिरं
कालिन्दीपुलिनोदरे किमपि यन्नीलं महो धावति ॥

*dhyānābhyāśavaśīkṛtēna manasā tannirguṇaṁ niṣkriyaṁ jyōtiḥ
kimcana yōginō yadi paraṁ paśyanti paśyantū tē ।
asmākaṁ tu tadēva lōcanacamatkāraya bhūyācciraṁ
kālindīpulinōdarē kimapi yannīlaṁ mahō dhāvati ॥*

“If the yogis, with their minds which have been brought under control through the practice of meditation, see some such transcendental light that is without qualities and action, let them see! But, for filling our eyes with astonishment, let there be forever that indescribable blue light which runs about hither and thither on the sands of Kālindī (Yamunā)”⁴.

This verse epitomizes Swami P’s disposition towards Kṛṣṇa which was amply evinced in his discourses on Śrīmad Bhāgavatam. The Kṛṣṇa who played on the sands of Kālindī came alive when Swamiji narrated the stories from the episodes described in the *Daśama Skandha* of Bhāgavatam relating Kṛṣṇa’s *Gōkula līlā* or *Brindāvana līlā*. Swamiji was an adept story teller and listeners felt transported to *Gōkula* with his *vācika abhinaya*. He will invariably recollect how his guru, Pūjya Swami Akhaṇḍānanda Maharaji, would relish the bhāgavata *kathā*. Swami P had a heightened *rasānubhava* which he never failed to pass on to his listeners. He would create an ambience of devotion with the hosts performing a *ṣōḍaśōpacāra pūjā* to a superbly decorated *pratimā* of Śrī Rādhākṛṣṇa before the *kathā*. Swamiji would lead the singing of “*vandē gōpālam*” with the devotees joining him during the *maṅgala dīpārādhana*. From beginning to end everyone’s heart would be filled with Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

There is a familiar prayer which says:

अनायासेन मरणं विनादैन्येन जीवनं देहि मे कृपया शम्भो त्वयि भक्तिं अचञ्चलां ॥
*anāyāsena maraṇaṁ vinādainyena jīvanaṁ dehi me kṛpayā śambho tvayi bhaktiṁ
acañcalāṁ ॥*

The devotee asks the Lord to bless him/her with an unwavering devotion such that living is free of dependence and death is effortless. The suddenness of Swamiji’s end seems perhaps like this devotee’s wish. He was uttering the name of Śrī Rāma till his last conscious moment. As Swami Tattvavidanandaji remarked in Swami P’s eulogy, the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam that was Swamiji’s constant companion protected him till the end. It may be also that Swamiji had some kind of a premonition. On that day of September 20, 2020, which

⁴ Madhusūdana Sarasvatī’s *Gūḍhartha-dīpikā* – Commentary on the Bhagavad Gītā; translated by Swami Gambhirananda, Advaita Ashrama Publications, Calcutta, India, 2000.

was the day of the 34th anniversary of the Saylorsburg *aśram*, Swami P spoke about his Gurus, his parents, his life before taking the *sannyāsa*, the day Pūjya Swami Dayanan-daji's gave him the *sannyāsa dīkṣā* for which his parents had come from Surat and how grateful he was for the blessings he had received from the Lord, his parents and Gurus.

It would appear that Swami P's anniversary address was his parting message. Swamiji quoted two verses of Gokarna's *upadeśa* to his father Ātmadeva from the Bhāgavata *mā-hātmya*.

देहो ऽस्थि-मांस-रुधिरं ऽभिमतिं त्यज त्वं	<i>deho 'sthi-māṃsa-rudhire 'bhimatiṃ tyaja tvam</i>
जायासुतादिषु सदा ममतां विमुञ्च ।	<i>jāyāsutādiṣu sadā mamatāṃ vimuñca </i>
पश्यानिशं जगद् इदं क्षण-भङ्ग-निष्ठं	<i>paśyāniśaṃ jagad idaṃ kṣaṇa-bhaṅga-niṣṭhaṃ</i>
वैराग्य-राग-रसिको भव भक्ति-निष्ठः	<i>vairāgya-rāga-rasiko bhava bhakti-niṣṭ</i>
धर्मं भजस्व सततं त्यज लोक-धर्मान्	<i>dharmaṃ bhajasva satataṃ tyaja loka-dharmān</i>
सेवस्व साधु-पुरुषाज् जहि काम-तृष्णाम्	<i>sevasva sādhu-puruṣāñ jahi kāma-trṣṇām</i>
अन्यस्य दोष-गुण-चिन्तनम् आशु मुक्त्वा	<i>anyasya doṣa-guṇa-cintanam āśu muktvā</i>
सेवा-कथा-रसम् अहो नितराम् पिब त्वम्	<i>sevā-kathā-rasam aho nitarām piba tvam</i>

Give up the identification with the body which is nothing but a collection of flesh, bones and blood. Give up the sense of 'mine' with reference to the spouse, sons etc. May you recognize that the world is ephemeral. Be objective. Become one who takes delight in *bhakti* and is abiding in it.

Seek *dharma* (which is Lord's form) always and give up worldly activities. Seek the company of wise people and give up the binding desires. Give up deliberating on the faults and virtues of others. May you always partake the *rasānubhava* of the stories of Bhagavān.

The poignancy of the message is striking, in retrospect, considering that later that day Swamiji attained *samādhi*.

On a personal note, Swami P was very dear to our family. In the early 90's I received the first teaching from Swamiji when he taught me the meaning of the sixteenth verse from the 2nd chapter of the Bhagavad Gītā⁵. When we moved into our new home in 1997, Swamiji did a Bhāgavata *saptāha*. He initiated for my wife the *vasanta navarātra pūjā*. He conducted numerous Vedanta and Śrīmad Bhāgavata *satsangas* at our home. He graced the occasion of our daughter's wedding and blessed the couple. We met him in Coimbatore in February 2020 and because of the pandemic situation did not have a chance to see him when he was at Saylorsburg. Swamiji was ready to travel to State College, PA to see us before he was scheduled to leave for India after the Gurukulam's anniversary. We took the

⁵ नासतो विद्यते भावो नाभावो विद्यते सतः | *nāsatō vidyatē bhāvō nābhāvō vidyatē sataḥ |*

उभयोरपि दृष्टो'न्तस्त्वनयोस्तत्त्वदर्शिभिः || *ubhayōrapi drṣṭō'ntastvanayōstattvadarśibhiḥ ||*

permission to visit the Gurukulam and went to see Swamiji on Friday, Sept 11, 2020. We had tea with him and Swamiji was telling us about the uniqueness of the interpretation of some of the Muṇḍakōpaniṣat *mantras* by Pūjya Swamiji. Swamiji then showed me his copy of the Muṇḍaka *bhāṣyam* with the commentary of Paṇḍita Śrīdharaśāstrī. I said to Swamiji that I was not aware of the commentator and immediately Swamiji gave me his copy and added that the Śrīdharaśāstrī's commentaries on the Upaniṣats are very insightful. I will forever cherish Swamiji's parting gift. We are ever grateful to Swamiji for his warmth, affection and teachings.

Om Tat Sat

श्री प्रत्यग्बोधानन्द सरस्वति श्रद्धाञ्जलिः

Written by Shankar Sundareshan, Cherry Hill, New Jersey, USA.

अखण्डश्रीदयानन्द गुरुभिः शिक्षयितारम् ।
स्वामि प्रत्यग्बोधानन्द सरस्वतिनं स्मरामि । ।
हास्यान्तर्गत वेदान्त तत्त्वोपदेश प्रवीणम् ।
स्वामि प्रत्यग्बोधानन्द सरस्वतिनं स्मरामि । ।
भागवतामृते मज्जन् श्रोतृभक्ति सुदोहकम् ।
स्वामि प्रत्यग्बोधानन्द सरस्वतिनं स्मरामि । ।
सौलभ्य समुपसृप्तं सुखमेलन शालिनम् ।
स्वामि प्रत्यग्बोधानन्द सरस्वतिनं स्मरामि । ।
सदा प्रसन्न भावेन आश्रित शिष्य दायकम् ।
स्वामि प्रत्यग्बोधानन्द सरस्वतिनं स्मरामि । ।
विश्वमङ्गल प्रापकम् शिष्यजन सुसेवितम् ।
स्वामि प्रत्यग्बोधानन्द सरस्वतिनं स्मरामि । ।
आर्षविद्यागुरुकुल आचार्यावलि राजितम् ।
स्वामि प्रत्यग्बोधानन्द सरस्वतिनं स्मरामि । ।
गुरुसेवा धुरन्धरं गुर्वाज्ञा परिपालकम् ।
हृदयांबुजे संस्थाप्य प्रणमामि यतिवरम् । ।