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A monthly newsletter that will bring you more happiness, more wisdom and more freedom



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Homage to the Guru of Gurus

on Pujya Swami Dayananda's 91st birth anniversary
By Swami Brahmavidananda



More than fifty years ago a teenager walked into a public lecture by a young sadhu from Rishikesh. There was nothing in common between the secular, convent-educated youngster and the traditional (almost orthodox looking) Swami. However, the intellectual rigour and the ruthless logic of the Swami impressed the rebellious teenager.

The youngster would often go and meet him at Powai and spend time discussing

the tricky issues of life which he could not discuss with his parents or elders. The Swami became a friend, philosopher and guide. Vedanta was still an interest – nothing more. Life in Bombay specially as a marine trainee on the waterfront can make a youngster grow up overnight. In 1973, he attended a weekend camp at Lonavla where he discovered that self knowledge i.e. Vedanta was his ultimate pursuit. It was only when he discovered the student in himself that he discovered the ‘guru’ in the Swami. Most days, the youngster would be at his Guru’s feet in the ashram and by 1976 he was Brahmachari Ram Mohan in the second course that Pujya Swamiji conducted in Powai.

The years have passed. A lot of water has flown down the Ganga. The teenager became a student, a sadhu and a teacher teaching Vedanta in Mumbai for more than 35 years. The young Swami became a jagatguru, teaching and blessing until his last breath in 2015 on earth and now as Ishvara himself.

When I think of Swamiji, I see him as an *avatāra* of *brahmavidyā* itself - the knowledge manifesting in a human form for the sake of the seekers. I see him playing a four fold role. The first as a guru, a teacher of *brahmavidyā* teaching thousands of students and making teachers out of many of them. This in my humble opinion was the role he was born to play. I have been blessed by the opportunity of studying at his feet for many years. I have also had the opportunity to study from other great teachers of Vedanta like Swami Tarananda Giriji and Swami Harihara Teerthaji to name a few. Great scholars and teachers as they were, Pujya Swamiji is unparalleled. As a teacher he stood head and shoulders above all others. The more I listened to other teachers, the more I realized what an incomparable teacher he was!

He was traditional and contemporary at the same time. Irrefutable logic, ruthless dismissals of erroneous ideas and clarity of vision marked his teachings. Along with his traditional scholarship he brought insights into the teachings from various modern disciplines like psychology, science etc without compromising the vision. His personal insights into the *śāstras* validates and enhanced the traditional teachings.

As a teacher relating to his students, he was non judgmental and compassionate – the very embodiment of *dayā* (compassion). As a student one could lay bare one’s heart and reveal one’s darkest secret with the knowledge that one would be viewed and accepted compassionately. Not only that, Pujya Swamiji would also help the student to grow out of those very issues and be a better student. His love for us all was unconditional. At the same time if situations demanded, he could also be very tough (though that was rare). I also recall the early days in

Rishikesh when we would be sitting in the verandah outside his kutiya swapping jokes and discussing everything under the sun after the classes. For years as a part of his 'travelling university' where Swamiji would travel from city to city giving public talks, morning and evening with *bhāṣya* classes in between. Not only the classes but also the way he dealt with situations and people was an education in itself.

The second role which I think nobody but him could be as effective in is as a revivalist of Hinduism/ *Sanātana dharma*. Not wanting to limit himself to only the role of a teacher, Swamiji saw the need to protect and nurture the culture that nurtured Vedanta. For this he created various forums like the 'Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha', the 'Dharma Rakshana Samiti'. Nobody but Swamiji who was rooted in tradition and had cross cultural comfort could have initiated these two fora. He extended much needed support to various vedapathshalas. His love for art was reflected in the 'Arsha Kala Bhushanam' awards he initiated. Anyone who sat in his satsangs would recognize what an artist was lost to the world of music when he became a sadhu.

The third role – much needed today was of working for better inter religious understanding. At the time of the *ṛṣis* other religions did not exist. Today, it is not so. One cannot be an island however great one's commitment to one's own religion. A better inter religious understanding was and is necessary for peaceful coexistence as well as protecting one's own culture and religion. Pujya Swamiji worked towards this through dialogue with various religious groups specially of non proselytizing religions. This culminated in setting up the 'World Council of Religious Leaders'.

The fourth role I saw him in, was as someone whose compassion extends to working for social upliftment specially of the marginalized. No one can afford to be an island of prosperity in a sea of poverty. The disparity of incomes and resources is very high in India. 'AIM for Seva' is an attempt to bridge that gap in time and also an opportunity for all of us to contribute our bit.

He was and is everything I wanted in a Guru and all I wanted from him was the knowledge and his blessings. In my devotion to him I did whatever I could in organizing his talks and seminars and raising funds for his work. My classes and teachings too are an offering to him. What more can I say of my Guru – whatever words I use will fall short – it will be like holding a candle to the sun. I can only say that it was and is a blessing to have a Guru like him and end with *sāṣṭaṅga namaskārams* at his lotus feet.