Divine Life Society's Rising Star
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TEACHERS

Divine Life Society's Rising Star

The charismatic Swami Adhyatmananda

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I will trade you all my sadhus for that one," proclaimed a prominent sadhu visiting the Divine Life Society in Rishikesh. But DLS President Swami Chidananda demurred on the half-serious bargain, and would not part with "my most sought-after sannyasin"--Swami Adhyatmananda. Without a doubt this charming 54-year-old monk has cut a wide swath through the Indian spiritual scene. A graduate engineer, Adhyatmananda first visited DLS at Rishikesh in 1965. With what he learned, he was finally able to control his chronic asthma. Impressed with the power of yoga and enchanted with the spiritual greatness of the DLS tradition, he renounced his promising career, joined the ashram in 1972, and was initiated into sannyas, Hindu monasticism, two years later.

He served early in his monastic life as Swami Chidananda's personal assistant, and since then has traveled out from Rishikesh to conduct hundreds of yoga camps and manage a wide range of projects. Fluent in eight languages, an accomplished singer, he has been welcomed across India as

well as Europe, America and Japan. He has impressed some very tough groups in India, including army outposts, and--with personal risk--helped prevent communal violence on several occasions.

When I spoke with this rising star during his visit to Los Angeles, I asked if he was being considered to succeed the great Swami Chidananda, now 93 [see Hinduism Today, October, 1999]. Adhyatmananda's answer was an emphatic "No," adding humbly, "There are several other wonderful swamis in the hierarchy, among the 200-plus Swamis of DLS. I am just happy to serve. DLS founder, the late Swami Sri Sivananda, was like the resplendent Sun. I do not come anywhere close to his greatness."

Swami has been the spiritual head of the DLS Gujarat center, the Sivananda Ashram in Ahmedabad, for the last four years. In addition to spiritual teaching, yoga and meditation, the center is actively involved in running free homeopathic clinics and a hospital. "There are many yogas, like Hatha Yoga, Raja Yoga, Nada Yoga, but our beloved late founder reveled in Seva Yoga--the yoga of service," said Adhyatmananda.

"The problem of humanity is ignorance, give them (spiritual) knowledge," the late Sivananda had said. "Be the best in whatever religion you are in, be it Hindu, Christian or Muslim, and be an ideal human being, compassionate and free, because you are not the body, but the all-abiding soul." Adhyatmananda elaborated, "All religions believe that God is great, and I am His servant. Religion is an outer attire. Inside we are all human. Understand inner peace, inner awareness

and your soul's true essence of eternal divinity. The Upanishads and the scriptures are a means to teach that eternal divinity."

Asked about the absence of the word "Hindu" in the DLS charter, Adhyatmananda says that DLS believes in Mother India, and that humanity is the first religion--that the language of the heart matters, nothing else. He adds, "There is a Vishwanath Mandir at our headquarters in Rishikesh; in our Ahmedabad center, we have a Siva temple, where we worship. We celebrate Navaratri, fasting through it. We teach the scriptures. We do not have to say the word Hindu to prove that we are."

We questioned Swami on several contemporary issues. Regarding corporal punishment of children, he said, "Children do not need punishment, they need love. Teach them by example. You as parents keep on doing the right things, they will learn it. Be patient and understanding. Parents give birth to children, but also give them life. They are like a musical instrument, you have to tune it to produce music from it."

On the issue of domestic violence he said, "Wife-beating takes place due to the ignorant ego of the man. He cannot get rid of the Lakshmi [Goddess of prosperity] of the home. Remember Manu Smriti: 'Where the women are respected, those are the only places where Gods rejoice.'" Swami said the societal ills of bribery and corruption arise out of greed. "Ishavasya Upanishad tells you, 'Do not covet someone else's property.' Even if society is full of bad elements, you do not give up your own goodness. That sets an example," he said. "Strengthen

your life, be a good Hindu. That is the real need of the hour."

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