

The Shraddhanjali of Swamini Vidyananda Saraswati took place on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of January 2023 at Rishikesh, two days after Swamini's Mahasamadhi. The function saw senior Guruparampara teachers, her co-teachers, devotees and students speak in honour of Swamini's life and legacy.

Many great qualities of Swamini and unique, indelible experiences and interactions with her were shared by them. The occasion maintained a solemn yet celebratory tone, highlighting her positive contribution to the Guruparampara from her earliest association with Pujya Swamiji.

Joining us by video call, Sri Swami Veditamanandaji inaugurated the Shraddhanjali, emphasising Swamini's devotion, love and shraddha for Pujya Swamiji, which he stated was 'out of this world'. Swamiji said this was illustrated by her leaving at the very feet of her beloved Guru, having just performed and completed the adhishtana puja.

Swamiji mentioned that one of the greatest spiritual accomplishments one can have is to establish the identity with your ishta devata, which for Swamini was Pujya Swamiji himself! He also condoled with all connected with Swamini, expressing the shock that all must have felt at the suddenness of her samadhi and prayed that her grace and Pujya Swamiji's blessings be showered on all, so there will be clarity for her students, in the future direction of their Vedanta study.

Next, it was the turn of Sri Swami Sakshatkrutanandaji to say a few words. In a most enlightening talk, Swamiji spoke of his view on Videha mukti: '*A shrotriya gains Videha mukti. One need not be a brahmanishtha. One has to be a brahmanishtha for jivanmukti. The logic is the obstacle to jivanmukti is in the form of upadhi of body-mind-sense complex...when the upadhi falls, the obstructions go away, and one remains as brahma, brahmavit brahmaiva bhavati.*' Swamiji stated that the shraddhanjali is offered to Swamini in the form of brahman.

Swamiji continued by emphasising Swamini's ability to communicate the vision of Vedanta, making her a great teacher with a rare capacity, endearing her to many students and devotees. He concluded by saying that Swamini never deviated from dharma throughout her life.

Sri Swami Aparokshanandaji recalled his memories of Swamini Vidyananda when she initially came to Rishikesh, and how the thirst for Vedanta jnanam immediately took her over, quoting the famous verse from Bhagavad Gita chapter 6.43, '*tatra tarñ buddhisanyogañ labhate paurva-dehikam...*' Swamiji stated he witnessed her blossoming into a great Vedanta teacher right from her student days.

Highlights from other speeches include Sri Swami Parabrahmananda's stress on the multi-talented nature of Swaminiji – from teaching, puja, music, chanting, organisational abilities, she excelled at everything she took up.

Brni Nandana Chaitanya spoke of Swamini's many virtues she had come to appreciate by speaking with and observing her over the years since their long term course together. Her non-complaining attitude, however much seva she had, her resilience, self confidence and self belief were all qualities spiritual seekers need to imbibe for their journey of life.

Sri Swami Chidghanandana recollected words spoken to him by Swaminiji during many conversations they had, *'Swamiji, I would like to live here in Rishikesh forever. I would like to bring back the vision of Pujya Swamiji, that teaching should continue here forever. It should continuously flow like Ganga.'* Let us pray her sankalpa is fulfilled.

Muktiji, a Vedanta teacher from Japan and also Swaminiji's gurubehen, highlighted Swamini's ability to focus during shravanam. Her ekagrata and commitment in the pursuit of this knowledge was inspiring to all.

Camilla from Brazil and Swamini Vimuktananda, other gurubehens of Swaminiji, mentioned the strength of Swamini and clear vision of what she wished to do in her life, giving her the ability to take tough decisions in her stride.

Among Swamini's current long-term course students, Rachna spoke of the huge void they now feel without Swamini's physical presence. She prayed to Swamini and Guruparampara to give them courage, strength and the teaching to overcome this huge loss; the loss of their dear teacher of Vedanta.

Amrish spoke of Swamini's life dedicated to the Guruparampara and her commitment to the propagation of the Vedanta vision. All students noticed that the source of 'Amma's' strength was her dedication to Pujya Swamiji and Swami Sakshatji, and during teaching, Amma aligned her expressions and words in keeping with the vision of Pujya Swamiji and the Parampara.

Rohineesha, a very ardent devotee and student of Swamini Vidyananda, spoke of how he saw her doing all that was to be done, without fail. He also learnt the art of giving from Swamini – giving with the right bhavana, recalling Swamini's teaching, *'Only by giving, we grow'*.

Finally, Swami Sakshatji retook the mic to bring the session to a close, underlining a few more accomplishments of Swaminiji, before finishing with a two minute silence in honour of Swamini Vidyan

- Report by Brni Nandana Chaitanya

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