

[Dada Vaswani: Walking with God](#)

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Profile

Dada Vaswani: Walking with God

At 90, the joyful leader of the Sadhu Vaswani Mission celebrates the Lord's lila

By Lavina Melwani, New York

lassiwithlavina.com

His eyes are smiling as he hands the little girl a chocolate bar and sees her eyes light up. His photographic memory can recall the first names and faces of hundreds of devotees, even those he hasn't seen for many years. He delivers soaring extemporaneous speeches which younger intellectuals would stumble on. He can quote from the Bhagavad Gita and from Thoreau with equal facility.

Thousands of followers and well-wishers came to New York's Town Hall on June 13 to greet Dada J.P. Vaswani, spiritual head of the Sadhu Vaswani Mission, at a celebration of his 90th birthday.

Dada, as he is fondly known, has kept his positive attitude, his sense of humor and his childlike joy so well that it is hard to believe that he is only a decade short of a century.

"I don't believe it myself," he affirms, laughing, his face unlined, his eyes shining, dressed as always in immaculate white. How does he look so calm, radiant and peaceful? Could he share with our readers his secret for looking and feeling so wonderful at 90? "The secret is always trying to live in the presence of Sri Krishna," he asserts simply.

How does one do that? Dada explains, "That comes through abhyaas, practice. As it is, God is just a word to so many people. There are some who get up in the morning, spend a few minutes in prayer and worship--their lips keep muttering certain words, their minds keep straying to places. Then they feel they've done their duty by God. They keep the Thakurs (Deities) in their place, and they go to their offices.

"I believe the one message we need is to make God real to ourselves in our daily lives. God is our constant companion. We should walk with God; we should talk to God. We should seek His advice, His guidance, at every step, at every round of life. As it is, the one disease that is increasing all over the world is the disease of loneliness. Why? Because we've cut ourselves off from God. All we need to do is close the eyes, shut out the world and call Him with longing in the heart, and here He is, in front of us."

This oneness with God is a core teaching of the Sadhu Vaswani Mission, an educational, religious and humanitarian organization based in Pune, Maharashtra, 165 km east of Mumbai. It was founded in 1930 by Sadhu T.L.Vaswani and today has centers in India and many parts of the world. Dada J.P. Vaswani, who was born on August 2, 1918, in Hyderabad, gave up a shining academic future to follow his uncle and guru, Sadhu Vaswani, on the rocky path of service to the needy and the disenfranchised.

Dada has a magical touch which connects him with just about everyone, be they scholars and swamis discussing intricate scriptures or teenagers conflicted about parental pressures. He has addressed august gatherings in the House of Commons and the United Nations and has gone one on one with families in spiritual camps.

Neelam Deo, Consul General of India in New York, points out that Vaswani is a gifted writer and orator, with over 100 books in English and Sindhi, his native language, and these have been translated into languages from French to Russian.

"He's a thinker, a philosopher who's written several books filled with practical wisdom and this is one of the features that characterizes him, that he gives simple examples from every day life," Deo reflected.

"He recounts anecdotes that we all can identify with, because these are the kinds of things which happen to people like you and to people like me. So we do not feel the wisdom that he imparts to us as something too rare and too difficult for us to grasp. When he speaks, he tells us something that we ourselves can easily understand and identify with, something we can absorb into the way we think and the way we live."

And that is Dada's strength: the ability to translate complex issues of dharma and morality into simple language for ordinary mortals--to educate people about dharma. Indeed, under Dada, the Sadhu Vaswani Mission has focused on education as the agent for character-building, inculcation of devotion to service and Indian ideals, international understanding and the cultivation of the soul. The most important component of education at the Sadhu Vaswani Mission is reverence toward all life.

"We should respect all life, because there is only one life," says Dada. "That same life flows into us, it flows into the animals, and it flows into the birds. This one life is asleep in the stones and the minerals; it stirs in the vegetables and the plants; it dreams in the birds and the animals; it wakes up in man. There's only one life, there's only one breath. The breath that I am taking is the breath the animal is taking. You see, there is unity of life. But this, man has forgotten."

Devotees of the late Sadhu Vaswani observe his birthday, November 25, as International Meatless Day. On this day each year, supporters pledge to give up all foods of violence--fish, flesh and fowl--to honor this great saint of mercy.

Dada feels strongly about the environmental crisis that looms over our Earth, pointing out that according to one estimate, every day 200,000 acres of rainforest are being destroyed; every day 13-15 million tons of toxic waste, most of which is carcinogenic, are being dumped into our air, into our water, and onto our soil. He adds, "Every day about 120 species are becoming extinct. About 120 types of plants and animals which are the product of billions of years of evolutionary process, are gone forever."

He points out that the Hindu way is not to exploit nature: "The true Hindu respects nature, worships nature. We begin our day by worshiping the Sun God. People laugh at us, but that is the correct way. We call the Earth 'Mother Earth.' We worship the Earth--we worship cows as a representative of the animal kingdom. We have respect for all life.

"This is what is missing today: we need to develop, we need to grow in respect for all life. Go back to the Hindu way of worshiping nature. People used to laugh at us and say we were superstitious. It was not superstition, it was the right way of handling nature. We have become scientific, we say. But science has taught us irreverence for nature."

While Dada's powerful message is all-encompassing and appeals to people across nations and cultures, it especially resonates with the Sindhi community, a people who lost their homeland of Sindh in the Partition of 1947. For this enterprising community scattered across the world, Dada Vaswani is guru and guide.

Author Lavina Melwani, a popular free-lance correspondent, was born in Sindh, grew up in New Delhi and has lived in Hong Kong and Africa. She currently resides in New York with her husband and two children.

Dada's Homespun Wisdom

Even as particles of dust cling to our clothes and we wash them with water and soap, even so there are particles of noise which cling to our hearts, to our minds and to our souls. They need to be cleansed every day in the waters of silence.... Silence is very much like a river--we need to go and take dips in the river of silence again and again and cleanse our hearts and our souls.

Do you respect those who can be of no help to you whatsoever? Then, indeed, are you a true pilgrim on the path--a pilgrim of peace.

Acceptance is not passive submission. Acceptance is active cooperation with the will of God.

Mission: Service To Humanity

The Sadhu Vaswani Mission in Pune is well known for its work in education, medicine and social service. Over 7,000 students attend its schools and college, the Mira College, which was judged the best college in the University of Pune for 2007-2008. It has now been given autonomous status. Dada's dream is that it will be its own independent university, and the Mission has acquired 100 acres of land on the outskirts of the city for this purpose.

The Mission has four hospitals, including a general hospital and others dedicated to eye care, heart and cancer care. Over 1,800 free or concessional cardiac operations are conducted every year.

"Thousands and thousands of villagers lose their vision due to cataracts and are not respected by their families because they are not productive and become a burden," says Krishna Kumari. "We have started the KK Eye Institute and have done over 20,000 cataract operations. We bus in the people from their remote villages, give them hospitality for three days, perform the operations and then deliver them back home."

Honor All of God's Creation: Don't Eat Meat

By Dada J.P. Vaswani

Today, man stands on a planet of limitless promise. He has set foot on the moon. His rockets go flying past the distant planets. But he has lost touch with his real being and purpose. His mind is agitated; his heart is troubled and unsure; his anger flares easily. He has become a slave to his appetites, cravings and desires. And the civilization he has built, and of which he is so proud, is already crumbling beneath the burden of its own weight. What is the reason?

Man has alienated himself from God's creation. He has lost his sense of at-one-ment with Nature, with Life. All Nature is one; All Life is one! And if a new civilization is to be built, if man is to grow in the peace that passeth understanding and the joy that no ending knows, he must make friends with all birds and animals,

trees, flowers, streams, and stars, with all that lives. Unless man becomes the guardian and protector of creatures that breathe the breath of life, the Earth will fight back at the greatest destroyer of nature and life, viz., man. There will be droughts and floods, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. And the tilting of the Earth and the melting of the ice caps will change the very face of the Earth.

The ancient Rishi of the Ishopanishad sang: Ishavasyam idam sarvam. "All that is, is the vesture of the Lord!" God comes to us, putting on different vestures, different garments. Clad in different garbs, the Lord comes to us to test us, to find out if we truly love Him, as we say we do. Alas! We slay the Lord. We handle Him roughly, we treat Him harshly. We offer Him worship in temples and churches; we chant hymns to His glory. But out in the street we are cruel to Him. We slay Him and eat His flesh. For we forget that the animal, too, is an image of God!

Much on Earth is masked. But there is a strange, a mystic sense of our fellowship with all that is. This is what makes every life sacred. The roots of our being are in the One Reality that breathes out benedictions on every man and bird and animal, river and rock, stream and star. For all, all is a part of God! From Him we come, unto Him we must return.

Vegetarianism is not an end in itself. It is only a means to an end. The end, the goal, is the vision of the One-in-all.

As the Bhagavad Gita says, "Who sees the separate lives of all creatures of the Earth, of men and birds and beasts, and of the worms that creep, and the fish that swim in the watery deep, who sees them all united in the Spirit, the one Eternal God, sees them brought forth from Him, His hidden depths, he sees, indeed!"