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Category : [December 1999](#)

Published by Anonymous on Dec. 02, 1999

INTERVIEW

Sitting with Swami

A candid interview with the Divine Life Society's general secretary

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"Do Good, Be Good." These four words are written in bold letters all over the inside and outside walls of the Divine Life Society's Rishikesh center. In these four words the founder of the Society, Swami Sivananda, has given the gist of his profound message. I was sent to Rishikesh by Hinduism Today to interview Swami Krishnananda, the DLS general secretary. He sweetly spared an hour out of his extremely busy schedule to give his message to our readers. Though the eighty-seven-year-old swami is no longer hale and hearty, he was full of energy throughout our conversation and said he felt fine. Visitors and devotees listened in pin-drop silence as our interview covered a wide range of subjects, beginning with his recollections of the famed DLS founder. Here are his words.

Swami Sivananda was a towering genius, a great tapasvi who did hard austerities. He was born in 1887 and came here in 1924. He used to enter the Ganga and stand navel deep in the very cold water and do prayer. He ate only dry chapatis given by nearby charities. Out of all the sadhus in the all of

Rishikesh, he was the only person who knew English, and as a highly learned doctor, people respected him always. He lived in a dilapidated and deserted cowshed. He used to say, "I adopted the technique of the East India Company. They came slowly, slowly, first occupying land on the Calcutta side and then became very strong."

Sivananda's writing career

Swami was a voracious reader and writer. He wanted to write books, but he did not have a sheet of paper. He used to collect old newspapers. In all the margins of the paper, he started writing his message. The first book that he wrote was Spiritual Lessons. He went on writing, writing and writing--eighty books came. He became very famous because his writings were very, very compelling, touching the heart of all people with a simple style of writing in English, and to the point. All this he did while living in a cowshed here in Rishikesh.

The singing saint

Sivananda used to start singing sacred songs, bhajanas, on the platforms of railway stations and anywhere he used to go. He would not bother who was there. People were thronging the platform. He would shout, "Hey, take the name of God," and begin to sing. And all these people who were getting to the railway train would wonder what was going on.

My evaluation

I can only say that he is the greatest man I have ever seen. And I do not hope to see another great man like him. Most generous. Most charitable. Everything he will give. Give, give, give and give. He was nicknamed by people as "Give-ananda." He was Sivananda, but they said "Give-ananda."

The place of God

Swami was a one hundred percent believer in God. In every book that he wrote the first line would be, "God realization is the goal of life." Afterwards he can go on writing anything.

Sivananda's mysterious ways

Everything was a mystery about him. We could not anticipate what he would talk about tomorrow. Nowadays devotees flock to the guru. If a guru is coming, hundreds would go and jump on his feet. But we were not like that. We were afraid of him. If he comes from somewhere and is at a distance, we would go in some other direction. We would avoid meeting him. He might say something suddenly which could be very painful. He used to say, "I am a Vishnu, caretaker. I am a Rudra also. I will destroy. Do not think that I am a kind-hearted man. I will punish you also, if you want."

On corporal punishment of children

The word punishment is not suitable. Say "training." You

cannot punish a child. You have to train the child. Training is different from punishment. Training is the holistic process of taking care of the entire personality. Why would you hit the child? You have heard of Montessori method. No hitting and all that. Nothing of the kind. No insulting them and throwing mud on them. It is not necessary.

The children are no fools, you understand. The only thing is you have to know how to handle them properly from the level at which they are. The teacher has to come down to the level of the child and not expect the child to go to the level of the genius. Children and youth of today are also human beings. They should be treated scientifically. A teacher should be a very good psychologist of education.

The state of India today

Going from the Himalayas to Kanyakumari, travelling throughout India, you will not find one man living according to the Vedas and the Upanishads. Very strange. The whole texture of life has changed, and no one knows anything about the foundation of Indian culture. So there is much degeneration.

On the training of new monks

We are not training anybody. If anybody wants to take sannyas, our president, Swami Chidananda Ji, will give sannyas. After that, we forget the person. We are quite

different from Ramakrishna Mission. They are using their sannyasins for missionary work. They cannot take sannyas and simply move wherever they like. They have to do some specific work. We are not like that. We do not do any missionary work. We do not expect anything from the sannyasins who are initiated in sannyas. We have no missionary zeal. We believe in individual salvation of people and not the social uplifting of humanity, though that is also in our mind to the extent possible, but it is not our aim. Our aim is that we should realize God in this very birth. Our interest is in the soul, atman. Its liberation is the foremost point. Let the world be. When we die, the world cannot come with us.

On modern education

The educational system is no good. "I am everything. All these things are for me only." This kind of mentality has entered the minds of people due to lack of proper education. What education people are obtaining in universities is of no use. It has no human touch. You may know physics and chemistry and astronomy and all that, but in the house you are a poor fellow. Master of English, master of astronomy, master of mathematics--he speaks very well in the college. But when he comes to his house, he quarrels with his wife and is very much distressed. Poor fellow. The man himself is not touched by the process of education. It is just a shirt that he can put on. But the shirt is not the person.

His daily routine

I consider myself as nobody, nothing. I am expecting to exit from this body and reach to the noble soul of God Himself as early as possible. I have no ambitions, no desires and no attachments. That term "general secretary" is a horrible thing. That term implies many duties. I take care of the Society. People come to me for every little thing. People come here for security when they are in suffering. We do a lot of charitable work, medical and educational aid. People quarrel in the family, and they come here to seek my guidance. You asked me about my routine. Today morning, I got up and quarreled with somebody. One of our employees. He drank some liquor and attacked a visitor. I have yet to take even a cup of tea also. This is what I did today.

On future expansion plans

We have no such idea. We have enough branches, and they are giving a lot of trouble to us. So I would not increase their number.

His message for Hindus

Everybody is destined for the highest realization. Work for your Self realization and everything will be taken care of automatically. If you neglect the presence of God and catch hold of all the other things, things will not work. He who forgets the existence of God will achieve nothing in this world. You will one day be a failure.

Every day you have to work for it, because God is not a cheap substance that you may casually take when you want, and when you do not want, forget it. Everything that is moving, alive, even the plants and trees, sun, moon, stars, is all a part of creation. They are all evolving towards the universal culmination of the whole existence in the integration of the cosmos, the ultimate being of the Almighty Being. "God first," Swami Sivananda used to say, "the world afterwards, and yourself the last." Do not bring yourself first. "I, I, I," and all that. Do not utter such words. Feel and believe in the presence of God. Then believe it that He will certainly take care of you and the whole world also.

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http://education.vsnl.com/swami_krishnananda/