Living for Inner Search
Category : April/May/June 2004
Published by Anonymous on Apr. 01, 2004

PROFILE

Living for Inner Search

One man's one-minded commitment to yoga yields a life of enlightened service

Tirtho Banerjee, Uttar Pradesh

Swami Shitlaprasad, 85, has lived his life in reverence for God and service to people. Born in a small village called Malke in Rae Bareli, Uttar Pradesh, he was sent by his father to live in an ashram at an early age. There, he learned Sanskrit, Vedic astrology, ayurveda and yoga. Although he loved the ashram life, he was consumed with a desire to wander freely in search of God. Sometime before the age of 20, he was initiated into sannyas by an old sadhu named Pandit Devi Sahaya Shukla. In 1940, at age 22, he left home to make his way on foot throughout North India and into the Himalayas on his quest for the ultimate Truth.

During his travels, he visited great places of learning, including the famous Samved Vidyalaya in Varanasi, and sat at the holy feet of many wise men. The turning point in his inner search came in 1946 when he arrived in Kanpur on the banks of the Ganga in the state of Uttar Pradesh. The British had occupied the strategically located city since 1803 and Muslims had looted and plundered its many Siva temples. The city's famous Sati Chaura Ghat (steps down to the river) was also nearly demolished. All the local inhabitants were distraught. Swami was deeply saddened by what he saw.

During his first night in Kanpur, Goddess Saraswati appeared to him in a dream. She told him to excavate a yantra (a mystic diagram composed of geometric and alphabetic figures) called Sriyantra from beneath the entrance to an abandoned Siva temple on the Sati Chaura ghat. Following his devonic instructions, the swami

did indeed find the Sriyantra. It was six feet tall, two feet wide and carved in white stone. Immediately, he had it installed in the dilapidated Siva temple and began the renovation of both the temple and the ghat. Through relentless efforts, he was able to mobilize like-minded people of the city to raise funds for the reconstruction project. Many contemporary luminaries of the 1950s, including Pandit Balkrishna Naveen, Pandit Sudarshan Bajpai, Pannalal Tripathi and Badri Prasad Dubey, participated in the effort. The temple was soon completely rebuilt. It became famous overnight.

In 1947, Swami Shitlaprasad organized the temple's first mayayagna (great fire ceremony). Today, it is an annual ritual. In 1948, he established a monastery called Sri Nanarao Surja Reshwar Shakti Yoga Ashram Sri Vidyapeeth within the temple compound. This ashram includes a satsang hall (gathering place for religious discussion), a library and a yoga training center, as well as accommodations for extensive ayurvedic research and practice. For more than half a century, the swami has tirelessly organized important religious seminars. In 1968, he arranged a spiritual meeting featuring India's four primary Shankaracharyas. In 1997, he established the Sri Vidya Raj Rajeshwari Lalitamba Trust to insure the well being of the temple/monastery complex even after his passing. In 1998, he celebrated the 50th anniversary of his ashram.

Swami is currently writing a book on yoga and, even in his old age, is unremitting in the practice of daily meditation. He often meets with devotees who come to his temple. In his conversations with them, he stresses the importance of religious discipline, especially the practice of silent japa. His very presence kindles in visitors that same flame of spiritual aspiration that made him the uncommon man that he is.

For more information write to Tirtho Banerjee, 131 Rabindra Palli, Faizabad Road, Lucknow, 226016, Uttar Pradesh, India.