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Swami Ishwarananda Giri is the founder of Samvit Sadhanayana Ashram at Mount Abu, Rajasthan, an institution dedicated to the revival of India's ancient spiritual culture and the mystic tradition of Adi Shankara. He is the author of several books and composes and sings his own music. I interviewed His Holiness in Phoenix, Arizona, in August, 1993. He had just come from giving the closing address at the Global Vision 2000 conference in Washington, D.C. Hinduism Today: What is the mission of Samvit Sadhanayan? Swami Ishwarananda Giri: Samvit Sadhanayana is not even an institution, and it has no mission. But, it has a message. The Samvit Sadhanayana is a spontaneous expression of our desire to afford a meeting place of the various forces of the Vedanta working in India, particularly those who want to usher Vedanta into this modern age. We are carrying on what has been done all these years in this tradition, particularly Adi Shankara's work started twelve hundred years ago. Shankara re-established Hinduism. HT: What is your message for Hindus living in America? Swami: India is at the helm of the affairs of the world. We have an opportunity to tell the world what it is to achieve success. Along with material success, you have to be ambassadors of the culture that has nurtured you and given you the brilliance and ability to take all challenges. You want more character and spiritual inspiration, not more money.

These have to be sought. Hindus have created beautiful temples in this country, but I did not find a library in any of these temples. Every religious center has to be a center for learning and the spread of the scriptural message. HT: How can we make religion an integral part of our everyday lives? Swami: I think the difficulty is more mental than physical. If a person is convinced of the preciousness and inevitability of the practice, he will find a time slot. If there is a compulsion from within that the reading of the scriptures is as inevitable and as essential as the other things, I am sure the person will be able to find time and energy for that. What is needed is an imbibing of the spirit and an awakening of an awareness. This can be done even when you are having a bath. It can enter into so many blank spaces in your everyday living. Hinduism is the only religion which does not believe in regimentation, does not dictate what you have to do. You are only told to discover the path yourself. Religion, spirituality, yoga also can find a place in this busy mechanical pattern of American life. HT: What about teaching our children? Swami: We should give to the young people not a routine but a spirit. If they can understand the most intricate ideas of science, such as holes in the ozone layer, they can understand with less difficulty how the holes in the mind are made, how your internal securities are broken when a wrong attitude to life is taken. If how you handle the mind, how you handle the body are explained through Vedanta, they will be able to do it. It's only a question of putting it to them in the scientific way. HT: Who is Swamiji? Swami: That is a very, very difficult question. I'm a monk, as you know. It is very difficult for a sannyasin to talk about himself because he has never done that all his life. This much I can say about myself. I have been initiated into the sannyas by my guru, Poojya Swami Sri Narasimhagiriji Maharaj, who was the head of the Dakshinamurthy Math in Banares, India. Under his training I learned the Upanishads, the entire Vedas. Thirty

years ago I came to Mount Abu. The spiritual atmosphere struck me so much that since then I have never left the place, except for going around lecturing or answering the calls of friends. I met Dr. Vikram Sarabhai, the famed nuclear scientist of India. He was eager to see that scientists get interested in spiritual practices, because they could save the world from nuclear catastrophe. It made me think deeply, and we started Samvit Sadhanayana to spread the message and project it properly so that it can be helpful for people who are at the helm of world affairs. I have no mission and no message even. I just open out the box whenever needed and share all the things Sri Shankara has said, and the other masters have said, and these are the things that have sustained and enriched my life. Address: Swami Ishwarananda Giri, Santa Sarovar, Mount Abu, 307 501, India. Sidebar: Swami's Phoenix Mission

Swami Ishwarananda Giri is the guiding light of Samvit Triveni Bhajan group in the Phoenix area, in the southwestern US state of Arizona. In August, he spent a few days in Phoenix and also held a discourse on "Vivekananda's Vision of World Civilization based on the Vedanta." Mr. S. Divakaruni, a Phoenix resident, said that while the Swamiji clearly reveals an extensive knowledge base in his talks, he has the great ability to not talk down to people. "He talks to us at our level, using references that are easy for us to understand. And he appeals to our reason, that is his attraction." The content of his speeches reveals contemporaneousness that is remarkable. They are liberally sprinkled with references from tennis star Boris Becker's style to the depletion of the ozone layer. Fifteen-year-old Smitha Radhakrishnan, a tenth grade student in Phoenix, has been exposed to Swami and his teachings from a very young age, since her mother has had a close association with him for many years. "I think just knowing Swamiji has given me a better insight to what's going on, spiritually, compared to others my age," she said. "He is very

human, not unapproachable like you would think a swamiji would be, and very lovable. Also, he seems to somehow know where you're coming from. He picks up things about you and what you are and he can understand a lot. That's my experience with him."